

When It Isn't Working

Minute twelve. The drill has collapsed, two players are wrestling, and the plan in your pocket suddenly reads like it was written for a different species. This page is for exactly now.

Every session in this folder was written to work. None of them work every night. Experienced coaches fix a dying practice without thinking about it; this page is that instinct, written down, for everyone still building it. Read it once at home — at the pitch you'll only have time for the bold bits.

The five-second diagnosis

Stand still and watch for five seconds. Nearly every failing practice is one of these six, and each has a fix you can make **without stopping the session** — announce the change while the balls keep rolling.

1. Queues have appeared. More than three waiting anywhere means the practice has stalled — and this folder's first rule is *no queues, ever*. **Fix: split it in two.** Same practice, two grids, half the players in each. No new cones needed — steal the neighbouring space. Every session's diagram works at half size.

2. Too easy — it works every time. Success rate near 100% teaches nothing and boredom arrives within two minutes. **Fix: read the session's harder line** — every practice has one. No time to look? The universal levers: shrink the space, add a defender, limit touches, add a time limit.

3. Too hard — it never works. Nobody has completed the thing even once; heads are dropping. **Fix: the easier line.** Universal levers in the other direction: bigger space, remove a defender, unlimited touches, walk-through pace, or let the weakest pairing demonstrate a success you engineer.

4. They don't understand the rules. Everyone is asking questions or wandering — the explanation was too long (it usually was; this folder budgets you about thirty seconds of talking). **Fix: stop explaining and play it.** Pick four players, run one rep at half speed while everyone watches, then everyone in. A demonstration is worth three explanations, and doesn't need to be perfect — a *wrong* demonstration you correct is even better.

5. The energy has gone. Rules understood, difficulty fine — but flat. **Fix: add a score.** Any score. First pair to five, team points on the board, winners stay on. Competition is the folder's built-in engine (the last fifteen minutes is *always* a game for a reason); pull that lever early when a night is flat. If it's the last practice anyway — skip ahead to the game. A shortened session with a great game beats a complete session everyone endured.

6. One or two players are wrecking it. Everyone else is fine. **Fix: give the wreckers a job,** not a punishment — serve the balls, keep the score, captain a team, demonstrate. Ninety per cent of youth disruption is a request for attention or a signal the practice is at the wrong level *for them* — the harder line applied to one player is also a behaviour tool.

When to abandon the plan entirely

Sometimes the right call is bigger than a fix. Three honest triggers:

- **The numbers are wrong for the session** — see *Session A6 — Odd Numbers*, built for exactly this, any night.
- **The space is wrong** — see *Session A5 — The Small Space Session*.
- **The group needs a different night than you planned** — after a rough school day or a heavy defeat on Saturday, ten minutes into a fight with the plan, surrender gracefully: 4v4 games (*Session A7*) with you saying almost nothing is never a wasted session. It is, in fact, one of the folder's best.

What never changes, whatever else does: finish with a game, finish on time, and finish with the reflection questions — even a session that collapsed produces a good sixty seconds of “what was hard tonight?” And afterwards, be kind to yourself: write one line about what happened, because that line is next week's session choice. The folder has forty-four; the one that suits *this* group *this* month is in there.

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