



SESSION 13 • STANDALONE PLAN

Width and Depth — Making the Pitch Big

Possession principles • Reference format: U12 9v9 • 60 minutes • 14–16 players

AT A GLANCE

TIME	MINS	PHASE	PRACTICE
0:00 – 0:10	10	■ Warm-up	13.1 Big Square, Small Square
0:10 – 0:25	15	■ Technical practice	13.2 The 5 v 2 Rondo
0:25 – 0:40	15	■ Skill game	13.3 The Switch Game
0:40 – 0:55	15	■ Conditioned match	13.4 The Wide 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

Where the earlier sessions build individuals and pairs, these build a team, and it starts with the simplest idea in football: the bigger you make the pitch, the easier it is to keep the ball. Under-12 teams do the opposite almost without exception. The ball goes to the left touchline and fourteen children follow it, until every player on the field is inside a twenty-metre circle and the only available pass is backwards. Nobody has done anything wrong individually — they have just all made the pitch small. Width and depth are the cure, and they are not really technical skills at all. Width is a decision to stand somewhere uncomfortable, far from the ball, where you may not be involved for thirty seconds. Depth is the same decision made forwards and backwards. Both require a player to trust that being available matters more than being near the action. Tonight the squad learns to feel the difference between a big pitch and a small one, and then learns the pass that punishes an opponent who has followed the ball across: the switch.

BY THE END, PLAYERS CAN

- Stay wide when the ball is on the far side, rather than drifting towards it.

- **Offer depth** — a player short of the ball and a player beyond it, at all times.
- **Recognise the overloaded side** and switch the ball to the free one.
- **Play the switch accurately** — firm, along the ground where possible, and early enough that the space still exists.
- **Understand why** a big pitch is easier to play on, and be able to explain it.

KIT LIST

Ground needed: about 60 × 45 m — and tonight the width matters. The conditioned match is deliberately 36 m wide rather than 34; if you can find 38, use it. A cramped pitch will teach the opposite of tonight's lesson.

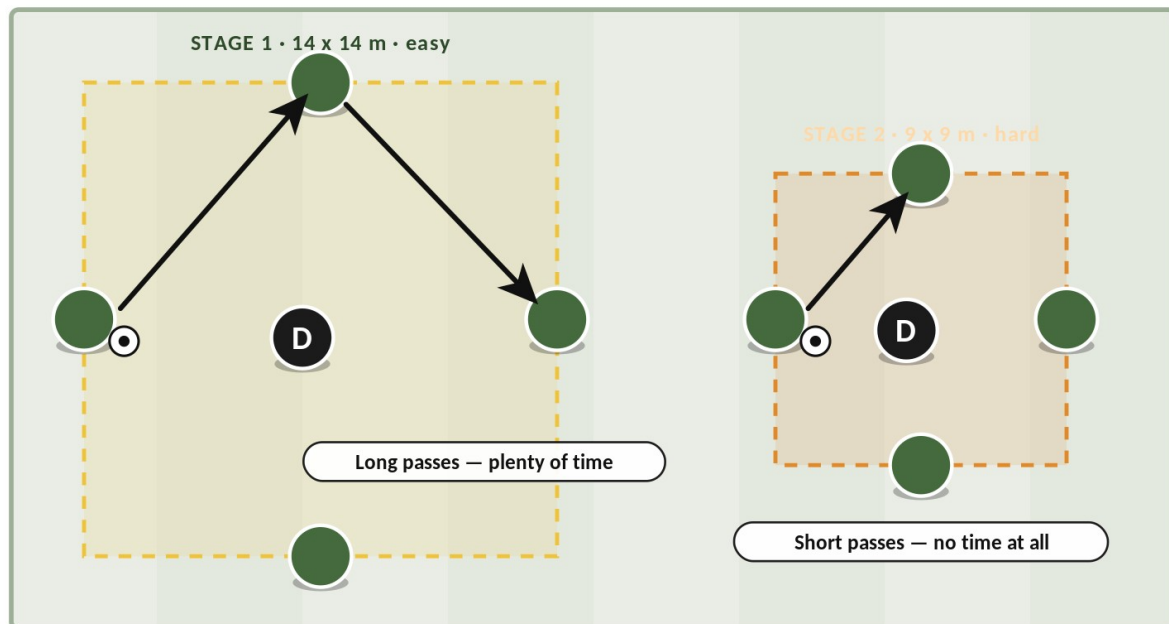
ITEM	QTY	USED IN
Footballs (size 4)	16	All practices
Flat markers	64	Squares, rondo boxes, channels, wide zones
Cones (tall)	8	Rondo corners (13.2)
Bibs — red / blue / yellow	8 / 8 / 2	13.1 onwards
Mini goals	2	Skill game (13.3) — one per end
Full-size goals	2	Conditioned match (13.4)

13.1 BIG SQUARE, SMALL SQUARE

Let them feel it rather than hear it. The same practice is played in a 14 m square and then a 9 m square, and nobody is told what will happen. The players discover that space is what makes possession possible.

two sizes, same practice • groups of five • four outside, one defender inside • 10 minutes

C



THE BIGGER THE SQUARE, THE EASIER IT IS TO KEEP THE BALL

● Outside players ● Defender ⊙ Ball ➔ Pass ■ Playing square C Coach

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SET UP

- **Two square sizes marked from the start:** a 14 × 14 m square and a 9 × 9 m square, using different-coloured flat markers. Mark three or four of each so every group has one.
- **Groups of five:** four players on the sides of the square (one per side), one defender inside.
- Outside players **must stay on their line** — they may move along it but not into the square.
- Balls at the edge so early arrivals start immediately.
- Coach moving between squares. Say almost nothing in the first six minutes.

HOW IT RUNS

- Minutes 0–3 — arrival.** Greet each player by name, ball each, free dribbling. **Collect the Session 12 homework** — *how many of each combination did you count?*
- Minute 3 — the big square.** Groups of five, four on the lines, one defender in the middle. *Keep the ball. Stay on your line. Two touches.* Three minutes.
- Minute 6 — move to the small square.** Say nothing else. Same rules, same numbers, half the space. Two minutes.
- Minute 8 — ask one question and let them answer it.** *Which one was easier? Why?* You want the words 'more space' and 'more time'. Then: *So what should we do in a match?*

5. **Minutes 8–10 — back to the big square** with one addition: the outside players may now move along their line to find a better angle, and must be moving whenever the ball is not with them.

RULES & SCORING

- **Outside players stay on their line.** Stepping inside loses the ball.
- **Two touches maximum.**
- The defender scores a point for every interception or every ball forced out.
- Rotate the defender every 45 seconds — nobody stays in the middle.
- Loose ball: nearest player retrieves and the group restarts immediately.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Firm, accurate passes along the ground over a genuine distance. Receive side-on so the next pass is available. The far player is often the right pass, and it needs weight.
Tactical	Stay on the line — and stay far apart. Two players close together on the same side give the defender an easy job. The bigger the distance between you, the harder it is for one player to cover both.
Physical	Constant small adjustments along the line, which is a genuine warm-up for the lateral movement of a match. Rotate the defender frequently — the middle is the hard work.
Psychological	Do not explain the point of the practice before they have felt it. The discovery is the lesson and it is ruined by being told.
Social	Outside players should be calling for the ball across the square, which means calling loudly. Quiet teams don't switch.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Outside players drifting towards the ball along their line	<i>If you come towards it, how far does his pass have to travel? Now how easy is that to intercept?</i>
Only using the two nearest players	<i>Which player have you not passed to? The far one is almost always available.</i>
Passes under-hit across the square	<i>The distance is new. That one has to travel. Get your body over it.</i>
Defender chasing everything and getting nothing	<i>Coach them too: Don't chase it — stand where two passes are blocked and make him choose.</i>
The small square becoming a scramble	<i>That's the point. Let it happen and then ask the question.</i>

ASK THEM

- Which square was easier? Why?
- What did you have to do differently in the small one?
- Where should you stand when the ball is on the far side?
- Which player is usually free — the nearest or the furthest?
- So in a match, when the ball's on the left touchline, where should the right winger be?
- Defenders — which square did you prefer?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
One touch in the big square.	Three touches and no defender for the first two minutes.

HARDER	EASIER
Two defenders in the big square.	Bigger squares (18 m) so success is frequent.
Outside players must alternate feet on every pass.	Five outside players on a five-sided shape, giving more options.
The ball must reach the opposite side every four passes.	Skip the small square if the group is struggling — the contrast can wait a week.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Outside players **holding their positions** rather than drifting to the ball.

Long passes across the square being attempted and completed.

Players able to say **why** the big square was easier.

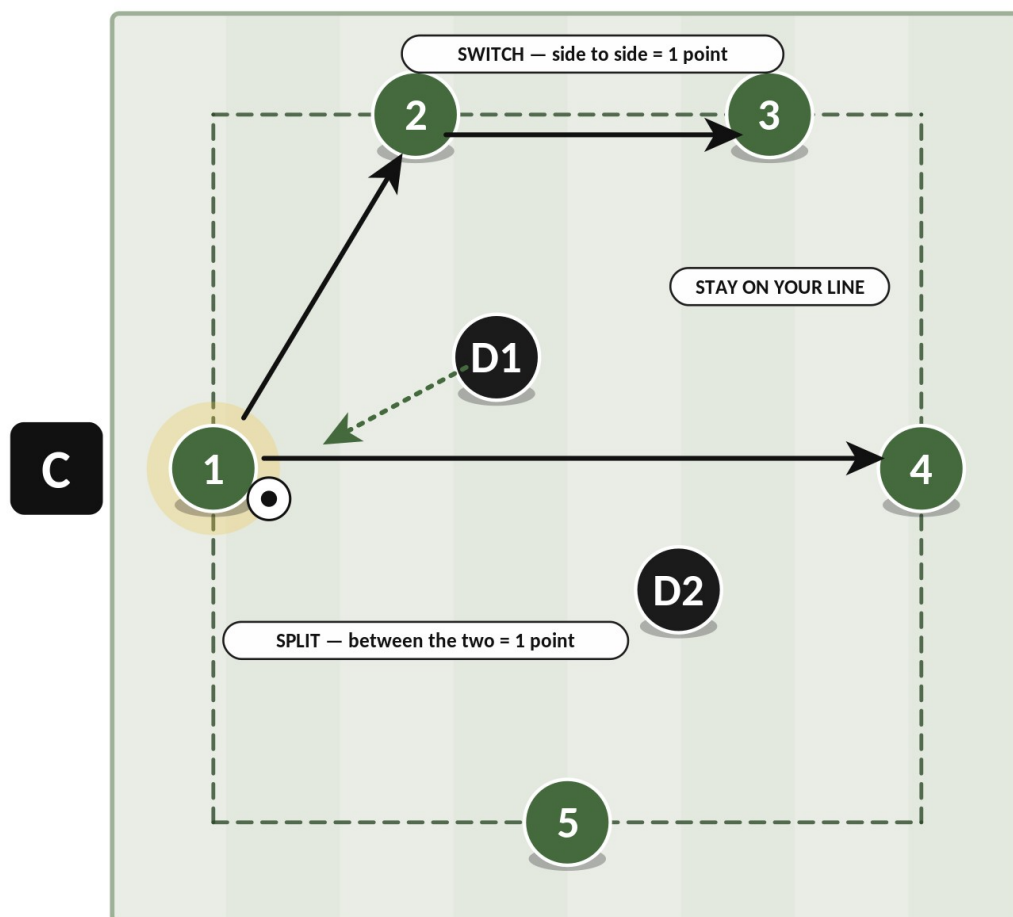
Audible calling from the far side.

Defenders positioning rather than chasing by minute eight.

13.2 THE 5 v 2 RONDO

The first rondo of the curriculum, and it arrives now rather than in September for a reason — a rondo teaches nothing to players who cannot yet receive under pressure. Five outside, two in, with points for the two passes that matter: the split and the switch.

14 x 14 m • five outside on the lines, two defenders inside • split = 1, switch = 1 • 15 minutes



OUTSIDE PLAYERS MAY NOT STEP INSIDE • TWO TOUCHES MAXIMUM

● Possession team ● Defenders ⊙ Ball ➔ Pass ➤ Press C Coach

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SET UP

- Two boxes, each **14 × 14 m**, marked with flat markers, with a cone at each corner.
- **Five outside players on the lines, two defenders inside.** Seven per box; two boxes covers 14 players, and with 15–16 add a sixth outside player.
- Outside players may move along their line but **may not step inside the box**.
- One ball per box plus two spares at the coach's feet.
- Coach between the two boxes, watching body shape on receiving.

HOW IT RUNS

1. **Set it up in 30 seconds.** *Five outside, two in. Stay on your line. Two touches. Keep it.* They know the shape from the warm-up.
2. **Minutes 0–4 — plain possession.** No scoring, just keep the ball. Let the pictures appear.
3. **Minute 4 — introduce the SPLIT.** *A pass that goes between the two defenders is worth a point.* Demonstrate once, twenty seconds. This is the pass that hurts a press.
4. **Minute 8 — introduce the SWITCH.** *A pass from one side of the box to the opposite side is also a point.* Now the outside players have two ways to score and the defenders have two things to stop.
5. **Minutes 11–15 — competitive.** Groups count their points across three minutes; defenders swap in when they win the ball twice. Announce the scores between boxes.
6. **Rotation:** defenders swap out every 60–90 seconds regardless of the scoring — the middle is exhausting and nobody should be stuck there.

RULES & SCORING

- **Outside players stay on their lines.** Stepping in gives the ball to the defenders.
- **Two touches maximum** for the first eleven minutes; one touch for the final four if the group is coping.
- **Split = 1 point. Switch = 1 point.** Ordinary passes score nothing.
- Defenders swap with an outside player when they win the ball twice, or every 90 seconds — whichever comes first.
- Ball out: instant restart with a spare.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Receive side-on so both the split and the switch are available — the Session 1 habit under a new demand. Firm passes. The split must be along the ground and hard; a soft split is an interception.
Tactical	Stay as far apart as the box allows. Watch the two defenders: when they stand side by side, the split is on; when they split up, the switch is on. The player opposite the ball is almost always the free one.
Physical	Short, sharp adjustments outside; genuinely hard work inside. Rotate defenders often and mean it.
Psychological	A rondo can become a place where the strongest players dominate and the weakest hide. Watch for anyone not receiving the ball and change the box order rather than saying anything.
Social	Two calls: " split! " from the player opposite and " switch! " from the far side. This is the first practice where players tell each other what's available rather than just asking for it.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Everyone bunching towards the ball along the lines	<i>How far apart are you? Get to your corner.</i> The distance is the whole practice.
Receiving square-on and only having one option	<i>Open out. Which way can you play from there?</i> The vocabulary paying off.
Split passes attempted when the defenders are apart	<i>Where are they standing? Is that pass on, or did you want it to be?</i>
Nobody switching because the pass is long	<i>Who's furthest from the ball? He's been free for ten seconds.</i>
Defenders chasing the ball in circles	Coach them: <i>Stand between two passes. Make him play the one you want.</i> This is this theme material appearing early and it's

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
	worth naming.
One player never touching the ball	Fix it silently by changing the boxes around. Never announce it.

ASK THEM

- When are the two defenders easiest to split?
- When is the switch on instead?
- Which player on your team is usually free?
- Where should you be standing when the ball is on the far side?
- Defenders — what made it hardest for you?
- What do you have to do before the ball arrives to have two options?
- Why is a switch worth as much as a split?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
One touch for the outside players.	Six outside players and one defender.
Three defenders in the box.	Three touches.
Only splits and switches keep possession — an ordinary pass gives the ball away.	Bigger box (18 × 18 m).
Shrink to 11 × 11 m for the last three minutes.	Drop the scoring and simply play for possession.

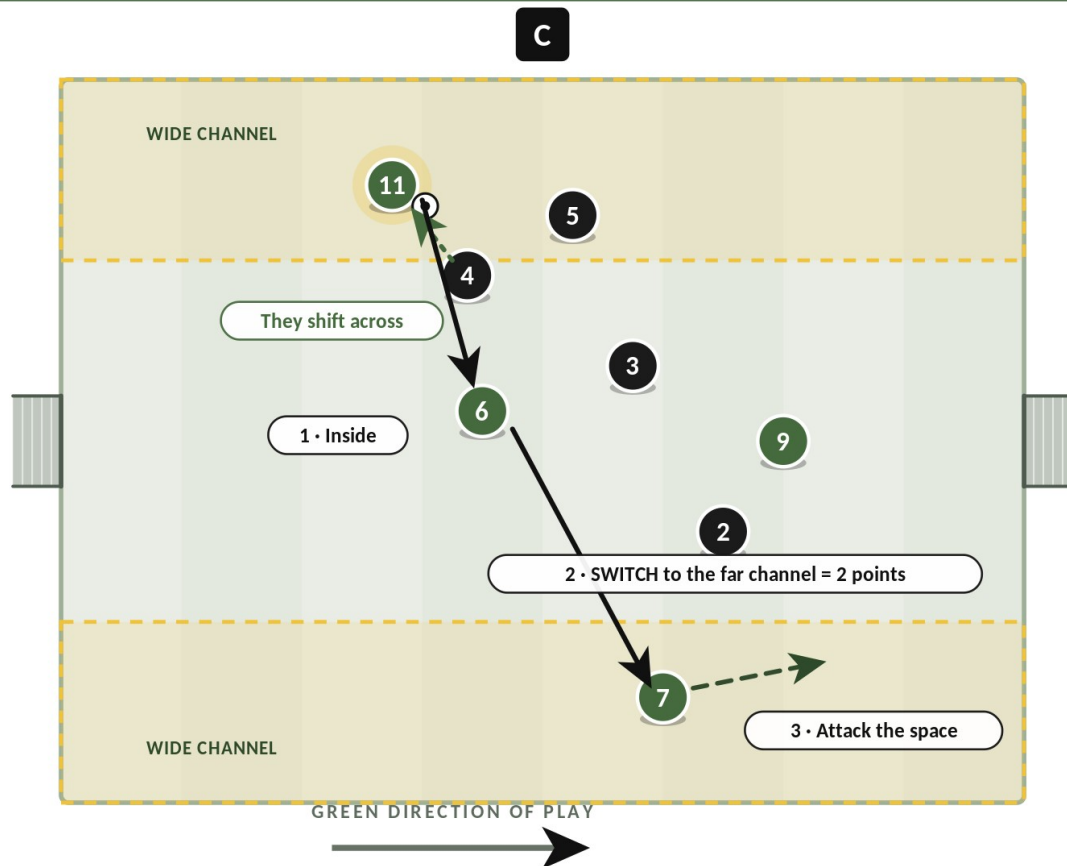
IT'S WORKING WHEN

Outside players **spread to the corners** of their lines.
Side-on receiving with two options available.
Split passes attempted when the defenders are together.
Switches attempted when they are apart.
The calls "split" and "switch" being used.
Every player receiving the ball regularly — check this deliberately.

13.3 THE SWITCH GAME (4 v 4)

Put a price on the switch. Wide channels on both sides mean the ball can be moved from one touchline to the other, and doing so is worth more than a goal — because at Under-12, the switch is the pass nobody plays.

32 x 24 m • 6 m wide channels • switching from one channel to the other = 2 points • 15 minutes



● Greens (attack right) ● Blues (attack left) ● Ball ■ Wide channel ➔ Pass / switch
 ➔ Move to receive ➔ Press C Coach

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SET UP

- Two pitches, each 32 × 24 m — as wide as you can make them — side by side with a 5 m corridor.
- 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.
- **At least one player from each team must be in a wide channel at all times** — announce this as a rule, not a suggestion.
- 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 25 seconds:** Goal is 1. Getting the ball from one wide channel to the other is 2. One of you must always be in a channel. Three minutes. Go.
3. **Game 1 — no coaching.** Watch how quickly both teams collapse towards the ball anyway.
4. **Between games 1 and 2, one question:** When the ball's on the left, where's the space? Point at nothing; let them look.

5. From game 3, add the follow-up: a goal scored **within five seconds of a switch** is worth 4. This stops the switch becoming a party trick and links it to the attack.
6. Four games of three minutes with 45 seconds between, ladder as usual.

RULES & SCORING

- Goal = 1 point. A switch from one wide channel to the other = 2 points. A goal within five seconds of a switch = 4 points.
- Each team must have a player in a wide channel at all times. If they don't, play continues but no switch can be scored.
- The switch may be one pass or two — the ball simply has to travel from one channel to the other without the opposition touching it.
- 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	The switch is usually a firm, driven pass along the ground or a lofted one over a crowd — teach both, and let the picture decide. Receive side-on in the channel so the next action is forward, not back.
Tactical	Switch early. The space on the far side exists because they've come across; by the time you've taken three touches it has gone. Sometimes the switch needs a bounce through a central player — that's still a switch. The player in the far channel must be visible and calling.
Physical	Three minutes on, 45 off, four times. Long lateral running for the wide players. Rotate who plays wide.
Psychological	Standing in a channel while the ball is forty metres away is boring, and children are honest about boredom. Acknowledge it: <i>it's dull until the ball comes — and then you're free.</i>
Social	The far winger must call. They are the only player who can see that they're free, and the ball carrier usually can't.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Both teams collapsing to the ball despite the rule	Ask between games: <i>how many of you were within ten metres of the ball just then? Whose job was the other side?</i>
Switches attempted too late, after the opposition has recovered	<i>When was the space biggest? Two seconds before you played it.</i>
Under-hit switches intercepted centrally	<i>That pass has to travel. Pick it up or drive it — but get it there.</i>
The wide player standing still and silent	<i>He can't see you. What are you going to do about that?</i>
Switch played and then nothing happens	The 4-point rule handles it. <i>You've got the whole side to yourself. Now what?</i>

ASK THEM

- When the ball's on the left, where's the space?
- When is the best moment to switch — early or late?
- Along the ground or in the air? What decides?
- What should the far winger be doing while he waits?
- What happens straight after a switch?
- How would you stop a team that switches well?

- Was it boring standing wide? Was it worth it?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
The switch must be one pass , no bounce through the middle.	Any pass that crosses the middle of the pitch counts as a switch.
Only goals after a switch count.	Widen the pitch to 36 m.
Two-touch maximum in the middle of the pitch.	Add a neutral player who plays for whoever has the ball and can act as the bounce.
Both wide channels must be occupied for a switch to score.	3 v 3 on 30 × 22 m — more space, more obvious switches.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

At least two completed switches per team per game by game 3.

Wide players **holding their channel** when the ball is on the far side.

Switches played early rather than after three touches.

The far player calling for it.

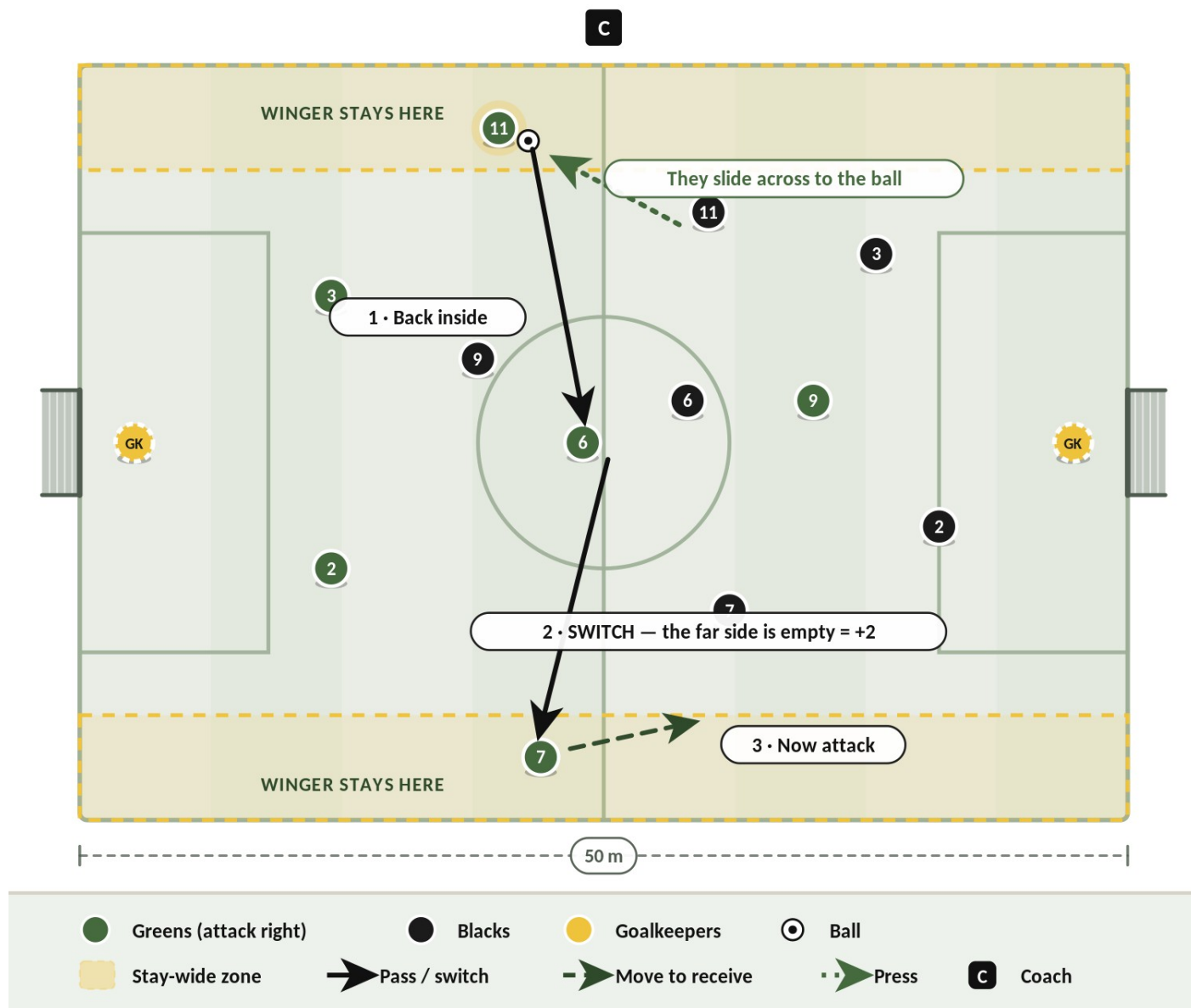
At least one 4-point sequence — a switch leading straight to a goal.

Teams recognising the overloaded side without being told.

13.4 THE WIDE MATCH (7 v 7)

A deliberately wide pitch and one instruction that changes everything: the wingers stay wide. What follows is a team discovering that a big pitch is easier to play on than a small one.

50 x 36 m — deliberately wide • a switch of play = +2 • 15 minutes



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SET UP

- 50 x 36 m — wider than any pitch used so far. If you can mark 38 m, do.
- A 5 m stay-wide zone marked down each touchline. Wingers must be inside it whenever their team has the ball in the opposition half.
- 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 shape, with the two wide midfielders explicitly told their job is the touchline.
- 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:** *Wingers stay in the wide zone when we have it. A switch from one side to the other is two points.*
3. **Minutes 0–5 — no interruption.** Watch how often the far winger is free and ignored. It will be most of the time.
4. **Minute 5 — drinks break, one question:** *Put your hand up if you were free at some point and didn't get it.* Count the hands. That's the coaching.
5. **Minutes 6–13.** Announce every switch. Name the player who was patient enough to stay wide, not just the passer.
6. **Final two minutes — remove the zones.** Play a normal game and see whether the pitch stays big.

RULES & SCORING

- **Goal = 3 points. A switch from one side of the pitch to the other = +2.**
- **Wingers must be in the wide zone** when their team has possession in the opposition half.
- The switch may travel through one central player.
- 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	Driven passes across the pitch, lofted where the ground route is blocked. Receiving in the channel on the half-turn, facing forward.
Tactical	Width stretches them, depth stretches them the other way. The centre-backs should be splitting wide when the keeper has it, the striker should be holding the highest line, and the wingers should be on the touchlines. When all of that happens at once, the opposition cannot press. The switch is what punishes them for trying.
Physical	A wider pitch means more running, especially for the wide players. Expect fatigue and rotate the wide roles at least once.
Psychological	Patience. Standing wide and unused for a minute is genuinely hard at this age. Name the patience every time it pays off.
Social	The far winger is the only person who knows they're free. If the squad learns nothing else tonight, teach them to shout for a switch.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Everyone within twenty metres of the ball	The break question — hands up if you were free — does more than any instruction.
Wingers drifting infield to get involved	<i>Stay there. I know it's boring. Watch what happens when it comes.</i>
Nobody looking up to find the switch	<i>Before you receive it, where's your far winger?</i> Session 1's scan, applied to the whole pitch.
Switches always in the air and inaccurate	<i>Could that have gone along the ground through the middle? Which is more likely to arrive?</i>
Centre-backs standing close together	<i>Spread out. Make their striker choose one of you.</i> Groundwork for this theme.
The pitch shrinking in the final two minutes	Say nothing until the reflection. Then ask them what happened.

ASK THEM

- Put your hand up if you were free and didn't get the ball.
- When the ball's on the right, whose job is the left touchline?
- Why is a big pitch easier to play on?
- What did the opposition do when we switched it?
- Was it worth standing wide? Be honest.
- When we took the zones away, what happened to the pitch?
- What's the hardest part of playing wide?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Two switches required before a goal counts.	Any pass across the middle counts as a switch.
Switches must travel along the ground.	Widen to 40 m if the ground allows.
Two-touch in the middle third.	No pressing in the wide zones for the first four minutes.
Both centre-backs must be in the wide half of their own third when the keeper has it.	6 v 6 on 46 × 34 m with rolling subs.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Wingers **holding the touchline** when the ball is on the far side.

At least four switches across the two teams.

Centre-backs splitting wide when the goalkeeper has it.

The far player calling for the ball.

Fewer players within twenty metres of the ball than at the start.

The pitch **staying big** in the final two unconditioned minutes.

Finish, match day & homework

REFLECTION — 5 MINUTES, SITTING DOWN

- Circle up and **sit down**.
- *Why is a big pitch easier to play on than a small one?*
- *When the ball's on the left touchline, where should our right winger be — and why is that hard?*
- *How many of you were free tonight and didn't get the ball? What are we going to do about that?*
- *When I took the zones away at the end, did the pitch stay big? Tell them honestly what you saw.*
- *What's the difference between width and depth? Get them to describe both.*
- Finish by naming **two players who stayed wide and patient** even when the ball never came.

MATCH-DAY LINK

MATCH OBJECTIVES	WATCH FOR	ASK AFTERWARDS
- Wingers stay on the touchline when the ball is on the far side. - At least three switches of play across the match. - Centre-backs split wide when the goalkeeper has the ball.	- How many players are within twenty metres of the ball. Pick three moments and count. It's the most revealing statistic in youth football. - Whether the far winger is free. They usually are. Note how often the ball reaches them. - When switches are attempted — early, or after the space has closed?	- <i>Were you free at any point on Saturday? Did the ball come?</i> - <i>How wide were we? Could we have been wider?</i> - <i>What happened when we switched it?</i>

HOMEWORK — "SEE THE FAR SIDE" · 15 MINUTES, THREE TIMES BEFORE YOU NEXT TRAIN

- **Long passing.** Mark 20 m and 25 m. Play thirty passes at each distance with each foot, aiming to land the ball within two metres of a target. This is the switch, and most U12 players have never practised a pass this long.
- **Driven and lofted.** From 20 m, play twenty passes **along the ground** as hard as you can, then twenty **lofted** over an obstacle. Notice which one arrives faster and which one is safer.
- **Watch a game with a job.** Fifteen minutes of any professional match watching **only the player furthest from the ball**. Note how far from the touchline they stand, and how often the ball eventually reaches them. Bring both.
- *Optional extra:* count how many players from one team are inside the centre circle when the ball is in a corner. The answer will surprise you.

WHERE TO GO NEXT

Same theme — possession principles. These cover the same ground from other angles and can be run in any order, before or after this one: **14** Support Angles; **15** Playing Forward; **16** Possession Under Pressure.

A natural follow-on. Session 14 — Support Angles and the Rondo. Width and depth make the pitch big; support angles make the ball keepable inside it. Session 14 teaches the shape around the ball — a player short, a player beyond, and nobody standing in a straight line behind a defender — and develops the rondo into a directional practice. Bring your notes on who stayed wide tonight; those are the players who will understand this theme fastest.

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.