



SESSION 17 • STANDALONE PLAN

The Goalkeeper Starts the Attack

Building from the back • Reference format: U12 9v9 • 60 minutes • 14–16 players

AT A GLANCE

TIME	MINS	PHASE	PRACTICE
0:00 – 0:10	10	■ Warm-up	17.1 The Back-Pass Warm-Up
0:10 – 0:25	15	■ Technical practice	17.2 Playing Out
0:25 – 0:40	15	■ Skill game	17.3 Out of the Box
0:40 – 0:55	15	■ Conditioned match	17.4 The Build-Out 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

In most under-12 teams the goalkeeper is the player who stops shots and then hoofs it. Tonight they become a footballer. This is the single biggest change of the season in how the team looks, and it is worth being honest about why it matters. A goal kick launched sixty metres is a fifty-fifty at best, and at Under-12 it is usually a thirty-seventy against you — the ball lands among taller opponents in the middle of the pitch with your team spread thin behind it. A goal kick played short to a free centre-back is a certainty, and it starts the attack with the ball at your feet and eleven opponents in front of you. The reason nobody does it is fear: everyone remembers the one that went wrong. So the practices tonight are built to make the short option genuinely safe — the opposition retreat, the numbers are in your favour, and the escape routes are marked. What the squad learns is not a trick but a habit, and the habit only forms if you accept that they will concede a goal from it at some point and say so out loud before it happens.

BY THE END, PLAYERS CAN

- **Play as a goalkeeper with their feet** — receive a back-pass side-on, and pass accurately to a moving teammate.

- **Split wide as a centre-back** to give the goalkeeper two separated options.
- **Show as the pivot** — a midfielder available in front of the goalkeeper, on an angle, never in a straight line.
- **Recognise which option is free** and take it without hesitating.
- **Know when to go long** — because sometimes the correct answer really is over the top, and that is a decision, not a failure.

KIT LIST

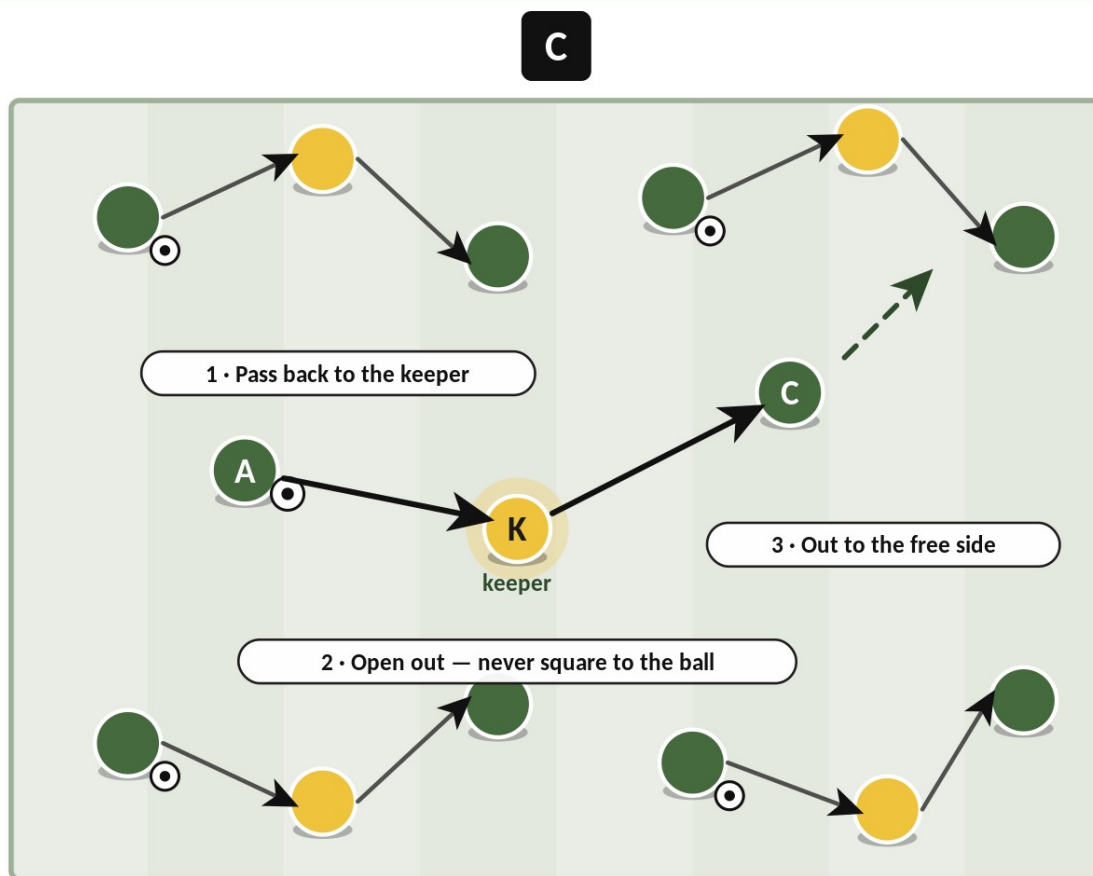
Ground needed: about 60 × 45 m, arranged around your two full goals. Tell the squad at the start of the session that they will lose the ball in dangerous areas tonight, that it is expected, and that nobody is to groan when it happens. Say the same thing to any parents watching. This one sentence is the difference between a squad that learns to build from the back and one that gives up on it in three weeks.

ITEM	QTY	USED IN
Footballs (size 4)	16	All practices
Flat markers	60	Build zones, escape gates, retreat lines
Cones (tall)	8	Escape gates (17.2)
Bibs — red / blue / yellow	8 / 8 / 4	Yellow for goalkeepers throughout
Full-size goals	2	17.2, 17.3 and 17.4
Goalkeeper gloves	2 pairs	Rotate keepers all session

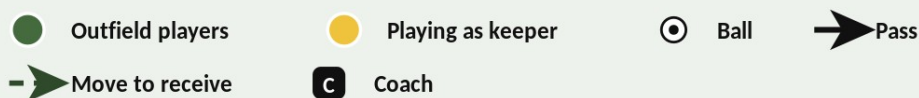
17.1 THE BACK-PASS WARM-UP

Every player takes a turn as the goalkeeper. Groups of three: a pass back to the keeper, the keeper opens out and plays to the free side. It is a passing warm-up with one difference — the middle player is doing the goalkeeper's job, and by the end everybody has done it.

28 x 20 m • groups of three • everybody takes a turn as the keeper • 10 minutes



THE KEEPER IS A FOOTBALLER WHO IS ALLOWED TO USE HIS HANDS



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SET UP

- 28 × 20 m grid marked with flat markers.
- **Groups of three**, one ball each. The middle player wears a yellow bib and plays as the goalkeeper — **feet only, no hands**.
- Groups travel around the grid; the 'keeper' is not restricted to a goal.
- Balls at the grid edge so early arrivals start immediately.
- Coach inside the grid from minute 5.

HOW IT RUNS

- Minutes 0–3 — arrival.** Greet each player by name, ball each, free dribbling. **Collect the Session 16 homework** — *how many times did that goalkeeper receive a pass from a teammate?*
- Minute 3 — form threes.** *A passes to the keeper. The keeper opens out and plays to C. Then C becomes the keeper.* Ninety seconds.
- Minute 5 — the body shape.** *Keeper — open out as the ball travels, so you can see both ends of the grid. Never square to the pass.* Demonstrate once, twenty seconds. This is Session 1's habit, and it matters more for a keeper than anyone.
- Minute 7 — add the touch limit.** Two touches for the keeper. One to open the body, one to pass.
- Minutes 8–10 — add a passive presser.** One player per two groups jogs in to apply mild pressure to the keeper. Nothing aggressive — the point is to make the keeper look before it arrives.

RULES & SCORING

- The keeper uses feet only.
- The keeper must be **rotated every 45 seconds** — everybody plays the role.
- Two touches for the keeper from minute 7.
- The pass to the keeper must be **firm and to the correct side** — a weak back-pass is the most dangerous ball in football and should be called out from the first minute.
- Loose ball: nearest player retrieves; the group restarts on the move.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Keeper: open the hips before the ball arrives, receive with the foot furthest from the pressure, first touch out of the feet and towards the space. Passer: firm, along the ground, to the side away from any opponent — never straight at the keeper.
Tactical	The keeper's first look should be to the far side. The nearest option is usually the one under pressure.
Physical	Ordinary passing warm-up demands. Include lateral shuffles for the players in the keeper role, as that's the movement they'll need.
Psychological	Outfield players who have never thought about the keeper's job are about to. Expect some sympathy for the goalkeepers by the end of ten minutes, which is exactly the point.
Social	The receiving player must call which side they want it. " Left! " or " right! " — two words that prevent most back-pass disasters.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Back-passes hit weakly or straight at the keeper's feet	The most important correction of the night: <i>That's how goals get conceded. Firm, and to the side away from trouble.</i>
Keeper receiving square-on and having to take three touches	<i>Open out before it comes. Same as everyone else.</i>
Keeper's first touch under the body	<i>Out of your feet. You've got less time than anyone.</i>
Nobody calling a side	Give them the two words and require them every repetition.
Actual goalkeepers being poor with their feet	Entirely normal — most U12 keepers have never practised it. Say so publicly so they aren't embarrassed.

ASK THEM

- Which foot should the keeper receive with?

- Where should a back-pass go — at the keeper, or to one side?
- What should the keeper look at first?
- How many touches should it take?
- What's the most dangerous pass in football? Why?
- Keepers — what do you want your defenders to shout?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
One touch for the keeper.	Three touches and no pressure.
Live presser rather than passive.	Bigger groups (four) so there is more time.
Weak foot only for the keeper's pass.	Walk the pattern for the first two minutes.
Two keepers in the group — the ball must go through both.	Hands allowed for the first ninety seconds so the keepers feel comfortable before the feet demand arrives.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Firm back-passes played to the correct side.
 Keepers opening out before the ball arrives.
 Two-touch resolutions from the keeper role.
 The calls "left" and "right" being used.
 Every player having played as the keeper.

32 x 26 m • goalkeeper + three v three pressers • escape through a gate • 15 minutes



SET UP

- One station at each full goal: **32 × 26 m** in front of the goal, with a **10 m build zone** marked across the width.
- **Two 3 m escape gates** on the far line, wide left and wide right.
- **Building team:** goalkeeper, two centre-backs (2 and 3) and a pivot (6). **Pressing team:** three.
- Seven per station plus rotations; with 14–16 run both goals, or one station with players rotating in every 90 seconds.
- Coach positioned to the side of the build zone, where the goalkeeper's body shape is visible.

HOW IT RUNS

1. **Set the picture in 45 seconds.** *Keeper, two centre-backs, one midfielder. Three of them. Get the ball out through a gate.*
2. **Minutes 0–4 — walk it, then jog it.** Pressers at half pace. The centre-backs split as wide as the zone allows; the pivot shows on an angle. Everybody sees the shape before anyone competes for it.
3. **Minute 4 — one freeze, twenty seconds.** *Four against three. Who is free right now?* Somebody points. That's the practice.
4. **Minutes 4–11 — live.** Pressers go properly. The building team scores by getting the ball out through either gate.
5. **Minutes 11–15 — add the long option.** The goalkeeper may now **go long over the top** to a target beyond the gates, and that counts for 1 point rather than 2. Suddenly the decision is real rather than forced.
6. **Rotation:** swap the pressing three with three of the building team every three minutes. Rotate the goalkeeper at the halfway point.

RULES & SCORING

- **2 points** for getting the ball out through a gate along the ground. **1 point** for the long option over the top. **2 points to the pressers** for winning the ball inside the build zone.
- The pressing three may not enter the six-yard area — the goalkeeper always has a moment.
- The centre-backs must be **outside the width of the goal** when the goalkeeper has it.
- Two touches maximum for the building team from minute 8.
- Ball out or won: instant restart from the goalkeeper.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Goalkeeper: receive side-on, look across the pitch before the first touch, pass firmly along the ground. Centre-backs: open body, receive on the back foot, first touch forward. Pivot: never in a straight line between the goalkeeper and a presser.
Tactical	Split wide, show short, and pick the free one. Three pressers cannot cover four players; whoever they leave is the answer. If their striker presses the goalkeeper, both centre-backs are free. If both centre-backs are marked, the pivot is free. If everything is marked, the space behind them is free — and that's the long ball, which is a choice, not a failure.
Physical	Low intensity for the building team, high for the pressers. Rotate the pressing three on schedule.
Psychological	This is where fear lives. Losing the ball twenty metres from your own goal feels catastrophic. Say clearly and repeatedly: <i>if we lose it here tonight, it costs us nothing. On Saturday it costs us a goal, and we'll still keep doing it.</i>
Social	The goalkeeper needs information they can't get themselves. Centre-backs call "time!" or "man on!" ; the pivot calls "turn!" Three words that make the whole thing possible.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Centre-backs standing too narrow	<i>Get outside the posts. If you're both in the middle, one of them marks both of you.</i>
The pivot standing in line with the goalkeeper and the presser	<i>Straight back to Session 14: He's screening you. Move two metres.</i>
The goalkeeper looking at one option only	<i>Look across before your first touch. Who's free on the other side?</i>
Panic clearances the moment a presser moves	<i>How close was he really? You had two seconds.</i>

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Pressers pressing individually	Coach them: <i>One goes to the ball, the others take the two nearest passes.</i> this theme groundwork again.
Nobody ever choosing the long ball once it's available	<i>Was the short one on? If it wasn't, why didn't you go over the top?</i> Both answers must be available.

ASK THEM

- Four against three — who is free?
- If their striker presses the keeper, who does that leave?
- Where should the centre-backs stand?
- Where should the pivot NOT stand?
- What should the centre-backs shout to the keeper?
- When is the long ball the right answer?
- Pressers — how would you stop this?
- What happens to us if we lose it here?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Four pressers against the goalkeeper and three.	Two pressers instead of three.
One touch for the centre-backs.	Add a second midfielder , making it five against three.
The long option removed entirely for a three-minute spell.	Passive pressers who shadow but don't tackle.
Pressers may enter the six-yard area , removing the goalkeeper's free moment.	Wider gates (5 m) and a bigger zone.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Centre-backs splitting outside the width of the goal every time.

The pivot on an angle rather than in a straight line.

The goalkeeper looking across before the first touch.

The free player being found rather than the nearest one.

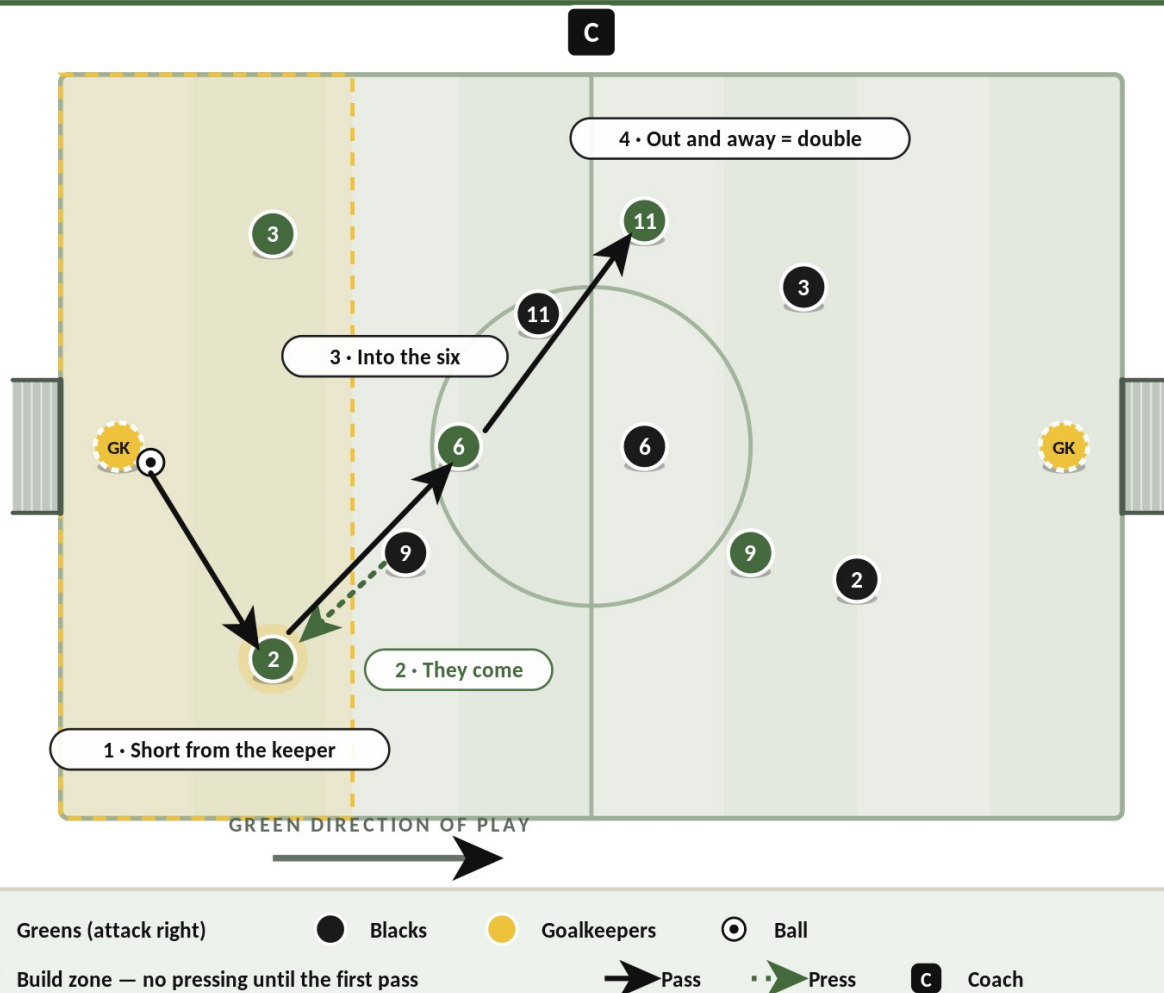
Escapes along the ground outnumbering long balls — but the long ball being **chosen** at least twice.

No visible panic when a presser closes.

17.3 OUT OF THE BOX (5 v 5 + GKs)

The build-up inside a real game, with a build zone that gives the team a head start. Every restart comes from the goalkeeper, and a goal that begins with a short build is worth double.

40 x 28 m • every restart from the keeper • building out and scoring = double • 15 minutes



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SET UP

- One pitch, 40 × 28 m, using both full goals with a goalkeeper in each.
- An 11 m build zone marked in front of each goal. The opposition may not press inside it until the goalkeeper's first pass is played.
- 5 v 5 outfield plus two goalkeepers (12). With 14–16, use rolling substitutes every two minutes — call the changes yourself.
- Spare balls behind each goal so restarts are instant.
- Coach on the halfway line, outside the pitch.

HOW IT RUNS

1. Teams and keepers set in 30 seconds.
2. Explain in 25 seconds: Every restart comes from the keeper, played short. They can't press until the first pass has gone. A goal is 1 — but a goal that started with a short build-up is 2.
3. Minutes 0–4 — let it run. Watch how quickly the short build turns into a panicked long ball once the pressure arrives.

4. **Minute 4 — 45 seconds, one question:** *Where does the keeper look first?* You want *the far side*. Restart.
5. **Minutes 5–11 — add the counter-cost:** if the opposition win the ball **inside the build zone** and score, that goal is worth 3. Now the risk is explicit and the decision-making sharpens immediately.
6. **Minutes 11–15 — rolling subs continue.** Announce the build-up goals by name and by sequence: *keeper, two, six, eleven — two points*.

RULES & SCORING

- Every restart is from the goalkeeper and must be played short — no punts.
- Goal = 1. Goal from a possession that started with a short build = 2. Goal scored by the opposition after winning it in the build zone = 3.
- No pressing inside the build zone until the goalkeeper's first pass is played.
- Rolling subs every two minutes with 14 or more players.
- No stoppages within a spell; coaching happens during substitutions, in a sentence.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	First touch out of the feet under pressure, firm passing, the goalkeeper's distribution along the ground.
Tactical	The build zone gives you a head start — use it to get the shape right, not to dawdle. Centre-backs wide, pivot showing, wide players high and wide to stretch them. Once the first pass is played the head start is gone, so the second pass has to be planned before the first one is made.
Physical	Continuous play with rolling subs. Manage the goalkeepers' workload — they are doing more thinking tonight than in the rest of the set combined.
Psychological	The 3-point counter-goal will frighten some teams into going long. That's fine — let them, and then ask them at the break whether it worked.
Social	Goalkeepers should be organising the shape before they play: <i>split!</i> , <i>show!</i> If a keeper is arranging their defenders, the session has already succeeded.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Long balls from the keeper despite the rule	Enforce it once, then ask: <i>what were you afraid of?</i>
The shape not set before the first pass	<i>You've got a free second. Use it to get in position, not to stand still.</i>
Centre-backs receiving and passing straight back to the keeper	<i>That's fine once. Twice is a problem — what were you looking for?</i>
Wide players coming short and crowding the build	<i>Stay high and wide. If you all come to it, there's nowhere to go.</i>
A team conceding a 3-point goal and abandoning the build	Expected. <i>One mistake. Do it again — we're not changing because of one.</i>
Substitutes disengaged	Give them a job: one counts successful build-ups, one counts lost balls in the zone. They report at the reflection.

ASK THEM

- Where does the keeper look first?
- What should you do with the free second before they can press?
- Where should the wide players be while we build?
- What happened when we went long instead?
- Was the 3-point risk worth taking? Why?

- Keepers — what did you want your defenders to do differently?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Remove the no-press rule — they can press from the goal kick.	Widen the build zone to 15 m.
The build must include four players before crossing the halfway line.	No pressing until the ball crosses the build-zone line , not just the first pass.
Two-touch inside the build zone.	Remove the 3-point counter-goal.
Narrow the build zone to 8 m.	4 v 4 + keepers on a 34 × 24 m pitch.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Short goal kicks being played every time without argument.

Shape set before the first pass.

At least two build-up goals across the game.

Goalkeepers organising their defenders verbally.

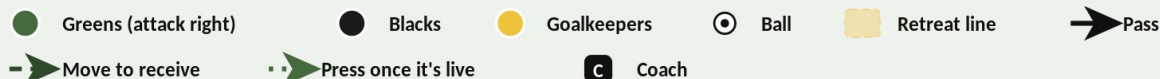
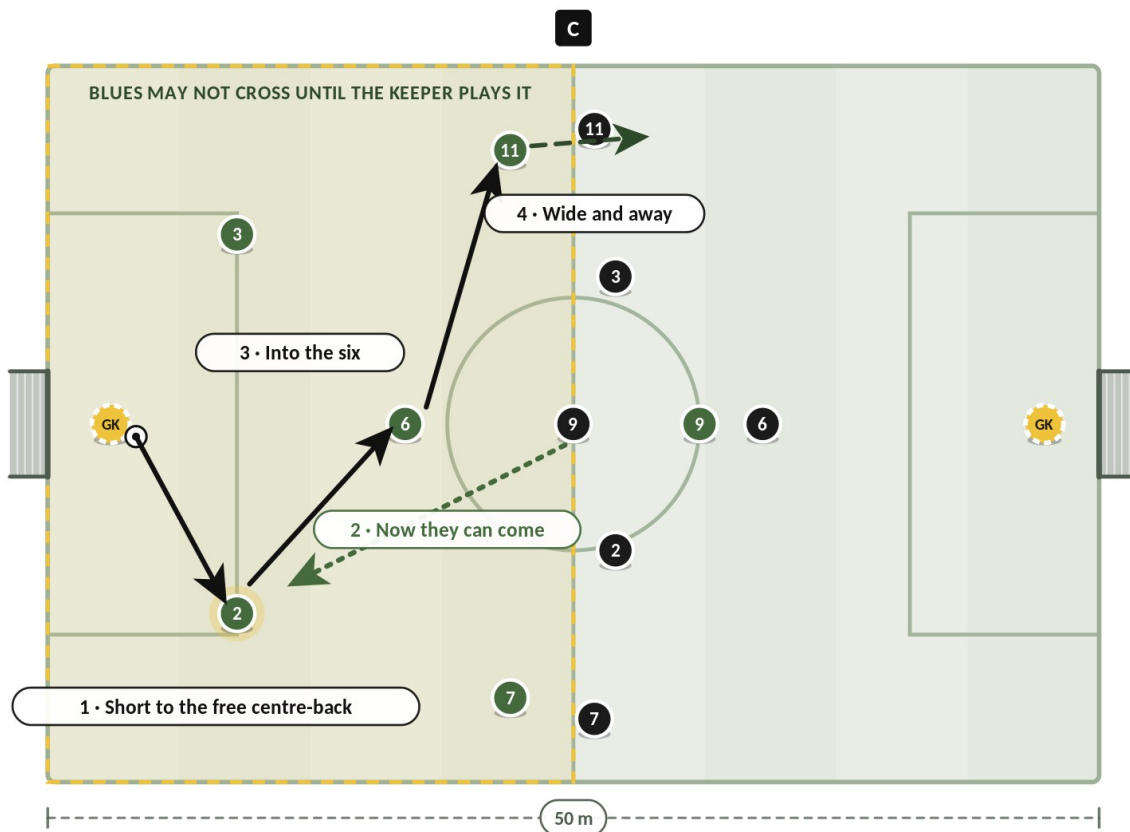
Teams continuing to build after conceding from a mistake.

Substitutes engaged, because they have a job.

17.4 THE BUILD-OUT MATCH (7 v 7)

A full match with the retreat line — the rule used across youth football worldwide to make building from the back possible. Every goal kick is short, and the opposition must retreat to the halfway line until it is played.

50 x 34 m • every goal kick is played short • opposition retreat to the halfway line • 15 minutes



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SET UP

- 50 × 34 m with full-size goals. A **retreat line at the halfway line**, marked or simply named.
- 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. Name the roles: two centre-backs who split, a six who shows, wide players who stay high and wide.
- 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:** *Every goal kick is short. When we have a goal kick, they retreat to halfway and can't cross it until the keeper plays it.*
- 3. Minutes 0–5 — no interruption.** Watch what happens after the first pass, when the retreat line stops helping.
- 4. Minute 5 — drinks break, one question:** *We get the first pass for free. What has to happen before the second one?* Restart.

5. **Minutes 6–13.** Announce successful build-ups by naming the sequence of players. Say nothing at all when one goes wrong.
6. **Final two minutes — remove the retreat line.** Normal goal kicks, normal pressing. Watch whether they still try to play out — and be honest about what you see.

RULES & SCORING

- Every goal kick is played short. No punts, no exceptions.
- The opposition retreat to the halfway line and may not cross it until the goalkeeper's pass is played.
- Goal = 3 points. A goal from a possession that began with a goal kick = +2.
- Keepers restart within ten seconds — the retreat line makes this comfortable.
- Two individual interventions maximum, and none at all after a mistake.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Everything from the block so far, at match size and match speed.
Tactical	The first pass is free; the second one is the game. Centre-backs should be receiving already facing up the pitch. The six must be available immediately, and the wide players high enough to stretch the opposition's retreat. When they do come, the space behind their press is exactly where the ball should go — which is Session 15's line-breaking pass in a new place.
Physical	Moderate. The goalkeepers are the ones under load, mentally more than physically.
Psychological	Say nothing when it goes wrong. Not one word, not a wince. Your reaction to the first mistake decides whether they attempt the tenth.
Social	Listen to the goalkeepers. By the end of tonight they should be the loudest players on the pitch, because they're the only ones who can see the whole picture.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
The second pass being a panicked clearance	<i>The first one was free. What did you plan to do with it?</i>
Centre-backs receiving facing their own goal	<i>Open out as it comes. You're the only one with the whole pitch in front of you.</i>
The six hiding behind their striker	<i>Move. If he can see you, so can the keeper.</i>
Wide players dropping deep to help	<i>Stay high. Helping means stretching them, not standing next to me.</i>
A goal conceded from a build-up	Say nothing at all. Then at the next goal kick, encourage them to do it again.
The build disappearing when the retreat line is removed	Entirely expected in week one of the block. Note it, and raise it gently in the reflection.

ASK THEM

- We get the first pass for free. What has to happen before the second one?
- Which way should the centre-back be facing when it arrives?
- Where should the wingers be while we build?
- When they came at us, what did that leave behind them?
- When I took the retreat line away, what changed?
- Keepers — what was the hardest part?
- How do we all react when it goes wrong?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Remove the retreat line for the whole game.	Retreat line moved to the opposition's defensive third , giving even more room.
The build must reach the halfway line through four players.	No pressing at all in the defensive third for the first five minutes.
Two-touch in the defensive third.	Bigger pitch (55 × 38 m).
No pass back to the goalkeeper once the build has started.	Allow one long goal kick per team per two minutes as a release valve.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Every goal kick played short without argument.

Centre-backs receiving open and facing forward.

The six available on an angle.

At least two possessions that travel from the goalkeeper into the opposition half.

No visible reaction from anybody when a build-up fails.

Goalkeepers talking more than they ever have.

Finish, match day & homework

REFLECTION — 5 MINUTES, SITTING DOWN

- Circle up and **sit down**.
- *Why do we play out from the back instead of kicking it long?* Let them make the argument — they'll do it better than you.
- *Where do the centre-backs stand? Where does the six stand?*
- *When is the long ball the right answer?* — make sure they know it still exists.
- *What happened when we lost it? What did everyone do?* This is the question that decides whether this theme works.
- *Keepers — what do you need from your defenders?* Let them answer at length.
- Finish by saying it plainly: **we will concede a goal from this at some point, and we will keep doing it anyway.**

MATCH-DAY LINK

MATCH OBJECTIVES	WATCH FOR	ASK AFTERWARDS
- Every goal kick is played short — no exceptions, whatever the score. - Centre-backs split wide and receive facing up the pitch. - Nobody reacts when a build-up goes wrong. Nobody.	- Count the short goal kicks and the long ones. That ratio is your this theme progress in a single number. - Where the second pass goes. The first is easy; the second is the skill. - The reaction to a mistake — from players, from you, and from the touchline.	- <i>How many goal kicks did we play short?</i> - <i>What happened after the first pass?</i> - <i>Did anyone say anything when it went wrong?</i>

HOMEWORK — "THE KEEPER'S FEET" · 15 MINUTES, THREE TIMES BEFORE YOU NEXT TRAIN

- **Everyone, not just the keepers.** Against a wall from 8 m: receive the rebound **side-on**, take one touch across your body, and pass firmly to a target 15 m away. Forty repetitions each foot. This is the goalkeeper's job and every player should be able to do it.
- **Driven passing over 20 m.** Thirty with each foot, along the ground, at a target. The build-up pass from centre-back to midfield is exactly this distance and most players have never practised it.
- **Watch a game with a job.** Fifteen minutes of any professional match, watching **only the goal kicks**. Count how many are short and how many are long, and note where the centre-backs stand. Bring both.
- *Optional extra (goalkeepers):* fifty passes with each foot at a target 20 m away, and fifty receiving touches side-on. You are a footballer now.

WHERE TO GO NEXT

Same theme — building from the back. These cover the same ground from other angles and can be run in any order, before or after this one: **18** Beating the First Press; **19** The Back Three and the Pivot; **20** Building Under Real Pressure.

A natural follow-on. Session 18 — Beating the First Press. Tonight established the shape; next time the opposition stop retreating. Session 18 covers what to do when the press arrives properly — the third-man escape from the goalkeeper, the centre-back who drives out with the ball, and the moment when going long is genuinely the right decision rather than a surrender. Bring your notes on which goalkeeper was most comfortable with their feet, and on how the squad reacted to the first mistake.

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.