



CASTLEWELLAN TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB

Pre-Season — A Four-Session Block

Four sessions, deliberate order, before results start • sequence, not content

WHAT PRE-SEASON IS FOR

Not fitness. Children get fit by playing, and running laps in August buys you very little by October. Anything you gain from conditioning work at this stage you would have got anyway from the last fifteen minutes of every session in the folder.

! FIRST — THE RETURN-TO-PLAY RAMP

After six weeks off, the first two nights are shorter and lighter than the sheet says, whatever is on it. Cut the conditioned match to ten minutes, keep high-speed running and sharp changes of direction down, and build back over a fortnight. Most pre-season injuries are load injuries in the first two weeks and they are largely avoidable. Watch for anyone who has visibly grown, and for knee or heel pain that has been there for weeks — that is a GP or a chartered physiotherapist, not something to coach around.

THE BLOCK — ORDER MATTERS FOR THE FIRST TWO

WEEK 1 **A7 • Four v Four**

You are not coaching this one, you are watching. Four v four strips the game back far enough that everything shows: who lifts their head, who hides, who goes past a player, who tracks back unprompted. Every intervention costs you information — write it down afterwards.

WEEK 2 **A8 • Movement, Landing and Growing Bodies**

Time-sensitive, and this is the week to run it. Bodies that landed fine in May do not necessarily land fine in August. Injury prevention rather than conditioning — landing, decelerating, turning without the knee falling in. Early means it is in place before the volume goes up.

WEEK 3 **1 • Scan, Open Out, Receive Across Your Body**

The individual habit everything else assumes. Head up before the ball arrives, first touch out of the feet, body open. If they come back receiving flat-footed with their back to the game, nothing in combination play or building from the back will land.

WEEK 4 **13 • Width and Depth**

The team habit, and the antidote to bunching. Six weeks of summer football in the street trains players to swarm the ball; this untrains it. Pair with Session 26 later in the year when the same problem returns, as it will.

READ A5 AND A6 BEFORE YOU NEED THEM — DO NOT RUN THEM

Read these, do not run them. Pre-season attendance is chaos — eight one night, twenty-two the next, and the pitch gone to the seniors half the time. A5 and A6 hold the four rules for scaling any session to any number of players and any size of space.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW BY THE END

- Who are the three players who consistently scan before receiving?
- Who is comfortable going past somebody, and who has never tried?
- Who defends when nobody is watching? Who talks, and who organises?
- Who has grown over the summer and is moving differently because of it?
- Who is smallest, and am I judging them on football or on size?
- Which two players do you not yet have a read on?

The last one is the useful question. There is always somebody who slips through pre-season without you forming a view, and they are usually the player who drifts by November.

IF YOU HAVE MORE THAN FOUR WEEKS

- A6** Odd Numbers — Run it properly rather than just reading it. Pre-season is the one time uneven numbers are guaranteed.
- 25** Press, Cover and Balance — The defensive habit that stops most goals at this age. Cheap to install early.
- A3** The Goalkeeper — Your keeper has had no coaching all summer, and probably none last season either.
- 5** The 1v1 Attacker — Confidence to take players on erodes fast once results matter. Bank it now.

THREE THINGS NOT TO DO

- No fitness test.** A beep test tells you who has hit puberty. Nothing you can coach, and it tells the slowest child something they need not learn about themselves at all.
- Do not pick a team in August.** The player who looks strongest in pre-season is often just the player who grew first. It evens out.
- Do not read a growth spurt as a drop in ability.** A player whose limbs changed length over the summer will have a worse touch for a few months. It comes back, and saying so out loud to them is worth more than any drill.
- Do not skip the reflection.** Five minutes sitting down is where it consolidates, and pre-season is when the habit gets set for the year.