



SESSION 16 • STANDALONE PLAN

Possession Under Pressure — Does It Survive Contact?

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	16.1 The Shrinking Rondo
0:10 – 0:25	15	■ Technical practice	16.2 The Pressure Box
0:25 – 0:40	15	■ Skill game	16.3 Possession v Press
0:40 – 0:55	15	■ Conditioned match	16.4 The Possession Exam
0:55 – 1:00	5	■ Reflection	Review, with the players

USING THIS SESSION

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

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

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

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

WHY THIS SESSION MATTERS

Possession work produces a team that keeps the ball nicely — against opponents who let them. Tonight finds out whether any of it survives contact with a team that genuinely wants it back. The design principle is simple: every practice removes time and space rather than adding new ideas. The rondo shrinks. The possession box has four pressing defenders instead of two. The skill game has one team told explicitly to hunt the ball for ninety seconds. Nothing new is taught, and that is deliberate — a summary session should test what is there, not add to it. What you are watching for is one specific behaviour under stress: **do they look earlier, or do they panic?** A player who has genuinely absorbed this theme responds to pressure by scanning sooner and moving into a better angle. A player who has memorised it responds by kicking the ball away. The gap between those two reactions is what tonight measures, and the review page at the end is where you write down what you saw.

BY THE END, PLAYERS CAN

- Keep the ball in a smaller space by looking earlier rather than playing faster.

- **Escape a four-player press** using the overload, a wide release and a change of direction.
- **Use a spare player** deliberately — recognise where the free man is and find them.
- **Choose between keeping and breaking** under genuine pressure, without defaulting to either.
- **Perform all four this theme behaviours** — width, depth, support angles and the forward pass — in a match with no coaching.

KIT LIST

Ground needed: about 60 × 45 m. This is a demanding session, so protect the final five minutes for the review — it is a genuine conversation about a month's work and it will tell you more than watching does. Mark both rondo sizes before the session; you cannot re-mark a grid mid-warm-up without losing the point of it.

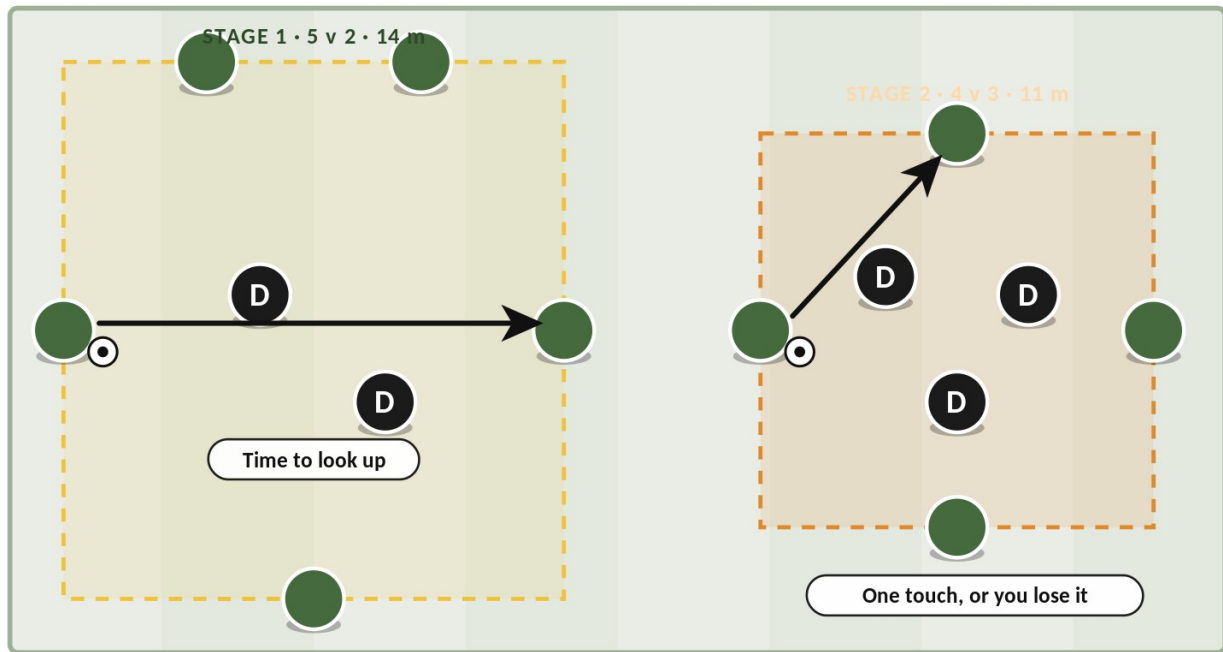
ITEM	QTY	USED IN
Footballs (size 4)	16	All practices
Flat markers	64	Rondo boxes, pressure box, wide zones
Cones (tall)	8	Release gates (16.2)
Bibs — red / blue / yellow	8 / 8 / 2	16.1 onwards
Mini goals	4	Skill game (16.3) — two per end
Full-size goals	2	Conditioned match (16.4)

16.1 THE SHRINKING RONDO

Session 13's rondo, compressed. Five against two in fourteen metres becomes four against three in eleven, and the squad discovers that the answer to less time is to look earlier — not to play faster.

same practice, less space and more defenders every three minutes • 10 minutes

C



SAME SKILL, LESS TIME • THE ANSWER IS TO LOOK EARLIER, NOT TO PANIC

● Possession team ● Defenders ● Ball ➔ Pass ■ Playing area C Coach

Castlewellan Town FC • Youth Coaching Plans • Session 16 • Diagrams not to scale

SET UP

- Two box sizes marked before the session: 14 × 14 m and 11 × 11 m, in different marker colours. Two or three of each.
- Stage 1: five outside, two defenders inside, 14 m. Stage 2: four outside, three defenders inside, 11 m.
- Outside players stay on their lines throughout.
- Balls at the edge so early arrivals start immediately.
- Coach between the boxes. Almost no talking until minute 8.

HOW IT RUNS

1. Minutes 0–3 — arrival. Greet each player by name, ball each, free dribbling. Collect the Session 15 homework — what's the most opponents you saw one pass take out?
2. Minutes 3–6 — Stage 1 (5 v 2, 14 m). Two touches. This should be comfortable; it's the baseline.
3. Minute 6 — Stage 2 (4 v 3, 11 m). Say nothing except the numbers. Let it fall apart for a minute.
4. Minute 8 — one question. What's different? What do you have to do sooner? You want the word **look**, not the word **quicker**.
5. Minutes 8–10 — Stage 2 again, with one instruction: *decide before it arrives*. Compare the difference out loud.

RULES & SCORING

- Outside players stay on their lines.
- **Two touches** in Stage 1; **one touch** in Stage 2 if the group can cope, two if they can't.
- Defenders swap with whoever loses the ball.
- Count consecutive passes in each stage and compare the two numbers at minute 8.
- Loose ball: instant restart.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Receive side-on. First touch out of the feet even in a small space — especially in a small space. Firm passes; an under-hit pass in an 11 m box is an interception.
Tactical	Less space means decide earlier, not move faster. The information has to be gathered before the ball arrives, because there is no time to gather it afterwards.
Physical	Short, sharp movement with high defensive workload. Rotate the defenders every 45 seconds in Stage 2 — three defenders in an 11 m box is genuinely hard running.
Psychological	Stage 2 will feel like failure for the first minute. Warn them: <i>this one is meant to be too hard. Watch what you start doing differently.</i>
Social	In a small box the calls have to be early and short. One word each: names, or <i>turn</i> , or <i>man on</i> .

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Panic — hitting it away first time in Stage 2	<i>You had a second. What could you have done with it? Then: when should you have looked?</i>
Heads down as space reduces	The core diagnostic of the night. <i>Look before it comes. That's the only thing that's changed.</i>
Under-hit passes	<i>In a small box a slow pass is a gift. Hit it.</i>
Outside players stepping in to help	<i>Stay on your line. Making the box smaller makes it worse.</i>
Defenders exhausted	Rotate on schedule. Three in an 11 m box is the hardest role in the session.

ASK THEM

- What's different in the small box?
- Do you need to play faster, or look earlier?
- When should you have decided?
- How many passes did you string together in each one?
- What happens to your first touch when you panic?
- Defenders — which box did you prefer?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
4 v 3 in a 9 m box for the last ninety seconds.	Stay at 5 v 2 and shrink the box only.
One touch throughout.	Three touches in Stage 2.
A defender who wins it joins the outside and the loser goes in immediately, with no reset.	5 v 3 rather than 4 v 3.

HARDER	EASIER
Silent phase — no calling for thirty seconds.	Skip Stage 2 if the group is fragile — the contrast can wait.

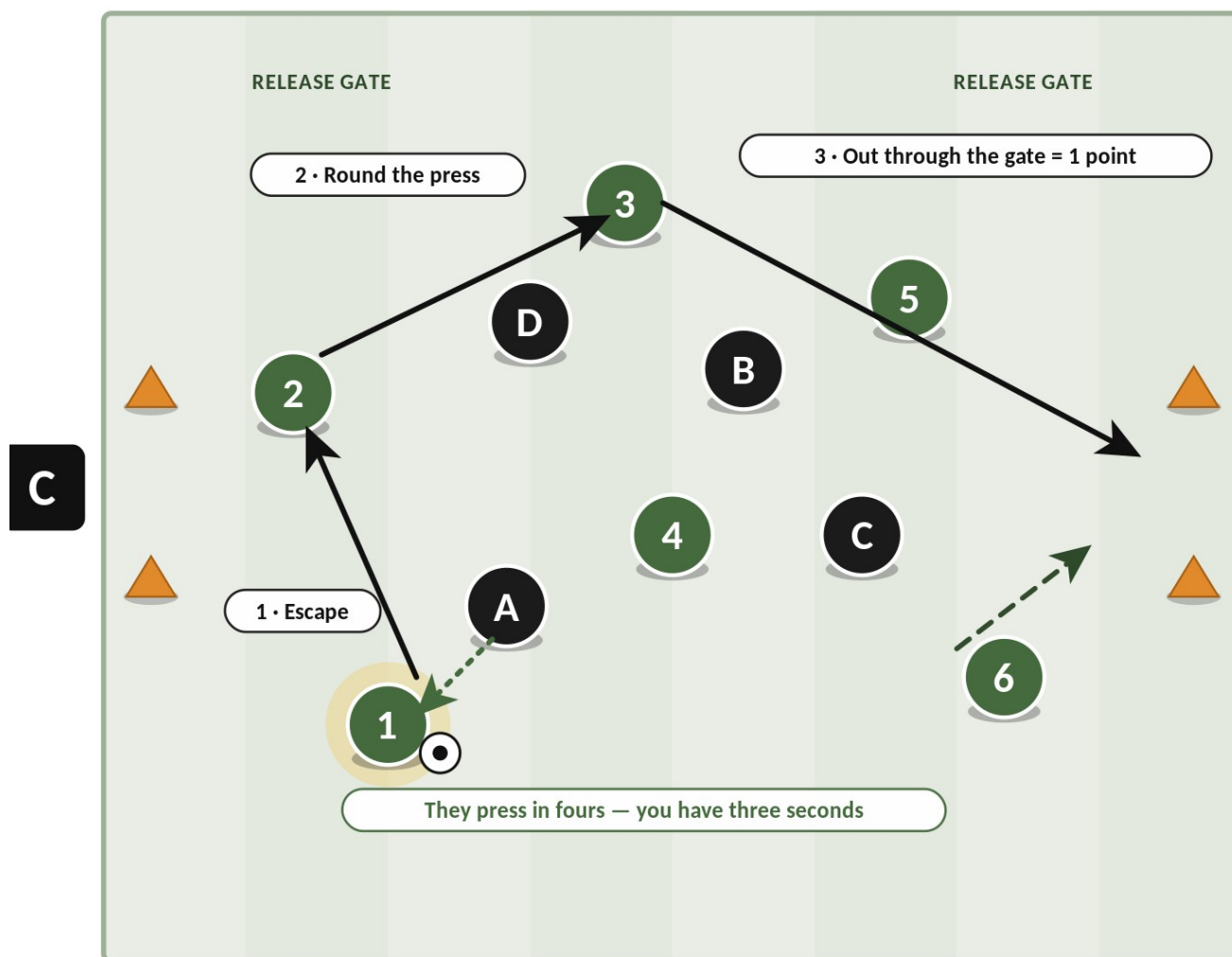
IT'S WORKING WHEN

- Visible earlier scanning in Stage 2 — heads turning before the ball arrives.
- Pass counts recovering in the final two minutes.
- First touches still travelling despite the smaller space.
- Short, early calls.
- Players able to say **look earlier** rather than **play faster**.

16.2 THE PRESSURE BOX

Six against four in a tight area, with two release gates as the reward. The overload is real but so is the press — and the squad has to learn that six against four is an advantage only if you use the free player.

22 x 18 m • six v four • survive the press and find a release gate • 15 minutes



SIX AGAINST FOUR IS AN OVERLOAD • USE IT, DON'T PANIC AT IT



Castlewellan Town FC • Youth Coaching Plans • Session 16 • Diagrams not to scale

SET UP

- One area 22 × 18 m with a 4 m release gate in the middle of each end line.
- **Six in possession against four pressing.** With 14–16 players run two areas, or one area with rolling changes every 90 seconds.
- The four defenders are told explicitly to press as a group — nearest player to the ball, others cutting passing lanes.
- One ball plus two spares with the coach.

- Coach standing to the side where the whole picture is visible.

HOW IT RUNS

- 1. Set it up in 40 seconds.** *Six of you against four. Keep it, and score by passing out through a gate.*
- 2. Minutes 0–4 — free.** Let them experience being pressed by four. Most groups lose the ball within three passes and it feels chaotic.
- 3. Minute 4 — one freeze, twenty seconds.** Stop the ball and ask: *six against four — where is the free player right now?* Somebody will point at them. That's the whole practice.
- 4. Minutes 4–10 — scored.** 1 point for a pass out through a gate; the possession team then restarts from the coach. Defenders score 1 for a win.
- 5. Minutes 10–15 — the three-second rule.** The pressing team must win the ball within **three seconds** of losing shape, or drop off and let the possession team reset. This teaches the pressers about sustained pressure and gives the possession team a rhythm to read.
- 6. Rotation:** swap two possession players with two defenders every three minutes.

RULES & SCORING

- **1 point** for a pass out through either release gate. **1 point to the defenders** for winning the ball.
- Two touches maximum for the possession team from minute 8.
- The possession team restarts from the coach after scoring — no dwelling.
- **Defenders press as a unit.** A defender chasing alone is a coaching moment, not a foul.
- Ball out: instant restart with a spare.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	First touch away from the nearest presser. Firm passing — under a four-player press, a soft pass is a turnover. Receive side-on so the escape route is available immediately.
Tactical	Find the free player. With six against four, two players are always unmarked; the skill is knowing which two. Escape routes: round the press with a wide pass, over it with a longer one, or through it if two pressers have converged. Changing direction is usually more effective than playing faster.
Physical	Very demanding for the pressing four. Rotate on schedule; a tired press stops teaching anything.
Psychological	Four defenders in a small space is intimidating and some players will hide. Watch for the player who stops asking for the ball — and get it to them deliberately.
Social	The free player must announce themselves. In a press, being visible is a skill: "here!" loudly and early.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Panicked clearances under the press	<i>You had six against four. Where were the other two?</i>
Everyone coming towards the ball	<i>If you all come, they don't have to move. Someone stay away from it.</i>
Passing into the press rather than round it	<i>Which way are they facing? Go the other way.</i>
The same two players always on the ball	Change the group order rather than saying anything, then check it improves.
Defenders chasing individually	Coach them: <i>One goes, three close the lanes.</i> This is this theme arriving early and it will help them later on.

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
A player who stops wanting the ball	The most important thing you'll see tonight. Get it to them, let them succeed twice, then say nothing.

ASK THEM

- Six against four — where is the free player right now?
- Round it, over it or through it? What decides?
- What happens if all six of you come towards the ball?
- Defenders — what worked? What made it hard for you?
- How do you make yourself findable when they're pressing?
- Is it better to play faster or change direction?
- What should you do in the first second after you receive it?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Six against five.	Seven against four , or six against three.
One touch for the possession team.	Bigger area (26 × 22 m).
Smaller area (18 × 15 m).	Three touches.
Both gates must be used alternately — no scoring through the same one twice.	Defenders press at three-quarter pace for the first four minutes.

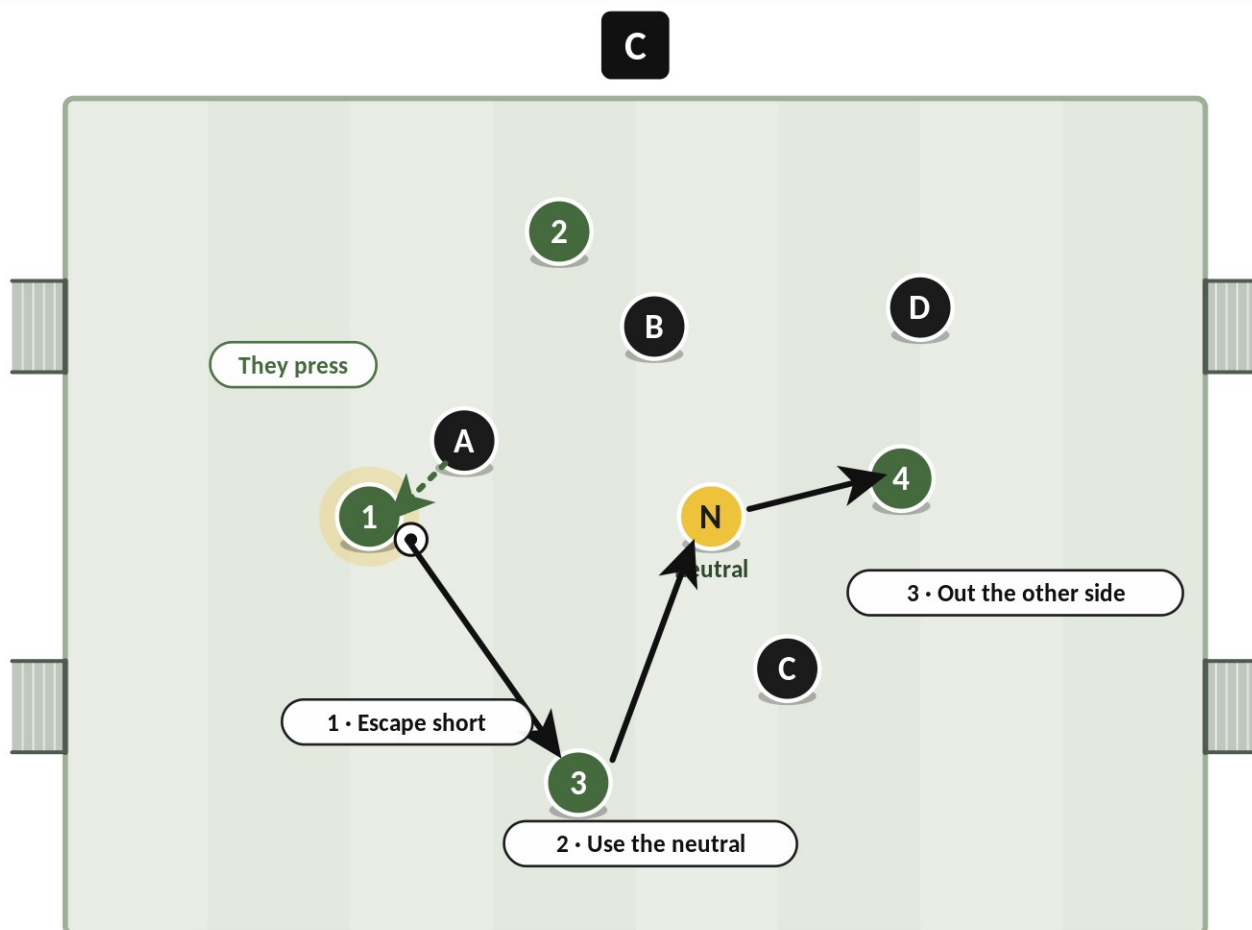
IT'S WORKING WHEN

The free player being found rather than the nearest one.
 Escapes going round or over the press rather than into it.
 First touches away from pressure under real stress.
 Gates being reached at least twice per group per three-minute spell.
 Every player receiving the ball — check this deliberately.
 Defenders pressing as a four rather than chasing as individuals.

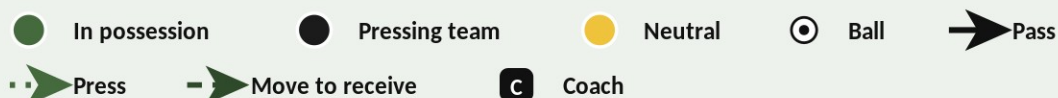
16.3 POSSESSION v PRESS (4 v 4 + 1)

A real game with an asymmetry: one team is told to press hard for ninety seconds while the other tries to play. Then they swap. Both jobs are coached, and the neutral player makes the overload available to whoever has the ball.

30 x 22 m • one team presses hard for 90 seconds, then they swap • 15 minutes



NINETY SECONDS OF PRESSING, THEN SWAP • BOTH JOBS MATTER



Castlewellan Town FC • Youth Coaching Plans • Session 16 • Diagrams not to scale

SET UP

- Two pitches, each 30 × 22 m, side by side with a 5 m corridor.
- Per pitch: **two mini goals at each end**, 4 red bibs, 4 blue bibs, **one neutral player in yellow** who always plays for the team in possession.
- 4 v 4 + 1 neutral per pitch = 9 players. With 14–16, run one pitch of 9 and one of 5–7 (3v3 + 1), rotating the neutral.
- **Announce which team is pressing before each ninety-second spell**, and mean it — the pressing team hunts the ball as a unit.
- Coach in the corridor between the pitches.

HOW IT RUNS

1. **Bibs out while you explain.** Neutrals identified clearly.
2. **Explain in 25 seconds:** *Reds press for ninety seconds — hunt it. Blues try to keep it and score. Then we swap. Neutral plays for whoever has the ball.*
3. **First spell — no coaching.** Watch both jobs. The pressing team will be disorganised and the possession team will panic; both are normal.
4. **After the first swap, one question to the pressing team:** *who goes first, and what do the other three do?* And to the possession team: *where's the free man?*
5. **From spell three, add the scoring:** possession team scores 1 for six passes and 2 for a goal; pressing team scores 2 for winning the ball within five seconds of the possession team receiving it.
6. **Ninety-second spells with fifteen seconds between,** so both teams do each job four or five times.

RULES & SCORING

- **Possession team: 1 point for six passes, 2 for a goal. Pressing team: 2 points for winning the ball within five seconds.**
- The neutral always plays for whoever has the ball and may not be tackled in their own half of the pitch — this keeps the overload alive.
- Ninety-second spells, then swap roles.
- Ball out: the coach rolls a new one in immediately to the possession team.
- No stoppages within a spell. Coaching happens in the fifteen-second swaps, in one sentence.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Under a hunting press, the first touch decides everything. Firm passing; a bouncing ball invites a tackle.
Tactical	In possession: use the neutral, change direction, and don't be predictable. Pressing: the nearest player goes, the others cut the passing lanes rather than following the ball. This is the first time the squad has been asked to press as a group and it seeds this theme directly.
Physical	Ninety seconds of hunting is genuinely hard. The fifteen-second swap is not a rest — build in a longer break at the halfway point.
Psychological	Both roles are rewarded, which matters. A squad that only gets praised for possession will never press properly, and vice versa.
Social	The pressing team has to talk — <i>go!, I've got him!, behind you!</i> A silent press is four players guessing.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
The press becoming four players chasing	<i>One goes. What do the other three do?</i> Let them answer; the word you want is <i>cut off</i> .
The possession team ignoring the neutral	<i>You've got a spare player. Why isn't he touching it?</i>
Panicked long balls under the press	<i>Was there an option? Where?</i> Then rerun the same picture in the next spell.
The press giving up after five seconds	That's the rule — praise it. Sustained pressing is for this theme; tonight it's about the first five seconds.
One team enjoying pressing far more than possession	Note the names. That's useful information for this theme and worth writing down.

ASK THEM

- Pressers — who goes first, and what do the other three do?
- In possession — where's the free man?
- What's the best escape from a press: round, over or through?
- Which job did you prefer? Why?
- What did the pressing team do that hurt you most?
- What happens to your first touch when four of them are running at you?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Remove the neutral for the last two spells.	Two neutrals.
Two-touch for the possession team.	Bigger pitch (34 × 24 m).
Pressing team scores 3 for winning it within three seconds.	Pressing team presses at three-quarter pace.
Smaller pitch (26 × 20 m).	Longer spells (two minutes) with a proper rest between.

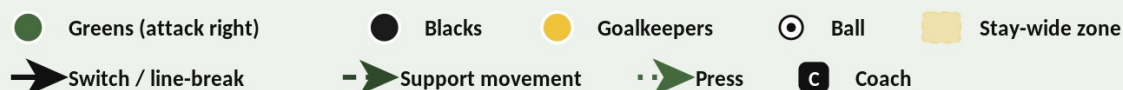
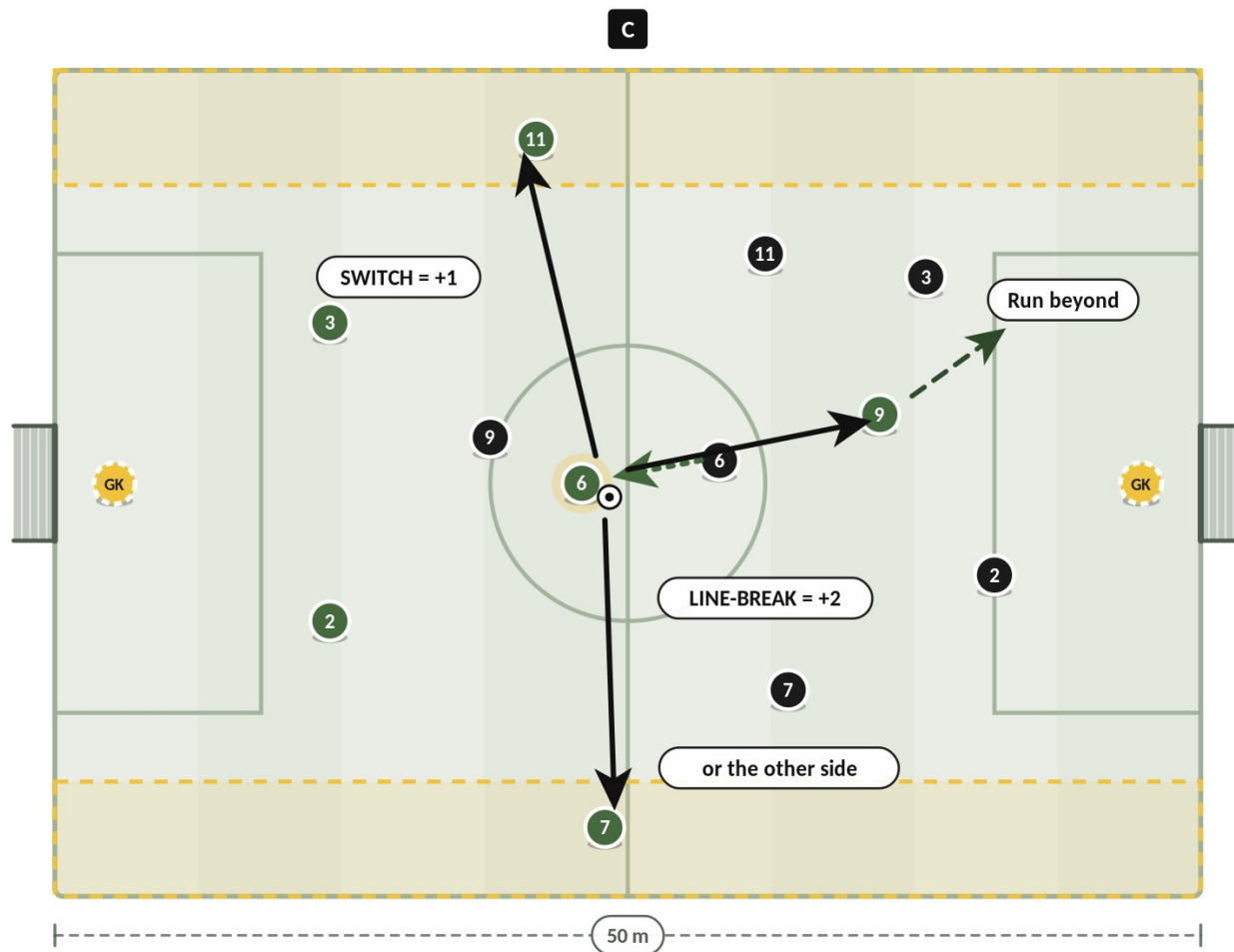
IT'S WORKING WHEN

The pressing team organising — one presses, others cut lanes.
The neutral being used consistently by whoever has the ball.
Six-pass sequences surviving under a real press at least once per spell.
Both scoreboards moving.
Audible communication from the pressing team.
Players who prefer pressing being identified — write the names down.

16.4 THE POSSESSION EXAM (7 v 7)

Every behaviour from the block is on the scoreboard, and you say almost nothing. This is a measurement, not a coaching session — what appears without prompting is what the squad actually owns.

50 x 36 m • every Block 4 behaviour scores • no instructions from the coach • 15 minutes



Castlewellan Town FC • Youth Coaching Plans • Session 16 • Diagrams not to scale

SET UP

- 50 x 36 m with full-size goals and the 5 m stay-wide zones from Session 13 marked.
- 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. Assign it, then leave it alone.
- Coach on the halfway line with a notebook. **This is the only practice in the curriculum where writing things down matters more than talking.**

HOW IT RUNS

1. **Keep the bibs and teams.** Shape assigned in 30 seconds.

2. **Explain the scoring once and then stop talking:** *Goal is 3. A switch is 1. Six passes is 1. A pass that beats two of them is 2. Go.*
3. **Minutes 0–7 — say nothing at all.** Not one coaching point. Write down what appears and what doesn't.
4. **Minute 7 — drinks break.** Read out the score by category, not by team: *five switches, two six-pass sequences, one line-break.* Let the numbers speak, then ask one question: *which one are we worst at?*
5. **Minutes 8–13 — play on.** Two individual interventions maximum, and only to the category they identified themselves.
6. **Final two minutes — no conditions, no scoring.** Just football. Watch what survives.

RULES & SCORING

- **Goal = 3. Switch of play = 1. Six consecutive passes = 1. A pass beating two or more opponents = 2.**
- Wingers stay in the wide zones when their team has possession in the opposition half.
- No touch restrictions. This is a match.
- Keepers restart within five seconds and count as passers.
- **The coach announces nothing during the first seven minutes.**

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Everything from four themes of work. Expect it to be imperfect and resist fixing it tonight.
Tactical	Width, depth, angles, forward. The four ideas in this theme, and the honest question is which of them exist without you. Note which team's shape holds when they're tired.
Physical	Fifteen minutes of match play at the end of a demanding session and a demanding block.
Psychological	Saying nothing for seven minutes is harder for the coach than the players. Do it anyway — the information is worth more than the intervention.
Social	Listen. The squad should be organising itself by now, and what they say to each other is your best evidence of what has landed.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Which category scores least	That's this theme's homework, and the players should name it themselves at the break.
Shape holding or collapsing under fatigue	Note the minute at which it changes.
Who talks	Write the names down. The squad's on-pitch voices are about to matter a lot in this theme.
Goalkeepers being used or ignored	Whatever you see tonight tells you exactly how hard this theme will be.
The final two minutes	Everything you need for the review is in these two minutes.

ASK THEM

- Which of the four are we worst at?
- Which one comes most naturally now?
- When you got tired, what was the first thing to go?
- In the last two minutes with no points — what did we keep doing?
- A few months ago, could we have played like that?
- What do you want to work on next?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Double all bonuses in the opposition half only.	Score two categories only — switch and six passes.
Two-touch in the middle third.	Bigger pitch (55 × 38 m).
A goal only counts if two of the three bonuses preceded it.	Add a neutral player.
Remove the wide zones and see whether width survives without markings.	6 v 6 on 44 × 32 m with rolling subs.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

All four behaviours appearing at least once without prompting.

Players naming their own weakest category at the break.

Shape holding into the last five minutes.

Goalkeepers used as outfield options.

Some of it surviving the final unconditioned two minutes.

A full page of notes — that's the real output of this practice.

Finish, match day & homework

REFLECTION — 5 MINUTES, SITTING DOWN

- This is the **end of this theme** — review the whole theme, and take the full five minutes.
- *What are the four things we've worked on this month?* (Width, depth, support angles, playing forward.)
- *Which one are we best at? Which needs the most work?*
- *What do you do when they press you — look earlier, or play faster?*
- *Is a backward pass a bad pass?* Check the answer has stuck.
- *In the last two minutes with no points on offer, what did we keep doing?* Tell them what you actually saw.
- **Name every player once** and give each one a specific thing that has improved since you ran Session 13.
- Finish by telling them what's next: *from now on we start from our own goalkeeper.*

MATCH-DAY LINK

MATCH OBJECTIVES	WATCH FOR	ASK AFTERWARDS
- Keep the ball for six passes at least three times. - Two switches of play across the match. - Four passes that beat two or more opponents.	- What breaks first under pressure. Shape, angles or composure? Note the minute. - Whether the far side is used. Count how many times the ball reaches the far winger. - Whether the goalkeeper is an option. Count the passes back to them. It's probably zero, and that's this theme's starting point.	- <i>When they pressed us, what did we do?</i> - <i>Did we keep the ball anywhere on Saturday, or was it all forwards and backwards?</i> - <i>Was there a point where the pitch got small? What happened then?</i>

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

- **Tight-space touches.** Mark a 3 × 3 m square. Keep the ball moving inside it for **thirty seconds** without it leaving — small touches, both feet, head up as often as you can. Ten rounds with thirty seconds' rest.
- **Wall under pressure.** Against a wall from 5 m, play fifty passes where you **look over your shoulder every single time** before the ball returns. Then fifty more where you take only one touch. The looking is the point.
- **Watch a game with a job.** Fifteen minutes of any professional match, watching **one team when they are being pressed**. Note what they do first — go long, go backwards, or find the free man. Bring one example of each if you can.
- *Optional extra:* watch how often a goalkeeper receives a pass from a teammate. Count it. We start on that next time.

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; **14** Support Angles; **15** Playing Forward.

A natural follow-on. Session 17 — Building from the Back. The goalkeeper joins the outfield picture properly. Playing out under a press, the back-three shape in 9v9, centre-backs splitting to receive, the pivot dropping in, and the crucial decision of when the goalkeeper should simply go long. January's harder ground makes this a good month for structured, lower-tempo work. Everything from this theme is a prerequisite — a team that cannot keep the ball in midfield has no business trying to play out from its own six-yard box, so bring tonight's notes with you.

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

Review — where the squad stands on possession principles

Complete this within a day of Session 16. This theme is the one where a group of individuals becomes a team, and the honest measure is what appeared in the final two unconditioned minutes of Session 16.

WHAT YOU SHOULD BE SEEING

AREA	WHAT YOU SHOULD NOW BE SEEING
Width	Wingers holding the touchline when the ball is on the far side. This is a discipline, not a skill — the test is whether they hold it when bored.
Depth	A player short of the ball and a player beyond it, at all times. Usually the striker holding a high line is the one that's missing.
Support angles	Triangles rather than lines. Nobody hidden behind a defender. Three options at three distances for the player on the ball.
Switching	The ball reaching the far side of the pitch deliberately rather than by accident.
Playing forward	Line-breaking passes attempted at sensible moments — neither forced constantly nor avoided entirely.
Composure under pressure	Looking earlier rather than playing faster when the space closes. This is the single best indicator of whether the block landed.
Vocabulary	Short, long, wide, switch, split, I can't see you. Six more phrases, taking the season total to nineteen.

SQUAD AUDIT — FILL THIS IN

QUESTION	PLAYERS
Which of the four behaviours survived the unconditioned final two minutes of Session 16?	
Which one collapsed as soon as the points stopped?	
Who holds width when the ball is forty metres away? Who drifts in?	
Who is your long option — the player who stays high and unrewarded?	
Who looks earlier under pressure, and who panics? Name three of each.	
Which players enjoyed pressing in Session 16.3? Write the names down — this theme needs them.	
How many times did a goalkeeper receive a deliberate pass from a teammate this month?	
Who talks on the pitch now who didn't in September?	

IF THE SQUAD HAS THIS COMFORTABLY

- **Take the goalkeeper straight into this theme as an outfield player.** A squad that kept the ball well this month is ready to build from the back immediately rather than easing into it.
- **Make two-touch the default** in every possession practice from Session 17 onwards.
- **Add a counter-press condition** to every possession game — five seconds to win it back after losing it. It sharpens the possession and starts this theme early.

- **Name the positions properly.** A team that understands width, depth and angles is ready to be told what a number six does and why.
- **Let the players set the possession target.** A squad that chooses 'eight passes' will work harder at it than one that is given six.

IF THE SQUAD IS STRUGGLING

- **Go back to bigger areas everywhere.** Almost every possession failure at U12 is a space problem, and this theme will be impossible in cramped grids.
- **Drop the forward-pass conditions for a fortnight** and simply reward keeping the ball. Penetration is meaningless if retention isn't there.
- **Reduce the numbers.** 4 v 2 and 3 v 1 teach more than 6 v 4 when players are struggling to see the picture.
- **Fix the first touch, not the shape.** If players lose the ball as it arrives, no amount of positional coaching will help — that's Session 2, and there is no shame in revisiting it.
- **Keep this theme simple.** If possession is fragile, build from the back with the goalkeeper and two centre-backs only, and add the midfield later.
- **Check the physical picture.** Possession work at the end of a session is where fatigue shows first. If the quality drops off a cliff at minute forty, shorten the conditioned match.

CARRY THIS FORWARD

The three habits worth carrying into anything you run next: looking earlier under pressure, holding width when the ball is far away, and offering an option before the carrier is in trouble.

The goalkeeper's involvement count from this month is your single best predictor of how hard the build-up sessions will be. If it's zero, plan for a slow start and say so to the players.

Where this sits. The individual, the duel, the partnership and the team in possession each have their own theme. From here the set is about the whole team — building, transitioning, defending and finishing as a unit.