



SESSION 14 • STANDALONE PLAN

Support Angles — Three Options, Always

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	14.1 The Triangle Grid
0:10 – 0:25	15	■ Technical practice	14.2 Short and Long
0:25 – 0:40	15	■ Skill game	14.3 No Straight Lines
0:40 – 0:55	15	■ Conditioned match	14.4 The Possession 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 13 made the pitch big. This one fills it properly. Width and depth are about the shape of the whole team; support angles are about the shape around the ball, and they are what decide whether a possession is kept or lost. The principle is simple enough to state in one sentence: **the player on the ball should always have three options — one short, one long, and one wide.** The reason it fails at Under-12 is not effort. Young players support the ball enthusiastically; they just support it from the wrong places. They stand directly behind the defender who is marking them. They stand in a straight line with the ball and a teammate, so one opponent blocks two passes. They arrive at the same moment and in the same space as somebody else. Every one of those is a positioning error made by a player who is trying hard. Tonight we teach the geometry: a triangle, never a line, and three different distances. It is the least glamorous session in the curriculum and one of the two or three most valuable.

BY THE END, PLAYERS CAN

- **Form triangles rather than lines** — never stand where one defender blocks two passes.

- **Offer three distances at once:** one player short of the ball, one beyond it, one wide.
- **Move when hidden** — recognise being screened by a defender and adjust before the ball arrives.
- **Support before it is needed**, not after the ball carrier is in trouble.
- **Keep the ball for six consecutive passes** under pressure, as a measurable team outcome.

KIT LIST

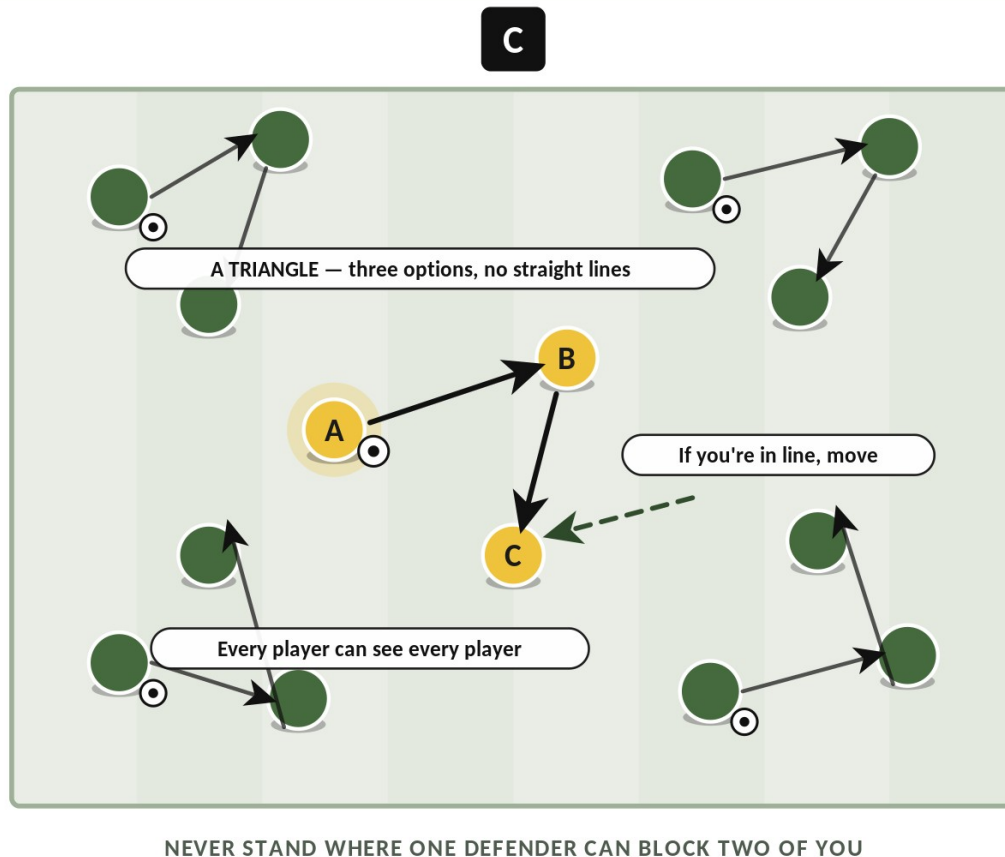
Ground needed: about 60 × 40 m. This session has no goals until minute 25, which is unusual and deliberate — support angles are learned faster when scoring isn't available to distract from them. Warn the squad at the start that the first half of the session is about keeping the ball, so nobody spends fifteen minutes wondering where the goals are.

ITEM	QTY	USED IN
Footballs (size 4)	16	All practices
Flat markers	60	Grid, target zones, pitch edges
Cones (tall)	8	Corners of the technical area (14.2)
Bibs — red / blue / yellow	8 / 8 / 4	14.1 onwards — yellow used for targets in 14.2
Mini goals	4	Skill game (14.3) — two per end
Full-size goals	2	Conditioned match (14.4)

14.1 THE TRIANGLE GRID

One rule, ten minutes: never stand in a straight line with the ball and a teammate. Groups of three move continuously and must keep re-forming a triangle, so the shape becomes something the body does rather than something the brain calculates.

28 x 20 m • groups of three • never stand in a straight line with the ball • 10 minutes



● Players ● Teaching trio ⊙ Ball ➔ Pass ➔ Adjust the angle 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.
- No obstacles — the groups must avoid each other, which is part of it.
- Balls at the grid edge so early arrivals start immediately.
- Coach inside the grid from minute 5, working with individual trios.

HOW IT RUNS

- Minutes 0–3 — arrival.** Greet each player by name, ball each, free dribbling. **Collect the Session 13 homework** — *how far from the touchline did that player stand?*
- Minute 3 — form trios and pass.** *Keep moving, keep the ball.* Ninety seconds of ordinary passing to get warm.
- Minute 5 — the rule.** *You three must always make a triangle. Never a straight line.* Freeze one group and show a line: one defender standing between two of them blocks both. Twenty seconds.

4. **Minute 7 — add the movement demand.** After every pass, the two players **off** the ball must adjust — nobody stands still while the ball travels.
5. **Minutes 8-10 — add a defender.** Two trios combine: six players keep the ball against one defender in a shared area. The triangle now has to survive a real opponent.

RULES & SCORING

- **Never a straight line.** If the coach can draw one line through all three players, the group has lost the ball.
- The two players off the ball must move every time the ball moves.
- Two touches maximum from minute 7.
- In the final phase, the defender swaps with whoever loses the ball.
- Loose ball: nearest player retrieves and the group restarts on the move.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Receive side-on so both other players are visible. Firm, along the ground. The pass to the far point of the triangle is often the right one and it needs weight.
Tactical	A triangle gives the ball carrier two passes and the defender an impossible job. Distance matters as much as angle — a triangle three metres across is as useless as a straight line.
Physical	Continuous small adjustments and repositioning. Less running than in Session 13 , more constant motion.
Psychological	This is the least exciting practice in the curriculum. Say so honestly and tell them why it matters: <i>this is the boring one that makes everything else work</i> . Players of any age respect being levelled with.
Social	Players should tell each other when they're in line: "I can't see you!" is the call of the night.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Straight lines forming constantly	Don't correct each one. Freeze one group, stand where a defender would, and let them see that you block both passes at once.
Triangles too small — three players within five metres	<i>Spread out. How far can you be and still make that pass?</i>
Players standing still while the ball travels	<i>Whoever isn't passing is moving. Every time.</i>
The same two players combining and the third being ignored	Set a rule for ninety seconds: <i>the ball must go to a different player every pass</i> .
Nobody talking	Give them the phrase — <i>I can't see you</i> — and require it once per group per minute.

ASK THEM

- Why is a straight line bad?
- How far apart should the three of you be?
- When the ball moves, what do the other two do?
- How do you know you're in a bad position?
- What should you say if you can't see the ball carrier?
- How many passes does a triangle give the player on the ball?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
One touch.	Three touches and no defender.
Two defenders in the shared area.	Walk it for the first two minutes.
Groups of four making a diamond , which is harder to keep shaped.	Mark a fixed triangle with cones and let players move between the points before playing it free.
Silent phase — no talking for ninety seconds, so the movement has to do the communicating.	Groups of four so there's always an easy option.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Visible triangles rather than lines, without reminders, by minute 8.

Both off-ball players adjusting every time the ball moves.

Distances of 8–12 m rather than 4–5 m.

The call "I can't see you" being used.

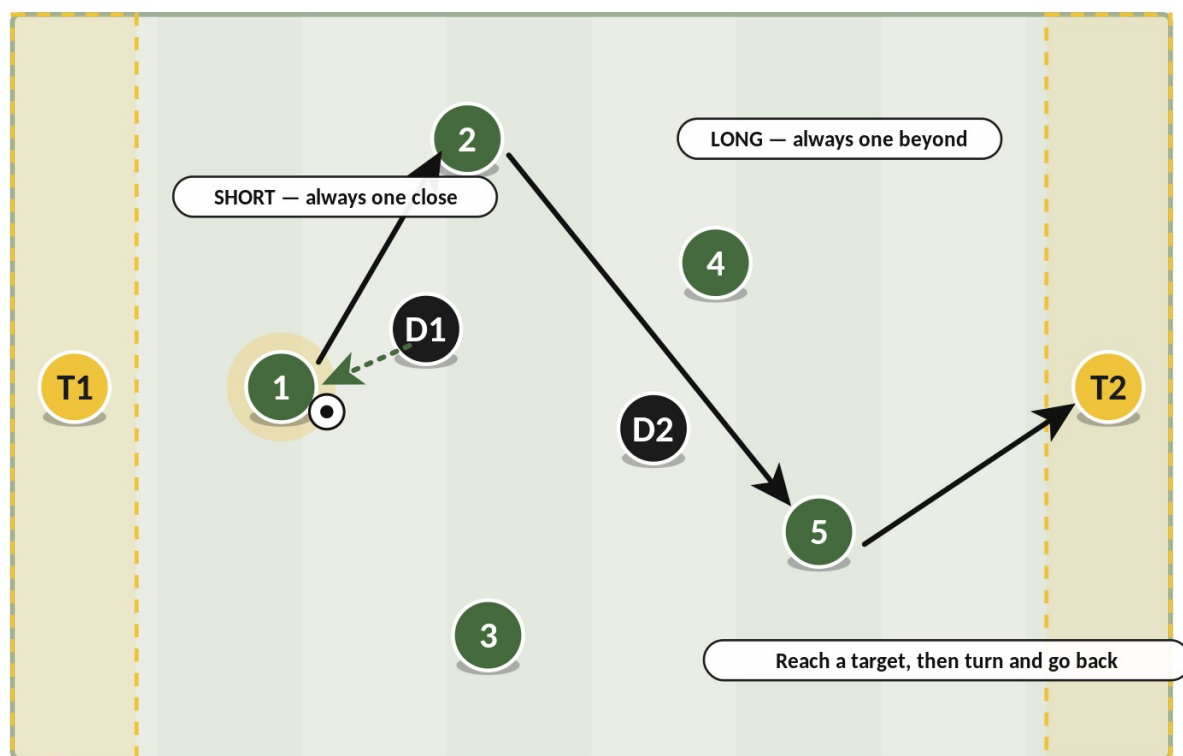
The shape surviving when the defender is added.

14.2 SHORT AND LONG

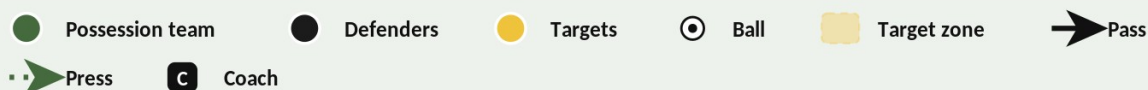
Add distance to angle. Five against two with a target at each end, and one demand: the player on the ball must always have someone short, someone long and someone wide. When they don't, they lose it — and they will feel exactly why.

24 x 16 m • five v two with a target at each end • always one short, one long • 15 minutes

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ONE SHORT, ONE LONG, ONE WIDE • THE BALL CARRIER MUST ALWAYS HAVE THREE



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SET UP

- Two areas, each **24 × 16 m**, with a 3 m target zone at each end.
- **Five in possession, two defenders, and a target player in each end zone.** Nine per area; two areas covers 16–18, so with 14–15 run one area of nine and one of six with a single defender.
- Target players stay in their zone and may not be tackled. They play one-touch back into the area.
- One ball per area plus two spares.
- Coach between the areas, watching the shape around the ball rather than the pass itself.

HOW IT RUNS

1. **Set it up in 40 seconds.** Five of you keep it against two. Reach a target and you score — then turn and go the other way.
2. **Minutes 0–4 — free.** No extra rules. Let them find the targets and let the shape be poor.
3. **Minute 4 — one freeze, twenty seconds.** Stop the ball and ask the player on it: *how many options have you got?* Then ask the group: *who should move, and where?* Restart.

4. **Minute 6 — the demand.** *The player on the ball must always have three: one short, one long, one wide. Say it once and then only ever ask about it.*
5. **Minutes 6–12 — competitive.** Count transfers from one target to the other. Defenders swap in when they win it twice.
6. **Minutes 12–15 — two touches maximum,** which forces the support to be in place before the ball arrives.

RULES & SCORING

- **1 point for reaching a target,** then the team turns and attacks the other one.
- Targets play **one touch** back into the area and may not be tackled.
- **The team loses the ball if the player on it has fewer than two options** — the coach calls it, once or twice, to make the point.
- Defenders swap out after two wins or every 90 seconds, whichever comes first.
- Ball out: instant restart with a spare.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Receive on the half-turn facing up the area. The pass into the target is the hardest one — firm, into the near foot, so they can return it one-touch.
Tactical	Short, long, wide — three different distances. The short option keeps the ball; the long option progresses it; the wide option escapes the press. Most U12 teams offer three short options and nothing else, which is why they can keep the ball but never move it forward.
Physical	Constant repositioning with short bursts. The defenders work hardest — rotate them properly.
Psychological	Being the long option is thankless: you rarely get the ball, and you're the one blamed when the team can't progress. Name that role and praise it.
Social	The three options should announce themselves — <i>short!, long!, wide!</i> Three words, and a team that uses them is a team that can be coached from within.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Everyone offering short — the ball can be kept but never progresses	<i>Who's your long option? Nobody? Then we're going nowhere.</i>
Players hidden behind defenders	<i>Can he see you? Move a metre. Now can he?</i>
The ball going to the target too early, before the shape exists	<i>Was that on, or were you just getting rid of it?</i>
Support arriving after the ball	The two-touch phase exposes this. <i>Be there before it comes, not after.</i>
Defenders chasing in pairs	Coach them: <i>One presses, one covers the best pass.</i> this theme groundwork again.
Targets standing still	<i>Move along your line so he can find you.</i>

ASK THEM

- How many options have you got right now?
- Which one is missing — short, long or wide?
- Who is your long option? Does he know that?
- What do you have to do before the ball comes to you?
- Defenders — what made it hardest?

- Why is the long option important if he hardly ever gets it?
- What happens to the shape when you all come short?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
One touch in the middle of the area.	Six in possession against two.
Three defenders.	Bigger area (28 × 20 m).
The team must reach a target within eight passes or possession changes.	Three touches.
Targets removed — the team must instead dribble over the end line, which demands more support beyond the ball.	Two targets at each end, making the progression pass easier to find.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Three distinct options available to the ball carrier most of the time.

Players moving out from behind defenders **before** the ball arrives.

Transfers from target to target increasing across the practice.

The words short, long and wide being used by players.

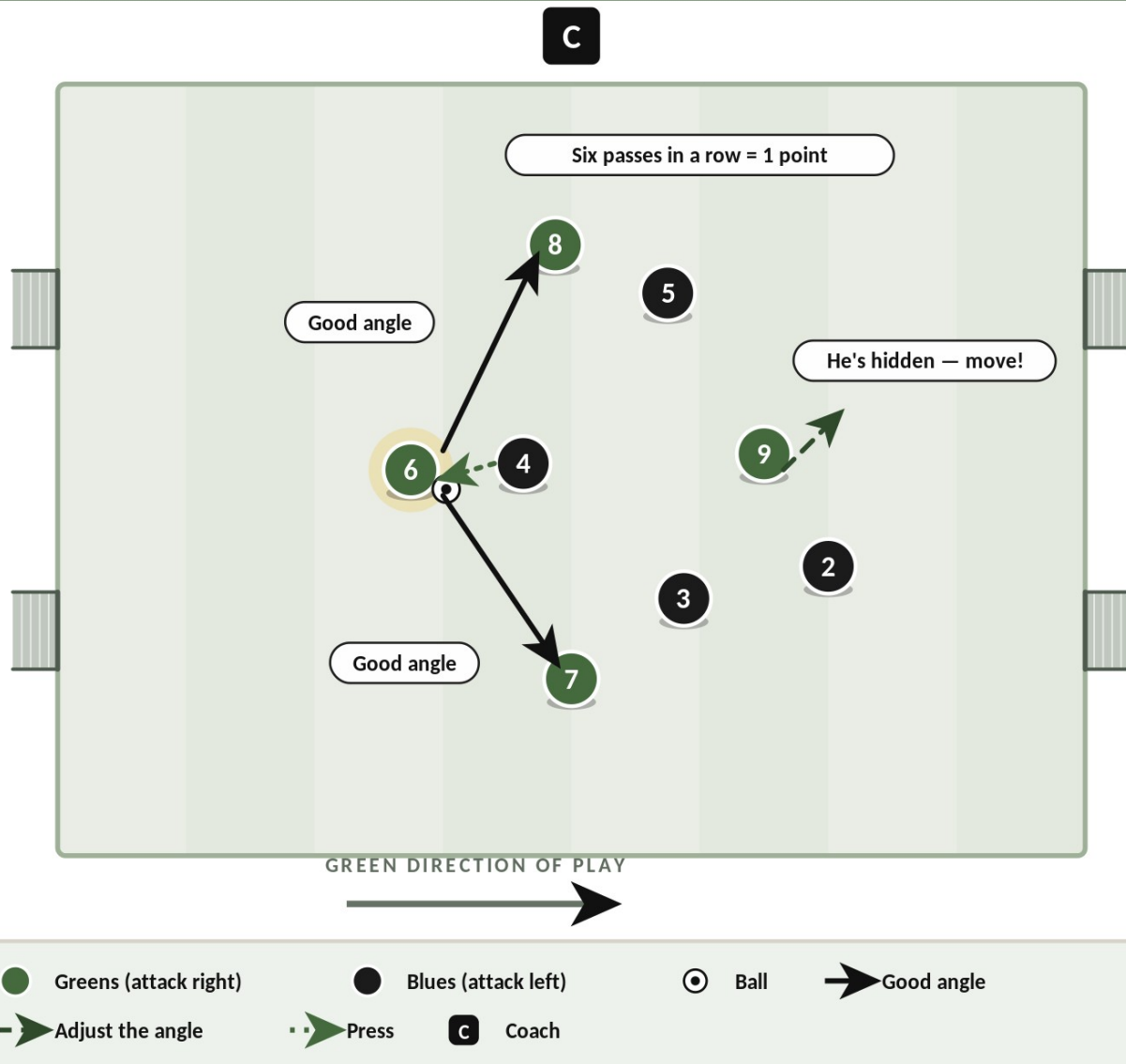
Support in place before the pass rather than after it.

The two-touch phase surviving — if it collapses, the support isn't early enough.

14.3 NO STRAIGHT LINES (4 v 4)

Possession with a purpose and a number attached. Six consecutive passes is worth a point, which is achievable enough to be motivating and hard enough to require proper support angles.

32 x 24 m • two mini goals per end • six consecutive passes = 1 point • 15 minutes



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SET UP

- Two pitches, each 32 × 24 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 teams count their own passes out loud.** This is not optional — the counting is what makes them aware of the sequence.
- 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 2. Six passes in a row is 1. Count them out loud. Three minutes. Go.

3. **Game 1 — no coaching.** Listen for the counting. Most teams reach three or four and lose it.
4. **Between games 1 and 2, one question:** *What happens at pass four or five? Why does it break down there?* Usually the answer is that everyone has come towards the ball.
5. **From game 3, add the shape rule:** a sequence only counts if **the ball changes direction at least once** during it — forward then back, or left then right. This stops six passes along one touchline.
6. **Four games of three minutes with 45 seconds between,** ladder as usual.

RULES & SCORING

- **Goal = 2 points. Six consecutive passes = 1 point.** The count resets on any turnover.
- From game 3, the sequence must **change direction** at least once.
- Teams count out loud. A sequence that isn't counted doesn't score.
- 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	Receive side-on, first touch out of the feet, firm passes. Under pressure the pass weight is the first thing to go — watch for under-hit balls at pass four and five.
Tactical	Triangles, three distances, and movement between passes. The sequence breaks when everyone converges on the ball; it survives when one player stays deep, one stays wide and one stays high. A backward pass is not a failure — it is often the pass that keeps the sequence alive.
Physical	Three minutes on, 45 off, four times. Constant repositioning rather than sprinting. Less demanding than the other sessions in this theme, which is welcome.
Psychological	Some players will find six passes frustrating and want to shoot. Point at the scoring: a goal is worth two, a sequence is worth one, and a sequence usually leads to a goal anyway.
Social	Counting out loud is a team act. A squad that counts together starts to sound like a team, and it's a surprisingly effective way to get quiet players talking.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Sequences dying at pass three or four	<i>Where was everyone at pass three? All near the ball?</i> Let them work it out.
Backward passes treated as failure	<i>Did it keep the sequence going? Then it was a good pass.</i> This needs saying explicitly.
Six passes along one touchline	The change-of-direction rule handles it from game 3.
Players hidden behind opponents	<i>Can he see you?</i> The Session 14 refrain.
Teams abandoning possession to shoot from anywhere	Don't ban it. Read the scores out loud and let arithmetic do the work.

ASK THEM

- What happens at pass four? Why does it break down there?
- Is a backward pass a bad pass?
- Where should the player furthest from the ball be standing?
- How do you know you're in a bad position?
- Which team kept the ball best, and what were they doing differently?
- Does keeping the ball help you score, or get in the way?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Eight consecutive passes for a point.	Four consecutive passes for a point.
Two touches maximum.	Add a neutral player who plays for whoever has the ball.
A goal only counts after a six-pass sequence.	Widen the pitch to 36 m.
Add a third mini goal in the middle of each end line to widen the picture.	3 v 3 on 30 × 22 m — far more space and more obvious angles.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Six-pass sequences being completed by both teams by game 3.

Audible counting.

Backward passes used deliberately to keep sequences alive.

Players adjusting out from behind defenders.

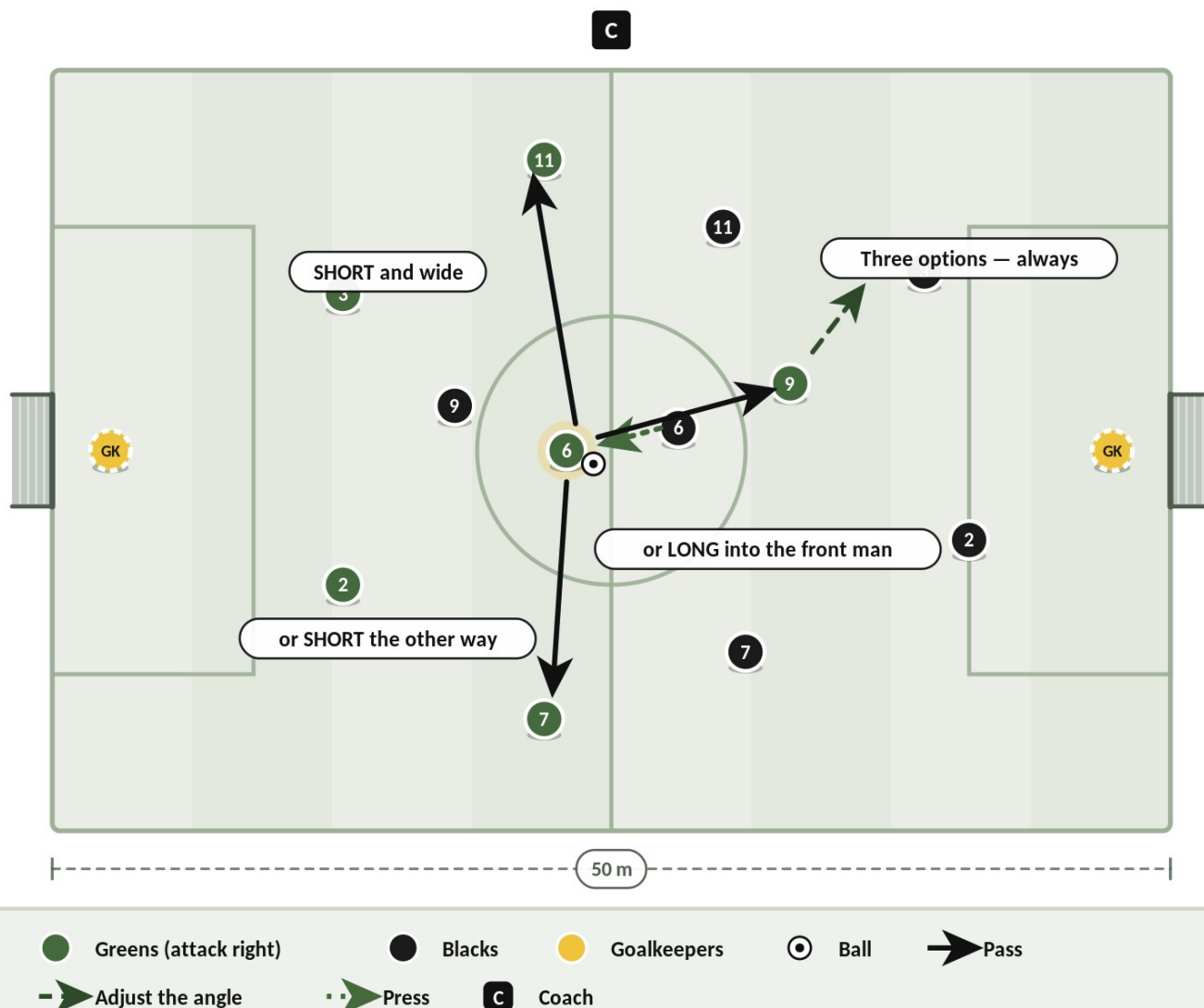
Fewer players converging on the ball as the games progress.

At least one goal that comes directly out of a long sequence.

14.4 THE POSSESSION MATCH (7 v 7)

Support angles in a full match, where the shape has to hold across a much bigger area and the ball carrier is often forty metres from three of their teammates.

50 x 34 m • six consecutive passes = +1 • a goal after six passes = +2 • 15 minutes



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SET UP

- 50 x 34 m with full-size goals.
- 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 roles:** the two centre-backs are the deep options, the wide midfielders are the wide options, the striker is the long option.
- 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:** Six passes in a row is one point. A goal that comes after six passes is worth two extra.

3. **Minutes 0–5 — no interruption.** Watch the shape when your team wins the ball. Count how many players come towards it.
4. **Minute 5 — drinks break, one question:** *When our centre-back has the ball, who is his short option? Who's long? Who's wide?* Get three names. Restart.
5. **Minutes 6–13.** Announce completed sequences by number: *that's six, reds.* Name the player who provided the option that kept it alive, not the one who finished it.
6. **Final two minutes — no conditions.** Watch whether the shape holds.

RULES & SCORING

- **Goal = 3 points. Six consecutive passes = +1. A goal within ten seconds of a six-pass sequence = +2 more.**
- The count resets on any turnover or when the ball goes out.
- No touch restrictions. This is a match.
- Keepers restart within five seconds and **count as a passer** — a pass back to the keeper keeps the sequence alive.
- Two individual interventions maximum, plus the scheduled break question.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Receiving side-on, first touch away from pressure, firm passing. All of this theme, now in service of a team idea.
Tactical	Three options at three distances, from every position on the pitch. Centre-backs split to give width at the back. The pivot offers short. The striker holds the highest line to give length. Wide players hold the touchline. When all four happen at once, six passes is easy; when they don't, three is hard.
Physical	Continuous repositioning rather than sprinting — the least physically brutal conditioned match in a while, which is welcome after Blocks 2 and 3.
Psychological	Possession football is undramatic and some players will find it dull compared with the last month. Frame it honestly: <i>this is what lets you do all the exciting stuff.</i>
Social	The three calls — short, long, wide — should now be audible across a full-sized pitch. That requires volume, and volume is a skill worth naming.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Everyone converging on the ball	The recurring U12 fault. <i>Who is furthest from the ball right now? What's his job?</i>
Centre-backs standing next to each other	<i>Split. Make their striker choose one of you.</i> Direct groundwork for this theme.
The striker dropping in and leaving no long option	<i>Who's our furthest player forward? Nobody? Then every pass we play is sideways.</i>
Sequences abandoned for a hopeful long ball	<i>Was that a pass or a hope?</i>
Goalkeeper not being used	The rule counts them. <i>He's free every time. Why aren't you using him?</i> this theme follows on from this, and this is the seed.
The shape dissolving in the last two minutes	Note it honestly and raise it in the reflection.

ASK THEM

- When our centre-back has it, who's short? Who's long? Who's wide?
- How many of us should be near the ball? How many away from it?

- Is a pass to the goalkeeper a good pass?
- Where does the striker have to stand for us to have a long option?
- When the conditions came off, did we keep the shape?
- Does keeping the ball make scoring easier or harder? Why?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Eight passes for the bonus.	Four passes for the bonus.
Two-touch in your own half.	Bigger pitch (55 × 38 m).
A goal only counts after a six-pass sequence.	Add a neutral player who always plays for the team in possession.
The sequence must include the goalkeeper to score.	6 v 6 on 44 × 30 m with rolling subs.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Six-pass sequences appearing regularly for both teams.

Centre-backs splitting wide.

A recognisable long option — usually the striker — holding position.

The goalkeeper being used as an outfield option at least twice.

Fewer players within twenty metres of the ball than in Session 13.

The shape surviving the final two unconditioned minutes.

Finish, match day & homework

REFLECTION — 5 MINUTES, SITTING DOWN

- Circle up and **sit down**.
- *What are the three options the player on the ball should always have?* (Short, long, wide.)
- *Why is a straight line bad?*
- *Is a backward pass a bad pass? When is it the best pass on the pitch?*
- *When our centre-back has the ball, whose job is it to be the long option?*
- *When I took the conditions off, did we keep the shape?* Tell them what you actually saw.
- Finish by naming **two players who kept offering an option they never received**. That's the behaviour that makes possession possible and it is almost never noticed.

MATCH-DAY LINK

MATCH OBJECTIVES	WATCH FOR	ASK AFTERWARDS
- The player on the ball always has three options — short, long and wide. - Centre-backs split wide when the goalkeeper or a teammate has it in our third. - One player always stays high to give the team length.	- How many players are within ten metres of the ball. Three is healthy; six is a problem. - Whether anybody is hidden behind an opponent when the ball is played to them. - Whether the striker holds a high line or drops in to get involved.	- <i>When you had the ball on Saturday, how many people could you pass to?</i> - <i>Was there a moment you were hidden and nobody could find you?</i> - <i>Who kept giving you an option all game?</i>

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

- **The wall triangle**. Stand 6 m from a wall. Pass, then **move two steps sideways** before it returns, receive and pass again from the new angle. Fifty repetitions each foot. The movement between passes is the homework.
- **Half-turn receiving**. Against a wall from 8 m: pass, turn your body side-on as it returns, and play it back first time. Forty each foot. If you're facing the wall square, you've done it wrong.
- **Watch a game with a job**. Fifteen minutes of any professional match watching **the player on the ball only**. Every time they receive, count how many teammates they could realistically pass to. Bring the average — it's usually three or four.
- *Optional extra*: watch the same match and find one moment where a team plays six passes in a row. Describe how they did it.

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: **13** Width and Depth; **15** Playing Forward; **16** Possession Under Pressure.

A natural follow-on. Session 15 — Playing Forward: When to Keep and When to Break. A team that can keep the ball but never progresses it has learned half a skill. Session 15 teaches the difference between the pass that retains and the pass that penetrates, and — harder — the judgement of which moment demands which. The six-pass condition returns, but this time a sequence only counts if it ends with a forward pass. Bring your notes on who offered the long option tonight; those players are about to become important.

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.