SESSION 8 · STANDALONE PLAN

Defending the Wide 1v1

One against one · Reference format: U12 9v9 · 60 minutes · 14–16 players

AT A GLANCE

TIME	MINS	PHASE	PRACTICE
0:00 – 0:10	10	**Warm-up**	8.1 Show Him the Line
0:10 – 0:25	15	**Technical practice**	8.2 The Wide 1v1
0:25 – 0:40	15	**Skill game**	8.3 The Crossing Duel
0:40 – 0:55	15	**Conditioned match**	8.4 Wide Duel Match
0:55 – 1:00	5	**Reflection**	Review, with the players

USING THIS SESSION

This is a standalone plan. It does not depend on any other session in the set and can be run whenever it is useful to you — as a one-off, out of order, or repeated. Nothing here assumes the players did something last week.

U12 nine-a-side is the reference format, not the audience. The session is written at 9v9 because something has to be, and the phone index adapts it to the other four Irish FA formats — pick your team at the top of it and this session will tell you whether to run it as printed, scale it, adapt it, or leave it for another age.

Scaling up, and down as far as 7v7, is a matter of numbers. Keep roughly the same space per player: to 7v7 that is about a fifth smaller with a player off each team, to 5v5 about a third. **For eleven-a-side** add ten to fifteen metres to the length of the bigger practices and put the extra players in as outside players or a second team, never in a queue.

Below U10 it is not just a matter of size, because the game itself is different. There is no offside, no throw-in — restarts are a dribble or a pass in — no referee, and no league result. At U8–U9 the technical practice usually wants shortening or dropping. At U6–U7 there are no goalkeepers at all and the four-phase hour is the wrong shape entirely. The Formats tab in the phone index has the rules for each stage.

WHY THIS SESSION MATTERS

Look at where Under-12 teams actually concede. It is very rarely from a defender being outrun through the middle; it is from a full-back being turned inside in a wide area, or from a winger reaching the byline unopposed and cutting the ball back. The wide 1v1 is where 9v9 matches are decided, and it is the one duel with a built-in advantage for the defender: the touchline. A full-back who understands that the line is a teammate has already halved the attacker's options before the duel begins. The principle is the opposite of what young defenders instinctively do. They stand square, protect the outside because it feels closer to the goal, and get turned inside into the space where a shot is on. The correct answer is to approach from the inside, show the winger down the line, and let the touchline shrink the pitch. Tonight closes this theme with that lesson, and with the four-week review.

BY THE END, PLAYERS CAN

- **Approach a wide attacker from the inside** so the only route left is down the line.
- **Use the touchline as a second defender** — squeeze the attacker towards it rather than away from it.

- **Stay goal-side and side-on**, never letting the attacker cut back inside onto their stronger foot.
- **Delay a winger who has reached the byline**, and block the cross with a front foot rather than a lunge.
- **Attack the box in threes** when the duel is won at the other end — near post, penalty spot, far post.

KIT LIST

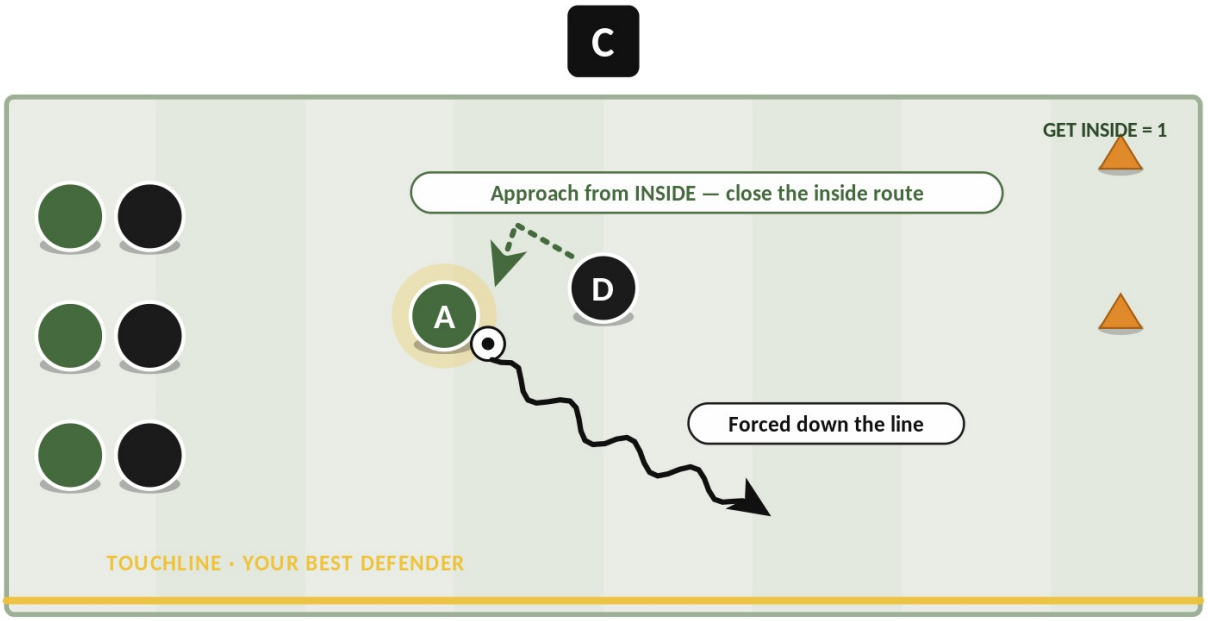
Ground needed: about 60 × 45 m. The warm-up uses a long thin strip along an actual touchline if you have one — a real line is more convincing than a row of markers. Session 8 is the summary session for this theme, so leave five minutes at the end for the review with the players; it matters more than squeezing out another two minutes of football.

ITEM	QTY	USED IN
Footballs (size 4)	16	All practices
Flat markers	60	Strip, channels, cutback zones
Cones (tall)	8	Target gates (8.1, 8.2)
Bibs — red / blue / yellow	8 / 8 / 2	8.1 onwards
Mini goals	2	Skill game (8.3) — one per end
Full-size goals	2	8.2 and 8.4

8.1 SHOW HIM THE LINE

Teach the single most important idea in wide defending before anything else happens: the touchline is on your side. Pairs work along a narrow strip, and the defender's only job is to make sure the attacker ends up next to the line rather than inside them.

30 x 12 m strip · the touchline is the extra defender · waves of pairs · 10 minutes



DEFEND THE INSIDE · LET HIM HAVE THE LINE · STAY GOAL-SIDE

Attacker · Defender · Ball · Target gate · Attacker's route · Force him wide · C Coach

SET UP

- A **30 × 12 m strip** marked along a real touchline if one is available. The touchline is the bottom edge and should be marked or pointed out clearly.
- A **4 m target gate** at the far end, positioned on the INSIDE (away from the touchline) — reaching it is the attacker's win.
- Pairs work in waves: one attacker and one defender at a time, with the rest waiting at the start. Waves are 8–10 seconds so waits are short.
- With 14–16 players, run **two strips side by side** so the waves are even shorter.
- Coach standing at the far end where you can see whether the defender's body is pointing inside or outside.

HOW IT RUNS

1. **Minutes 0–3 — arrival.** Greet each player by name, ball each, free dribbling. **Collect the Session 7 homework** — *how many times did your defender win it with a tackle? How many without?*
2. **Minute 3 — walk the idea.** Stand on the touchline and ask: *How many directions can he go if he's here? How many if he's in the middle?* Twenty seconds. Let them answer.
3. **Minute 4 — first waves, passive.** Attacker at three-quarter pace, defender may not tackle — only steer. The point is the approach angle, not the outcome.

4. **Minute 6 — live.** Attacker goes properly and tries to reach the inside gate. Defender may tackle.
5. **Minutes 8–10 — score it.** The **attacker scores 1** for reaching the gate. The **defender scores 2** for forcing the attacker over the touchline or backwards without tackling. Swap roles halfway.

RULES & SCORING

- The attacker's target is the **inside** gate — they only win by getting central.
- **Defender scores double for a stop without a tackle.**
- Ball over the touchline is a win for the defender.

! No slide tackling.

- Waves of 8–10 seconds. Next pair goes as soon as the previous one finishes.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Approach on a curve from the **inside**. Arrive side-on, inside shoulder forward, front foot pointing down the line. Small steps, feet never crossing, retreating while still facing the attacker.
Tactical	**Defend the inside, concede the line.** The touchline removes half the attacker's options for free. Stay goal-side — if the attacker gets between you and the goal, the duel is already lost.
Physical	Short accelerations followed by lateral and backward movement. Waves of 8–10 seconds with 40 seconds recovery is a good work-to-rest ratio for U12.
Psychological	The defenders should feel like specialists tonight, not like the people who couldn't get in the attack. Frame it that way from the first minute.
Social	Waiting players should watch and be asked: *which side did he show him?* Watching with a question is worth more than watching without one.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Approaching from outside and protecting the line, which opens the inside	*Which way did he go? Which way did you want him to go? Now run at him from the other side.*
Standing square and getting turned either way	*Point your inside shoulder at him. Now which way is easiest for him?*
Getting beaten on the inside, which is the failure that costs goals	Stop, reset that pair, and run it once at half pace with the correct angle. Then go again at full speed.
Diving in near the line	*The line is already helping you. Why gamble?*
Losing goal-side position and ending up alongside the attacker	*Where's the goal? Get between him and it before you worry about the ball.*

ASK THEM

- How many directions can an attacker go when he's next to the line? How many in the middle?
- Which side should you approach from?
- Where should your inside shoulder be pointing?
- Is forcing him over the line a win?
- Attackers — which defenders were hardest, and what were they doing?
- What happens if he gets inside you?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Narrow the strip to 8 m, so the defender's angle has to be exact.	**Widen the strip to 16 m** and slow the attacker.
The attacker scores double for getting inside, raising the pressure on the angle.	**Passive attacker** — walking pace while the approach angle is learned.
Defender starts a metre behind, recovering rather than set.	**Remove the tackle** entirely; steering is enough.
Add a second attacker arriving centrally, so the defender must delay rather than commit.	**Shorten the strip** so the duel resolves quickly and repetitions increase.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Defenders approaching from the **inside** without being reminded.

Inside shoulder forward, body side-on.

Attackers ending up next to the touchline rather than cutting inside.

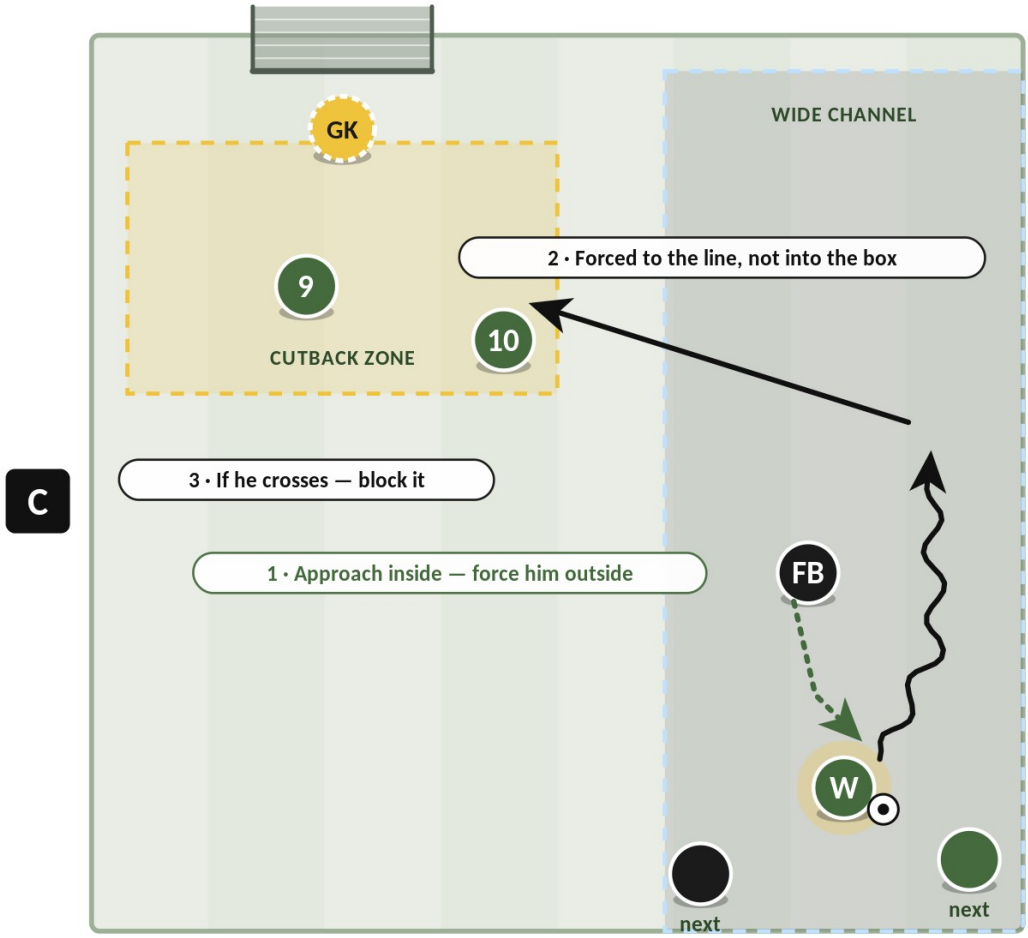
Stops achieved without tackles — the number to count.

Waiting players able to answer *which side did he show him?*

8.2 THE WIDE 1v1 — Full-Back v Winger

The real picture: a winger in a wide channel, a full-back defending, a goalkeeper, and two attackers arriving in the box. Both sides of the idea get coached at once — the full-back learns to force outside and block the cross, the winger learns to beat them and deliver.

26 x 24 m · full-back v winger with a goalkeeper · 6–8 players per station · 15 minutes



ROTATION: full-back → winger · winger → box runner · runner → back of the line

Attackers · Full-back · Goalkeeper · Ball · Cutback zone / wide channel
Winger's route · Force him outside · Cross / cutback · C Coach

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SET UP

- One station at each full-size goal, each 26 × 24 m, with the goal off to one side.
- A **10 m wide channel** marked down one side, and a **cutback zone** marked in front of goal.
- Six to eight players per station: goalkeeper, winger, full-back, two box runners, and the rest waiting.
- Balls stacked with the waiting wingers, not with the coach.
- Coach positioned where you can see the full-back's **approach angle** — beside the channel, not behind the goal.

HOW IT RUNS

1. **Set the picture in 40 seconds.** *Winger, get to the byline and cut it back. Full-back, make sure he never gets inside you.*
2. **Minutes 0–4 — winger at three-quarter pace.** The full-back practises the approach angle with a fair chance of getting it right.
3. **Minute 4 — one freeze, twenty seconds.** Show a full-back who approached from outside and got turned inside, beside one who approached from inside and forced the winger to the line. Ask the box runners which one they'd rather defend against.
4. **Minutes 4–11 — full pace.** Wingers go properly. Full-backs force outside, delay, and block the cross with the front foot.
5. **Minutes 11–15 — score it both ways.** Full-back points and attacker points on the same board, announced together.
6. **Rotation:** full-back → winger → box runner → back of the line. Everybody defends and everybody attacks. **Rotate the goalkeeper every four minutes.**

RULES & SCORING

- **Full-back: 2 points** for forcing the winger over the touchline or backwards; **2 points** for blocking a cross; **3 points** for winning the ball cleanly.
- **Attackers: 1 point** for a cross or cutback that reaches a runner; **3 points** for a goal; **4 points** if the winger got inside the full-back first.
- The winger may go inside or outside — the full-back's job is to make outside the only realistic option.

! **No slide tackling.**

- Ball out or goal scored: next group goes immediately.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	**Full-back:** curved approach from the inside, arrive side-on, front foot pointing down the line, small steps. Block the cross with the **front foot** and a low body — never a lunge or a turned back. **Winger:** attack the full-back's front foot, and if you're forced wide, get to the byline and cut it back along the ground.
Tactical	The full-back concedes the line and defends the inside. Once the winger is on the byline the danger drops sharply — that is a small victory and should be named as one. **Box runners: near post, penalty spot, far post.** Three different places, not three players in the same one.
Physical	Repeated wide sprints, decelerations and blocking actions. Demanding on the ankles and hips — the warm-up matters.
Psychological	Both roles get praised here, which is the point of doing them in the same practice. Alternate who you praise so neither side feels like the exercise is against them.
Social	The goalkeeper should be organising: **"stay outside!"** or **"he's coming inside!"** This is the first session where the keeper has a genuine coaching role, and it changes how they see the position.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Full-back approaching from outside and being cut inside	The most costly error in 9v9 defending. *Which way did he go? Where were you when he decided?*
Turning the back or jumping when blocking a cross	*Front foot out, stay big, watch the ball.* A turned back concedes and often hurts.
Winger crossing from too deep into a crowd	*How far can you get before you cross? Get to the line.*
All box runners at the near post	*Three of you, three different places. Who's at the far post?*

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Full-back diving in at the byline	*He's on the line with nowhere to go. What's the rush?*
Goalkeeper silent	Give them the two phrases and ask them to use them every repetition. They will.

ASK THEM

- Which side did you approach from? Which way did he go?
- Is forcing him to the byline a win? Why?
- How do you block a cross without turning your back?
- Wingers — when were you sure you'd beaten him?
- Box runners — where are the three places to be?
- Keepers — what could you see that the full-back couldn't?
- Which is more dangerous — a cross from the byline or one from deep?
- How is this exactly what happens on Saturday?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Second attacker overlapping outside the winger, so the full-back has a decision as well as a duel.	**Winger at half pace** while the approach angle is learned.
Two-touch for the winger in the channel, speeding everything up.	**Narrow the channel to 6 m**, reducing the ground the full-back has to cover.
Recovering centre-back arrives late, so the full-back must delay rather than commit.	**Remove the goalkeeper** and use a mini goal for a few repetitions.
Only cutbacks count — no crosses in the air.	**No box runners** — the practice becomes a pure wide 1v1 with the byline as the target.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Full-backs approaching from the inside and forcing wingers down the line.

Crosses blocked with the front foot, body low and facing the ball.

Wingers reaching the byline and cutting back along the ground.

Three runners in three different positions in the box.

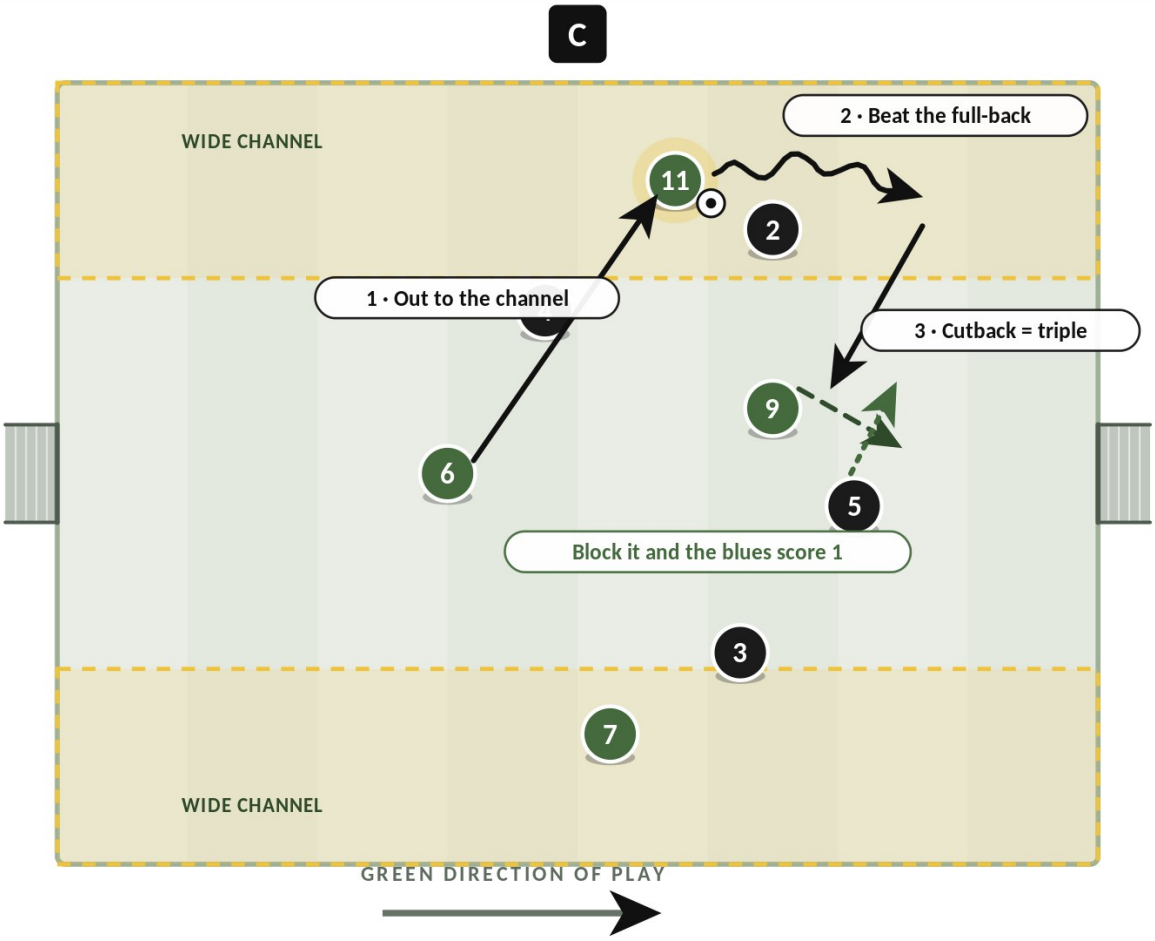
Goalkeepers talking.

Both scoreboards in use — neither role dominating the session.

8.3 THE CROSSING DUEL (4 v 4)

A live game that pays for exactly the two behaviours these sessions have built: beating your player wide and delivering, or defending it and stopping the delivery. Both teams can win on either scoreboard.

32 x 24 m · 6 m wide channels · goals from a cross or cutback score triple · 15 minutes



Greens (attack right) · Blues (attack left) · Ball · Wide channel
Beat the full-back · Cutback · Block the cross · Attack the box · C Coach

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SET UP

- Two pitches, each 32 × 24 m, side by side with a 5 m corridor between them.
- Per pitch: **one mini goal at each end**, plus a **6 m wide channel** marked down each touchline.
- 4 v 4 per pitch (16). With 14, run 4v4 and 3v3. With 15, run 4v4 and 4v3.
- Coach in the corridor with a spare ball, feeding both games.

HOW IT RUNS

1. **Bibs out while you explain.** Balanced teams.
2. **Explain in 25 seconds:** *Normal goal is 1. A goal from a cross or cutback out of the wide channel is 3. Blocking a cross is 1 to the defending team. Three minutes. Go.*
3. **Game 1 — no coaching.** Watch whether anyone uses the channels at all.
4. **Between games 1 and 2, one question:** *If the cross is worth three, what does that mean for where you stand?*

5. **From game 3, add the arrival rule:** the 3-point goal only counts if **two attackers** were in the central area when the cross was played.
6. **Four games of three minutes with 45 seconds between**, ladder as usual.

RULES & SCORING

- **Goal = 1 point. Goal from a cross or cutback delivered out of a wide channel = 3 points. Blocking a cross = 1 point to the defending team.**
- From game 3, the 3-point goal needs **two attackers in the central area** when the ball is delivered.
- Only one defender may enter the wide channel at a time — this preserves the 1v1 and stops the game becoming a wall of bodies.
- Ball out: the coach rolls a new one in immediately.
- No stoppages. Coaching in the 45-second gaps, as a question.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Cutbacks along the ground, into the space between the goal and the edge of the central area. Blocking with the front foot. Attackers arriving on the move, not standing still.
Tactical	**Get the ball wide early** — the channel is worth three times as much as the middle. Full-backs: force the winger to the line and stay goal-side. Attackers: two of you into the middle before the cross, in different places.
Physical	Three minutes on, 45 off, four times, with repeated wide sprints. Shorten the last game if quality drops.
Psychological	this theme finishes here. Praise the specific behaviours this theme spends four sessions building — the brave duel, the patient defender, the run to the far post.
Social	Wingers should demand the ball; box runners should call for the cutback. Listen for whether the vocabulary of the block has become theirs.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Nobody using the channels despite the 3-point reward	Ask directly: *Which points haven't we scored? What would we have to change?*
Crosses hit high into a crowd	*Where are your teammates — in the air or on the ground?*
Only one attacker in the middle	The two-attacker rule from game 3 handles it. Reinforce with the question, not the instruction.
Two defenders piling into the channel	Enforce the one-defender rule; the duel is what you're coaching.
Defenders backing off to the goal line and conceding the cross	*Where do you stop the cross — at the goal, or where he's standing?*

ASK THEM

- If a cross is worth three, where should the ball go?
- How many of you should be in the middle when the ball's wide?
- Where does a cutback need to land?
- Full-backs — which way are you sending the winger?
- How do you block a cross without turning away?
- Which was easier tonight, attacking wide or defending it?
- What's changed about your defending across this theme?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Cutbacks only — no aerial crosses count.	**Any goal from a wide delivery counts as 3**, however it arrives.
Three attackers required in the central area for the 3-point goal.	**Widen the channels to 8 m.**
First-time finishes only from a cross.	**Remove the blocking point** if the game becomes purely defensive.
Narrow the channels to 4 m.	**3 v 3 on 28 × 20 m** — more space, more crosses, more chances.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

The ball reaching the wide channels regularly.

Cutbacks along the ground rather than hopeful crosses.

Two or three attackers arriving in different central positions.

Full-backs forcing wingers down the line and blocking with the front foot.

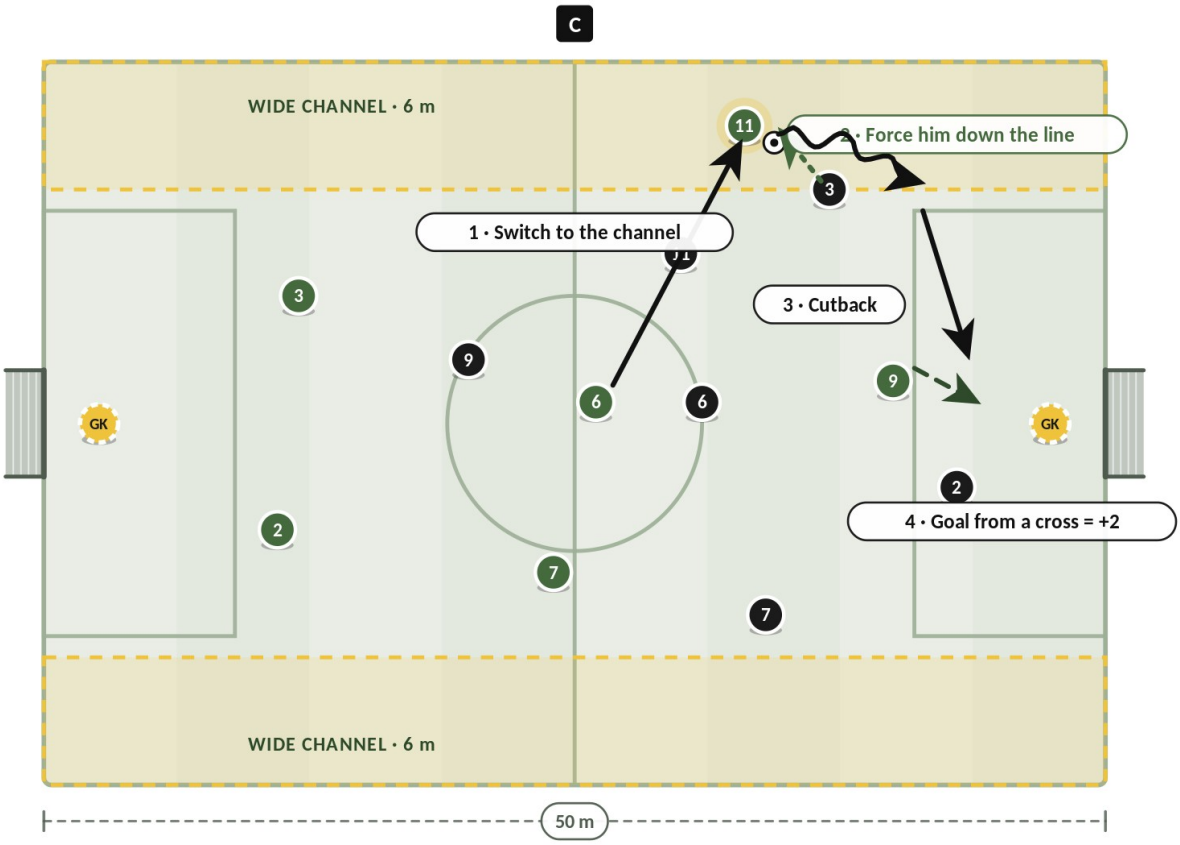
Both scoreboards being used — attacking and defensive points.

The block's vocabulary being spoken by the players.

8.4 WIDE DUEL MATCH (7 v 7)

The last fifteen minutes, with both halves of the theme on the same scoreboard in a full match picture. Win the wide duel or beat it — either way, the moments that decide 9v9 matches are the ones that pay.

50 x 34 m · 6 m channels · full-back wins a wide duel = +2 · goal from a cross = +2 · 15 minutes



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SET UP

- 50 × 34 m with full-size goals. A **6 m channel** marked down each touchline.
- Four spare balls in the back of each goal.
- 7 v 7 including goalkeepers (14). With 15–16, play 8v8 or roll subs every 90 seconds.
- 2-3-1 outfield shape. Rotate keepers at the halfway point.
- Coach on the halfway line, outside the pitch.

HOW IT RUNS

1. **Keep the bibs and teams.** Keepers and shape in 30 seconds.
2. **Explain the condition once:** *Normal game. A full-back who wins a duel in the wide channel gets two. A goal from a cross or cutback gets two on top.*
3. **Minutes 0–5 — no interruption.** Watch the wide areas and nothing else.
4. **Minute 5 — drinks break, one question:** *When their winger gets the ball wide, what's our full-back's first job?* You want *get inside him.* Restart.

5. **Minutes 6–13.** Announce both kinds of bonus loudly and by name.
6. **Final two minutes — free play, no conditions.** Then straight into the review page while they're still on the pitch.

RULES & SCORING

- **Goal = 3 points. Full-back wins a duel in the wide channel = +2. Goal from a cross or cutback = +2.**
- A wide duel is 'won' by forcing the attacker out, backwards, or by a clean tackle.

! **No slide tackling.**

- Keepers restart within five seconds. Throw-ins may be taken as pass-ins.
- Two individual interventions maximum, plus the scheduled break question.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Approach angle, side-on arrival, front-foot block. Cutbacks along the ground. Everything from this whole theme, under fatigue.
Tactical	Full-backs defend the inside and concede the line. Wingers hold the width until the ball can reach them. Three attackers into the box on every wide delivery. Somebody holds the edge for the rebound.
Physical	Fifteen minutes of continuous match play with heavy wide running. Expect the last five minutes to be scrappy; it is the end of a four-week block and that is fine.
Psychological	This is the final practice of this theme — let them play. Coach less than you want to, and praise more than feels necessary.
Social	Listen for the block's language: *go on*, *inside*, *I'm behind you*, *far post*. If those four phrases are on the pitch without you, the block has worked.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Full-backs tucking inside and leaving the winger free	*Who's picking him up? When he gets it, where do you need to be?*
Wingers drifting infield and crowding the middle	*Stay on that line. If you're inside, who's stretching them?*
Crosses with nobody in the box	*Count them for me. How many of us went in?*
Defenders showing wingers inside under fatigue	One reminder, then let it go. Tired legs make old mistakes and that's normal at the end of a block.
The bonuses being chased rather than the game being played	Remind them a goal is worth three, then remove the conditions for the last two minutes.

ASK THEM

- When their winger gets it wide, what's your first job?
- Which way are you sending him, and why?
- How many of us go in the box when the ball's wide?
- Where does the cutback need to go?
- When the conditions stopped, did anything change?
- Across this theme — are you better at attacking a 1v1 or defending one?
- What's the one thing you'd want to work on next?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Wide duels only score when won without a tackle.	**Any tackle or interception in the channel counts.**
Goals only count from crosses or cutbacks for one three-minute spell.	**Widen the channels to 9 m.**
Narrow the channels to 4 m.	**Any goal after a wide delivery counts as +2**, however it's delivered.
Man-marking in the wide areas.	**6 v 6 on 44 × 30 m** with rolling subs.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Full-backs approaching from the inside and forcing wingers wide.

Wingers holding the width rather than drifting in.

Three attackers arriving in the box on wide deliveries.

At least four bonus points of each type across the two teams.

The block's vocabulary being used by players without prompting.

The behaviours surviving the final two minutes with no conditions.

Finish, match day & homework

REFLECTION — 5 MINUTES, SITTING DOWN

- This is the **end of this theme** — review the whole theme, not one session.
- *What are the three parts of beating a player?* (Approach, move, accelerate.)
- *What are the three parts of defending one?* (Close fast, slow down, force him one way.)
- *Which way do we send a winger — inside or outside? Why?*
- *Who has become braver across this theme? Who has become a better defender?* Let them name each other.
- **Name every player once** and give each of them one specific thing that has improved since you ran Session 5.
- Ask one final question and listen carefully to the answer: *Is it OK in this team to lose the ball trying something?*

MATCH-DAY LINK

MATCH OBJECTIVES	WATCH FOR	ASK AFTERWARDS
- **Full-backs approach from the inside** and force wingers down the line. - **Nobody dives in** in a wide area — delay and let the touchline help. - **Three players attack the box** every time we get the ball into a wide area.	- **Which way wingers are forced.** Inside or outside? Count it for both full-backs across ten minutes. - **How many players arrive in the box** on each wide delivery. - **Whether the 1v1 willingness from Sessions 5 and 6 has survived** into a real match with a scoreline.	- *Tell me about a wide 1v1 you defended. Which way did you send him?* - *Did you get into the box when we crossed it? Where did you go?* - *What's the one thing from this theme you actually used on Saturday?*

HOMEWORK — "THE WIDE DUEL" · 15 MINUTES, THREE TIMES BEFORE YOU NEXT TRAIN

- **Angle work.** Put a jumper down as an attacker and a line on the ground as a touchline. Practise approaching on a **curve from the inside** so you finish side-on with your front foot pointing down the line. Twenty repetitions each side. Boring, and exactly what the good ones do.
- **Front-foot blocks.** Against a wall from 3 m, throw or kick the ball at yourself and block it with your **front foot**, body low, never turning away. Thirty repetitions each foot.
- **Watch a game with a job.** Fifteen minutes of any professional match watching **one full-back only.** Every time their winger gets the ball, note which way the full-back shows him. Bring the tally.
- *Optional extra:* watch the same match again and count how many players get into the box on each cross. It's usually three.

WHERE TO GO NEXT

Same theme — one against one. These cover the same ground from other angles and can be run in any order, before or after this one: **5** The 1v1 Attacker; **6** Beating Your Player and Finishing; **7** The 1v1 Defender.

A natural follow-on. Session 9 — Combination Play. The individual now learns to be a partner. Wall passes and give-and-go, overlaps and underlaps, third-man runs, and the disguise that makes them work. After a run of duels, the question changes from *can I beat him alone?* to *can two of us solve this faster than one of us can?* Bring your notes from tonight's review page — the pairings you build in this theme should put your bravest players with your most hesitant ones.

Or simply run this one again. Nothing in the set has to be done once. A session repeated three weeks later with a harder progression is usually worth more than a new session the players are meeting cold.

Review — where the squad stands on one against one

Complete this within a day of Session 8. This theme is the one where confidence is either built or quietly damaged, so the audit below matters more than the technical checklist.

WHAT YOU SHOULD BE SEEING

AREA	WHAT YOU SHOULD NOW BE SEEING
Willingness	Players attempting 1v1s in matches without being told. This is the headline outcome of this theme — if it hasn't moved, nothing else in this theme landed.
The attacking sequence	Approach at controlled speed, a feint that moves the defender's upper body, then acceleration. The acceleration is the part that usually goes missing.
Finishing	Two recognisable finishes — driven and placed — with players choosing between them rather than defaulting to a blast.
The defending sequence	Close fast, decelerate, arrive side-on, force one way. Visible deceleration in the last three steps is the tell.
Wide defending	Full-backs approaching from the inside. Wingers ending up on the touchline rather than cutting inside.
Cover	A second defender behind the presser, and the call that goes with it.
Culture	Losing the ball while trying something is met with encouragement — from teammates, from you, and from the sideline. Be honest about the sideline.

SQUAD AUDIT — FILL THIS IN

QUESTION	PLAYERS
Who attempts 1v1s freely now who wouldn't have in September?	
Who still won't try one? What specifically is stopping them?	
Who has become a genuinely good defender across this theme?	
Who is still diving in? Is it habit, or is it that they don't trust their footwork?	
Which players are hardest to defend against? Do they know it?	
Who was quietest tonight, and when did you last praise them by name?	
Which goalkeeper enjoyed being in goal? Which didn't, and why?	
Has anyone's confidence gone backwards across this theme?	

IF THE SQUAD HAS THIS COMFORTABLY

- **Move to this theme with the harder progressions as default** — overlapping second attackers in the wide 1v1, one-touch finishes, and duel points that only count without a tackle.
- **Add a defensive counter-goal to every attacking practice** in this theme, so the transition moments start appearing a block early.
- **Give the strongest 1v1 players a constraint** rather than more space: two-touch, weak foot, or a three-second limit. Constraint develops them; freedom just entertains them.
- **Start naming positions.** A squad that defends the wide 1v1 well is ready to be told what a full-back's job actually is.
- **Introduce the third-man run early** in Session 9 rather than at the end — a confident squad will take it immediately.

IF THE SQUAD IS STRUGGLING

- **Rerun the 1v1 Arena from Session 5 inside this theme.** Ten minutes of it in a warm-up costs nothing and rebuilds the pattern.
- **Make every arena bigger.** Almost every failed duel at U12 is a space problem, not a technique problem.
- **Go back to passive defenders for anyone who has stopped trying.** Three successes in a row rebuilds more than any amount of explanation.
- **Drop the finishing demands.** If shooting is causing visible anxiety, take the goalkeeper out for a fortnight and let players see the ball go in.
- **Check the sideline.** If a parent groans when a child loses the ball, no amount of coaching will fix the willingness. Have the conversation this week — it is the single highest-value thing you can do for this squad.
- **Shorten the conditioned match to ten minutes** and add the time to the skill game, where the pictures are smaller and clearer.

CARRY THIS FORWARD

The three habits worth carrying into anything you run next: the willingness to attempt a duel, the patience not to dive in, and the covering call behind a presser.

Name the two players whose confidence needs protecting in the combination-play sessions, and pair them deliberately with your most generous passers — not your best players, your most generous ones.

The vocabulary now stands at: scan, open out, back foot, out of your feet, free side, round or through, go on, inside, I'm behind you, far post. Ten phrases in the set. Do not add an eleventh word for an idea that already has one.