



SESSION 27 • STANDALONE PLAN

Defending the Wide Areas — Where We Send Them

Defending as a team • Reference format: U12 9v9 • 60 minutes • 14–16 players

AT A GLANCE

TIME	MINS	PHASE	PRACTICE
0:00 – 0:10	10	■ Warm-up	27.1 Show Him the Line
0:10 – 0:25	15	■ Technical practice	27.2 The Wide Trap
0:25 – 0:40	15	■ Skill game	27.3 Four Jobs in the Box
0:40 – 0:55	15	■ Conditioned match	27.4 Out Wide
0:55 – 1:00	5	■ Reflection	Questions and homework

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

A compact block does not stop attacks — it decides where they happen. Hold twenty-five metres in the middle and the opposition are left with one route, which is round the outside. That is not a failure of the block; it is the entire purpose of it. **The wide area is the safest place on the pitch to be attacked**, because a player out there has the touchline behind him, a bad angle to the goal, and thirty metres to travel before the ball is dangerous. So tonight has two halves. The first is making sure the ball goes there and stays there: the full-back's body shape shows the winger down the line rather than inside, the midfielder shuts the pass back into the middle, and the touchline does the work of a third defender. The second half is what happens when the cross comes anyway, because at under-12 it usually does. **Four jobs in the box: near post, middle, far post, and the edge.** Most goals conceded from crosses at this age come from one of two things — nobody on the near post, or nobody on the edge of the box for the second ball. Neither is a talent problem. Both are jobs that nobody was given.

BY THE END, PLAYERS CAN

- **Show the winger down the line**, never inside, using body shape rather than words.
- **Shut the inside pass** as the second defender, so the trap has a lid on it.
- **Use the touchline as a defender** and win the ball in the corner.
- **Fill the four jobs in the box** on every cross — near post, middle, far post, edge.
- **Clear it high, wide and away**, and then win the second ball.

KIT LIST

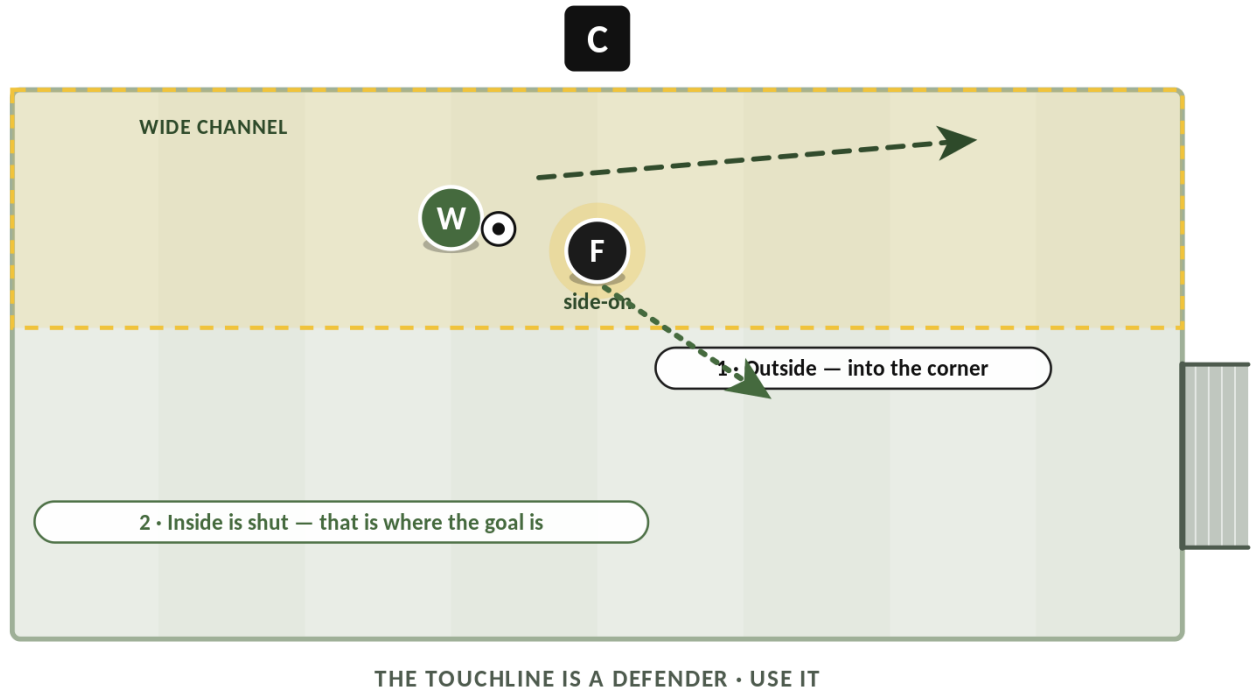
Ground needed: about 60 × 45 m. Two notes before you start. First, this is the best goalkeeping session of the season, so if you have a keeper who wants to improve, tell them beforehand that tonight is theirs — 27.3 in particular is fifteen minutes of high-quality crossing practice they will not get anywhere else. Second, the phrase show him the line is confusing the first time they hear it, because it sounds like an instruction to the winger. Say it once as "**send him outside**" and then use the proper phrase from then on.

ITEM	QTY	USED IN
Footballs (size 4)	20	Crossing practices need more balls than usual
Flat markers	56	Channels, trap zones and box markings
Bibs — red / blue / yellow	8 / 8 / 4	Two clear teams plus goalkeepers
Full-size goals	2	27.2, 27.3 and 27.4
Poles	4	Marking the crossing channels in 27.3
Goalkeeper gloves	2 pairs	Rotate keepers — this is a big session for them

27.1 SHOW HIM THE LINE

One against one in a wide channel with one rule that changes everything: the defender concedes the outside and shuts the inside. The winger going down the line is a good outcome; the winger coming inside is a goal.

32 x 15 m • one v one in a wide channel • send him outside, never inside • 10 minutes



Castlewellan Town FC • Youth Coaching Plans • Session 27 • Diagrams not to scale

SET UP

- **32 x 15 m channel** along one side, with a **full goal** at the far end positioned centrally — so the inside route leads to goal and the outside route leads to the corner.
- **Pairs — one winger, one full-back.** Queue of two at each start.
- The winger starts on the ball, 12 m from the defender.
- Balls at the starting point; plenty spare.
- Coach at the side of the channel.

HOW IT RUNS

- Minutes 0–3 — arrival.** Greet each player by name, ball each, dribbling and turning. **Collect the Session 26 homework** — *how far apart were the highest and deepest players?*
- Minute 3 — show the body shape, statically.** Stand side-on with your inside shoulder forward and walk it: *my body says you can go that way, not this way.* Sixty seconds, no more.
- Minutes 4–7 — live pairs.** Winger tries to get inside; defender tries to send him outside. Nobody is trying to tackle yet.
- Minute 7 — one question, twenty seconds.** *Why is outside better than inside?* You want *because the goal is inside.*

- 5. Minutes 7-10 — scored.** Winger 1 for beating the defender on the inside, or for reaching the byline. Defender 1 for forcing him outside and 2 for winning it in the corner.

RULES & SCORING

- **The winger scores 1** for getting inside the defender, **1** for reaching the byline.
- **The defender scores 1** for forcing him outside, **2** for winning the ball or forcing it out near the corner.
- **Defenders may not tackle for the first three minutes** — position only.
- Swap roles every repetition.
- Everybody defends at least four times.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Body shape is the whole skill: side-on, inside shoulder forward, low, and close enough to influence but far enough not to be knocked past.
Tactical	Concede the space that does not lead to goal. A defender who tries to stop everything stops nothing. And the touchline is a defender you do not have to pick — every metre the winger goes towards it is a metre of help.
Physical	Repeated short efforts with rest between. A proper warm-up load.
Psychological	Being beaten on the outside feels like being beaten. Say clearly that it isn't — a winger on the byline with nobody in the box is a wasted attack.
Social	In a match this job is never done alone. Mention that now; 27.2 is about the help.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Square body shape	The root of everything. <i>Turn your body. Which way are you sending him?</i>
Diving in	<i>Don't tackle. Steer him.</i>
Standing too far off	The winger just cuts inside at speed. <i>Close enough to touch him if you had to.</i>
Defenders happy to be beaten outside and then giving up	<i>Now go with him. He's still got to cross it.</i>
Wingers going outside voluntarily	<i>Make him work. Try to get inside.</i>

ASK THEM

- Why is outside better than inside?
- What does your body have to look like?
- How close should you be?
- What's the best thing that can happen out there?
- What happens if you dive in and miss?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Wider channel (9 m) so the winger has room to change direction.	Narrower channel (5 m).
Two attackers against one defender.	Winger at three-quarter pace.

HARDER	EASIER
The winger may cut inside and shoot from anywhere.	No tackling at all for the whole practice.
Defender starts two metres further off.	Defender starts closer.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Side-on body shape as a default.

Wingers being consistently sent outside.

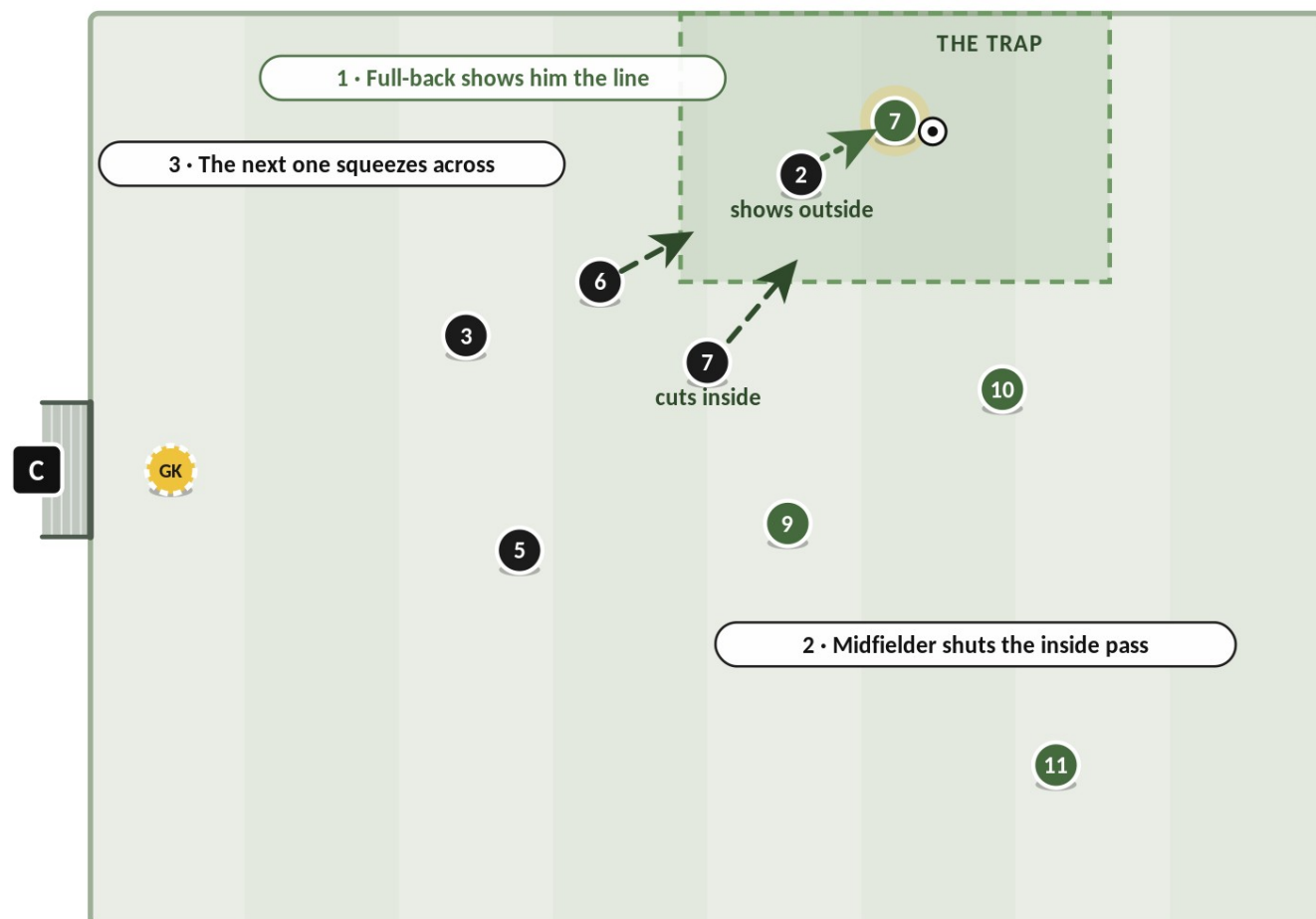
Few dives in.

Defenders staying with the winger after conceding the outside.

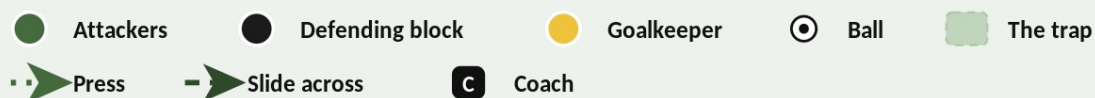
27.2 THE WIDE TRAP

The one-against-one becomes a three-against-one, which is what it should be in a match. The full-back shows outside, the midfielder shuts the inside pass, and the next player squeezes across. The corner becomes a trap rather than an escape.

46 x 34 m • the ball goes wide and three defenders close the door • 15 minutes



SHOW HIM THE LINE • SHUT THE INSIDE • WIN IT IN THE CORNER



Castlewellan Town FC • Youth Coaching Plans • Session 27 • Diagrams not to scale

SET UP

- 46 x 34 m with a full goal and goalkeeper at one end.
- Five attackers against five defenders in a block, ball starting wide and high.
- Mark the trap — a 16 x 10 m box in the attacking corner — so the defenders can see where they are trying to win it.
- Attackers score in the goal or by reaching the byline; defenders score by winning it in the trap.
- Coach behind the goal.

HOW IT RUNS

1. Set it up in 60 seconds. Ball to the wide attacker; defenders start in a block.

2. **Minutes 0–3 — walk the three movements.** Full-back shows outside, midfielder cuts the inside pass, next defender squeezes across. Show it once slowly and then let them try it twice at walking pace.
3. **Minutes 3–8 — live at three-quarter pace, scored.** Attackers 1 for a goal, 1 for the byline. Defenders 1 for winning it, 2 for winning it inside the trap.
4. **Minute 8 — one freeze.** Stop it the moment the ball goes wide and ask three defenders: *what's your job right now?* Restart.
5. **Minutes 8–13 — full speed,** attackers free to switch the ball to test whether the block slides back.
6. **Minutes 13–15 — swap the teams** so everybody defends.

RULES & SCORING

- **Attackers score 1** in the goal, **1** for reaching the byline in control.
- **Defenders score 1** for winning the ball, **2** inside the trap.
- **The full-back must show outside.** Beaten on the inside concedes a point regardless of what happens next.
- The rest of the block must stay connected — no more than about nine metres apart.
- Ball out or goal: restart from the coach to the attackers, alternating sides.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Approach angle. The full-back arrives on a curve so his body already points the winger outside before contact.
Tactical	The trap only works because of the second defender. Showing outside with nobody covering the inside pass means the winger simply plays it back inside and the block is bypassed. And the third movement — the squeeze across — is what stops the switch, which is the attackers' best answer to being trapped.
Physical	Repeated angled sprints. Rotate every three or four minutes.
Psychological	Winning the ball in the corner as a group is enormously satisfying and worth celebrating out loud the first two or three times.
Social	The trap is triggered by a call. <i>Line!</i> or <i>outside!</i> is enough, and it should come from the covering midfielder, not the full-back.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
The full-back showing inside	The whole practice fails here. Watch the hips, not the feet.
Nobody covering the inside pass	<i>Where's the pass he wants to play? Stand there.</i>
Everybody going to the ball	Three jobs, three players — same as Session 25. <i>One shows, one cuts, one squeezes.</i>
The far side not sliding	The switch will punish it and the score will show it.
Defenders waiting for the winger rather than pressing him wide	<i>Go to him. Make him go outside — don't hope.</i>
The trap becoming a foul-fest	Be strict. A free-kick in the corner is a good outcome for the attackers.

ASK THEM

- What's your job when the ball goes wide?
- Where's the pass he wants to play?
- Who calls the trap?

- What do they do if we trap them well?
- Why is the corner a good place for us?
- What happens if the full-back shows him inside?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Six attackers against five.	Four attackers against five.
Attackers may switch the ball freely.	Walking pace for five minutes.
A smaller trap (12 × 8 m).	Mark the three defensive positions with cones the first two times.
The winning point requires the ball to be won and then passed to a teammate.	No switching allowed for the first eight minutes.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Full-backs consistently showing outside.

The inside pass being covered every time.

Balls being won in the trap regularly by minute 12.

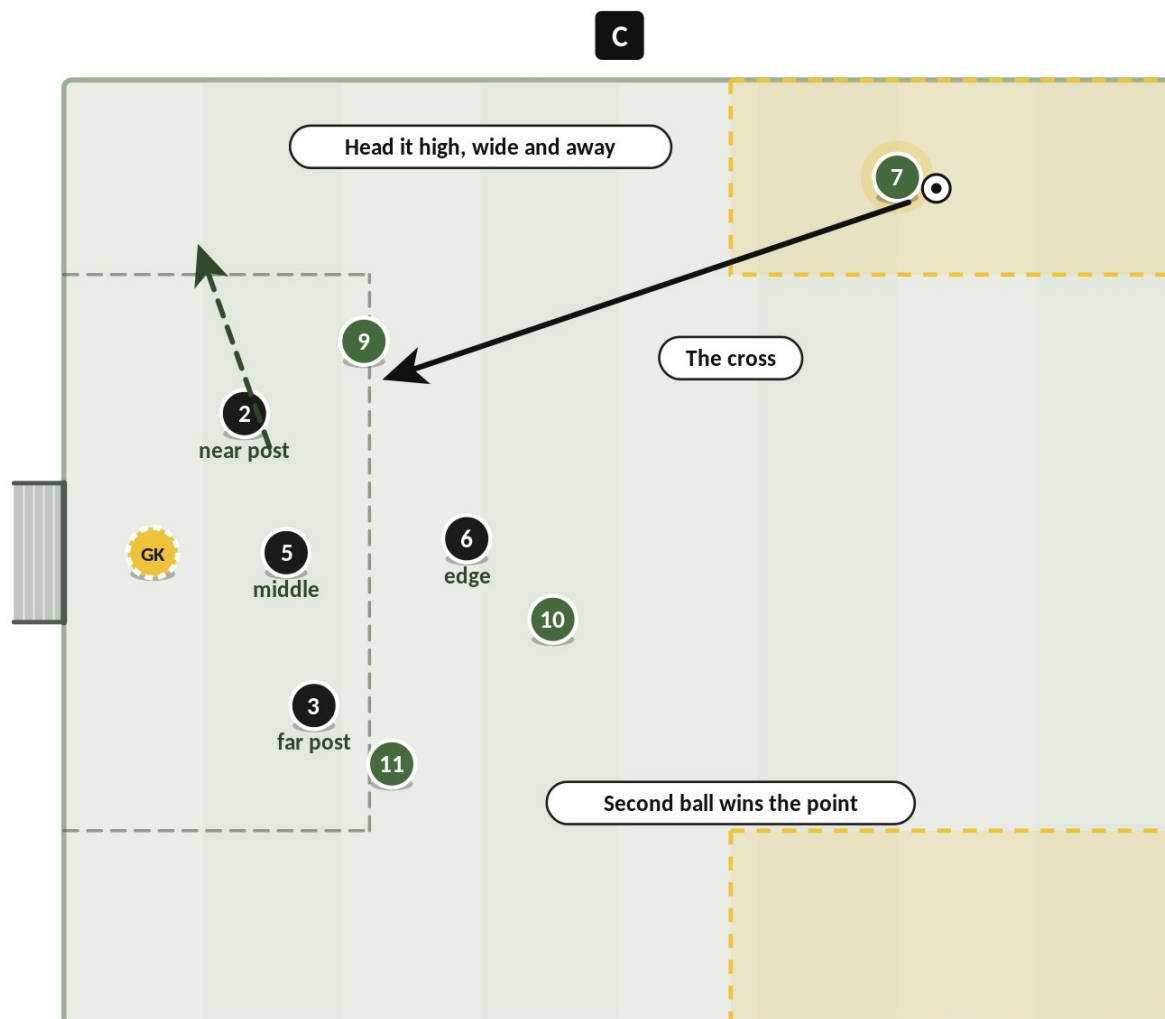
The block sliding back when the ball is switched.

A call triggering the trap.

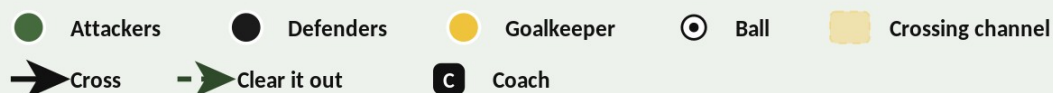
27.3 FOUR JOBS IN THE BOX

The cross comes in anyway — so defend it properly. Four defenders, four jobs, and a point for the team that wins the second ball. Fifteen minutes of repeated crossing that is also the best goalkeeping practice of the season.

40 x 34 m • crosses from both sides • near post, middle, far post, edge • 15 minutes



NEAR POST • MIDDLE • FAR POST • EDGE — ALL FOUR, EVERY TIME



Castlewellan Town FC • Youth Coaching Plans • Session 27 • Diagrams not to scale

SET UP

- 40 x 34 m with a **full goal and goalkeeper** at one end and **marked crossing channels** on both flanks.
- **Four attackers against four defenders** in the box, plus **two crossers** who alternate sides and are unopposed.
- Twelve or thirteen players including the keeper. Rotate the crossers every two minutes so everybody crosses and everybody defends.
- A supply of balls with each crosser.
- Coach behind the goal where you can see the four jobs at once.

HOW IT RUNS

1. **Set it up in 60 seconds.** Name the four jobs out loud and put a defender in each: **near post, middle, far post, edge of the box.**
2. **Minutes 0–4 — walk two crosses.** Freeze the defenders as the ball is struck and let them look at where they are. Almost nobody will be on the edge of the box, and that is the lesson.
3. **Minutes 4–9 — live, alternating sides.** Attackers score 1. Defenders score 1 for clearing it beyond the edge of the box, 2 if they also win the second ball.
4. **Minute 9 — one question:** *which of the four jobs keeps disappearing?* It is the edge, every time, and the players should say so themselves.
5. **Minutes 9–13 — the crossers may now cut inside** occasionally, so the defenders cannot set themselves before the ball arrives.
6. **Minutes 13–15 — rotate the goalkeepers** and finish with crosses only, no scoring, so both keepers get a clean run.

RULES & SCORING

- **Attackers score 1** from a cross. **Defenders score 1** for clearing beyond the edge of the box, **2** for also winning the second ball.
- **All four jobs must be filled before the cross comes in.** If one is empty, the defending team cannot score on that repetition.
- Crossers alternate sides and are unopposed.
- Clearances must be **high, wide and away** — a clearance straight up the middle scores nothing.
- Eight seconds per repetition, then the next cross.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Heading and clearing technique: attack the ball, meet it, and send it back where it came from — high, wide, and away from the middle. Also the goalkeeper's decision to come or stay, which is the biggest single variable in defending crosses at this age.
Tactical	Near post and edge of the box are the two jobs nobody wants and the two that concede the goals. The near post stops the cross that beats everybody; the edge picks up the ball that gets headed out twelve metres. At under-12, more goals come from second balls than from first contacts — worth saying out loud, because it will surprise them.
Physical	Repeated jumping and short sprints. Give a proper break at minute 9.
Psychological	Defending crosses is frightening for smaller players. Pair them with the edge job rather than the far post, and say why: <i>you're quicker to the second ball than anybody.</i>
Social	The goalkeeper has to organise this and nobody else can. If your keeper is quiet, give them one word — <i>away!</i> — and insist on it every cross.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Nobody on the edge of the box	The most common gap and the most expensive one.
Ball-watching	Defenders staring at the crosser and losing the runner behind them. <i>See both. Head on a swivel.</i>
Clearances straight up the middle	<i>High, wide and away.</i> The scoring enforces it.
The goalkeeper staying rooted	Encourage decisions in both directions: coming and staying are both fine, dithering is not.
Defenders too deep, on the goal line	<i>Off the line. Meet it.</i>

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Attackers all attacking the same spot	Coach them too — the practice needs good crosses and varied runs to be worth anything.

ASK THEM

- What are the four jobs?
- Which one keeps disappearing?
- Where should the clearance go?
- Who wins the second ball?
- Goalkeeper — what's your call?
- Where do most goals actually come from in this practice?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Five attackers against four defenders.	Three attackers against four defenders.
Crossers may take on a defender before crossing.	Mark the four positions with cones for the whole practice.
The second ball must be controlled, not cleared.	Slower, floated crosses from closer in.
Two crosses in quick succession so the defenders have to reset at speed.	Remove the second-ball rule and score only the clearance.

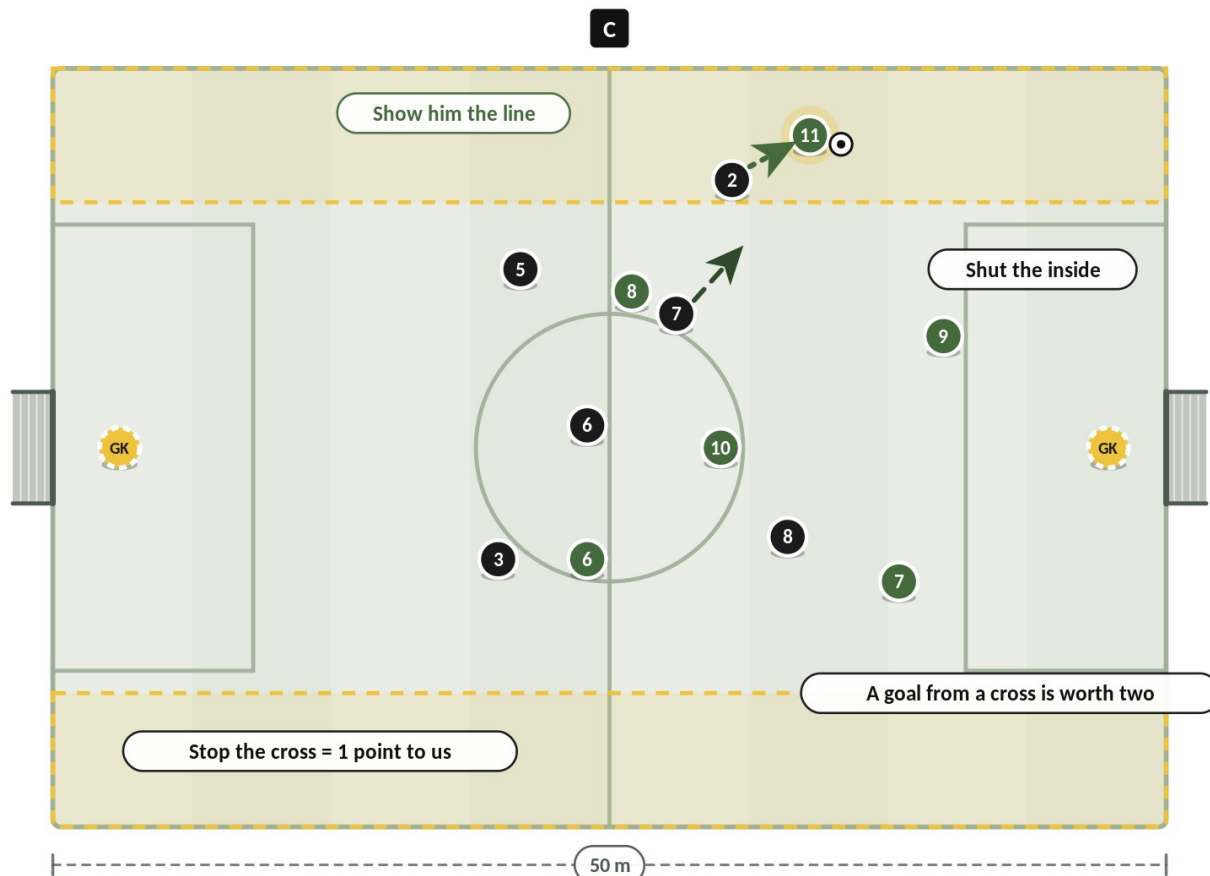
IT'S WORKING WHEN

All four jobs filled before each cross.
 Somebody consistently on the edge of the box.
 Clearances going high, wide and away.
 Second balls being won.
 The goalkeeper making clear decisions and talking.

27.4 OUT WIDE (7 v 7)

A match in which crossing is worth twice as much, so both teams have to attack the wide areas and both teams have to defend them. The condition creates about four times the normal number of repetitions of tonight's picture.

50 x 34 m • goals from crosses count double • stop the cross and you score too • 15 minutes



- Greens (attack right) ● Blacks ● Goalkeepers ● Ball ■ Wide channels
- ➡ Press ➡ Slide across C Coach

Castlewellan Town FC • Youth Coaching Plans • Session 27 • Diagrams not to scale

SET UP

- 50 × 34 m with full-size goals and marked boxes.
- **Wide channels marked 6 m in from each touchline** along the full length.
- 7 v 7 including goalkeepers (14). With 15–16, play 8v8 or roll substitutes every two minutes.
- 2-3-1 shape assigned.
- Coach on the halfway line.

HOW IT RUNS

1. **Shape and teams in 60 seconds.**
2. **Explain in two sentences:** *A goal scored from a cross is worth two. Stopping a cross — forcing it out, blocking it, or winning it in the wide channel — is worth one to you.*
3. **Minutes 0–6 — play and announce both scores.** The crossing reward will produce a lot of wide play very quickly, which is the point.

4. **Minute 6 — drinks and one question:** *where are we making them cross from?* You want them to notice the difference between a cross from the byline and one from thirty metres out.
5. **Minutes 7-13 — add the four jobs rule:** if a goal is scored from a cross and any of the four box jobs was empty, it counts triple. Harsh, and it works.
6. **Final two minutes — all conditions removed.** Watch whether the full-backs still show outside.

RULES & SCORING

- A goal from a cross = 2 points. Any other goal = 1 point.
- Stopping a cross — blocking it, forcing it out, or winning it in the wide channel — = 1 point.
- From minute 7: a crossed goal with one of the four box jobs empty counts triple.
- Keepers restart within eight seconds. No offside.
- All conditions removed for the last two minutes.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Match-speed body shape from the full-backs, and clearing technique under real pressure.
Tactical	Where the cross comes from matters more than whether it comes. A cross from the byline with defenders facing their own goal is dangerous; a cross from thirty metres out with everybody set is a goal kick. The block does not stop crosses — it makes them bad ones.
Physical	Wide play means a lot of running for full-backs and wingers. Rotate those positions more than the central ones.
Psychological	The triple-goal rule will produce at least one loud disagreement about whose job was empty. Handle it as information rather than blame.
Social	The goalkeeper organising the box is the sound of a team that defends well. If it appears tonight, name it.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Full-backs showing inside under match pressure	The habit is only two practices old. One reminder, then let the scoreline teach.
Crosses coming from deep	Point out that these are almost never dangerous. It reassures defenders enormously.
The edge of the box empty	Expected. The triple rule will find it.
The block failing to slide when the ball is switched	Back to Session 26 — one word: <i>slide</i> .
Second balls falling to the attacking team	Note who wins them; that player belongs on the edge of the box permanently.
The final two minutes	Whatever survives without a score attached is what they have learned.

ASK THEM

- Where are we making them cross from?
- Which crosses are actually dangerous?
- Who's on the edge of the box?
- Full-backs — which way are you sending him?
- Who's organising the box?
- How many of their crosses came to nothing?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Crosses must come from inside the wide channel and beyond the halfway line.	Drop the triple rule.
A goal from a cross counts triple throughout.	Remove the wide-channel marking and judge crosses by eye.
Larger pitch (58 × 38 m) so the wide areas are genuinely wide.	6 v 6 on 44 × 30 m with rolling substitutes.
Only headed goals from crosses count double.	Award the defensive point for any cleared cross , however it is cleared.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Full-backs showing outside consistently at match speed.

Most crosses coming from deep and wide rather than the byline.

The four box jobs filled most of the time.

Second balls being won by the defending team.

The goalkeeper organising the box audibly.

Finish, match day & homework

REFLECTION — 5 MINUTES, SITTING DOWN

- Which way do we send the winger? — outside, and they should be able to say why.
- What's the second defender's job? Shut the inside pass.
- What are the four jobs in the box? Near post, middle, far post, edge.
- Which one do we keep forgetting? The edge.
- Where should a clearance go? High, wide and away.
- **Name the player who won the most second balls tonight** — that job is invisible and worth making visible.
- Finish with next time: *last one of this theme — we defend our own box, and the coach says nothing for seven minutes at the end of it.*

MATCH-DAY LINK

MATCH OBJECTIVES	WATCH FOR	ASK AFTERWARDS
- Every winger gets sent outside, never inside. - All four box jobs filled on every cross. - Clearances go high, wide and away — never across our own box.	- Which way our full-backs send the winger. Count the times they are beaten on the inside. - Whether anybody is on the edge of the box when a cross comes in. - Where the opposition's crosses come from — byline or deep?	- Which way were you sending him? - Who was on the edge of the box? - Did any of their crosses actually hurt us?

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

- **Side-on approach.** Mark a start point and a target 8 m away. Approach on a curve so that you arrive side-on with your inside shoulder forward, then shuffle backwards for 5 m keeping that shape. Fifteen repetitions each side. This is the single technique the whole session rests on.
- **Heading a ball away.** If you have someone to throw for you, thirty headers aiming high and to one side — never straight back at the thrower. If not, practise the jump and the neck action without a ball; the timing is most of it.
- **Watch a game with a job.** Fifteen minutes of any professional match, watching **only the full-back when the opposition winger has the ball**. Notice how rarely a winger gets inside them, and notice how much space is conceded down the line without anybody panicking.
- *Optional extra:* watch three crosses and find the player standing on the edge of the box. He is always there, and no under-12 ever notices him.

WHERE TO GO NEXT

Same theme — defending as a team. These cover the same ground from other angles and can be run in any order, before or after this one: **25** Press, Cover and Balance; **26** The Compact Block; **28** Defending the Box.

A natural follow-on. Session 28 — Defending the Box, and the review page. The summary session for this theme and the last thirty metres of the pitch. Blocking shots, defending the one-against-one in the box without diving in, dealing with the ball played behind, and the discipline of not conceding cheap penalties. It closes with this theme exam — no conditions, seven minutes of silence, and a notebook.

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.