



SESSION 31 • STANDALONE PLAN

Attacking Overloads — When We Have More Than They Do

Attacking and finishing • Reference format: U12 9v9 • 60 minutes • 14–16 players

AT A GLANCE

TIME	MINS	PHASE	PRACTICE
0:00 – 0:10	10	■ Warm-up	31.1 Two Against One
0:10 – 0:25	15	■ Technical practice	31.2 Three Against Two
0:25 – 0:40	15	■ Skill game	31.3 Find the Spare Man
0:40 – 0:55	15	■ Conditioned match	31.4 Overload the Side
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

Every match contains a dozen moments where one team briefly has more players than the other in the part of the pitch that matters. Under-12 teams create these moments constantly, almost always by accident, and then waste nearly all of them. There are three reasons and they are always the same. **They take too long** — an overload lasts about four seconds before the defence recovers, and a player who takes three touches deciding has already given it back. **They pass sideways** — an extra player used to pass across the pitch is not an extra player, it is a longer route to the same place. **And the spare player runs towards the ball** instead of staying where the space is, which turns a two-against-one back into a one-against-one with a crowd. The whole session hangs on one idea that is genuinely hard for children to do, because it feels like showing off and it feels selfish: **you have to run at a defender and make him choose.** A two-against-one only becomes a goal when the ball carrier commits the defender. If he never commits, nobody is free, and the extra player might as well not be there. **An extra player is only useful if somebody is being occupied.**

BY THE END, PLAYERS CAN

- Carry the ball at a defender to commit him before passing.
- Release at the moment he commits — not before, not after.
- Stay wide as the spare player, rather than running towards the ball.
- Use the overload within about four seconds, before the defence recovers.
- Recognise where the overload is and move the ball there quickly.

KIT LIST

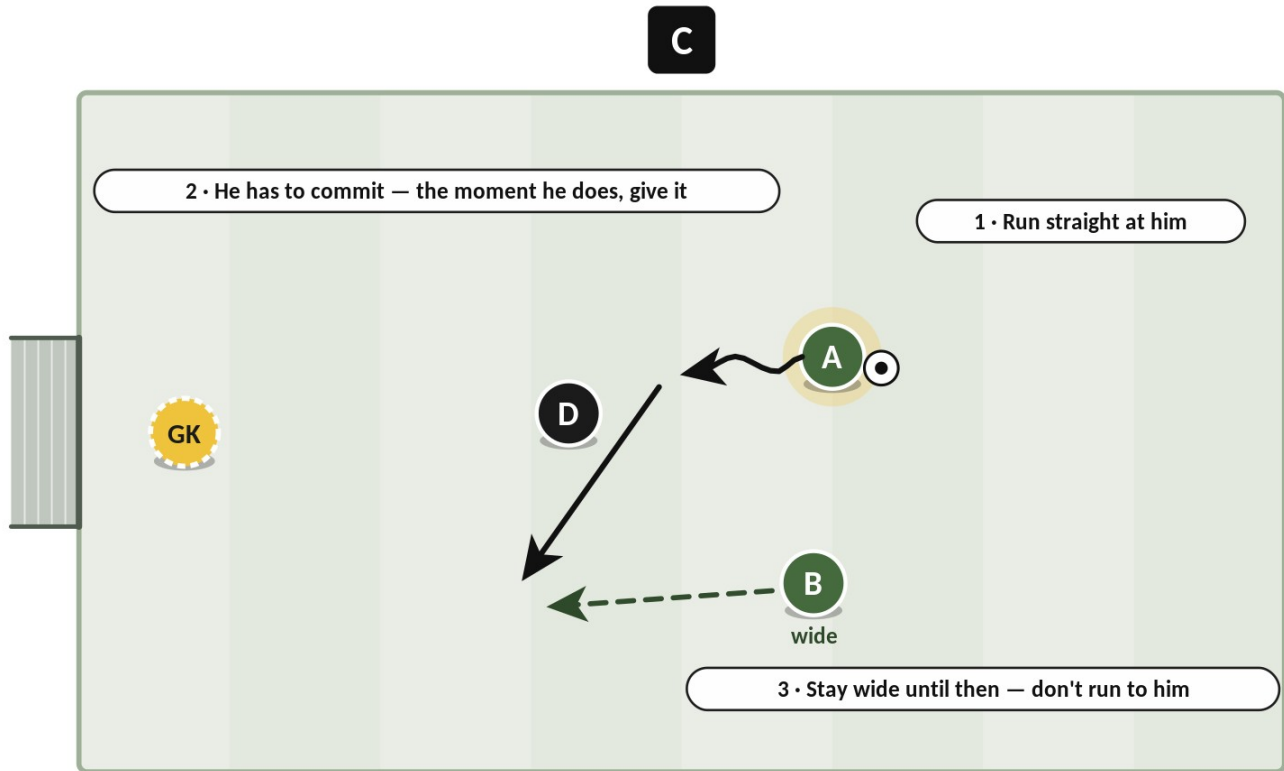
Ground needed: about 60 × 45 m. One thing to say clearly at the start, because it is the sentence the whole session rests on and it contradicts what most children have been told: **running at a defender with the ball is a team action, not a selfish one.** A player who carries the ball at somebody is doing a job for the teammate who ends up free. Say it in the warm-up, say it again in the match, and praise the carrier as loudly as the scorer.

ITEM	QTY	USED IN
Footballs (size 4)	20	All practices
Flat markers	52	Channels, boxes and pitch edges
Bibs — red / blue / yellow / grey	8 / 8 / 4 / 1	Grey identifies the neutral in 31.3
Full-size goals	2	31.1, 31.2, 31.3 and 31.4
Poles	4	Marking the wide channels in 31.4
Stopwatch or phone	1	Counting the four seconds

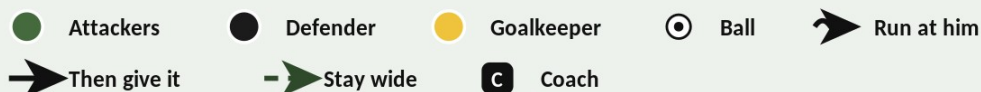
31.1 TWO AGAINST ONE

The simplest overload there is, and the one every other overload is built from. Carry at the defender until he commits, then release. The spare player's only job is to stay wide and wait.

32 x 18 m • two attackers, one defender • run at him, then give it • 10 minutes



AN EXTRA PLAYER IS ONLY USEFUL IF SOMEBODY IS BEING OCCUPIED



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SET UP

- 32 × 18 m with a full goal and goalkeeper at one end.
- Two attackers against one defender, starting 20 m out.
- Queues of two behind each attacking pair; the defender rotates every repetition.
- Balls at the starting point, plenty spare.
- Coach beside the goal.

HOW IT RUNS

- Minutes 0–3 — arrival.** Greet each player by name, ball each, dribbling and passing. **Collect the Session 30 homework** — how many goals were blasted and how many were passed in?
- Minute 3 — walk it once.** Carry at the defender, watch his feet, and pass the moment he moves towards you. Sixty seconds.
- Minutes 4–7 — live.** Attackers score in the goal; the defender scores for winning the ball or forcing a shot from outside the box.

4. **Minute 7 — one question, twenty seconds.** *When exactly do you pass?* You want *when he commits* — and if somebody says *when he moves*, that is better still.
5. **Minutes 7–10 — scored.** 1 point for a goal; 2 if the pass came after the defender committed. You judge it, out loud.

RULES & SCORING

- **The ball carrier must carry it at the defender.** A pass played before he engages scores nothing.
- **The spare player must stay wide** until the pass is made — no drifting inside.
- **1 point** for a goal, 2 if the defender was committed first.
- **Six seconds** per attack.
- Rotate roles every repetition; everybody defends.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Carrying with the ball far enough from the feet to travel, close enough to change direction. The pass is usually a short side-foot played while running.
Tactical	The defender decides the outcome, and your job is to force him to decide. If he goes to the ball, pass. If he covers the pass, keep going and shoot. The one thing that never works is doing neither — carrying half-heartedly and passing early leaves him defending both.
Physical	Short repeated efforts. Standard warm-up load.
Psychological	Carrying at somebody feels risky, and a player who tries it and loses the ball feels responsible. Praise the attempt every time it fails, or it will stop happening.
Social	The spare player should be calling — but calling <i>late</i> , not from thirty metres out. Timing applies to the voice as well as the run.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Passing too early	The default. <i>He hadn't moved yet. Take him on.</i>
The spare player running inside	<i>Stay wide. If you come to me, he can defend us both.</i>
Carrying too slowly	<i>At him, properly. He has to believe you're going past.</i>
Never passing at all	The opposite fault. <i>He committed — where was your teammate?</i>
Defenders diving in	Coach them too: <i>stay on your feet and make them decide.</i>

ASK THEM

- When exactly do you pass?
- What's the spare player's job before the pass?
- What happens if you pass too early?
- What if he doesn't come to you at all?
- Whose job is it to make him choose?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Four seconds per attack.	Eight seconds.
Two against two with one defender starting behind.	Passive defender for the first two minutes.
The carrier must beat the defender himself if the pass is	Closer start (14 m).

HARDER	EASIER
not on.	
Longer starting distance (26 m).	Three against one.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Ball carriers engaging the defender before passing.

Spare players holding their width.

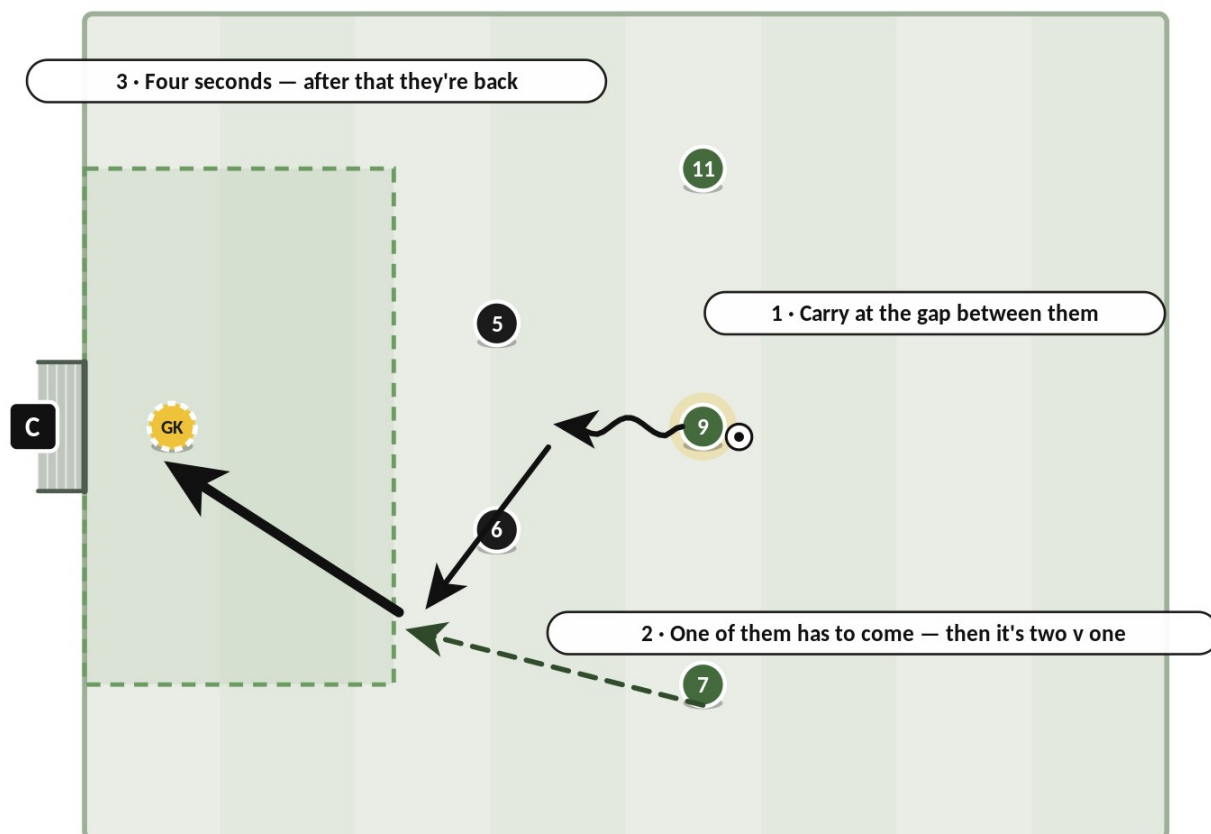
Passes released at the moment of commitment.

Attempts continuing after failures.

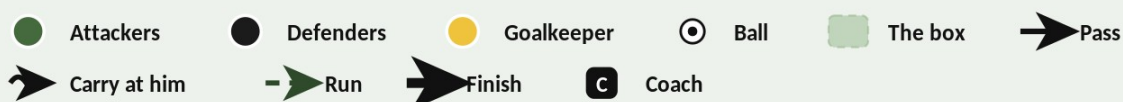
31.2 THREE AGAINST TWO

The overload that actually occurs in matches. Three attack two and a goalkeeper, with four seconds on the clock — enough time to do it properly and not enough to think about it twice.

42 x 32 m • three attack two and a keeper • four seconds, then it's gone • 15 minutes



CARRY • COMMIT • RELEASE — AND DO IT BEFORE THEY RECOVER



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SET UP

- 42 × 32 m with a full goal and goalkeeper, the box marked.
- Three attackers against two defenders, starting 25 m out.
- Twelve or thirteen players; two groups of three attacking alternately, defenders rotating every two repetitions.
- Balls with the coach for instant restarts.
- Coach at the halfway point with a stopwatch.

HOW IT RUNS

1. Set it up in 45 seconds. Three go, two defend, four seconds from the first touch.
2. Minutes 0–4 — free, no coaching. Most groups will pass square twice and run out of time. Let them.

3. **Minute 4 — one freeze, forty seconds.** Stop it on the first pass and ask: *has anybody been made to choose yet?* The answer is nearly always no, and it is the lesson of the practice.
4. **Minutes 5–10 — scored.** 1 point for a goal, **2 if the goal came after a defender was committed.** Announce which kind each goal was.
5. **Minute 10 — tighten the clock to three seconds.** It forces the carry to start immediately.
6. **Minutes 10–15 — rotate everybody through defending.**

RULES & SCORING

- **Four seconds** from the first touch to the shot; three seconds from minute 10.
- **1 point** for a goal, **2** if a defender was committed first.
- **No square passing across the front of the defenders** — the ball must go forward or diagonally.
- Defenders score 1 for winning it or running the clock out.
- Rotate after every two repetitions.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Carrying at speed and passing while moving. Almost no under-12 practises the pass played mid-stride, and it is the pass this situation requires.
Tactical	Attack the gap between the two defenders, not one of them. Carrying at the space between them forces one to come, which creates the two-against-one on the other side. And the third attacker's job is to be far away — the width is what makes the second defender unable to cover both.
Physical	Short sprints with rest between repetitions. Comfortable.
Psychological	Four seconds is deliberately uncomfortable. Say why: an overload in a match lasts about that long, and practising it slowly teaches a habit that does not exist on Saturday.
Social	Three players attacking need almost no talking and a lot of looking. Point that out — this is one of the few situations where shouting makes it worse.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Square passing	The rule bans it and the score punishes it, but say it once as well: <i>sideways doesn't beat anybody.</i>
All three attacking the same channel	<i>Spread out. He can't cover both of you if you're twenty metres apart.</i>
Nobody carrying	The freeze at minute 4 exists for this. <i>Who's making them choose?</i>
The clock running out	Time it audibly — <i>four, three, two</i> — and they will speed up without being told.
Shooting from distance to beat the clock	Fair, but note whether the overload was used first.
Defenders backing off and running the clock down	Good defending, and worth praising — it is exactly what Session 23 taught.

ASK THEM

- Has anybody been made to choose yet?
- Where should you carry it — at him, or between them?
- Where's the third attacker?
- How long does an overload last in a match?

- What did the defenders do that made it hard?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Three seconds.	Six seconds.
Three against three with one defender starting five metres behind.	Three against one.
Two touches for the attackers.	Remove the square-pass rule.
The goal must come from the third attacker.	Walk the picture through once more before restarting.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Somebody carrying at the defenders every repetition.

Attackers spread across the width.

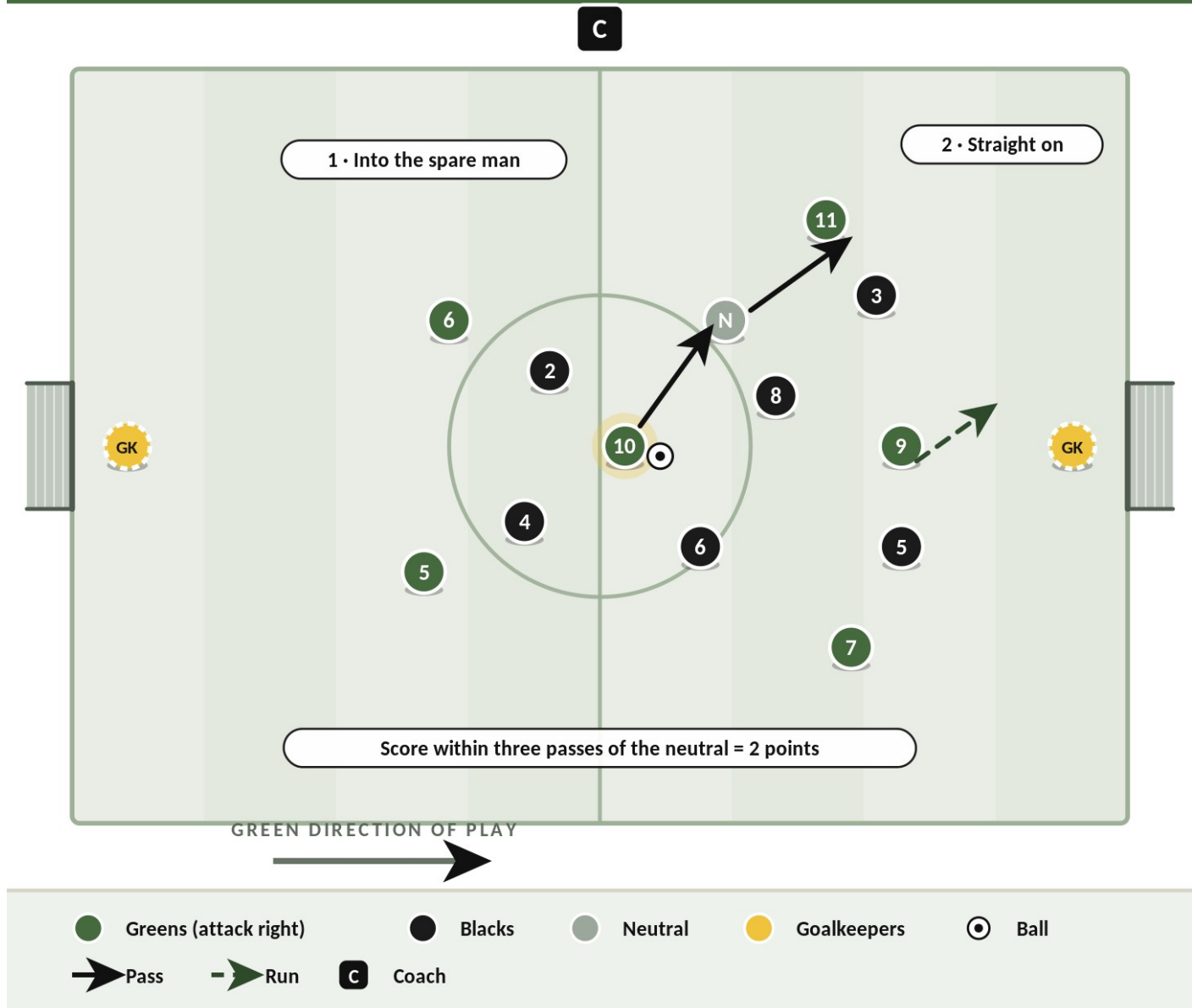
Goals coming inside four seconds.

Two-point goals outnumbering one-point goals by minute 13.

31.3 FIND THE SPARE MAN (6 v 6 + 1)

One neutral player who always plays for whoever has the ball, so there is a permanent overload somewhere. The skill is finding it fast — and the scoring makes sure they look.

42 x 30 m • one neutral always plays with the team on the ball • 15 minutes



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SET UP

- One pitch, **42 × 30 m**, both full goals with a goalkeeper in each.
- **6 v 6 outfield plus one neutral in grey** who plays for the team in possession, plus two goalkeepers (15).
- With 14, play 5 v 5 plus a neutral. With 16, add a second neutral.
- The neutral has **two touches maximum** so they cannot dominate.
- Coach on the halfway line.

HOW IT RUNS

1. Teams, bibs, neutral and keepers in 90 seconds.

2. **Explain in one sentence:** *Grey plays for whoever has the ball, so one of you is always spare — find him.*
3. **Minutes 0–5 — play.** Point out the overload as it happens: *seven against six — where is it?*
4. **Minute 5 — one question:** *where should the spare man be standing? You want away from the ball, where there's space rather than in the middle.*
5. **Minutes 6–12 — scored.** A goal scored within three passes of the neutral touching the ball counts double.
6. **Minutes 12–15 — rotate the neutral** so a different player experiences always being free. It is the best fifteen minutes of football a shy player will have all season.

RULES & SCORING

- The neutral always plays for the team in possession and has two touches maximum.
- A goal scored within three passes of the neutral touching the ball = 2 points.
- Keepers restart within eight seconds. No offside.
- The neutral may not score.
- Rotate the neutral every three or four minutes.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Receiving on the half-turn under no pressure — the neutral's whole game — and the pass that arrives quickly enough to keep the overload alive.
Tactical	An overload is only useful where the ball can reach. A spare player on the far touchline is a spare player in theory. And the overload moves — the moment the ball is played, the spare man is somebody else, and the whole team has to keep re-reading it.
Physical	Standard game. The neutral works hardest — rotate them on time.
Psychological	Being the neutral is the most enjoyable role in football. Give it to a quieter or less confident player first and watch what happens.
Social	Teams that use the neutral well are talking constantly. Listen for players directing him rather than calling for the ball themselves.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
The neutral being ignored	<i>Seven against six and you didn't use him.</i> Say it once per occurrence and it stops.
The neutral running to the ball	<i>Stay away from it. You're only free while you're not near it.</i>
The neutral taking three touches	Enforce the two-touch rule or the game becomes about one player.
Overloads being found and then wasted	Same lesson as 31.2 — the four seconds still apply.
A quiet player thriving as the neutral	Name it and remember it. It often reveals a player who has been positionally lost rather than lacking ability.
One team using him much better	Change the neutral rather than explaining it.

ASK THEM

- Where should the spare man stand?
- How quickly does the overload disappear?
- Who is the spare man right now?
- What happens when he comes towards the ball?

- Which team used him better? Why?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
The neutral has one touch.	The neutral has unlimited touches.
Only goals within two passes of the neutral count.	Two neutrals.
Bigger pitch (48 × 32 m) so finding him is harder.	Smaller pitch (36 × 28 m).
The neutral must be used in every attack or the goal does not count.	Any goal after the neutral touches it counts double, however many passes later.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

The neutral being found within a pass or two of the ball being won.

The neutral holding distance from the ball.

Overloads being used quickly rather than admired.

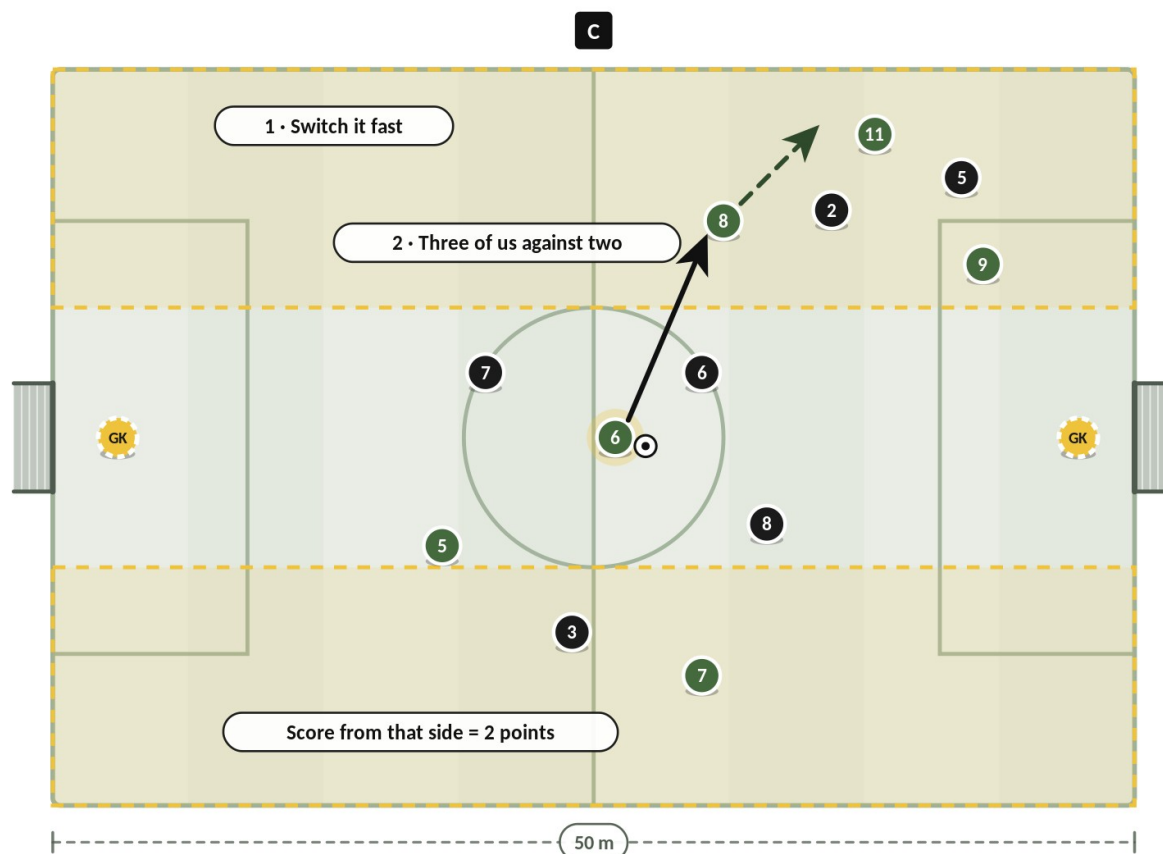
Both teams scoring doubles.

A quieter player having a good fifteen minutes.

31.4 OVERLOAD THE SIDE (7 v 7)

A match with wide channels marked and one reward: get three of your players into a channel against two of theirs, and a goal from that side counts double. It teaches the squad to build an overload deliberately rather than stumble into one.

50 x 34 m • three of you in one wide channel against two = the goal counts double • 15 minutes



● Greens (attack right) ● Blacks ● Goalkeepers ● Ball ● Wide channels
 ➔ Switch ➔ Join the overload C Coach

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SET UP

- 50 × 34 m with full-size goals and marked boxes.
- **Two wide channels marked 11 m in from each touchline**, running 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, but players may go anywhere.
- Coach on the halfway line, counting bodies in the channels.

HOW IT RUNS

1. **Shape, channels and teams in 90 seconds.**
2. **Explain in two sentences:** *If you get three players into one wide channel against two of theirs, and you score from that side, it's worth two. So look at which side has the space.*
3. **Minutes 0–6 — call the counts out loud.** *Three against two on the left!* The commentary is what teaches them to look.

4. **Minute 6 — drinks and one question:** *how do we get three players over there quickly?* The answer is a switch of play, and it connects directly to Session 13.
5. **Minutes 7-13 — add the timing rule:** the double only counts if the goal comes within eight seconds of the overload being created. Now it has to be used, not just built.
6. **Final two minutes — conditions removed.** Watch whether they still move the ball to the free side.

RULES & SCORING

- **Three attackers against two defenders in a wide channel, then a goal from that side = 2 points.**
- From minute 7: **the goal must come within eight seconds** of the overload existing.
- Players may move freely between channels and the middle.
- Keepers restart within eight seconds. No offside.
- Conditions removed for the last two minutes.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	The switch of play — a firm, accurate pass of 25 m or more, usually driven along the ground at this age rather than lofted.
Tactical	Overloads are built by switching, not by running. Three players cannot sprint across a pitch faster than the ball can travel, so the way to create an overload on one side is to attack the other one first. That is the whole idea, and it is the most sophisticated thing in this theme.
Physical	Wide players will run a long way. Substitute them more often than the central players.
Psychological	Some squads will find this genuinely difficult and that is fine — it is a Year 8 idea being introduced at Year 7. Keep the tone light and treat partial success as success.
Social	The player who spots the overload is usually not the one who uses it. Name the spotter.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Everybody following the ball into one channel	The natural under-12 instinct, and the opposite of what creates an overload.
Overloads created and then not used	The eight-second rule at minute 7 fixes it.
Switches being played in the air and taking too long	<i>Along the ground. Faster.</i>
The far-side player drifting inside	Same fault as the warm-up, forty metres higher up the pitch.
Nobody looking up before receiving	You cannot switch to a side you have not looked at. Back to Session 1.
The final two minutes	Does the ball still travel to the free side with nothing scored for it?

ASK THEM

- How do we get three players over there quickly?
- Which side has the space right now?
- Why doesn't running across work?
- Who spotted it?
- How long does the overload last?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Four against three required for the double.	Two against one in the channel counts.
Six seconds to use it.	Twelve seconds to use it.
Larger pitch (58 × 38 m).	Remove the timing rule entirely.
A goal from the crowded side counts nothing.	6 v 6 on 44 × 30 m with rolling substitutes.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Deliberate switches to the free side.

Three players arriving in a channel before the ball does.

Overloads used within a few seconds.

Somebody consistently spotting where the space is.

The ball still travelling to the free side in the last two minutes.

Finish, match day & homework

REFLECTION — 5 MINUTES, SITTING DOWN

- *What makes an extra player useful?* — somebody being occupied.
- *When do you pass in a two-against-one?* When he commits.
- *What's the spare player's job?* Stay wide and wait.
- *How long does an overload last?* About four seconds.
- *How do we create one on the far side?* Switch it — don't run.
- **Name the player who carried at defenders most tonight**, and say plainly that it is a team action rather than a selfish one.
- Finish with next time: *last one of this theme — everything we've built, in a proper game, and then we look at how the season has gone.*

MATCH-DAY LINK

MATCH OBJECTIVES	WATCH FOR	ASK AFTERWARDS
- Carry at a defender whenever we have a spare player. - The spare player stays wide until the pass is made. - Switch the ball to the free side at least three times.	- How many two-against-ones we create and how many we use. Count both. - Whether the ball carrier commits the defender or passes early. - Whether we ever switch to the free side, or attack whichever side the ball happens to be on.	- <i>Did we make them choose?</i> - <i>How many overloads did we waste?</i> - <i>Which side had the space?</i>

HOMEWORK — "CARRY AND RELEASE" · 15 MINUTES, THREE TIMES BEFORE YOU NEXT TRAIN

- **Carry at a marker.** Set a cone 10 m away, dribble straight at it at pace, then push the ball wide and away at the last moment as if passing. Twenty repetitions each side. The technique is a fast, controlled carry followed by a pass played while still moving.
- **Passing on the move.** Dribble in a straight line and, without stopping, side-foot the ball at a target 8 m to your side. Twenty each foot. Nearly every wasted overload is a pass played from a standing start.
- **Watch a game with a job.** Fifteen minutes of any professional match, watching **only what happens when one team has a two-against-one**. Count how often the carrier runs at the defender before passing. It is nearly always, and it is nearly always the reason it works.
- *Optional extra:* watch a switch of play and count the seconds from the ball leaving one side to arriving at the other. It is usually under three, which is why running across never works.

WHERE TO GO NEXT

Same theme — attacking and finishing. These cover the same ground from other angles and can be run in any order, before or after this one: **29** Penetration; **30** Finishing; **32** Creating and Taking Chances.

A natural follow-on. Session 32 — Creating and Taking Chances, and the review page. The summary session for this theme, pulling penetration, finishing and overloads into one game with almost no conditions on it. It closes with this theme exam — a normal match, seven minutes of silence, and four things counted: chances created, shots on target, players in the box, and goals. And then the review, which asks the one question the season has been building towards: are we better at scoring than we were in September?

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.