



SESSION 10 • STANDALONE PLAN

Overlaps and Underlaps — Making It Two Against One

Combination play • Reference format: U12 9v9 • 60 minutes • 14–16 players

AT A GLANCE

TIME	MINS	PHASE	PRACTICE
0:00 – 0:10	10	■ Warm-up	10.1 The Rotation Square
0:10 – 0:25	15	■ Technical practice	10.2 Overlap or Underlap
0:25 – 0:40	15	■ Skill game	10.3 Make It Two v One
0:40 – 0:55	15	■ Conditioned match	10.4 Overlap Match
0:55 – 1:00	5	■ Reflection	Player-led review

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

Session 9 the combination went THROUGH the defender. Here it goes AROUND them. An overlap is a teammate running beyond the ball carrier on the outside, and it does something no individual skill can do: it turns one against one into two against one, and it makes the defender choose. Whichever choice they make is wrong. Stay with the carrier and the runner is free; follow the runner and the carrier can go inside. The reason this matters so much at Under-12 is that it is the first idea in the curriculum that requires a player to run somewhere the ball is not. Everything before this — receiving, dribbling, passing, the wall pass — happens near the ball. The overlap asks a player to sprint forty metres knowing they may never touch it. That is a genuinely difficult thing to ask of a young player, and the coaching job tonight is less about technique and more about making that run feel worthwhile.

BY THE END, PLAYERS CAN

- Run beyond the ball carrier on the outside and keep running even when the ball doesn't come.
- Carry the ball at the defender rather than away from them, so the overlap has something to exploit.

- **Time the release** — the ball is played when the runner is level or past, not before.
- **Choose between the overlap and the underlap** based on which side the defender has closed.
- **Recognise the two-against-one** when it appears, and know that the defender's choice decides yours.

KIT LIST

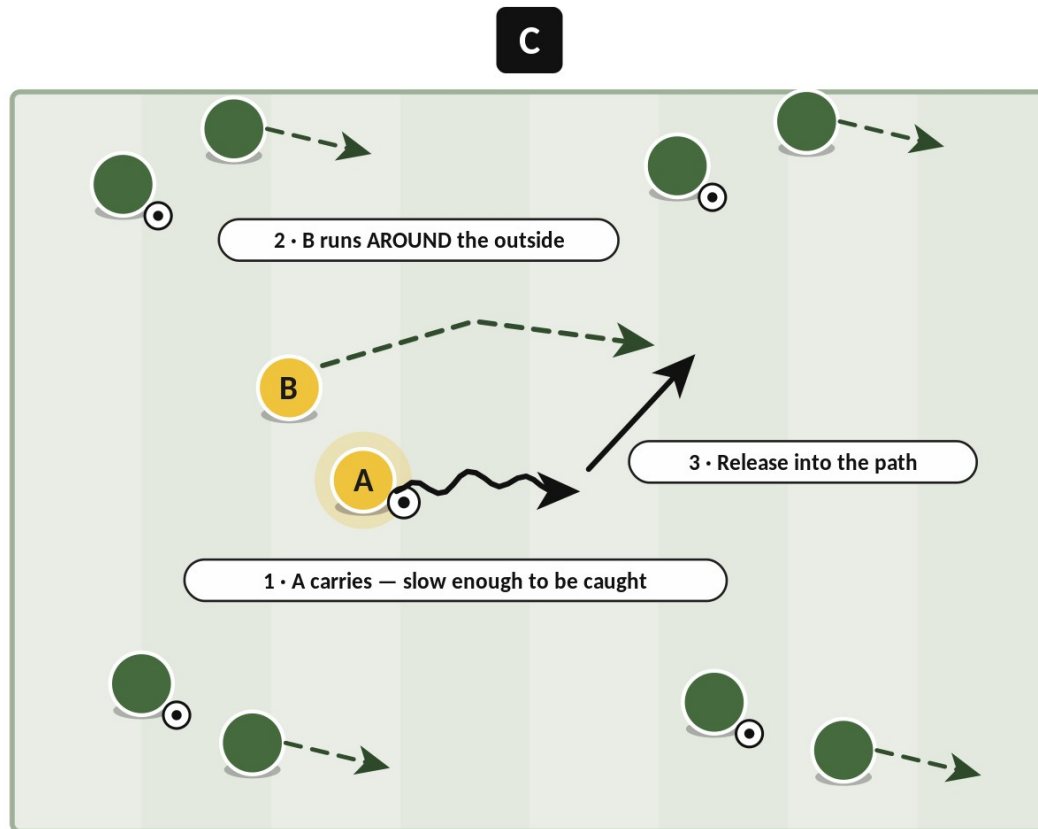
Ground needed: about 60 × 40 m. Tonight is physically demanding for the runners — overlaps are long sprints that often end with no reward. Build in more recovery than usual and be generous with praise for runs that came to nothing; those are the ones that teach the habit.

ITEM	QTY	USED IN
Footballs (size 4)	16	All practices
Flat markers	52	Grid, stations, pitch edges
Cones (tall)	12	Target gates (10.2, 3 stations × 4)
Bibs — red / blue / yellow	8 / 8 / 3	10.1 onwards
Mini goals	4	Skill game (10.3) — two per end
Full-size goals	2	Conditioned match (10.4)

10.1 THE ROTATION SQUARE

Get the overlap into the legs with nobody defending. One player carries, the other runs around the outside and receives the release. Then they swap, continuously, so the run becomes automatic before it becomes a decision.

28 x 20 m • pairs • one ball per pair • carry, overlap, release, repeat • 10 minutes



THE RUNNER GOES OUTSIDE • THE BALL WAITS UNTIL HE IS PAST



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SET UP

- 28 x 20 m grid marked with flat markers.
- **Pairs, one ball between two.** The carrier travels with the ball; the partner overlaps.
- No obstacles inside the grid — pairs must avoid each other, which is part of the warm-up.
- Balls at the grid edge so early arrivals start immediately.
- Coach inside the grid from minute 5, coaching individual pairs on the move.

HOW IT RUNS

- Minutes 0–3 — arrival.** Greet each player by name, ball each, free dribbling. **Collect the Session 9 homework** — *how many one-twos did you see? What was the defender doing first?*
- Minute 3 — pair up and walk it.** A carries. B runs around the outside of A and keeps going. A passes into the space in front of B. Walk it twice, then jog it.

3. **Minute 5 — continuous.** As soon as B receives, B becomes the carrier and A overlaps. The pair travels around the grid in a rolling rotation with no stopping.
4. **Minute 7 — add the timing rule.** *The ball doesn't go until the runner is past you.* This is the session's key discipline and it should be repeated all evening.
5. **Minutes 8–10 — count it.** Pairs count how many clean overlaps they complete in ninety seconds. Best score, two attempts.

RULES & SCORING

- The runner goes on the outside, never through the middle.
- The ball is released only when the runner is level or past the carrier.
- The pass must arrive in front of the runner so they don't break stride.
- Roles swap automatically on every repetition — no stopping to organise.
- Loose ball: nearest player retrieves and the pair restarts on the move.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Carrier: ball out of the feet, travelling at a controlled pace — too fast and the runner can never get past. Runner: wide arc on the outside, accelerating as they come level. Release: firm, along the ground, into the space ahead.
Tactical	The carrier's job is to hold the ball long enough for the run to happen. This is the opposite of everything they've been taught all season and it will need saying repeatedly.
Physical	Continuous running with repeated wide arcs. This is the most aerobically demanding warm-up in the curriculum so far — build the pace gradually and don't be surprised if it feels hard.
Psychological	The overlap only works if the runner commits fully. Half-hearted runs achieve nothing and are worse than no run at all. Say so, cheerfully, at the start.
Social	One call: " outside! " from the runner as they come. It tells the carrier the run is happening and it should be loud enough to hear across the grid.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Carrier travelling too fast — the runner can never get past	<i>Slow down. You're not trying to get away from him, you're waiting for him.</i>
Ball released too early , while the runner is still behind	<i>Where was he when you passed it? Wait until you can see him in front of you.</i>
Runner cutting inside instead of going around	<i>Outside. Wide of him. If you go inside you're just standing where he already is.</i>
Jogging the overlap	<i>That run has to be flat out or it doesn't threaten anybody.</i>
Pass into the feet rather than into the space	<i>He's running. Put it in front of him.</i>

ASK THEM

- How fast should the carrier be travelling? Why?
- When exactly does the ball get released?
- Which side does the runner go — inside or outside?
- Where should the pass arrive?
- What would a defender have to do to stop that?
- What's harder — carrying or running?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Groups of three with two possible overlaps, so the carrier has to choose.	Walk the whole sequence for the first three minutes.
Two-touch maximum for the carrier.	Static carrier who stands still while the runner overlaps.
Weak foot release only.	Bigger grid , so there's more room to complete the arc.
Add a floating defender with no ball who tries to intercept.	No swapping — fix the roles for two minutes each so the pattern settles.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Runners going **outside** and at full pace.

Carriers travelling slowly enough to be overtaken.

The ball released **after** the runner is past.

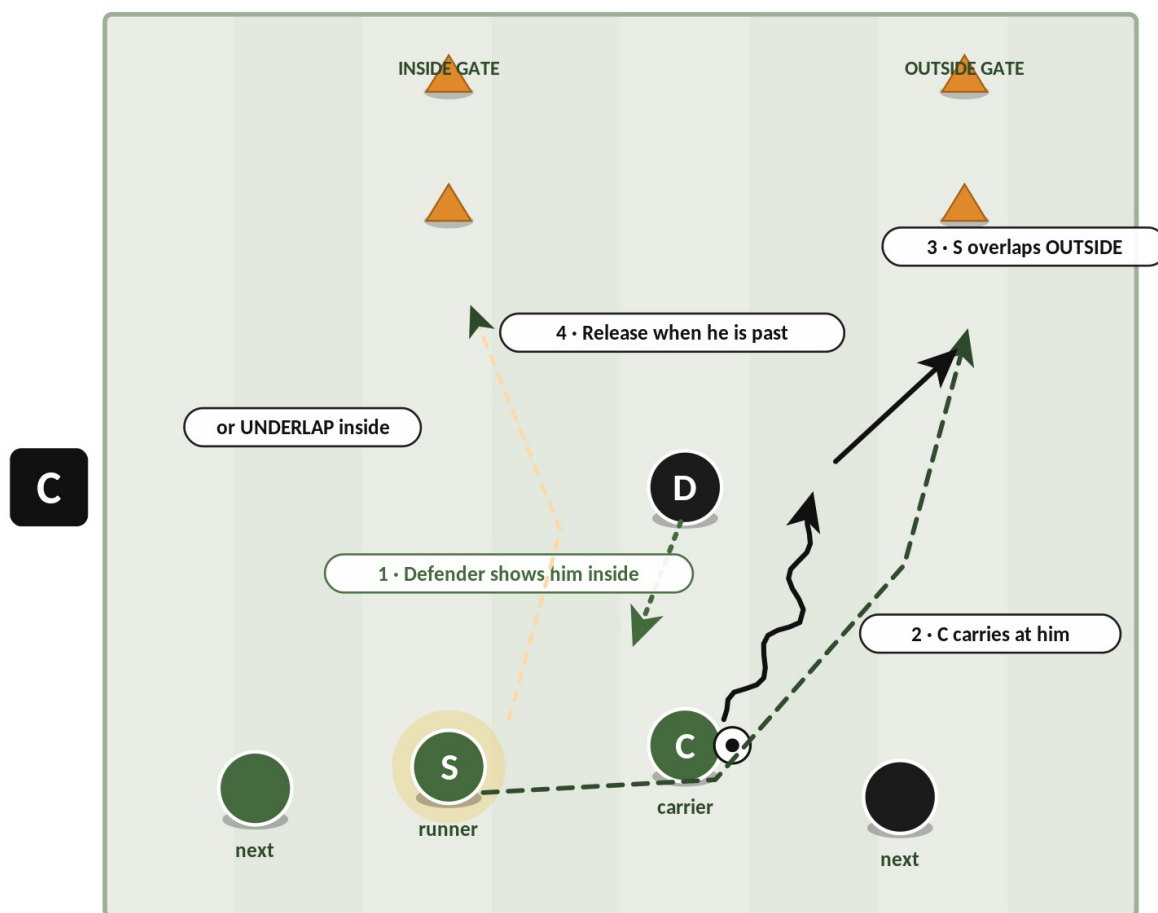
Passes arriving in front, taken in stride.

The call "outside!" audible around the grid.

10.2 OVERLAP OR UNDERLAP

Turn the pattern into a decision. There are two gates — one outside, one inside — and the defender chooses which one to close. Whichever they close, the other is the answer. The carrier and the runner have to read it together.

24 x 20 m per station • 5 players per station • 3 stations • the defender decides • 15 minutes



ROTATION: carrier → runner • runner → defender • defender → back of the line

- | | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|---------|-------------|-------|
| Carrier / runner | Defender | Ball | Target gate | Carry |
| Overlap (outside) | Defender shows inside | Release | Coach | |

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SET UP

- Three stations, each 24 × 20 m, with 4 m between them.
- Per station: an **outside gate** and an **inside gate**, both 3 m, on the far line; one ball plus a spare; one blue bib.
- Five players per station (15): carrier, runner, defender, and two waiting. Waits under 20 seconds.
- The runner starts **level with and inside** the carrier, so both routes are genuinely available.
- Coach walking between stations, watching the **timing of the release** more than anything else.

HOW IT RUNS

1. **Set the picture in 45 seconds.** Two of you against one. Two gates. He can only stop one route — find the other one.

2. **Minutes 0–3 — defender shows inside every time.** The overlap is always the answer, so the pattern establishes cleanly. Tell the defenders exactly what to do.
3. **Minute 3 — defender shows outside every time.** Now the underlap is always the answer. Same three minutes, opposite picture.
4. **Minute 6 — one freeze, twenty seconds.** Ask the group: *how do you know which one is on?* You want the answer *look at where the defender is standing, not the coach told us.*
5. **Minutes 6–13 — defender chooses freely.** The carrier and runner must now read it live. This is the whole practice.
6. **Minutes 13–15 — score it.** Two points if they use the correct route, one if they get through the wrong one anyway, two to the defender if they stop both.
7. **Rotation:** carrier → runner → defender → back of the line.

RULES & SCORING

- **2 points** for going through the gate the defender has NOT closed. **1 point** for getting through the closed side anyway. **2 points to the defender** for stopping both routes or winning the ball.
- **The ball must be released after the runner is level or past.** A release before that doesn't score.
- The carrier must **carry towards the defender** — carrying away from them earns nothing.
- The runner must commit fully; a jogged run is not a run.
- Ball out: instant restart with the spare ball.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Carrier: ball on the outside foot, travelling at the defender, ready to release or to go inside. Runner: wide arc for the overlap, sharp diagonal for the underlap. Release: into the path, weighted so the runner keeps their stride.
Tactical	Read the defender's body. If their front foot and shoulders are pointing inside, they have closed the inside — overlap. If they are showing you outside, the underlap is on. The carrier decides; the runner must go where the space is, not where they prefer.
Physical	Long sprints with an arc, roughly one every 25 seconds per player. Genuinely demanding; watch for the runs shortening in the last three minutes and rotate more often if needed.
Psychological	The runner who overlaps and doesn't get it has still done their job — they moved the defender. Praise the run, not just the pass. If you only praise the ones that get the ball, the runs will stop within two weeks.
Social	Two calls: "outside!" for the overlap and "inside!" for the underlap. The runner tells the carrier what's coming — the carrier shouldn't have to guess.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Carrying away from the defender so there's nothing to exploit	<i>Go AT him. He can't be beaten if he never has to make a decision.</i>
Releasing too early	<i>Where was your runner? If he's still behind you, you've passed to nobody.</i>
Runner choosing their favourite side regardless of the defender	<i>Which side is open? Look at his feet, not at where you want to go.</i>
Runner slowing down when the ball doesn't come	The most important one to fix: <i>Keep going. Your run is what made the space — finish it.</i>
Both players going for the same space	<i>One of you goes outside and one goes inside. Talk to each other.</i>

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Defender simply retreating and closing nothing	Coach the defender: <i>You have to commit to one. Delaying works, but eventually you have to choose.</i>

ASK THEM

- How do you know which one is on — overlap or underlap?
- What do you look at on the defender?
- When exactly does the ball get released?
- Runner — what's your job if the ball doesn't come to you?
- Carrier — why do you have to go at him rather than away?
- Defenders — which was harder to stop? What did you try?
- Whose decision is it — the carrier's or the runner's?
- When is the overlap the wrong answer?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Two defenders , so the two-against-one becomes a genuine problem-solving exercise.	Defender announces which side they're closing as they engage.
Two-touch maximum for the carrier.	Passive defender who steers but doesn't tackle.
The runner may choose either route without telling the carrier , forcing the carrier to read the run as well as the defender.	Wider gates (5 m) and a shorter distance.
Finish at the end — replace a gate with a mini goal and require a shot.	Overlap only — remove the underlap until the first pattern is solid.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Carriers travelling **towards** the defender.

Releases timed after the runner is past.

The correct route chosen more often than not by the end of the free-choice phase.

Runners completing the run even when the ball doesn't come.

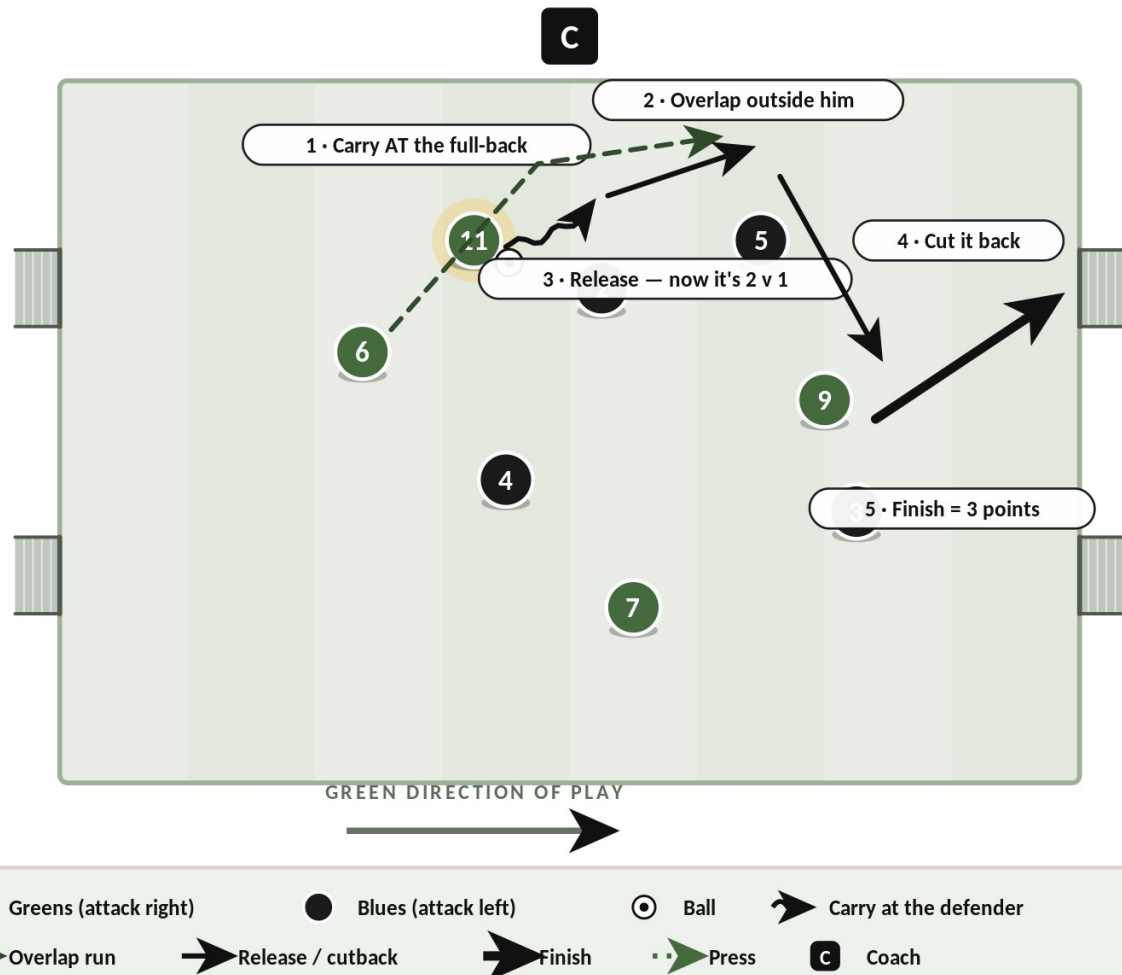
The calls "outside" and "inside" being used.

Defenders finding it genuinely difficult — if they stop everything, the timing isn't there.

10.3 MAKE IT TWO v ONE (4 v 4)

Pay for the run. A goal that follows an overlap or underlap scores three, which means the long sprint that produces nothing directly becomes the most valuable action on the pitch.

32 x 22 m • two mini goals per end • a goal after an overlap or underlap = 3 • 15 minutes



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SET UP

- Two pitches, each 32 × 22 m, side by side with a 5 m corridor between them.
- Per pitch: **two mini goals at each end**, 4 red bibs, 4 blue bibs, 2 balls.
- 4 v 4 per pitch (16). With 14, run 4v4 and 3v3. With 15, run 4v4 and 4v3.
- **The pitch is deliberately wider than usual** — 32 m gives the overlap somewhere to happen.
- Coach in the corridor between the pitches with a spare ball.

HOW IT RUNS

- 1. Bibs out while you explain.** Balanced teams.
- 2. Explain in 20 seconds:** Goal is 1. Goal after an overlap or underlap is 3. Three minutes. Go.
- 3. Game 1 — no coaching.** Count the runs, not the goals. Most teams will attempt none in the first game.
- 4. Between games 1 and 2, one question:** *Who is allowed to overlap?* The answer is anybody, and most squads assume it's only full-backs.

5. From game 3, add the run bonus: 1 point for any completed overlap run, whether or not the ball goes to them. This is the rule that changes the session — it pays for the effort rather than the outcome.
6. Four games of three minutes with 45 seconds between, ladder as usual.

RULES & SCORING

- Goal = 1 point. Goal after an overlap or underlap = 3 points. A completed overlap run = 1 point on its own (from game 3).
- A run counts only if it goes **beyond** the ball carrier — running alongside doesn't count.
- Ball out: the coach rolls a new one in immediately.
- No stoppages during games. Coaching happens in the 45-second gaps, as a question.
- Give any close call to the attacking team.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Carry at the defender, release into the path, cut back along the ground. The delivery from the overlap is almost always a cutback rather than a cross.
Tactical	Anybody can overlap. The nearest player to the ball carrier has the job, not a particular position. Once the two-against-one exists, the carrier's job is simply to make the defender commit — the moment they do, the answer is obvious.
Physical	Three minutes on, 45 off, four times, with long sprints in every attack. This is the hardest running in this theme; shorten the last game without hesitation.
Psychological	The 1-point run bonus exists entirely for psychological reasons. Runs that come to nothing are invisible and unrewarded in normal football, so young players stop making them. Pay for them and they continue.
Social	Watch who makes runs for other people. Those players are the ones who make a team work, and they are almost never the ones who get praised.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Nobody overlapping — the game reverts to individual play	Ask: <i>Which points haven't we scored?</i> Then introduce the run bonus early if needed.
Only one player ever making the run	<i>Who's allowed to overlap?</i> Then to a specific quiet player: <i>Next attack, you go. Doesn't matter what happens.</i>
Carrier ignoring the runner and dribbling anyway	<i>Did you see him? What could he have given you?</i> Don't ban the dribble; make them notice the alternative.
Runs made too early , arriving before the carrier is ready	<i>Time it. Go when he's carrying at someone, not before.</i>
Everyone overlapping at once and leaving nobody behind the ball	<i>If three of you go, who's covering?</i> This is worth seeding now — it's this theme material.

ASK THEM

- Who is allowed to overlap?
- What does the carrier have to do for the overlap to work?
- What's your job if you make the run and the ball doesn't come?
- Where should the delivery from an overlap go?
- What happens to the defender when two of you arrive?
- Who made the most runs tonight? Did they get the ball?

- If everybody overlaps, what's the problem?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Only goals after an overlap count.	Any run beyond the ball carrier counts, inside or outside.
Two-touch maximum for the carrier.	3 v 3 on 28 × 20 m — fewer bodies, more obvious space.
The overlap must be completed by a different player each time within an attack.	Add a neutral player who always plays for the team in possession and can make the run.
Double the run bonus but require it to reach the byline.	Widen the pitch to 36 m.

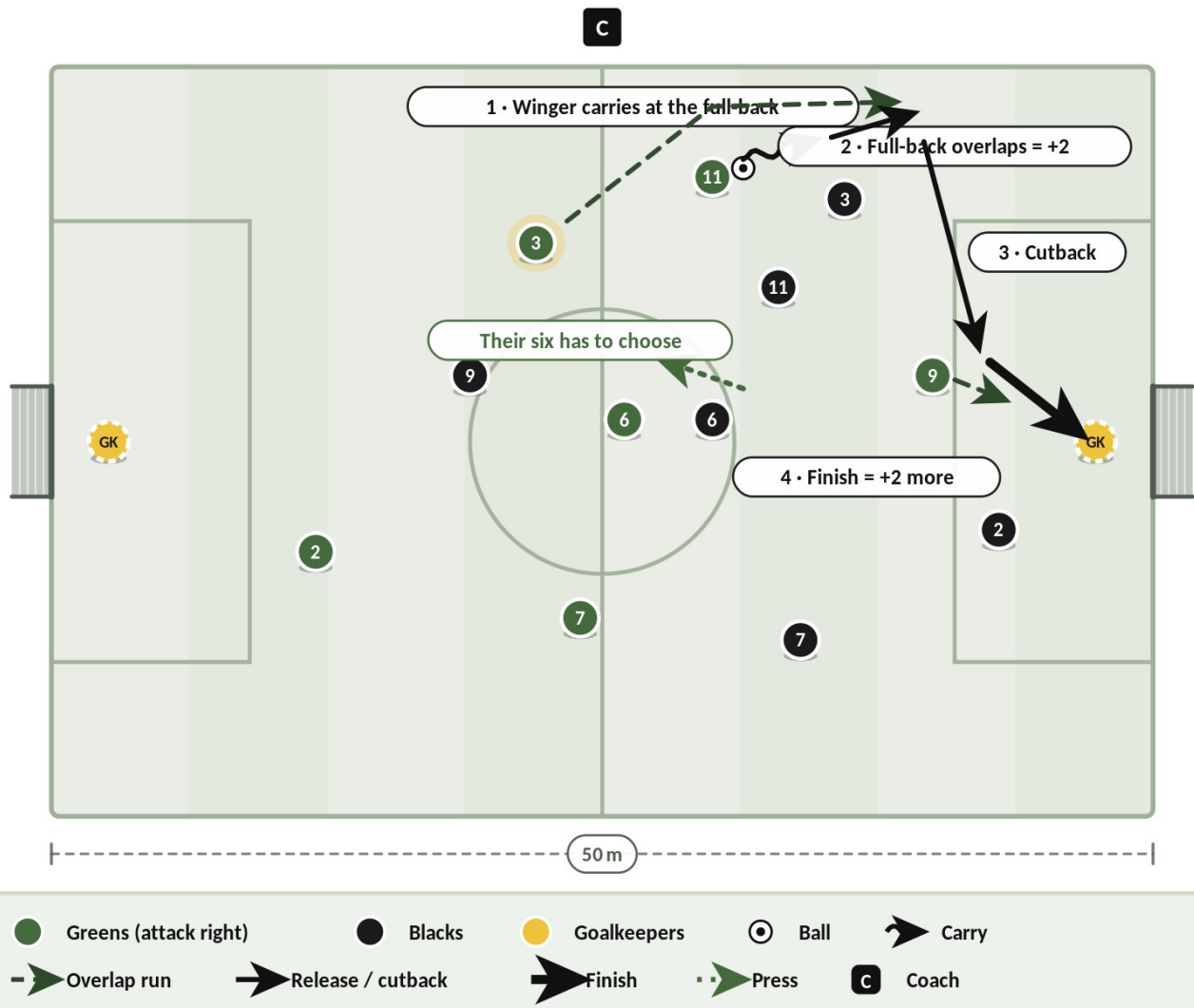
IT'S WORKING WHEN

Overlap runs being attempted by **more than one player** per team.
 Carriers holding the ball long enough for runs to develop.
 Cutbacks along the ground from the wide overlap.
 Runs continuing when the ball doesn't come.
 At least one 3-point goal per team by game 4.
 Players noticing and mentioning each other's runs.

10.4 OVERLAP MATCH (7 v 7)

The overlap in its natural habitat — a full-back going beyond a winger in a real match, and a central midfielder having to decide whether to follow the runner or hold their position.

50 x 34 m • an overlap that creates a free player = +2 • goal from it = +2 • 15 minutes



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SET UP

- 50 x 34 m with full-size goals. No extra markings.
- 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. **Name the full-backs out loud** and tell them the overlap is part of their job — this is the first session where a position gets a specific instruction.
- 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. An overlap that creates a free player is two points. A goal that comes from it is two more.

3. **Minutes 0–5 — no interruption.** Watch the full-backs. Most will stay behind the ball for the entire five minutes.
4. **Minute 5 — drinks break, one question:** *When our winger gets the ball, what should the full-back behind him do?*
Restart.
5. **Minutes 6–13.** Announce overlaps loudly and name the runner, whether or not they received the ball.
6. **Final two minutes — free play.** Watch whether the runs continue without the bonus.

RULES & SCORING

- **Goal = 3 points. An overlap that creates a free player = +2. A goal originating from an overlap = +2 more.**
- The run must go **beyond** the ball carrier to count.
- No touch restrictions. This is a match.
- 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	Carry at the full-back, release into the path, cut back along the ground. The finisher arrives on the move.
Tactical	The overlap creates a two-against-one in the widest part of the pitch , which is the safest place to have one. When the full-back goes, the nearest midfielder must drop into the space behind them — this is the first appearance of rotation and it's worth naming. Three attackers into the box on the cutback.
Physical	Fifteen minutes of continuous play with long recovery runs after every overlap. The hardest physical session in the curriculum so far; if the quality collapses at minute ten, that's fatigue, not a coaching failure.
Psychological	Name the runner every time, especially when they don't get the ball. That is the entire mechanism by which this habit survives past tonight.
Social	Listen for wingers demanding the overlap and full-backs announcing it. If the two of them are talking, the combination will happen without you.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Full-backs never going beyond the ball	One intervention: <i>When he gets it, you go. Every time. I'll tell you when to stop.</i>
Winger passing inside the moment the full-back overlaps	<i>He's outside you and he's free. What did you see?</i>
Nobody covering when the full-back goes	<i>He's gone. Who's filling in? Ask the midfielder, not the full-back.</i>
Overlaps in the middle of the pitch into congestion	<i>Where's the space? Where does an overlap actually work?</i>
Runs stopping after two unrewarded ones	Praise the third one loudly before it happens: <i>I want to see that run again — I don't care if it comes to you.</i>

ASK THEM

- When our winger gets the ball, what should the full-back do?
- Who covers the space the full-back leaves?
- Where on the pitch does an overlap actually work?
- What does the defender have to decide when two of you arrive?

- What's your job if you make the run and it doesn't come?
- When the bonuses stopped, did you keep running?
- Which is better — the wall pass or the overlap? When is each one right?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Only overlaps that reach the byline score.	Any run beyond the ball carrier counts, anywhere on the pitch.
Both full-backs must overlap at least twice each.	Bigger pitch (55 × 38 m) so the runs have room.
Double bonus for an underlap, which is harder and rarer.	No pressing in wide areas for the first four minutes.
The covering midfielder must be in position for the overlap to score.	6 v 6 on 44 × 30 m with rolling subs to manage the running load.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Both full-backs making overlap runs without being told after minute six.

A midfielder covering the vacated space at least occasionally.

Cutbacks along the ground with players arriving.

At least four overlaps across the two teams.

Runs continuing in the final two minutes with no bonus.

Wingers and full-backs talking to each other.

Finish, match day & homework

REFLECTION — 5 MINUTES, SITTING DOWN

- Circle up and **sit down**.
- *What's the difference between an overlap and an underlap?*
- *How do you know which one is on?* (Look at the defender's feet.)
- *What's your job if you make the run and the ball doesn't come?* — get this answer from three different players.
- *Who made a run for somebody else tonight?* Let the players name each other.
- *Which is better, the one-two or the overlap?* There's no right answer; listen to the reasoning.
- Finish by naming **two players whose runs came to nothing** and thanking them for making them.

MATCH-DAY LINK

MATCH OBJECTIVES	WATCH FOR	ASK AFTERWARDS
- Both full-backs overlap at least twice. - Somebody covers the space every time a full-back goes forward. - At least one attack creates a two-against-one in a wide area.	- Whether the runs happen at all. Pick both full-backs and count their overlaps across the match. - Whether the carrier sees the run. A run that isn't noticed is a coaching problem for the carrier, not the runner. - What happens behind the overlap. Is anybody filling in, or are we open on the counter?	- <i>Tell me about a run you made that didn't get the ball. Was it worth it?</i> - <i>Did you see the overlap? What made you choose what you chose?</i> - <i>Who covered for you when you went forward?</i>

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

- **Arc sprints.** Mark two points 25 m apart. Sprint between them on a **curved outside arc**, not in a straight line — this is the shape of an overlap. Eight repetitions with a walk-back recovery. It's fitness work, and it's specific.
- **Carry and release.** With anyone who will help: you carry the ball slowly, they run past you on the outside, you release it into their path once they're level. Thirty repetitions each way. If nobody's available, carry the ball and release it into a marked space at the exact moment you count to three.
- **Watch a game with a job.** Fifteen minutes of any professional match watching **one full-back only**. Count how many times they run beyond their winger, and how many times they get the ball. The gap between those two numbers is the lesson. Bring both.
- *Optional extra:* watch what the midfielder behind the overlapping full-back does. Somebody always covers.

WHERE TO GO NEXT

Same theme — combination play. These cover the same ground from other angles and can be run in any order, before or after this one: **9** The Wall Pass; **11** The Third-Man Run; **12** Combination Play Under Pressure.

A natural follow-on. Session 11 — The Third-Man Run. The most sophisticated combination in this theme and the one that separates good U12 teams from average ones. Player A passes to B, and the ball arrives with C — a player who was never involved in the first pass but who timed their run to arrive as the ball did. It requires everything built so far: the scan, the first touch, the set-back, and the run beyond. Bring your notes on who made runs tonight that came to nothing; those players will be your third men.

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.