



SESSION 11 • STANDALONE PLAN

# The Third-Man Run — The Pass You Never Touched

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            | 11.1 The Third-Man Triangle  |
| 0:10 – 0:25 | 15   | ■ Technical practice | 11.2 The Third-Man Gate      |
| 0:25 – 0:40 | 15   | ■ Skill game         | 11.3 Third Man Scores Triple |
| 0:40 – 0:55 | 15   | ■ Conditioned match  | 11.4 Third-Man 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

This is the most sophisticated idea in this theme and the one that separates good Under-12 teams from average ones. A passes to B, and the ball arrives with C — a player who was not involved in the first pass at all, but who started running the instant it was played. It works because defenders react to the ball. When A plays into B, every defender's eyes and weight shift towards B, and for that half-second nobody is watching C. If C is already moving, they arrive in the space before anyone has registered they left. If C waits to see what B does, the space has gone. The whole skill is contained in one sentence: **the third man moves on the FIRST pass, not the second.** It is difficult because it requires a player to commit to a run based on a prediction rather than a certainty, and because — like the overlap in **Session 10** — most of those runs will not receive the ball. But when it works it is the cleanest way to break a defensive line in football, and it needs everything the squad has built: the scan, the first touch, the one-touch set, and the willingness to run for nothing.

## BY THE END, PLAYERS CAN

- Start the run as the first pass is played, not when the second is about to be.

- **Come short as the middle man** to drag a defender out, then release first time.
- **Play the second pass into the space ahead of the runner**, never to their feet.
- **Recognise the picture** — a teammate under pressure, a defender following them, and space behind.
- **Keep making the run** when it doesn't come, because the run is what creates the space for someone else.

## KIT LIST

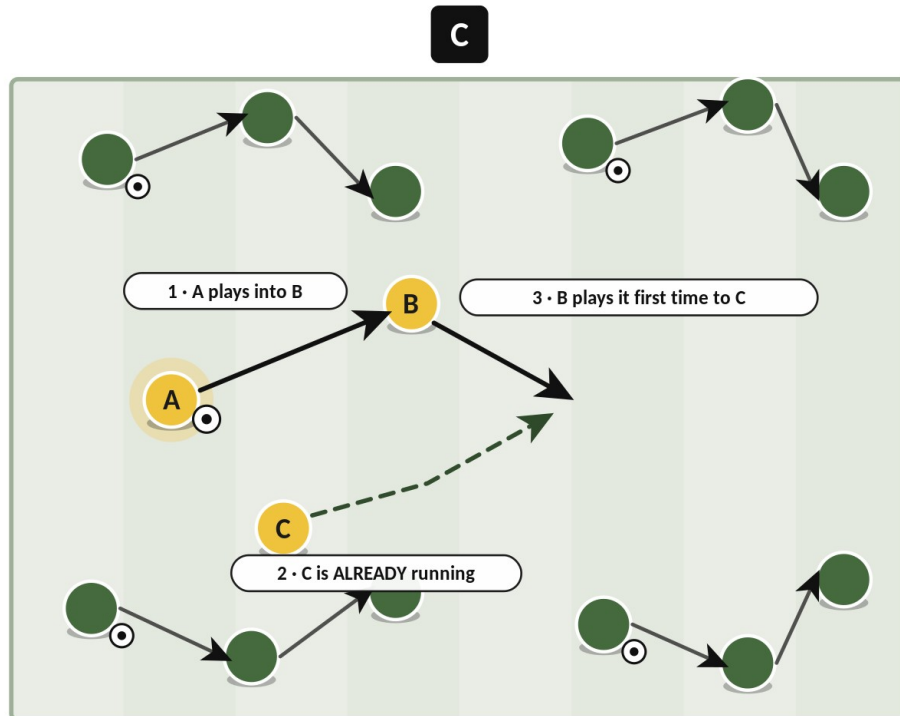
*Ground needed: about 60 × 40 m. This is the hardest idea in the curriculum so far and it will take longer to land than the earlier sessions in this theme. Accept a scrappy first ten minutes and resist the urge to over-explain — the warm-up teaches it better than any amount of talking.*

| ITEM                       | QTY       | USED IN                             |
|----------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------|
| Footballs (size 4)         | 16        | All practices                       |
| Flat markers               | 50        | Grid, stations, pitch edges         |
| Cones (tall)               | 8         | Target gates (11.2, 2 stations × 4) |
| Bibs — red / blue / yellow | 8 / 8 / 3 | 11.1 onwards                        |
| Mini goals                 | 4         | Skill game (11.3) — two per end     |
| Full-size goals            | 2         | Conditioned match (11.4)            |

## 11.1 THE THIRD-MAN TRIANGLE

Install the timing before anything else. Groups of three, moving continuously: A passes to B, and C — who started running the moment A's foot hit the ball — receives from B first time. Unopposed, so the only thing being learned is when to go.

28 x 20 m • groups of three • the third man starts running as the FIRST pass is played • 10 minutes



THE THIRD MAN MOVES ON THE FIRST PASS • NOT THE SECOND

● Players   ● Teaching trio   ● Ball   → Pass   → Third-man run   **C** Coach

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### SET UP

- 28 × 20 m grid marked with flat markers.
- **Groups of three**, one ball each. Four or five trios with a squad of 14–16.
- The three players form a rough triangle and travel around the grid together.
- Balls at the grid edge so early arrivals start immediately.
- Coach inside the grid from minute 5, coaching individual trios on the move.

### HOW IT RUNS

- Minutes 0–3 — arrival.** Greet each player by name, ball each, free dribbling. **Collect the Session 10 homework** — *how many overlaps did your full-back make? How many got the ball?* The gap between those numbers is tonight's lesson too.
- Minute 3 — walk the pattern.** A passes to B. C runs. B plays it to C first time. Walk it three times, slowly, so the shape is obvious. Then jog it.
- Minute 5 — the timing rule.** C, you go when A's foot hits the ball. Not when B gets it — when A PLAYS it. Demonstrate the difference once: run it with C going late, then with C going early, and ask which one arrived in space.
- Minute 7 — continuous rotation.** Once C receives, C becomes the new A and the triangle re-forms. No stopping, no organising.

5. **Minutes 8–10 — count it.** Trios count clean sequences in ninety seconds, where clean means B played it first time and C didn't have to check their run. Two attempts.

## RULES & SCORING

- **C starts running as the first pass is played.** A late run doesn't count.
- **B plays the second pass first time.** A controlling touch doesn't count.
- The second pass must go **in front of C.**
- Roles rotate automatically — no stopping to reorganise.
- Loose ball: nearest player retrieves and the trio restarts on the move.

## COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

|               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Technical     | <b>B:</b> open the body before the ball arrives so the second pass is available immediately, and use the far foot. <b>A:</b> firm pass into B's feet. <b>C:</b> accelerate into the space, take the ball in stride on the far foot. |
| Tactical      | The run creates the pass; the pass does not create the run. If C waits to see whether the pass is on, it never will be.                                                                                                             |
| Physical      | Continuous running with a sharp acceleration on every repetition. Similar demand to earlier but in shorter bursts.                                                                                                                  |
| Psychological | This will feel confusing for the first five minutes and that is normal. Say so at the start: <i>this one takes a while — don't worry if it's messy.</i>                                                                             |
| Social        | The third man should call as they go — " <b>through!</b> " — so B knows the run is happening before they receive.                                                                                                                   |

## WATCH FOR

| WHAT YOU'LL SEE                                                                       | WHAT TO DO                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>C runs too late</b> — waits to see what B does, arrives after the space has closed | The whole session in one correction: <i>When did you go? Go when A passes, not when B gets it.</i> Run it twice at walking pace to prove it. |
| <b>B takes a touch</b> and the timing collapses                                       | <i>One touch. C is already running — he can't wait for you.</i>                                                                              |
| <b>Second pass into C's feet</b>                                                      | <i>He's sprinting. Put it in front of him.</i>                                                                                               |
| <b>The triangle becomes a straight line</b>                                           | <i>Spread out. If all three of you are in a row, there's no angle for the second pass.</i>                                                   |
| <b>Trios stopping between repetitions</b>                                             | <i>Nobody stops. C becomes A and you go again.</i>                                                                                           |

## ASK THEM

- When exactly does the third man start running?
- What happens if he waits to see what B does?
- How many touches does B take?
- Where should the second pass arrive?
- What shape should the three of you be in?
- Why do defenders not see the third man?

## ADJUST IT

| HARDER                          | EASIER                                                |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>One touch for everybody.</b> | <b>Two touches for B</b> while the timing is learned. |

| HARDER                                                                 | EASIER                                                                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Add a floating defender</b> who marks whichever player they choose. | <b>Walk the whole pattern</b> for a full three minutes.                          |
| <b>Groups of four</b> — two possible third men, so B must choose.      | <b>Fixed roles</b> for two minutes each rather than rotating.                    |
| <b>Weak foot for the second pass.</b>                                  | <b>Bigger triangle</b> , so there's more time between the first and second pass. |

#### IT'S WORKING WHEN

**Runs starting on the first pass** in most repetitions by minute 8.

One-touch second passes from B.

The ball arriving in front of C, taken in stride.

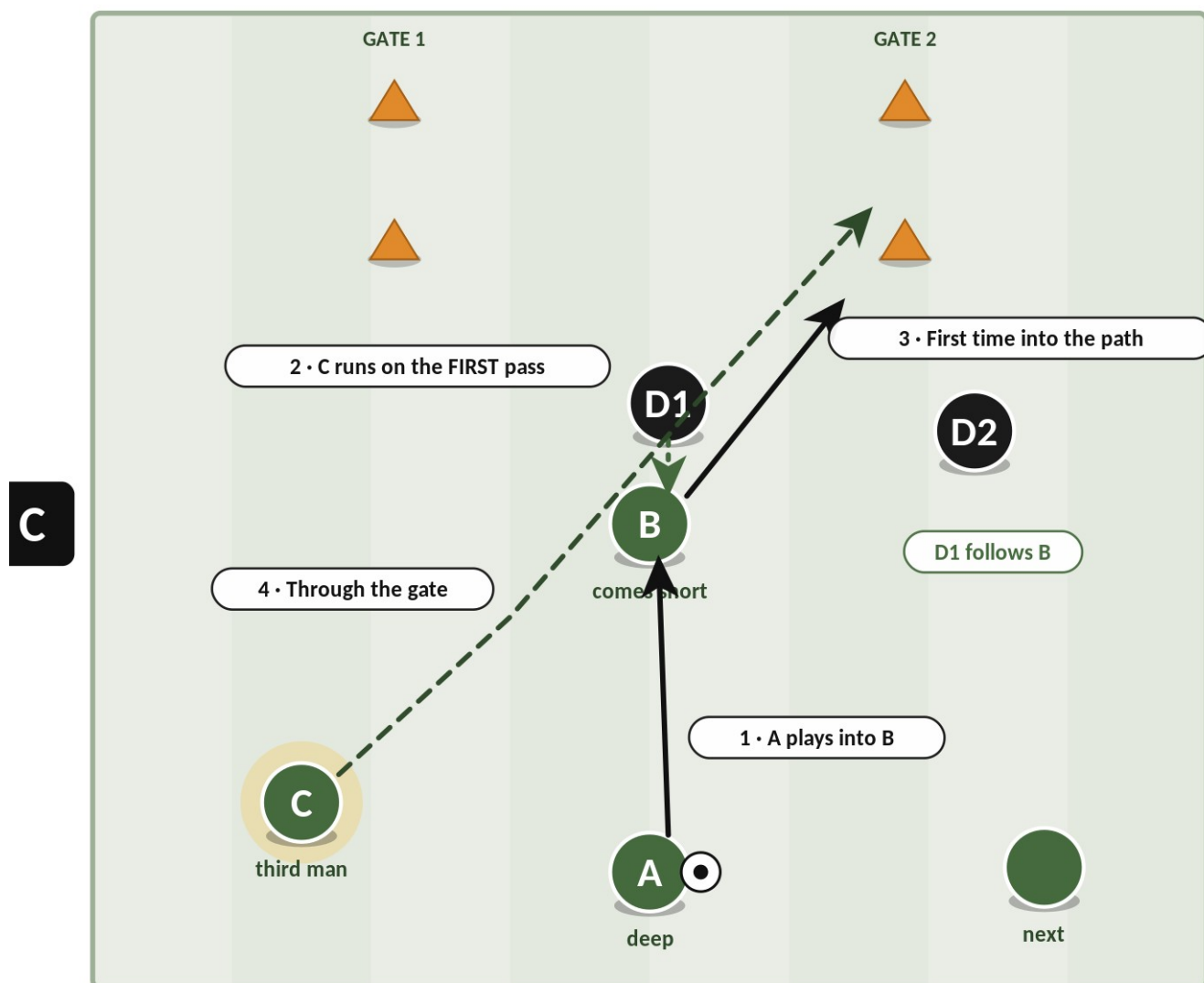
Trios keeping a genuine triangle rather than a line.

The call "through!" being used.

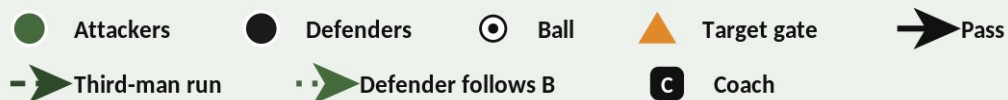
## 11.2 THE THIRD-MAN GATE

The third-man run against defenders who behave like real ones. B comes short and drags their marker out; C runs into the space the marker has just vacated. The picture is exactly what happens in a 9v9 midfield twenty times a match.

24 x 20 m per station • 6 players per station • 2-3 stations • 15 minutes



ROTATION: A → B • B → third man • third man → defender • defender → back of the line



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### SET UP

- Two or three stations, each 24 × 20 m, with 4 m between them.
- Per station: **two 3 m gates** on the far line; one ball plus a spare; two blue bibs.

- Six players per station (12–15 across two or three stations): A (deep, on the ball), B (comes short), C (the third man), two defenders, one waiting.
- **D1 marks B and is told to follow B when B comes short.** That instruction is what creates the space — without it there is nothing to run into.
- Coach walking between stations, watching **when C starts** and nothing else.

## HOW IT RUNS

1. **Set the picture in 45 seconds.** *B comes short, his marker follows him, and the space behind opens up. C, that's your space — but only if you're already moving.*
2. **Minutes 0–4 — D1 only, no second defender.** Simplest possible version: B comes short, D1 follows, C runs, B sets it into the path.
3. **Minute 4 — one freeze, twenty seconds.** Ask C: *when did you start?* Then ask D1: *when did you notice him?* The gap between those two answers is the whole practice.
4. **Minutes 4–10 — add D2** covering the space behind. Now the run must be genuinely well-timed and the pass genuinely accurate.
5. **Minutes 10–15 — add the choice.** B may now **turn and carry** if D1 doesn't follow. The third man is one option, not an instruction.
6. **Rotation:** A → B → third man → defender → back of the line. Everybody plays every role.

## RULES & SCORING

- **B plays the second pass first time** in the first ten minutes. From minute 10, B may turn instead if the picture demands it.
- **2 points** for a completed third-man run through a gate. **1 point** if C receives but has to check their run. **2 points to the defenders** for an interception.
- **C must start before the first pass arrives at B.** A late run scores nothing even if it works.
- D1's job is to follow B — this is a coaching instruction, not a tactical choice, for the first ten minutes.
- Ball out: instant restart with the spare ball.

## COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

|               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Technical     | <b>B:</b> check away and come short sharply, receive on the half-turn with the body open, one-touch set into the space. <b>C:</b> accelerate from a standing start, take it in stride with the far foot. <b>A:</b> firm and accurate — a slow pass gives D1 time to think. |
| Tactical      | <b>The space is created by B's movement, not by C's.</b> C's job is simply to be in it first. Read the trigger: the moment B checks short and their marker follows, the run is on. If the marker doesn't follow, the run is not on and B should turn instead.              |
| Physical      | Explosive accelerations from a standing start — different from <b>Session 10's</b> long arcs and, for most players, harder. Rotate roles often.                                                                                                                            |
| Psychological | This will fail more often than it works, especially in the first eight minutes. Praise the timing of the run every single time it is right, regardless of what happens to the ball afterwards.                                                                             |
| Social        | Three voices: A calls " <b>short!</b> ", C calls " <b>through!</b> ", and B — who can see least — needs both of them.                                                                                                                                                      |

## WATCH FOR

| WHAT YOU'LL SEE                                           | WHAT TO DO                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>C starts when B receives</b> rather than when A passes | <i>Half a second too late is the same as not going. Watch A's foot, not B.</i> |
| <b>B receiving square</b> and unable to set it forward    | Back to Session 1: <i>Open out before it comes to you.</i> The vocabulary      |

| WHAT YOU'LL SEE                              | WHAT TO DO                                                                                                               |
|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                              | paying off.                                                                                                              |
| <b>Second pass into C's feet</b>             | <i>He's at full speed. Put it where he's going.</i>                                                                      |
| <b>C stopping when the ball doesn't come</b> | <i>Finish the run. You dragged a defender with you — that's why your teammate was free.</i>                              |
| <b>B taking a touch</b> under pressure       | <i>One touch. Two touches and D1 has recovered.</i>                                                                      |
| <b>D1 not following B</b>                    | For the first ten minutes, insist. After that, let them choose — and let the attackers discover that the answer changes. |

### ASK THEM

- When exactly do you start your run?
- Who creates the space — you, or the player coming short?
- What's the trigger that tells you it's on?
- Defenders — when did you first see the runner?
- B — what do you do if your marker DOESN'T follow you?
- Where should the second pass go?
- What's your job if you run and the ball doesn't come?
- Where does this happen in a real match?

### ADJUST IT

| HARDER                                                                         | EASIER                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>One touch for B throughout</b> , including the receiving touch.             | <b>Remove D2</b> entirely.                                                                                    |
| <b>Two third men</b> — C and a second runner, so B chooses.                    | <b>Passive defenders</b> who follow but don't intercept.                                                      |
| <b>D1 chooses freely</b> whether to follow, from minute four rather than ten.  | <b>Two touches for B.</b>                                                                                     |
| <b>Finish at the end</b> — replace a gate with a mini goal and require a shot. | <b>Coach calls "go!"</b> for the third man for the first few repetitions, then hands the timing back to them. |

### IT'S WORKING WHEN

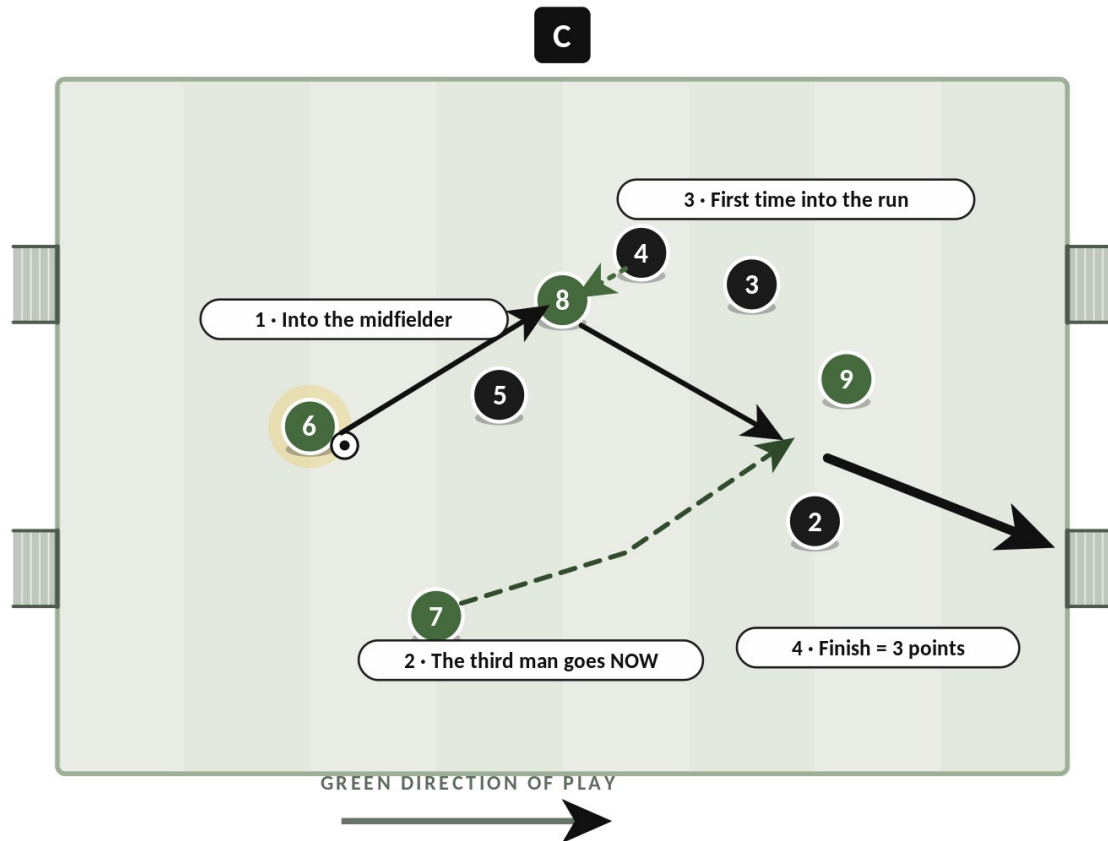
**Runs starting on the first pass** rather than the second.  
 B receiving on the half-turn and setting it first time.  
 The ball arriving in front of the runner.  
 Defenders reporting that they saw the runner late — ask them.  
 From minute 10, B **choosing** between the set and the turn.  
 Runs completed even when the pass doesn't come.



## 11.3 THIRD MAN SCORES TRIPLE (4 v 4)

Find the third-man run in a live game, where nobody organises the picture and the trigger has to be recognised rather than announced.

32 x 22 m • two mini goals per end • a goal after a third-man combination = 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.
- **Four players is the minimum for a third-man run to exist** — passer, receiver, runner, plus one more for width. Don't drop below it.
- 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 a third-man run — where the ball goes A to B to C and C was already running — is 3. Three minutes. Go.
- 3. Game 1 — no coaching.** It may not happen at all. Watch anyway; you're looking for who is moving without the ball.
- 4. Between games 1 and 2, one question:** When your teammate gets pressed, what does that create behind the presser?

5. From game 3, add the run bonus: 1 point for any third-man run made at the right time, ball or no ball. Same mechanism as in **Session 10** and for the same reason.
6. Four games of three minutes with 45 seconds between, ladder as usual.

## RULES & SCORING

- Goal = 1 point. Goal after a third-man combination = 3 points. A correctly-timed third-man run = 1 point on its own (from game 3).
- The run must start **before or as** the first pass is played.
- Ball out: the coach rolls a new one in immediately.
- No stoppages. Coaching happens in the 45-second gaps, as a question.
- Give any close call to the attacking team.

## COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

|               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Technical     | One-touch second passes wherever possible. Receive on the half-turn. Deliver into the path.                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Tactical      | <b>The trigger is a teammate being pressed.</b> When an opponent commits to the ball, the space behind them belongs to whoever moves first. The player furthest from the ball usually has the best view and the best angle — they are the natural third man. |
| Physical      | Three minutes on, 45 off, four times. Repeated accelerations from standing. Shorten the last game if quality drops.                                                                                                                                          |
| Psychological | The third-man run is invisible when it fails and looks like magic when it works. Make the failures visible instead — announce every well-timed run, especially the ones that don't get the ball.                                                             |
| Social        | By now the squad has three combination calls: " <b>one-two!</b> ", " <b>outside!</b> " and " <b>through!</b> " If all three are being used tonight, this theme has done its job.                                                                             |

## WATCH FOR

| WHAT YOU'LL SEE                                         | WHAT TO DO                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Nobody moving off the ball                              | Ask: <i>Who was furthest from the ball just then? What could you see that nobody else could?</i> |
| Runs made too late, after the second pass is already on | Watch the first pass, not the second. Repeat all evening.                                        |
| Everyone watching the ball                              | The root cause of the above. <i>Where are your eyes when your teammate has it?</i>               |
| The middle man turning instead of setting               | Not a fault — it's a valid choice. Ask: <i>Was your marker following you? Then what was on?</i>  |
| Combinations forced in your own third                   | <i>Where did that break down? What would it have cost us?</i>                                    |

## ASK THEM

- When your teammate gets pressed, what does that create?
- Who is best placed to be the third man?
- When do you start running?
- Where should the second pass go?
- What did the goals worth three have in common?
- How many runs did you make that didn't come to you?
- Which of our three combinations is hardest — the one-two, the overlap, or this?

## ADJUST IT

| HARDER                                                                  | EASIER                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Only goals after a third-man combination count.                         | Any three-pass sequence involving three different players counts as a combination.       |
| Two-touch maximum across the pitch.                                     | Allow two touches for the middle man.                                                    |
| The third man must be the player who started furthest from the ball.    | Add a neutral who always plays for the team in possession and can act as the middle man. |
| Combination chains — a one-two followed by a third-man run scores five. | Widen the pitch to 36 m.                                                                 |

### IT'S WORKING WHEN

At least one completed third-man combination per team by game 3.

Runs being made at the right moment even when unrewarded.

Players away from the ball moving rather than watching.

One-touch second passes.

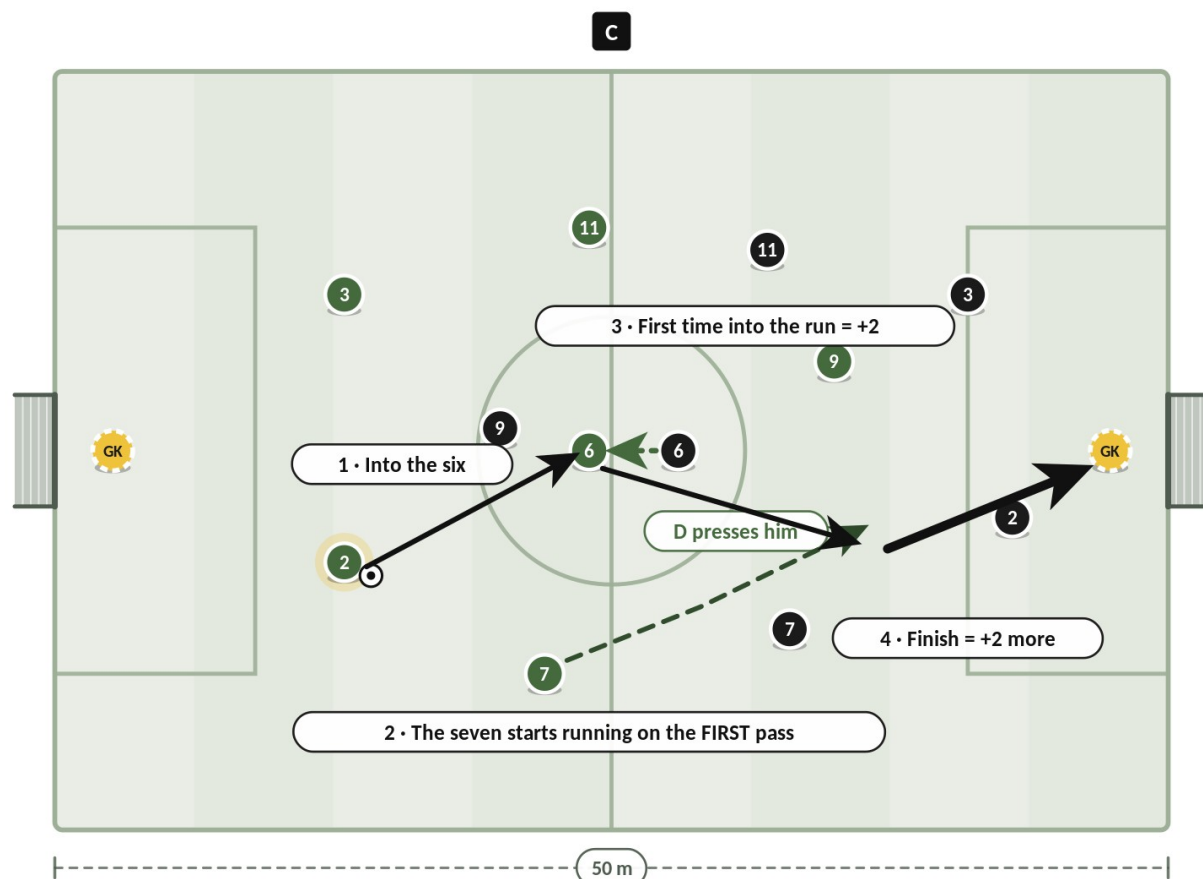
All three combination calls audible on the pitch.

Middle men choosing between the set and the turn.

## 11.4 THIRD-MAN MATCH (7 v 7)

The third-man run where it wins matches — from a defender, through a pressed midfielder, into a forward running beyond the last line.

50 x 34 m • a third-man combination that beats a line = +2 • goal from it = +2 • 15 minutes



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### SET UP

- 50 × 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. 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 third-man combination that beats a line of their players is two points. A goal from it is two more.
3. **Minutes 0–5 — no interruption.** Watch the forward and the wingers: are they moving when the ball is at the back, or waiting?

4. **Minute 5 — drinks break, one question:** *When our centre-back has the ball and their midfielder presses our six, who should be running?* Restart.
5. **Minutes 6–13.** Announce every correctly-timed run, named, whether or not it received the ball.
6. **Final two minutes — free play.** This is the last combination session before the review page; let them finish with football.

## RULES & SCORING

- **Goal = 3 points. A third-man combination that beats a line = +2. A goal originating from one = +2 more.**
- The run must start on the **first** pass.
- 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

|                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Technical</b>     | Firm first pass, half-turn receive, one-touch release into the path, controlled finish. Four techniques from four different sessions in one action.                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Tactical</b>      | <b>The forward's job is to read the midfield.</b> When our midfielder is about to be pressed, the forward should already be moving into the space behind the presser. Wingers can be the third man too — a run from wide into the channel is the same idea. The middle man must know whether their marker is following them. |
| <b>Physical</b>      | Fifteen minutes with repeated accelerations from standing. The forward will make many runs and receive few — manage their load and praise the effort.                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Psychological</b> | The end of the combination work. Point out how much has been added: not long ago these players could barely receive under pressure and tonight they are timing runs off a pass they never touch.                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Social</b>        | Listen for the squad organising itself. If a defender is calling for the midfielder to come short and a forward is calling for the ball behind, the team is starting to think together.                                                                                                                                      |

## WATCH FOR

| WHAT YOU'LL SEE                                                 | WHAT TO DO                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The forward standing still</b> while the ball is at the back | <i>What are you watching? When he's about to get pressed, that's your cue.</i>         |
| <b>Midfielders not coming short</b>                             | <i>If you don't come to it, nobody's marker moves and there's no space for anyone.</i> |
| <b>Runs made but never found</b>                                | Coach the passer, not the runner: <i>Did you see him? Where were your eyes?</i>        |
| <b>Everything played long</b> to skip the midfield entirely     | <i>What did that miss out? Who was free?</i> this theme material appearing early.      |
| <b>Third-man runs only from the striker</b>                     | <i>Wingers — can you be the third man? Where would you run?</i>                        |

## ASK THEM

- When our six is about to be pressed, who should be running?
- What does the middle man have to do first?
- Can a winger be the third man? Where would he go?
- How do you know your run is on?
- What did our best attack tonight look like?

- Across this theme — which combination suits you best?
- What's the difference between a good run and a well-timed run?

## ADJUST IT

| HARDER                                                                         | EASIER                                                                               |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Only combinations that beat their midfield line count.                         | Any three-player passing sequence counts.                                            |
| Two-touch in the middle third, combining Session 2's condition with tonight's. | Bigger pitch (55 × 38 m).                                                            |
| The goalkeeper must start one combination per team.                            | Award the bonus for the correctly-timed run alone, whether or not the pass finds it. |
| Double bonus for a third-man run that beats the last line.                     | 6 v 6 on 44 × 30 m with rolling subs.                                                |

### IT'S WORKING WHEN

Forwards and wingers moving while the ball is still at the back.  
 Midfielders coming short to create the space.  
 At least three well-timed third-man runs across the two teams.  
 Passers finding the runner at least once each.  
 The behaviour surviving the final two minutes.  
 The squad organising itself vocally without you.

# Finish, match day & homework

## REFLECTION — 5 MINUTES, SITTING DOWN

- Circle up and **sit down**.
- *When does the third man start running?* Get the answer from three different players until it's automatic.
- *Who creates the space — the runner, or the player who comes short?*
- *What's the trigger?* (A teammate about to be pressed.)
- *We've done three combinations now — one-two, overlap, third man. Which one do you like best, and why?*
- *Who made a run tonight that didn't come to them?* Every hand should go up.
- Finish by telling them **next time is the review week** and that you'll be asking them what they've learned — so they should think about it.

## MATCH-DAY LINK

| MATCH OBJECTIVES                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | WATCH FOR                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | ASK AFTERWARDS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <b>The forward starts moving when our midfielder is about to be pressed</b>, not after.</li><li>- <b>A midfielder comes short at least five times</b> to create space behind them.</li><li>- <b>At least one attack breaks a line</b> through a three-player combination.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <b>Where the forward's eyes are</b> when the ball is at the back. Watching the ball, or reading the midfield?</li><li>- <b>When runs start</b>. Pick one player and note whether they move on the first pass or the second.</li><li>- <b>Whether passers see runners</b>. A missed third-man run is usually a perception failure by the passer, not the runner.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <i>Tell me about a run you made that nobody saw. When did you start it?</i></li><li>- <i>Did anyone come short for you? What did that create?</i></li><li>- <i>Which of our three combinations did we actually use on Saturday?</i></li></ul> |

## HOMEWORK — "WATCH THE FIRST PASS" · 15 MINUTES, THREE TIMES BEFORE YOU NEXT TRAIN

- **Reaction starts**. Get anyone to hold a ball and drop it without warning. The moment it leaves their hand, **sprint 10 m**. Fifteen repetitions. That reaction — moving on a cue rather than a certainty — is the entire skill.
- **Half-turn receives**. Against a wall from 6 m: pass, take one step sideways as it returns, receive on the **half-turn** and play it first time back. Forty each foot.
- **Watch a game with a job**. Fifteen minutes of any professional match watching **the player furthest from the ball**. Every time a pass is played, note whether they move. Bring one example of a run that was made and never found.
- *Optional extra*: find one third-man goal on video and describe the three players' jobs to us next time.

### 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; **10** Overlaps and Underlaps; **12** Combination Play Under Pressure.

**A natural follow-on. Session 12 — Combination Play Under Pressure, and the review page**. The summary session for this theme puts all three combinations into one practice and lets the players choose between them — because a squad that can perform a one-two, an overlap and a third-man run separately has learned three tricks, while a squad that can pick the right one has learned to play. Session 12 also closes this theme with the third four-week review and prepares the ground for possession principles in this theme.

**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.