



SESSION 18 • STANDALONE PLAN

Beating the First Press — Three Ways Out

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	18.1 The Escape Squares
0:10 – 0:25	15	■ Technical practice	18.2 Beating the First Press
0:25 – 0:40	15	■ Skill game	18.3 Press or Play
0:40 – 0:55	15	■ Conditioned match	18.4 No Retreat 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 17 the opposition retreated. Tonight they don't. The retreat line is a wonderful teaching tool and a completely artificial one — on Saturday the other team's striker will sprint at your goalkeeper the moment the ball is placed, and everything the squad learned in **Session 17** will be tested by that. The good news is that a press is a gamble. When four opponents commit to winning the ball in your defensive third, they leave four spaces behind them, and a team that can survive the first six seconds has a far better attack than one that kicked it long. There are exactly three ways out and the squad needs all of them. **Round it** — the third-man escape, where the ball goes into a midfielder and out to a free winger before the press can adjust. **Through it** — a centre-back who drives out with the ball because nobody has picked them up. **Over it** — the long ball, chosen deliberately because the press has committed and the space is behind. Tonight is about having all three available and knowing which one the picture is asking for. It is Session 12's lesson, relocated to the most dangerous part of the pitch.

BY THE END, PLAYERS CAN

- **Survive the first six seconds** of a press without panicking or clearing.
- **Use the third man** — goalkeeper to centre-back to midfielder to a free wide player.
- **Drive out with the ball** as a centre-back when nobody engages.
- **Choose the long ball deliberately** when the press has committed, and know why that is a good decision.
- **Recognise what a press leaves behind** — four players pressing means four spaces somewhere else.

KIT LIST

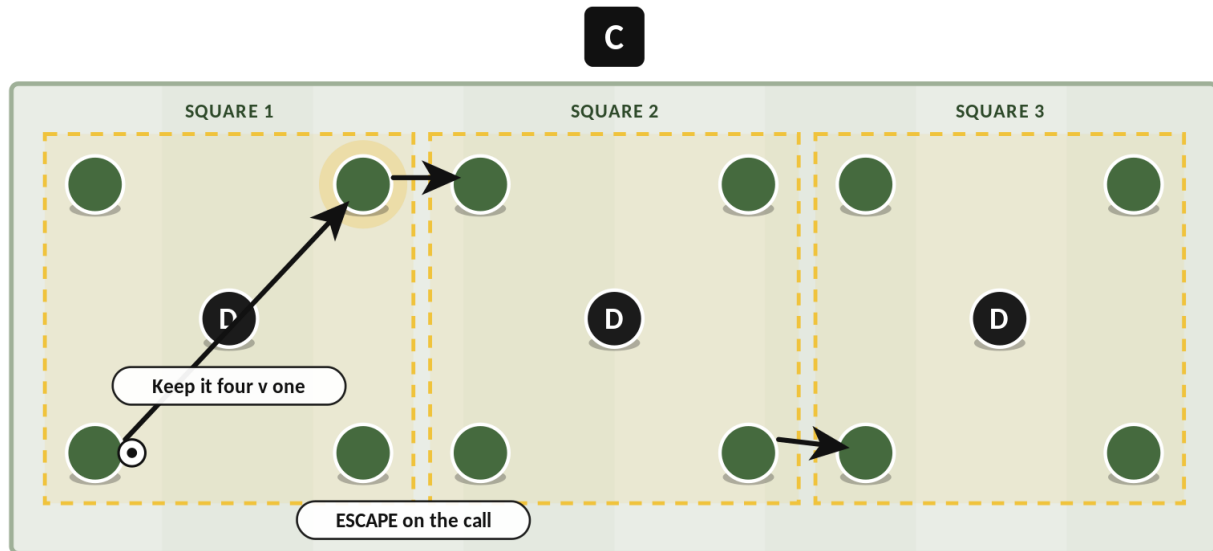
Ground needed: about 60 × 45 m around your two goals. The pressing teams tonight must genuinely press — a half-hearted press teaches nothing and makes the building team believe they are better than they are. Brief the pressers properly each time: nearest player to the ball, everyone else cutting the next pass.

ITEM	QTY	USED IN
Footballs (size 4)	16	All practices
Flat markers	64	Escape squares, build areas, press zones
Cones (tall)	8	Escape gates (18.2)
Bibs — red / blue / yellow	8 / 8 / 4	Yellow for goalkeepers
Full-size goals	2	18.2, 18.3 and 18.4
Goalkeeper gloves	2 pairs	Rotate keepers all session

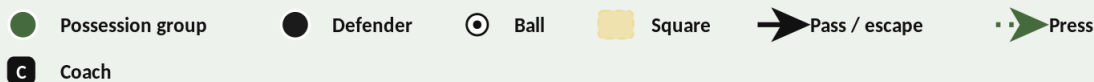
18.1 THE ESCAPE SQUARES

Four against one is comfortable. The skill being warmed up is not keeping the ball — it is transferring it out of a pressured space into a free one, which is exactly what beating a press is.

three 11 m squares • four v one in each • escape into the next square on the call • 10 minutes



FOUR AGAINST ONE IS EASY • THE SKILL IS ESCAPING WHEN THEY COME



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SET UP

- **Three 11 × 11 m squares in a row**, with 1 m between them, marked in flat markers.
- **Four players and one defender in each square.** Fifteen players fills three squares exactly; with 14 run one square as four v nothing to start, with 16 add a second defender to one square.
- The ball may be transferred between adjacent squares by a pass.
- Balls at the end of the row so early arrivals start immediately.
- Coach at the side, calling the escapes.

HOW IT RUNS

- Minutes 0–3 — arrival.** Greet each player by name, ball each, free dribbling. **Collect the Session 17 homework** — *how many goal kicks were short?*
- Minute 3 — four v one in your own square.** Two touches. Ninety seconds. This should be comfortable.
- Minute 5 — the escape.** On the coach's call of "OUT!", the group must transfer the ball into the next square within three seconds. The receiving group keeps it until the next call.
- Minute 7 — two defenders in the middle square only**, so one escape route is genuinely contested.
- Minutes 8–10 — continuous.** Calls every fifteen to twenty seconds, alternating direction. Count successful escapes as a whole group.

RULES & SCORING

- **Three seconds to escape** once the call is made.

- Two touches maximum throughout.
- The escape pass must be **controlled** by the receiving group — a hopeful ball into the next square doesn't count.
- Defenders may not leave their square.
- Loose ball: nearest player retrieves and the group restarts.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Firm passes, first touch out of the feet. The escape pass is often 12–14 m and must be accurate.
Tactical	Know your escape before the call comes. The players who look up while the ball is safe are the ones who escape cleanly when it isn't.
Physical	Gentle. Constant small adjustments with occasional sharp movement.
Psychological	The three-second limit creates artificial urgency, which is the point. Notice who speeds up and who looks up — those are different responses and only one of them works.
Social	The receiving square must call for it. "Here!" early, from a player who has already found space.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Panic on the call	<i>You had three seconds and four players. What was the rush?</i>
Escape passes into a crowd	<i>Who was free in the next square? Look before the call comes.</i>
Nobody in the receiving square moving	<i>They need you. Show yourself before they need to look.</i>
Groups waiting for the call	<i>Keep playing. The call comes when it comes.</i>

ASK THEM

- When should you decide where the escape is going?
- Four against one — why does it still go wrong sometimes?
- What should the next square be doing while you're keeping it?
- Do you need to be quicker, or to look earlier?
- What made an escape fail?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Two seconds to escape.	Five seconds to escape.
Two defenders in every square.	Bigger squares (14 m).
One touch.	Three touches.
The escape must skip a square where the geometry allows.	Five players against one.

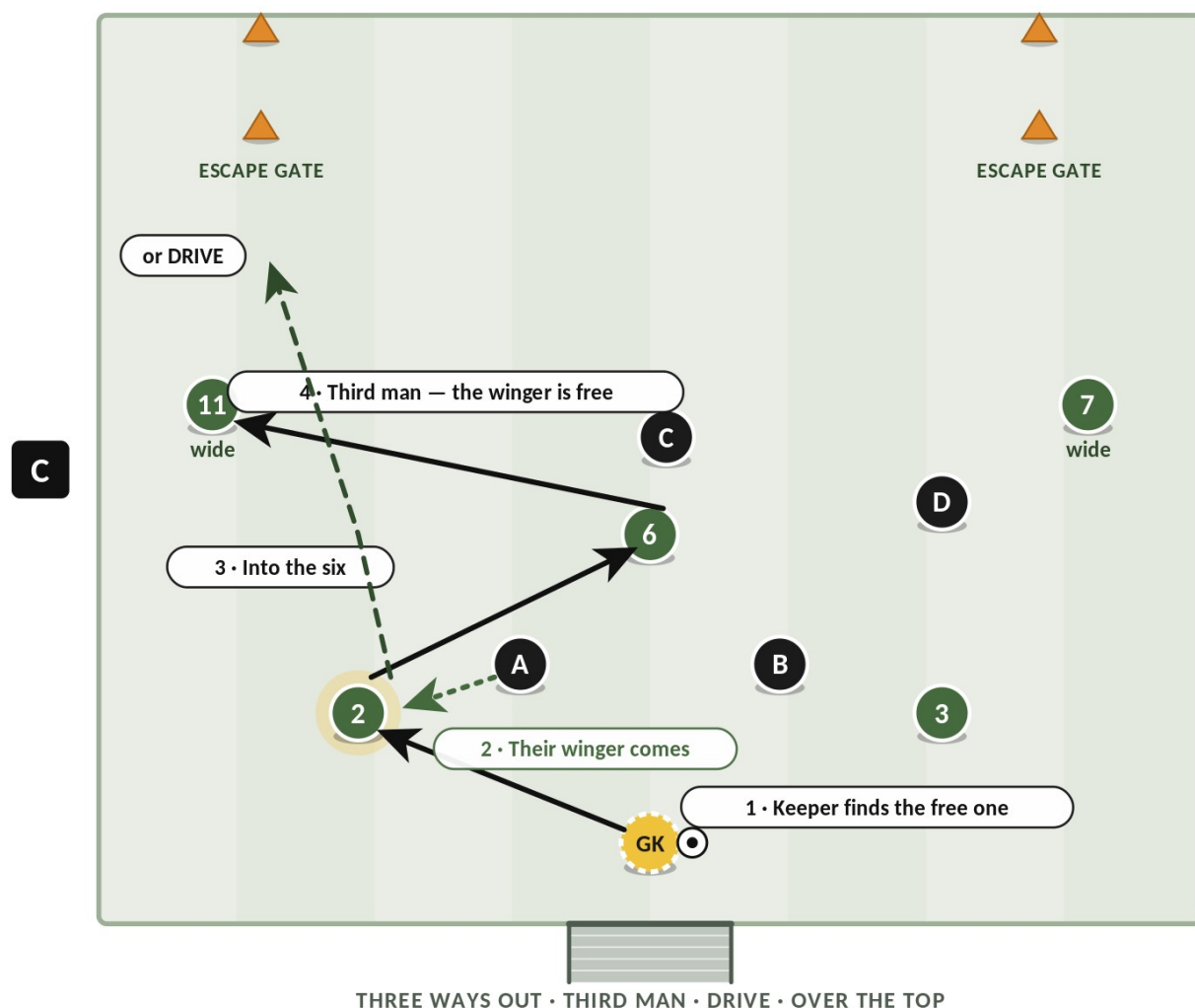
IT'S WORKING WHEN

Escapes completed within the time limit most of the time.
 Players looking into the next square **before** the call.
 Receiving groups showing early.
 Controlled escape passes rather than hopeful ones.

18.2 BEATING THE FIRST PRESS

The full build-up picture against a press that has stopped being polite. Three routes are available and all three score — the practice teaches the squad that the press chooses the answer, not the coach.

34 x 28 m • goalkeeper + five v four pressing properly • three ways out • 15 minutes



● Building team ● Goalkeeper ● Pressers ● Ball ▲ Escape gate
 ➔ Route A • third man ➔ Route B • drive out ➔ Press C Coach

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SET UP

- One station at each full goal: **34 × 28 m**, with a **3 m escape gate** in each far corner.
- **Building team:** goalkeeper, two centre-backs, a six, and two wide players who stay high and wide. **Pressing team:** four.
- Eleven per station; with 14–16 run one station and rotate, or two stations with reduced numbers (goalkeeper + four v three).
- **Brief the pressers properly:** the nearest player goes to the ball, the other three take the nearest passes. A disorganised press teaches nothing.

- Coach positioned to the side where the goalkeeper's first look is visible.

HOW IT RUNS

- 1. Set the picture in 45 seconds.** *They're not retreating tonight. There are three ways out — find whichever one they've left you.*
- 2. Minutes 0–4 — one route at a time.** Three minutes rehearsing the **third-man escape**: keeper to centre-back, centre-back to six, six to the free winger. Walk it, then jog it, then play it.
- 3. Minute 4 — add the drive.** *If nobody comes to you, run with it.* Two minutes. Centre-backs discover that an unpressed defender should carry the ball forward, not pass it sideways.
- 4. Minute 7 — add the long ball.** The goalkeeper may go over the top to a winger. Worth 1 point rather than 2, and available at any time.
- 5. Minutes 8–15 — free.** All three routes live, pressers choosing their own approach. Score all three differently and announce which route was used every time.
- 6. Rotation:** swap the four pressers with four of the building team every three minutes. Rotate the goalkeeper at the halfway point.

RULES & SCORING

- **2 points** for escaping through a gate along the ground (third man or drive). **1 point** for the long ball reaching a wide player. **2 points to the pressers** for winning the ball in the build zone.
- The wide players must stay **high and wide** until the ball is released.
- Two touches maximum for the centre-backs and the six from minute 10.
- The pressers may press the goalkeeper.
- Ball out or won: instant restart from the goalkeeper.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	The third-man sequence needs three good actions: a firm pass into the six, a receive on the half-turn, and an accurate release wide. Any one of them failing kills it.
Tactical	Read what the press has left. If their winger comes inside to press your centre-back, your winger is free — that's the third man. If nobody engages your centre-back, drive. If they've committed four players high, the space is over the top. The press picks the answer; the squad just has to see it.
Physical	Hard for the pressing four and for the six, who is constantly repositioning. Rotate on schedule.
Psychological	This is genuinely difficult and there will be turnovers in dangerous positions. Keep the tone light and say the thing again: <i>this costs nothing here</i> .
Social	The six is the key voice — they must tell the centre-back whether they're free. "Time!" or "man on!" , loud and early.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Centre-backs passing sideways when unmarked	<i>Nobody's within ten metres of you. Why aren't you running?</i>
The six standing still and being marked out of the game	<i>Move. Find the angle. If he can see you, you're in the wrong place.</i>
Wingers coming short to help	<i>Stay high. If you come short, you're just another player in the crowd.</i>
The long ball chosen every time	<i>Was the short one on? Look first, then decide.</i>

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
The long ball never chosen	<i>They've got four players in our half. What's behind them?</i>
A disorganised press	Fix it — the practice fails if the press isn't real. <i>One goes, three cut the passes.</i>

ASK THEM

- If their winger presses your centre-back, who is free?
- If nobody comes to you, what should you do?
- When is the long ball the right answer?
- What does a press leave behind it?
- Six — what do you shout, and when?
- Pressers — which route was hardest to stop?
- How long do you actually have before the press arrives?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Five pressers.	Three pressers.
One touch for the centre-backs.	Add a second midfielder.
Remove the long ball for a three-minute spell.	Pressers start ten metres further back.
The escape must reach a wide player , not just a gate.	Announce the press type before each repetition so the answer is findable.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

All three routes used across the practice.

Centre-backs driving forward when unmarked.

The six receiving on the half-turn and finding the free winger.

The long ball chosen deliberately at least twice, not as a panic.

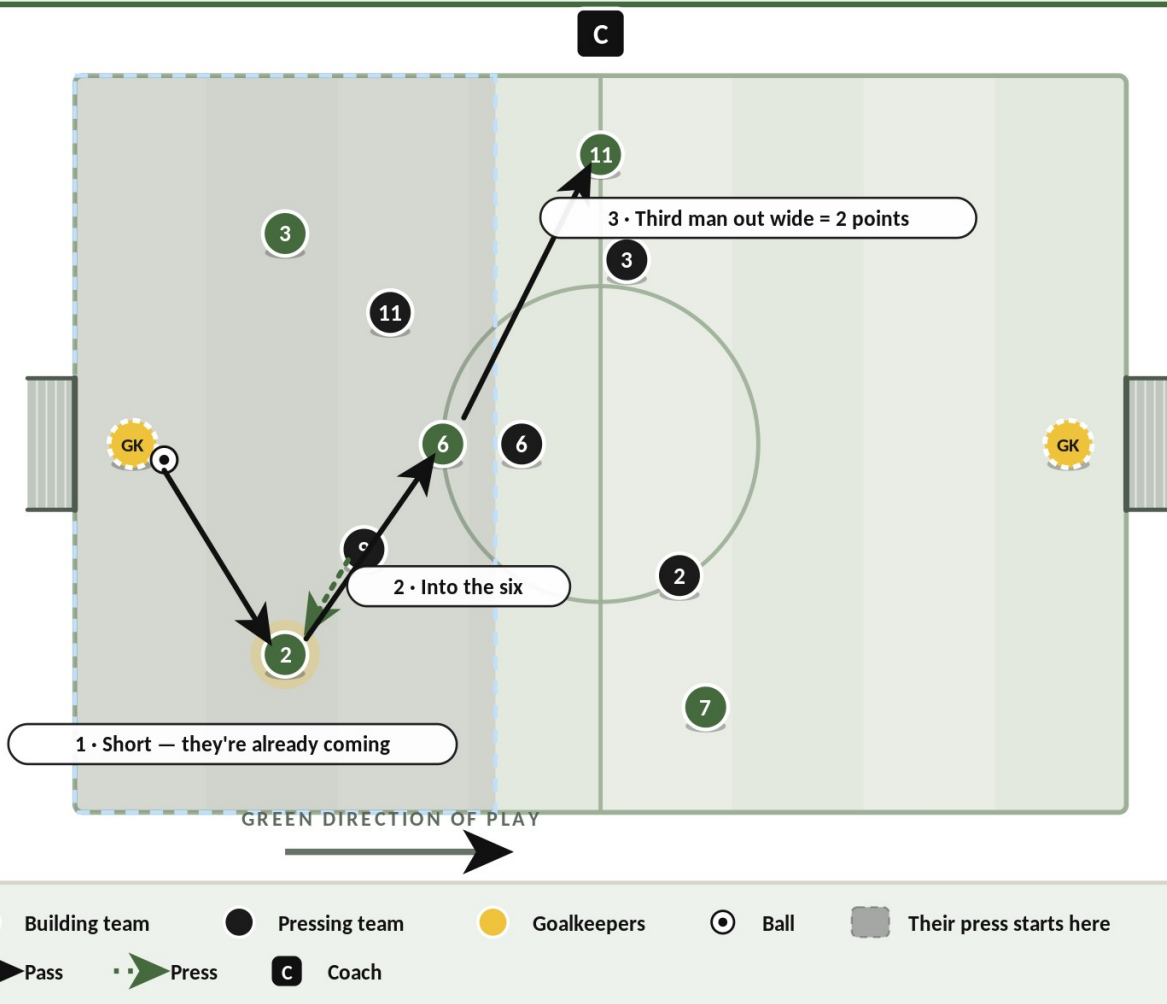
Players able to explain which route they took and why.

The pressing four organised rather than chasing.

18.3 PRESS OR PLAY (5 v 5 + GKs)

A game with no retreat line and no protection. Every goal kick is short and the opposition may press it from the moment it is placed — which is exactly Saturday.

40 x 28 m • no retreat line — they press the goal kick • beating the press = 2 • 15 minutes



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SET UP

- One pitch, **40 × 28 m**, using both full goals with a goalkeeper in each.
- **No build zone and no retreat line.** The pressing team may start pressing as soon as the ball is placed.
- 5 v 5 outfield plus two goalkeepers (12). **With 14–16, rolling substitutes every two minutes.**
- Spare balls behind each goal.
- Coach on the halfway line, outside the pitch.

HOW IT RUNS

1. Teams and keepers set in 30 seconds.
2. Explain in 25 seconds: Short goal kicks, and they can press straight away. If you beat the press and get into their half with the ball, that's 2 points. A goal is 2 as well.
3. Minutes 0–4 — let it run. Expect chaos and turnovers. Say nothing.
4. Minute 4 — 45 seconds, one question: When they send four players at us, how many have they got left at the back? Restart.

5. **Minutes 5–11 — add the reward for going long:** a long goal kick that a teammate wins is worth 1. The choice is now genuinely open and the players have to weigh it themselves.
6. **Minutes 11–15 — rolling subs continue.** Announce every successful escape by naming the route.

RULES & SCORING

- **Short goal kicks by default**, but a long one is allowed from minute 5 and scores 1 if a teammate wins it.
- **Goal = 2. Beating the press into the opposition half = 2.**
- The pressing team may press from the moment the ball is placed.
- Rolling subs every two minutes with 14 or more players.
- No stoppages within a spell; coaching during substitutions, in a sentence.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Everything faster than in Session 17 . First touch is the whole thing — a heavy touch under a live press is a goal against.
Tactical	Count what's behind their press. Four pressing means three or fewer defending, which is why beating it is worth so much. If the press is well organised and you can't find a route, the long ball is not a failure.
Physical	High intensity for both teams. Rolling subs are essential; use them.
Psychological	Turnovers here lead directly to goals and the mood can drop fast. Keep announcing the successful escapes and let the failed ones pass in silence.
Social	The goalkeeper has to be decisive and vocal. Hesitation is what gets punished, not the wrong choice.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Goalkeepers hesitating and being closed down	<i>Decide before they arrive. Wrong and quick beats right and late.</i>
The press being beaten and then possession wasted	<i>You've beaten four of them. Now look up — there's nobody left.</i>
Everyone dropping deep to help	<i>If we all come back, who are we passing to?</i>
Long balls chosen out of fear rather than judgement	<i>Was that a choice or a panic? Be honest.</i>
Mood dropping after a conceded goal	<i>Address it directly and briefly: that's the cost. We're still doing it.</i>

ASK THEM

- When they send four at us, how many have they got left?
- What's the first thing the keeper should do?
- Was that long ball a choice or a panic?
- Once you've beaten the press, what's in front of you?
- Pressers — what made it hard for you?
- Is it worth the risk? Really?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
No long ball at all.	Reinstate a small build zone where pressing is delayed by

HARDER	EASIER
	two seconds.
Two-touch in your own half.	Bigger pitch (46 × 30 m).
The escape must involve four players to score.	Long balls allowed from the start.
Six pressers against five.	4 v 4 + keepers.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

At least two clean escapes per team.

Goalkeepers deciding early rather than hesitating.

The long ball used as a deliberate choice, not a reflex.

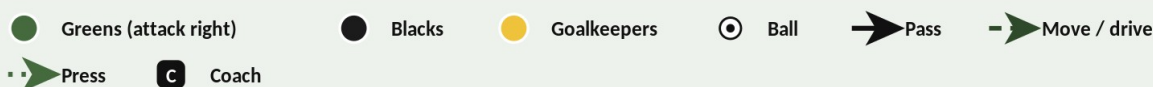
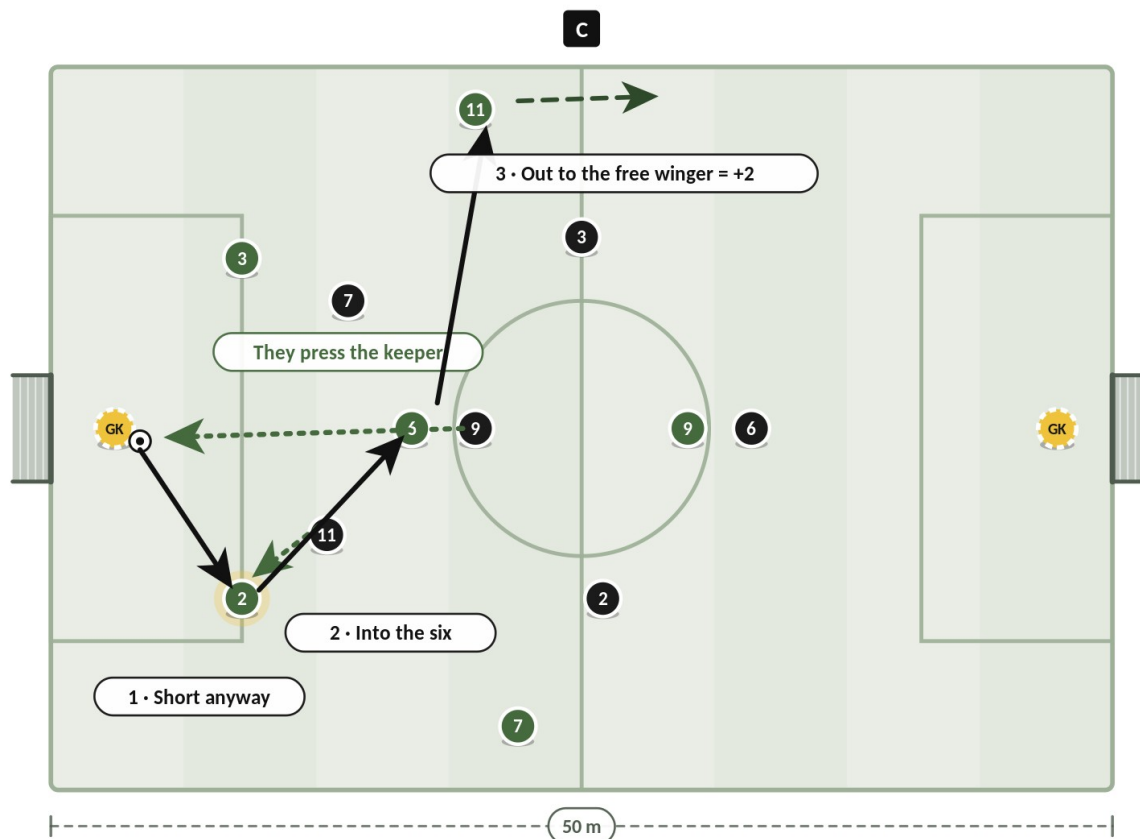
Players recognising the space behind a committed press.

The squad continuing to play short after conceding from it.

18.4 NO RETREAT MATCH (7 v 7)

Saturday, in training. No retreat line, no build zone, no protection — just a full match in which the squad has to decide, every single goal kick, whether they believe in what they have been taught.

50 x 34 m • full press allowed from every goal kick • escaping into their half = +2 • 15 minutes



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SET UP

- 50 × 34 m with full-size goals. **No special markings at all.**
- 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. Remind the wide players to 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:** *Normal football. If you beat their press and get into their half with the ball, that's two points.*
- 3. Minutes 0–5 — no interruption.** Count how many goal kicks are played short when nobody is making them.
- 4. Minute 5 — drinks break, one question:** *How many did we play short when we didn't have to? Then: what stopped us the other times?* Restart.

5. **Minutes 6–13.** Announce escapes by route: *third man, that's two*. Say nothing when it goes wrong.
6. **Final two minutes — one team is told to press everything.** The other must survive. Then swap for the last minute if there's time.

RULES & SCORING

- **Goal = 3. Beating the press into the opposition half with the ball = +2.**
- Goal kicks may be short or long — the choice belongs to the goalkeeper and the coach does not comment on it.
- No touch restrictions. This is a match.
- Keepers restart within ten seconds.
- **Two individual interventions maximum, and none after a mistake.**

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	All of this theme under match conditions.
Tactical	The press decides the route. Third man round it, drive through it, or go over it. And once beaten, the press has left space — the next pass after an escape should be forward, not sideways.
Physical	Full match intensity with a heavy load on the six and the centre-backs.
Psychological	This is the week where a squad either commits to building from the back or quietly abandons it. Your reaction to the first conceded goal is the deciding factor — again.
Social	Listen to the goalkeepers and the six. If those two are talking, the build works. If they're silent, it won't.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Long goal kicks by default now that nobody is forcing the short one	The break question handles it. Don't instruct.
Escapes followed by a sideways pass	<i>You've beaten four of them. What's in front of you?</i>
Wide players dropping in to help under pressure	<i>Stay high. You're the escape route, not the rescue party.</i>
Centre-backs refusing to drive even when unmarked	<i>Nobody's near you. Take it.</i>
A goal conceded from a build-up	Say nothing. Encourage the next one.
The squad abandoning it after one mistake	This is the moment. One sentence: <i>we're doing it again. That's the deal.</i>

ASK THEM

- How many did we play short when we didn't have to?
- What stopped us the other times?
- Which of the three routes did we use most?
- Once we beat the press, what did we do next?
- Keepers — what do you need from your defenders?
- Is it worth it? Tell me honestly.

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Every goal kick must be short, whatever the score.	Reinstate the retreat line for one team at a time.
The escape must reach the opposition half within four passes.	Bigger pitch (55 × 38 m).
Two-touch in your own third.	Allow one long goal kick per two minutes.
Both teams press every goal kick with four players.	6 v 6 on 44 × 30 m with rolling subs.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Short goal kicks chosen freely rather than imposed.

All three escape routes appearing.

Forward passes immediately after beating the press.

Wide players holding their positions.

No reaction from anyone when a build-up fails.

Goalkeepers and the six talking constantly.

Finish, match day & homework

REFLECTION — 5 MINUTES, SITTING DOWN

- Circle up and **sit down**.
- *What are the three ways out?* (Round it, through it, over it. Get them to say all three.)
- *Who decides which one? The coach, or them?*
- *What does a press leave behind it?*
- *How many did we play short tonight when nobody made us?*
- *What did we do when it went wrong?*
- Finish by naming **the goalkeeper** and one specific thing they did well with their feet. They have had the hardest fortnight of anyone.

MATCH-DAY LINK

MATCH OBJECTIVES	WATCH FOR	ASK AFTERWARDS
- At least half our goal kicks are played short, whatever the score. - The pass after beating a press goes forward, not sideways. - Nobody reacts to a mistake in the build-up.	- Short versus long goal kicks. Count both. That ratio is your this theme progress. - Which escape route we use most, and whether all three appear. - What happens in the five seconds after we beat a press. It's usually the best attacking moment of the match and usually wasted.	- <i>How many goal kicks did we play short?</i> - <i>Which way out did we use most?</i> - <i>What did we do straight after we beat their press?</i>

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

- **Receive and go.** Against a wall from 8 m: as the ball returns, **look over your shoulder, receive side-on, and drive the ball five metres forward** before passing again. Forty repetitions each foot. That's the centre-back's drive.
- **Long passing.** Thirty passes with each foot at a target 25 m away, along the ground and then in the air. That's the goalkeeper's option and the third-man release.
- **Watch a game with a job.** Fifteen minutes of any professional match, watching **what a team does when it is pressed at a goal kick**. Note which of the three ways out they use each time. Bring the tally.
- *Optional extra (goalkeepers):* practise receiving a back-pass while moving sideways, thirty times each foot. That's the touch that saves you on Saturday.

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: **17** The Goalkeeper Starts the Attack; **19** The Back Three and the Pivot; **20** Building Under Real Pressure.

A natural follow-on. Session 19 — The Back Three and the Pivot. With the escape routes established, Session 19 formalises the shape that makes them repeatable: how the two centre-backs and the goalkeeper occupy the width of the pitch, where the six stands and when they drop between the centre-backs, and how the full-backs push on to create the first line of five. This is the session that turns 'playing out' from a series of rescues into a structure. Bring your notes on which centre-back is most comfortable driving with the ball.

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.