



Week 18 — Tactical Adaptability

Tags: `structural-adaptability` `possession` `defending` `full-squad-practice` `conditioning`

Weekly Overview

FIELD	DETAIL
Week number	18 of 36
Season phase	4 — Tactical Adaptability
Core principle	Structural adaptability (possession)
Secondary principle	Compactness
Previous match review focus	Apply the three routes below to the most recent fixture.
Weekly tactical problem	Phases 1–3 taught the team to recognise different opposition shapes and adapt its own pressing or build-up picture between matches, or occasionally within a match through instruction. What hasn't yet been taught is the mechanism itself — how a team actually changes its own structure mid-game, fluidly, without a stoppage in play, and without losing the picture in the process. This week teaches that mechanism from both sides of the ball: changing from a back four to a back three in possession, and dropping from a mid-block to a low-block out of possession.
Formation-neutral explanation	Structural adaptability is the clearest possible expression of the Season Architecture's core distinction — a team that can change its own structure mid-match while keeping its principles constant has fully separated "the shape on the team sheet" from "the job being done." This is not a trick reserved for elite teams; it is a specific, learnable mechanism.
Example structural applications	Changing from a back four to a back three: typically achieved by a holding midfielder or a full-back stepping into the back line, converting a 4-3-3's build-up shape into a temporary 3-4-3 picture without a whistle ever blowing. Changing from a mid-block to a low-block: achieved by the whole defensive line dropping together on a shared cue — sustained pressure, a specific match state, or a ball played in behind — rather than a gradual, individual retreat. Both changes are drilled as team mechanisms this week, not abstract ideas.

Match Review and Weekly Adjustment

Route A — Previous performance was strong. If the team played well, look for moments where a structural change might have helped but wasn't attempted — a good result can still hide a team that only knows one shape. Name it plainly.

Route B — Previous performance exposed a tactical weakness. If the team struggled once the opposition changed its picture, or was caught between two structures without committing to either, this week answers it directly — open the relevant session with the specific moment from the match.

Route C — Attendance, facilities or player availability are disrupted. Both mechanisms — changing to a back three in possession, and dropping to a low block without the ball — scale to any numbers. Protect the coordinated, shared-cue nature of both changes above pure player counts.

Tuesday — Session 35

FIELD	DETAIL
Session number	35 of 72
Week	18
Season phase	4 — Tactical Adaptability
Training day	Tuesday
Session theme	Changing shape in possession: back four to back three
Short summary	Teaches the specific mechanism of converting a back-four build-up into a back-three build-up mid-possession — usually a midfielder or full-back dropping into the back line — so the team can change its picture fluidly in response to the opponent's press, without a stoppage in play.
Tags	`structural-adaptability` `possession` `conditioning`
Primary learning objective	The team converts a back-four build-up into a back-three build-up smoothly, without losing possession or passing options during the change.
Secondary learning objective	The team recognises when a structural change is genuinely needed, rather than changing shape reflexively or on a fixed pattern.
Match connection	This week's foundation for the match-day connection named for Thursday: shape change without a stoppage in play.
Expected tactical outcome	The team can be seen building from two different shapes within the same match, chosen in response to the picture rather than pre-decided.
Expected physical load	Moderate — decision-density is high, but physical intensity is moderate rather than maximal.
Recommended intensity	6.5–7.5 / 10.
Equipment list	20 footballs · 22 flat markers · 14 cones (orange) · 2 sets of bibs (2 colours, 10 each) · 2 full-size or portable goals
Player numbers	Designed for 16 outfield + 2 goalkeepers; scales 10–22, see contingencies.
Goalkeeper requirements	Both goalkeepers train throughout; in Practice 4 the goalkeeper is coached as an active participant in the structural change, adjusting their own position as the back line reshapes.
Pitch dimensions	Largest area this week is 50 x 36 m (Practice 4).
Area layout	A tight technical zone for Practice 2, widening through Practices 3 and 4.
Contingency — lower attendance (10–13)	Practice 2 reduces to a 3-into-2 conversion; Practice 3 becomes 5v5; Practice 4 becomes 6v6.
Contingency — higher attendance (20+)	Practice 4 can extend to 9v9.
Contingency — restricted space	Compress the practice areas proportionally; the timing and coordination of the structural change survives compression well.

TIMELINE (60 MINUTES)

TIME	DURATION	PHASE	COLOUR CODE
0:00-0:10	10 min	Arrival & warm-up — <i>Drop and Set</i>	Light green
0:10-0:25	15 min	Technical practice — <i>Drop and Set</i>	Club green
0:25-0:27	2 min	Water break / transition	—
0:27-0:42	15 min	Skill game — <i>Shift the Shape</i>	Dark green
0:42-0:44	2 min	Water break / transition	—
0:44-0:59	15 min	Conditioned match — <i>Read and Change</i>	Black
0:59-1:00	1 min	Reflection	—

PRACTICE 1 — DROP AND SET (ARRIVAL)

Duration: 10 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

Tactical purpose: Introduces the physical action of dropping into a new line without losing balance or passing options, before any tactical structure is added.

Organisation: 20 x 16 m grid, small rondo groups. No goalkeeper requirement — both keepers join fully.

Walkthrough: Rolling rondo groups in which the coach periodically calls "Drop," and one player from an outer position must immediately move into a deeper line while continuing to demand and use the ball — a simple, physical rehearsal of changing position without losing involvement.

Rules: The dropping player must remain a genuine passing option throughout the movement, not disappear from play while repositioning.

Coaching points:

- *Technical:* receiving and passing while on the move into a new position.
- *Physical:* smooth, controlled repositioning rather than a rushed scramble.
- *Psychological:* staying involved in possession while changing role.

PRACTICE 2 — DROP AND SET (TECHNICAL PRACTICE)

Duration: 15 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

Tactical purpose: Isolates the specific technique of a midfielder or full-back dropping into the back line to convert a back four into a back three, so the team feels directly how the picture changes and what must be maintained throughout the transition.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 36 x 24 m
- **Players:** 4 back-line players plus 1 dropping midfielder vs 3 opposition pressers
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers rotate through as part of the back line
- **Team sizes:** 5 (possession) v 3 (pressers)
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** flat markers marking the back line's before-and-after positions
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** 2 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart:** coach restarts centrally on any stoppage
- **Coach position:** central, able to see the whole picture
- **Rotation method:** the dropping role rotates every few minutes
- **Direction of play:** possession retention

Practice walkthrough: Four back-line players build possession against three pressers, starting in a clear back-four shape. On a call (or on recognising the picture themselves), a midfielder drops between or alongside the two centre-backs, converting the shape into a back three, while the full-backs push higher to become wider outlets. The whole team's task is to maintain clean possession and passing options throughout the change, not just before and after it.

Rules: The structural change must be completed within a set number of passes once triggered, and possession must not be lost during the transition itself.

Tactical roles:

- *Individual:* the dropping player's timing and body shape on the way into the new position.
- *Unit:* the rest of the back line and the full-backs adjusting their own positions in coordination with the drop.
- *Team:* not applicable at this scale.
- *Transition:* not applicable — this practice is possession-focused throughout.

Decision-making triggers:

- The opposition's press is set up to cope with a back four specifically → drop a midfielder to create a back three and unbalance the press.
- The current back-four shape is already comfortable and unpressured → no change is needed.

Communication language used: *Drop, Hold, Time.*

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Clean receiving and passing throughout the transition, not just before and after.
Tactical	Correct timing and recognition of when the change is genuinely useful.
Physical	Smooth, coordinated repositioning across multiple players simultaneously.
Psychological	Composure during the moment of transition, when the picture is briefly less settled.
Communication & leadership	The dropping player and the back line confirming the change together, out loud.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What told the team the structural change was genuinely useful at that moment?
2. What happened to the team's passing options during the transition itself?
3. Why might a team choose not to change shape even when it's technically possible to?
4. How does this connect to Week 16's pressing-a-back-three work — you're now creating the exact picture your own team learned to press?

Progressions:

1. Add a fourth presser, testing whether the new back-three shape still copes.
2. Reduce the number of passes allowed to complete the transition.
3. Add a second possible dropping player, requiring the team to decide who drops based on the picture.

Regressions:

1. Allow the coach to call the change explicitly while the mechanism is being learned.
2. Widen the practice area for more time and space.
3. Reduce the opposition to two pressers.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The dropping player disappears from play during the transition, unavailable as a passing option	Focus on repositioning rather than staying involved	The team has fewer usable options during the change than before or after it	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: rehearse staying available throughout the movement	Resume
The rest of the back line doesn't adjust in coordination with the drop	The change is treated as one player's job rather than a team movement	The resulting shape is uneven or leaves gaps	Stop	Short group intervention: "who else needed to move when they dropped?"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: heavy on *freeze-and-correct*, since coordinated, simultaneous movement is the entire teaching point.

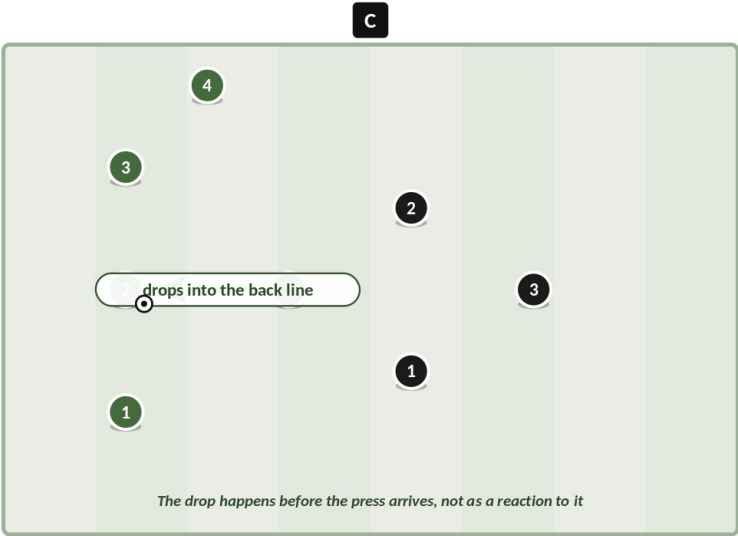
Success indicators:

- The structural change is completed without losing possession.
- The dropping player remains a genuine passing option throughout.
- The rest of the back line adjusts in coordination, producing a clean back-three shape.

Coach's eye: watch the moment of transition itself, not just the before-and-after shapes — a team that stays composed and available for a pass during the change has learned the actual skill this practice is built to produce.

T18.2 DROP AND SET — Four Becomes Three

36 x 24 m · 4v3 becoming 5v3 · a midfielder drops between the centre-backs without losing the picture · 15 minutes



● Back four (before) ● Dropping midfielder ● Opposition pressers ● Ball ➔ Drops into the back line

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AI image-generation prompt (tactical diagram): "Top-down 2D vector football coaching diagram, clean white background, UEFA coaching-manual style. A 36x24 metre grid with dimension labels. Four players in dark green bibs numbered 1–4 arranged in a back-four shape on the left. A fifth player in dark green bibs numbered 5 shown with a short dashed run arrow labelled 'drops into the back line' moving from a midfield position into the back line. Three players in black bibs numbered 1–3 pressing. White football near a back-line green player. Title: 'DROP AND SET — Four Becomes Three'. Subtitle: '36 x 24 m · 4v3 becoming 5v3 · a midfielder drops between the centre-backs without losing the picture · 15 minutes'. Legend row at bottom. High-resolution landscape vector illustration, clear typography, no decorative elements, no club badges or logos."

Realistic illustration — description: Elevated view of a training grid, four green-bibbed players in a back-four shape, a fifth green-bibbed player dropping smoothly from a midfield position into the back line to form a back three, three black-bibbed pressers reacting to the changing picture, coach centrally positioned observing the coordination closely.

AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration): "Elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of adult amateur football training. Four players in dark green bibs arranged in a back-four shape. A fifth player in a dark green bib dropping smoothly from a midfield position into the back line to form a back three. Three players in black bibs pressing and reacting to the changing shape. A coach standing centrally, closely observing the coordination of the movement. Overcast evening light, realistic grass texture, amateur adult players of varied build. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."

PRACTICE 3 — SHIFT THE SHAPE (SKILL GAME)

Duration: 15 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

Tactical purpose: Moves the structural-change mechanism into a genuine small-sided game, rewarding a clean shape change that leads directly to progression, connecting Tuesday's technical work to a real attacking outcome.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 34 x 22 m
- **Players:** 13 outfield, rotating
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers rotate through
- **Team sizes:** 7 v 6
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** 2 full-size or portable goals, 6 flat markers
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** 3 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart location:** nearest sideline
- **Coach position:** sideline, central
- **Rotation method:** none required at this scale
- **Direction of play:** both directions, two goals

Practice walkthrough: A game in which the possession team starts in a back-four shape, and a clean structural change into a back three that leads directly to a progressive pass or a goal is worth double. The coach notes, without necessarily announcing, how often the team recognises a genuine opportunity to change shape versus forcing the change unnecessarily.

Rules: As described; otherwise standard small-sided-game rules.

Tactical roles: the full structural-change skill set from Practice 2, now inside live, directional play with a genuine attacking consequence.

Decision-making triggers: as established in Practice 2, applied under live, directional conditions.

Communication language used: *Drop, Hold, Time, Travel.*

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Clean execution of the structural change under real opposition pressure.
Tactical	Recognising the genuine moment to change shape rather than doing so reflexively.
Physical	Coordinated, simultaneous repositioning under game conditions.
Psychological	Confidence to commit to the change rather than staying in a comfortable but suboptimal shape.
Communication & leadership	Calling and confirming the change clearly enough for the whole team to react together.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What was your team's clearest example of a useful structural change tonight?
2. What happened when the change was attempted but not genuinely needed?
3. How did the opposition's picture change once your team converted to a back three?
4. How does this connect to Week 16's back-three pressing content — what does the opposition now have to solve?

Progressions:

AI image-generation prompt (tactical diagram): "Top-down 2D vector football coaching diagram, clean white background, UEFA coaching-manual style. A 34x22 metre pitch with a full-size goal at each end. Seven players in dark green bibs numbered 1–7 and six players in black bibs numbered 1–6 spread across the pitch. A short dashed run arrow labelled 'drops to form a three' showing a green player moving into the back line. A black solid arrow with an arrowhead showing a progression pass. Title: 'SHIFT THE SHAPE — Small-Sided Game'. Subtitle: '34 x 22 m · 7v6 · a clean structural change (4 to 3) that leads to progression is worth double · 15 minutes'. Legend row at bottom. High-resolution landscape vector illustration, clear typography, no decorative elements, no club badges or logos."

Realistic illustration — description: Elevated sideline view of a game, a green-bibbed player dropping into a back-three shape as the possession team reorganise, a progression pass following immediately, black-bibbed opponents reacting a fraction late, coach on the touchline tracking the moment closely.

AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration): "Elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of an adult amateur small-sided football game on a grass pitch. A player in a dark green bib dropping into a back-three shape as team-mates reorganise around the change. A progression pass following immediately into space. Opposition players in black bibs reacting a fraction late. Late-afternoon light, realistic grass pitch and shadows, amateur adult players of varied build. A coach on the touchline, tracking the moment closely. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."

PRACTICE 4 — READ AND CHANGE (CONDITIONED MATCH)

Duration: 15 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Tactical purpose: Confirms the week's principle at full match scale, requiring the possession team to genuinely read the opposition's pressing picture and change from a back four to a back three when — and only when — it's the correct response.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 50 x 36 m (half pitch)
- **Players:** 16 outfield + 2 goalkeepers
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers play their own-goal role; the possession team's goalkeeper is coached as an active participant in the structural change

- **Team sizes:** 8 v 8
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** 2 full-size or portable goals, 8 flat markers, corner cones
- **Starting positions:** standard match shape
- **Ball supply:** 3 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart location:** match-realistic restarts
- **Coach position:** touchline, halfway line, mobile
- **Rotation method:** none required; goalkeepers may split time at the midpoint
- **Direction of play:** standard, both teams attack opposite goals

Practice walkthrough: A conditioned 8v8 match in which the pressing team is instructed to press a back-four build-up specifically (echoing Week 15's teaching), and the possession team is coached to recognise this and convert to a back three when it's genuinely the correct response, applying Tuesday's full sequence at match scale.

Rules: Standard conditioned-match rules.

Tactical roles: the full structural-change skill set, combined for the first time with a genuinely reactive, pressing opponent at match scale.

Decision-making triggers: the full set from Practices 2–3, applied under match conditions with a moving, live opponent.

Communication language used: the full season's language so far.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Execution under full match pressure and fatigue.
Tactical	Genuine, live decision-making about when the structural change is the correct response.
Physical	Coordinated repositioning combined with the week's peak physical demand.
Psychological	Composure to commit to the change rather than hesitating.
Communication & leadership	The team organising the change out loud, quickly and clearly.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What was the clearest example of the team correctly changing shape in response to the press tonight?
2. When did the team correctly choose not to change shape, even though it was possible?
3. How does this connect to Week 16's pressing-a-back-three content — you're now the team creating that exact problem for the opposition?
4. What did the pressing team have to solve once your team changed shape?

Progressions:

1. Instruct the pressing team to also adapt, testing whether the possession team can recognise a second change of picture.
2. Add a genuine offside line.
3. Reduce numbers to 7v7.

Regressions:

1. Instruct the pressing team to press less aggressively while the change mechanism is being consolidated.
2. Reduce to 6v6 on a smaller area.
3. Reintroduce Practice 2's isolated drop-and-set drilling briefly if the mechanism has broken down under full match conditions.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The team fails to recognise the moment to change shape under match pressure	Genuine cognitive demand of a live, fast-moving picture	The back-four shape persists even under sustained, uncomfortable pressure	Stop	Short group intervention connecting directly to this week's principle	Resume
The change is attempted but loses possession during the transition	Habitual patterns from Practice 2 haven't yet transferred to full match speed	Possession is lost specifically during the moment of repositioning	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "what happened during the change itself?"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: a mix of *short group intervention* and *questioning*, reserving deeper correction for the reflection immediately after.

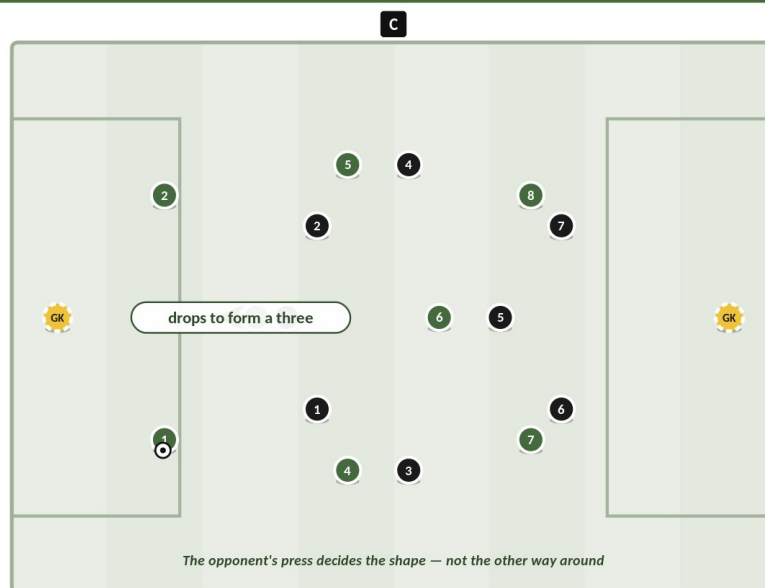
Success indicators:

- The team recognises and executes the structural change at genuinely useful moments.
- Possession is maintained throughout the transition.
- The team can articulate, after the practice, when and why it changed or held its shape.

Coach's eye: this practice is the week's clearest test of whether Tuesday's teaching has transferred — judge it specifically against the quality of the decision, not just whether the mechanism itself works.

T18.4 READ AND CHANGE — Conditioned Match

50 x 36 m (half pitch) • 8v8 + GKs • change from a back four to a back three build-up when the press demands it • 15 minutes



● Team in possession ● Opposition press ● Goalkeeper ● Ball ➔ Structural change

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AI image-generation prompt (tactical diagram): "Top-down 2D vector football coaching diagram, clean white background, UEFA coaching-manual style, showing half of a football pitch, 50x36 metres, with penalty box markings at both ends and a full-size goal at each end with a goalkeeper in yellow at each. Eight players in dark green bibs numbered 1–8 and eight players in black bibs numbered 1–8 spread across the area. A short dashed run arrow labelled 'drops to form a three' showing a green player moving into the back line. White football near a green player. Title: 'READ AND CHANGE — Conditioned Match'. Subtitle: '50 x 36 m (half pitch) • 8v8 + GKs • change from a back four to a back three build-up when the press demands it • 15 minutes'. Legend row at bottom. High-resolution landscape vector illustration, clear typography, no decorative elements, no club badges or logos."

Realistic illustration — description: Wide elevated view of a full-scale 8v8 conditioned match, a green-bibbed player dropping into the back line to form a back three as team-mates reorganise around the change, black-bibbed opponents pressing, coach on the touchline near halfway tracking the whole picture.

AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration): "Wide elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of an adult amateur 8v8 conditioned football match on a half-size grass pitch with full-size goals and goalkeepers in yellow at each end. A player in a dark green bib dropping into the back line to form a back three as team-mates reorganise around the change. Opponents in black bibs pressing. A coach stands near the halfway line on the touchline, tracking the whole picture. Early evening light with long shadows, realistic grass pitch markings, amateur adult players of varied build. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."

REFLECTION (1 MINUTE)

One question to the group: "Name one moment tonight where changing shape genuinely helped us, and one where we should have stayed as we were."

Thursday — Session 36

FIELD	DETAIL
Session number	36 of 72
Week	18
Season phase	4 — Tactical Adaptability
Training day	Thursday
Session theme	Changing shape without the ball: mid-block to low-block
Short summary	Teaches the defensive mirror of Tuesday's mechanism — the whole defensive line dropping together, on a shared cue, from Week 7's mid-block into a deeper, more compact low-block, without a gradual or individual retreat.
Tags	`structural-adaptability` `defending` `compactness` `unit-work`
Primary learning objective	The defensive line drops from a mid-block to a low-block together, on a shared cue, not as a gradual individual retreat.
Secondary learning objective	The team recognises the specific cues (sustained pressure, a ball played in behind, a match-state need) that call for dropping into a low block.
Match connection	This week's named match-day connection: shape change without a stoppage in play.
Expected tactical outcome	A visibly organised, coordinated drop into a deeper defensive shape when the picture calls for it, rather than a scrambled retreat.
Expected physical load	Moderate, decision-density high — similar demand to Tuesday.
Recommended intensity	6.5–7.5 / 10.
Equipment list	20 footballs · 20 flat markers · 12 cones (orange) · 2 sets of bibs (2 colours, 10 each) · 2 full-size or portable goals
Player numbers	Designed for 16 outfield + 2 goalkeepers; scales 10–22, see contingencies.
Goalkeeper requirements	Both goalkeepers train throughout; the defending goalkeeper is coached specifically on calling the drop for the whole line.
Pitch dimensions	Largest area this week is 50 x 34 m (Practice 3).
Area layout	A positional line-drop grid for Practice 2, widening through Practices 3 and 4.
Contingency — lower attendance (10–13)	Practice 2 reduces to a 4-player line; Practice 3 becomes 5v5; Practice 4 becomes 6v6.
Contingency — higher attendance (20+)	Practice 3 can extend to 9v9.
Contingency — restricted space	Compress the practice areas proportionally; the coordinated, shared-cue nature of the drop survives compression well.

TIMELINE (60 MINUTES)

TIME	DURATION	PHASE	COLOUR CODE
0:00–0:10	10 min	Arrival & warm-up — <i>One Call, One Line</i>	Light green

TIME	DURATION	PHASE	COLOUR CODE
0:10-0:25	15 min	Technical practice — <i>Drop Together</i>	Club green
0:25-0:27	2 min	Water break / transition	—
0:27-0:42	15 min	Unit / tactical practice — <i>Two Blocks</i>	Dark green
0:42-0:44	2 min	Water break / transition	—
0:44-0:59	15 min	Confidence game — <i>Hold the Low Block</i>	Black
0:59-1:00	1 min	Reflection	—

PRACTICE 1 — ONE CALL, ONE LINE (ARRIVAL)

Duration: 10 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Tactical purpose: Introduces the physical sensation of a line dropping together on a single shared cue, before any tactical structure is added.

Organisation: 24 x 18 m grid, a line of players facing the coach. No goalkeeper requirement — both keepers join fully.

Walkthrough: A line of players jogs forward together, then on a single call drops backward together to a new marked line, maintaining even spacing throughout — a direct physical rehearsal of the coordinated drop.

Rules: The whole line must move at the same moment, on the same call.

Coaching points:

- *Physical:* explosive, coordinated backward movement.
- *Psychological:* reacting to the shared cue together, not individually.

PRACTICE 2 — DROP TOGETHER (TECHNICAL PRACTICE)

Duration: 15 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Tactical purpose: Isolates the mechanics of the defensive line dropping together from a mid-block position to a low-block position on a single call, so the team feels directly the difference between a coordinated drop and an individual, staggered retreat.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 40 x 26 m
- **Players:** 4 defending outfield vs 3 opposition players working the ball forward
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers rotate through the defending line
- **Team sizes:** 4 v 3
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** flat markers marking the mid-block and low-block reference lines
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** 2 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart:** coach restarts centrally on any stoppage
- **Coach position:** central, able to see the whole line
- **Rotation method:** groups swap every few minutes
- **Direction of play:** the opposition works the ball forward; the line holds, then drops

Practice walkthrough: Four defending players hold a mid-block line against three opposition players building forward. On a named cue (sustained pressure, or the coach calling it), the whole line drops together to a deeper, marked low-block line, maintaining even spacing throughout the movement, not drifting back individually as pressure builds.

Rules: The whole line must drop at the same moment the cue occurs; a player moving independently before or after the rest of the line is an immediate stoppage.

Tactical roles:

- *Individual:* each line player must move at the same time as their neighbours.
- *Unit:* the whole line functions as one connected shape throughout the drop, echoing Week 15's block-shifting work applied to a change of depth rather than width.
- *Team:* not applicable at this scale.
- *Transition:* not applicable — this practice isolates the structural change specifically.

Decision-making triggers:

- Sustained pressure with no realistic chance of regaining the ball at the current depth → drop together to the low block.
- The mid-block is coping comfortably → hold the current line.

Communication language used: *Squeeze, Cover, Drop, Step.*

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Even spacing maintained throughout the drop.
Tactical	Correct recognition of the cue that calls for dropping.
Physical	Explosive, coordinated backward movement.
Psychological	Discipline to drop together rather than individually reacting to pressure.
Communication & leadership	A single voice calling the drop for the whole line.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What happened to the line's shape when one player dropped before the rest?
2. What cue told the team it was time to drop, rather than hold the mid-block?
3. Why does a coordinated drop protect the team better than an individual, staggered retreat?
4. How does this connect to Week 15's lateral block-shifting work — is this the same idea applied to depth instead of width?

Progressions:

1. Remove the coach's explicit call, requiring the line to recognise the cue itself.
2. Add a genuine attacking direction and goal for the opposition once the drop happens.
3. Reduce the practice area, sharpening the precision required.

Regressions:

1. Allow the coach to call the drop clearly for longer while the mechanism is being learned.
2. Widen the practice area for more time to react.
3. Reduce to a 3-player line.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
One or two players drop while others hold, tearing the line's connection	The cue is recognised individually rather than as a shared signal	The line's shape visibly stretches or tears during the drop	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: reset and rehearse the coordinated drop	Resume
The line drops too early, conceding territory unnecessarily	Overcorrection, or misreading a cue that wasn't genuinely there	The mid-block is abandoned even though it was coping comfortably	Stop	Short group intervention: "was that cue really there?"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: heavy on *freeze-and-correct*, since precise, collective timing is the entire teaching point.

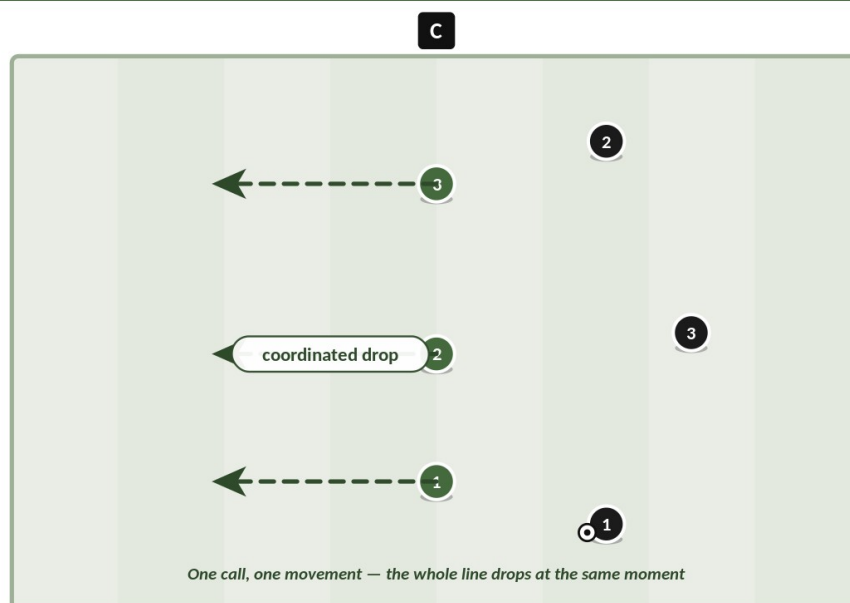
Success indicators:

- The line drops together, at the same time, every repetition.
- Even spacing is maintained throughout the drop.
- The drop happens only when a genuine cue is present, not reflexively.

Coach's eye: watch the whole line's spacing during the drop itself, not just the before-and-after positions — a coordinated drop should look identical in shape to the mid-block it came from, just deeper.

H18.2 DROP TOGETHER — Coordinated Line Drop

40 x 26 m · 6 defenders drop from a mid-block line to a low-block line together, on one call · 15 minutes



● Mid-block (before) ● Low-block (after) ● Possession team ● Ball ➡ Coordinated drop

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AI image-generation prompt (tactical diagram): "Top-down 2D vector football coaching diagram, clean white background, UEFA coaching-manual style. A 40x26 metre area with dimension labels. Three players in dark green bibs numbered 1–3 arranged in a mid-block line, each connected to a short dashed run arrow labelled 'coordinated drop' moving backward to a second, deeper marked line. Three players in black bibs numbered 1–3 working the ball forward. White football near a black player. Title: 'DROP TOGETHER — Coordinated Line Drop'. Subtitle: '40 x 26 m · 6 defenders drop from a mid-block line to a low-block line together, on one call · 15 minutes'. Legend row at bottom. High-resolution landscape vector illustration, clear typography, no decorative elements, no club badges or logos."

Realistic illustration — description: Elevated view of a training area, a line of green-bibbed defenders dropping backward together in clearly coordinated, even spacing, black-bibbed opponents working the ball forward, coach centrally positioned observing the timing and spacing of the drop closely.

AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration): "Elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of adult amateur football training. A line of players in dark green bibs dropping backward together in clearly coordinated, even spacing. Players in black bibs working the ball forward toward them. A coach standing centrally, closely observing the timing and spacing of the coordinated movement. Overcast evening light, realistic grass texture, amateur adult players of varied build. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."

PRACTICE 3 — TWO BLOCKS (UNIT / TACTICAL PRACTICE)

Duration: 15 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Tactical purpose: Expands the coordinated-drop mechanism into a full positional practice with a genuine mid-block held first, then dropped to a low-block on a named cue, so the whole team — not just the back line — reorganises together.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 50 x 34 m
- **Players:** 8 defending outfield vs 8 building outfield + goalkeeper
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** the building team's goalkeeper participates fully; the defending team's shape is the focus of this practice

- **Team sizes:** 8 v 8 + GK
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** flat markers for the mid-block and low-block reference lines
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** 3 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart:** nearest player restarts any stoppage
- **Coach position:** mobile, able to see the whole picture
- **Rotation method:** roles swap at the midpoint
- **Direction of play:** the building team works to progress; the defending team holds, then drops

Practice walkthrough: The defending team holds a genuine mid-block, exactly as taught in Week 7, against a building team working to progress. When a named cue occurs — sustained pressure inside the mid-block for a set period, or the ball played into the space behind the line — the whole defending team drops together to a low block, maintaining its shape and compactness throughout.

Rules: Standard positional practice rules; the defending team scores a point for a regain, the building team scores a point for a set number of consecutive passes or a shot.

Tactical roles: the full coordinated-drop skill set from Practice 2, now combined with Week 7's mid-block principles and the whole team's shape, not just the back line.

Decision-making triggers:

- Sustained pressure with no realistic regain at the current depth → drop as a team.
- A ball is played in behind the mid-block line → drop immediately and collectively to protect the space.
- The mid-block is coping comfortably → hold the current shape.

Communication language used: *Squeeze, Cover, Drop, Step, Delay.*

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Coordinated, whole-team movement during the drop.
Tactical	Correct recognition of the specific cues that call for dropping.
Physical	Explosive, coordinated backward movement at team scale.
Psychological	Discipline to drop together rather than reacting individually to pressure or a difficult moment.
Communication & leadership	The whole team organising the drop out loud, led by a clear voice.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What specific cue triggered the drop each time it happened?

2. How did the whole team's shape — not just the back line — change during the drop?
3. What is the cost of dropping too early, and what is the cost of dropping too late?
4. How does this connect to Week 7's mid-block work — is the low block simply a deeper version of the same discipline?

Progressions:

1. Add a genuine attacking direction and goal for the building team.
2. Introduce a second cue (a specific match-state scenario, foreshadowing Phase 5) requiring the team to drop for a different reason.
3. Reduce the practice area, raising the intensity of the decision-making.

Regressions:

1. Allow the coach to call the drop clearly for longer while the mechanism is being learned.
2. Widen the practice area for more time.
3. Reduce numbers to 6v6.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The whole team fails to drop together, with some players holding the mid-block and others already retreating	The cue isn't recognised as a shared signal across the whole team	The team's shape stretches vertically during the drop	Stop	Short group intervention connecting directly to this week's principle	Resume
The team drops even when the mid-block is coping comfortably	Overcorrection, or misreading a cue that wasn't genuinely there	Territory is conceded unnecessarily	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "was that cue really there?"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: a mix of *short group intervention* and *questioning*.

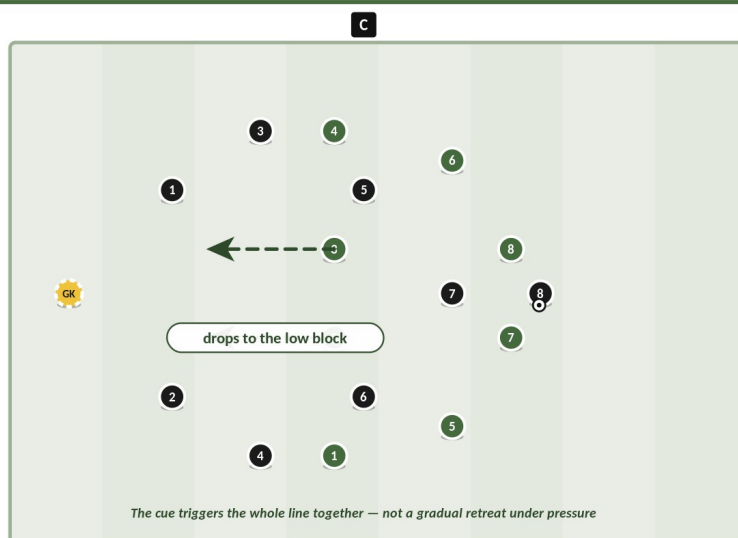
Success indicators:

- The whole team drops together, on the same cue, at the same time.
- The low block maintains the same compactness and connection as the mid-block it dropped from.
- The drop happens only when a genuine cue is present.

Coach's eye: watch the whole team's shape during the drop, not just the back line — a genuinely coordinated structural change involves everyone, not just the players closest to goal.

H18.3 TWO BLOCKS — Mid-Block to Low-Block on a Cue

50 x 34 m · 8 defenders hold a mid-block, then drop to a low-block on a named cue (sustained pressure, ball in behind) · 15 minutes



● Defending team ● Building team ● Goalkeeper ● Ball ● Mid-block line ➡ Drops to the low block

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AI image-generation prompt (tactical diagram): "Top-down 2D vector football coaching diagram, clean white background, UEFA coaching-manual style. A 50x34 metre area with dimension labels. A goalkeeper in yellow on the left. Eight players in black bibs numbered 1–8 organised in a building shape, and eight players in dark green bibs numbered 1–8 organised in a mid-block line, two of them connected to short dashed run arrows labelled 'drops to the low block' moving backward. White football near a black player. Title: 'TWO BLOCKS — Mid-Block to Low-Block on a Cue'. Subtitle: '50 x 34 m · 8 defenders hold a mid-block, then drop to a low-block on a named cue (sustained pressure, ball in behind) · 15 minutes'. Legend row at bottom. High-resolution landscape vector illustration, clear typography, no decorative elements, no club badges or logos."

Realistic illustration — description: Elevated wide view of a positional practice, a compact line of green-bibbed defenders holding a mid-block position, then visibly dropping together toward their own goal in coordinated, even spacing as pressure builds, black-bibbed opponents working the ball forward, coach observing from a central, elevated vantage point.

AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration): "Elevated wide three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of an adult amateur football positional practice on a grass pitch. A compact line of players in dark green bibs holding a mid-block defensive position, then visibly dropping together toward their own goal in coordinated, even spacing. Players in black bibs working the ball forward toward them. A coach observing from a central vantage point. Overcast evening light, realistic grass texture, amateur adult players of varied build. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."

PRACTICE 4 — HOLD THE LOW BLOCK (CONFIDENCE GAME)

Duration: 15 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

Tactical purpose: Closes the session with a competitive, enjoyable game that rewards a clean regain won inside an organised low block, immediately following a coordinated drop, reinforcing the week's technical and tactical work inside a genuinely fun context that sends players into the weekend confident.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 34 x 22 m
- **Players:** 14 outfield, rotating
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers rotate through
- **Team sizes:** 7 v 7
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** 2 full-size or portable goals, 6 flat markers
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** 3 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart location:** nearest sideline
- **Coach position:** sideline, central
- **Rotation method:** none required at this scale
- **Direction of play:** both directions, one goal per end

Practice walkthrough: A 7v7 game in which a regain won inside a marked low-block area, immediately after a coordinated drop, is worth double.

Rules: As described; otherwise standard small-sided-game rules.

Tactical roles: the full coordinated-drop skill set from Practices 2–3, applied inside free-flowing, competitive play.

Decision-making triggers: the full set from Practice 3, applied spontaneously as the picture demands during play.

Communication language used: the full season's language so far.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Clean, coordinated dropping technique under game-realistic, competitive conditions.
Tactical	Recognising the genuine cue to drop, then defending the low block with organisation.
Physical	Moderate, game-based intensity to close the week on a positive note.
Psychological	Confidence and enjoyment — this is the week's designed high point.
Communication & leadership	Organising the drop and the resulting low block quickly, without needing a stoppage to reset.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What made tonight's best coordinated drop work?
2. What's one thing from this week — changing shape in possession, or dropping without the ball — you feel ready to take into Saturday?
3. Why does a genuinely coordinated drop matter more than simply "getting bodies back"?

Progressions:

1. Increase the bonus value for a regain that leads directly to a shot within five seconds.
2. Add a genuine offside line.
3. Reduce the pitch size slightly to increase the frequency of drop opportunities.

Regressions:

- 1. Reduce the bonus zone size if the condition is proving too difficult.
- 2. Increase the pitch size for more space and time.
- 3. Reduce to 5v5 for more individual involvement.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Players drop individually rather than as a coordinated unit, chasing the bonus	The bonus condition is chased at the expense of the structure taught earlier in the week	The low block forms unevenly, with gaps between players	Stop	Short group intervention connecting back to Practice 3	Resume
The team drops too readily, abandoning the mid-block even when it's coping	Overcorrection toward caution to secure the bonus	Territory is conceded unnecessarily throughout the game	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "did we need to drop there?"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: light touch — mostly *questioning*, preserving the game's flow and enjoyment as the session's intended closing note.

Success indicators:

- Regains inside the low block, following a coordinated drop, increase across the practice.
- The drop remains coordinated and even, not staggered, even under game pressure.
- Players finish the session animated and positive.

Coach's eye: this is a confidence-building close to the week — resist over- coaching it; let the week's earlier correction do its work and allow the group to enjoy what they've built.

H18.4 HOLD THE LOW BLOCK — Confidence Game

34 x 22 m · 7v7 · bonus for a clean regain won inside an organised low block, right after a coordinated drop · 17 minutes

C

Team A

Team B

Ball

Low-block area

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AI image-generation prompt (tactical diagram): "Top-down 2D vector football coaching diagram, clean white background, UEFA coaching-manual style. A 34x22 metre pitch with a full-size goal at each end, and a shaded zone near one end labelled 'LOW-BLOCK AREA'. Seven players in dark green bibs numbered 1–7 and six players in black bibs numbered 1–6 spread across the pitch. White football near a green player. Title: 'HOLD THE LOW BLOCK — Confidence Game'. Subtitle:

'34 x 22 m · 7v7 · bonus for a clean regain won inside an organised low block, right after a coordinated drop · 17 minutes'. Legend row at bottom. High-resolution landscape vector illustration, clear typography, no decorative elements, no club badges or logos."

Realistic illustration — description: Elevated sideline view of a lively 7v7 game, a compact group of green-bibbed defenders organised in a deep, low-block shape near their own goal, winning the ball cleanly from a black-bibbed attacker, coach on the touchline smiling and encouraging.

AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration): "Elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of an adult amateur 7v7 small-sided football game on a grass pitch with two full-size goals. A compact group of players in dark green bibs organised in a deep, low-block defensive shape near their own goal, winning the ball cleanly from an opponent in a black bib. Warm early-evening light, realistic grass pitch and long shadows, amateur adult players of varied build showing visible energy and enjoyment. A coach on the touchline, smiling and encouraging. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."

REFLECTION (1 MINUTE)

One question to the group: "Name the cue that told us to drop tonight, and how quickly we reacted to it as a team."

Match-Day Objectives

Three team objectives:

1. Change from a back-four to a back-three build-up when the opposition's press genuinely calls for it, without losing possession during the change.
2. Drop from a mid-block to a low-block together, on a shared cue, when the picture calls for it.
3. Maintain compactness and connection throughout both structural changes, in possession and out of it.

Three unit objectives:

1. **Back line and goalkeeper:** organise and call both structural changes clearly and early.
2. **Midfield unit:** provide the dropping body for the back-three build-up, and hold the connection with the back line throughout any defensive drop.
3. **Front players:** recognise when the team's structural change opens a new picture in possession, and adjust their own positioning accordingly.

Individual role reminders:

- The player converting the shape — in possession or out of it — must stay a genuine, available option throughout the movement, not disappear from the picture.
- A structural change should answer a genuine problem, not happen on a fixed pattern.
- When the cue to drop occurs, react with the whole line together, not as an individual.

Measurable performance indicators:

- Number of clean structural changes from a back four to a back three during build-up.
- Number of coordinated drops from a mid-block to a low-block, and whether they occurred on a genuine cue.
- Possession retained versus lost specifically during the moment of a structural change.
- Territory conceded unnecessarily from a premature or unneeded drop.

Formation Translation — Applying This Across Different Shapes

Changing shape in possession:

STRUCTURE	WHO TYPICALLY DROPS TO CREATE THE BACK THREE	WHAT STAYS THE SAME	WHAT CHANGES	KEY RISK
4-3-3	A holding midfielder, or occasionally a full-back tucking in	The recognition and coordinated-movement principle	Which specific player drops depends on the opposition's press shape	The dropping player becoming unavailable as a passing option during the transition
3-4-3 / back-three structure	Already builds from a back three; the equivalent change may instead be converting to a back four by pushing a centre-back into midfield	The recognition and coordinated-movement principle	The direction of the change is reversed, but the underlying skill — recognising and executing a fluid structural change — is identical	Losing defensive solidity if the change is made without a clear tactical reason

Changing shape without the ball:

STRUCTURE	WHO FORMS THE DROPPING LINE	WHAT STAYS THE SAME	WHAT CHANGES	KEY RISK
4-3-3	The back four, with the midfield three dropping in coordination	The shared-cue, coordinated-drop principle	The front three's pressing picture also drops deeper, changing where the team looks to press from next	The front three failing to drop with the rest of the team, leaving a disconnected shape
4-1-4-1 / back-three defensive structure	The back three or five, with the rest of the team dropping in coordination	The shared-cue, coordinated-drop principle	A back three or five often has a naturally different low-block shape than a back four	Wing-backs dropping at a different speed than the rest of the line

Coach Review

To be completed by the coaching staff after delivery.

What worked well this week:

What needs more work:

Attendance and availability notes:

Adjustments for next week:

Individual player notes:

Written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI · Castlewellan Town FC — Senior Coaching Curriculum · session design follows the four-corner model used in UEFA coach education (technical, tactical, physical, psychological) and the principle-led, formation-neutral approach set out in modern coach education. An independent club resource, not an official UEFA or Irish FA publication and not endorsed by either.