



SESSION 33 • STANDALONE PLAN

Game Management — The Score and the Clock

Match intelligence • Reference format: U12 9v9 • 60 minutes • 14–16 players

AT A GLANCE

TIME	MINS	PHASE	PRACTICE
0:00 – 0:10	10	■ Warm-up	33.1 The Corner
0:10 – 0:25	15	■ Technical practice	33.2 Seeing It Out
0:25 – 0:40	15	■ Skill game	33.3 The Scoreboard Game
0:40 – 0:55	15	■ Conditioned match	33.4 The Last Ten Minutes
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

Most of this set teaches a squad how to play. These last four teach them when — and the last four sessions are about judgement rather than technique. Tonight is the one every coach recognises: the team is a goal up with five minutes left, and everybody on the touchline can see what is about to happen. The ball keeps getting kicked away and coming straight back. The full-backs are still overlapping. Somebody tries to dribble out of their own box. And with two minutes to go it is 1–1 and nobody understands why. **The score and the clock are information, and under-12 players do not use them.** They play the same way at 3–0 up in the last minute as they do at 0–0 in the first. Learning to read the state of a game is one of the genuinely new things you can give a twelve-year-old, and it costs nothing physically. There is one caution worth stating plainly, though, because it matters more than the football. **This is not a session about time-wasting, and it must not become one.** Keeping the ball in the corner is a skill. Rolling around on the floor is not, and at this age it is the beginning of something ugly. Teach the first and refuse the second, out loud, so the squad knows the difference.

BY THE END, PLAYERS CAN

- **Read the score and the clock** and change how they play accordingly.
- **Keep the ball in safe areas** when ahead and short of time.
- **Take controlled risks** when behind, rather than panicking.
- **Shield the ball and win throw-ins** as a deliberate skill.
- **Make these decisions themselves**, without instruction from the touchline.

KIT LIST

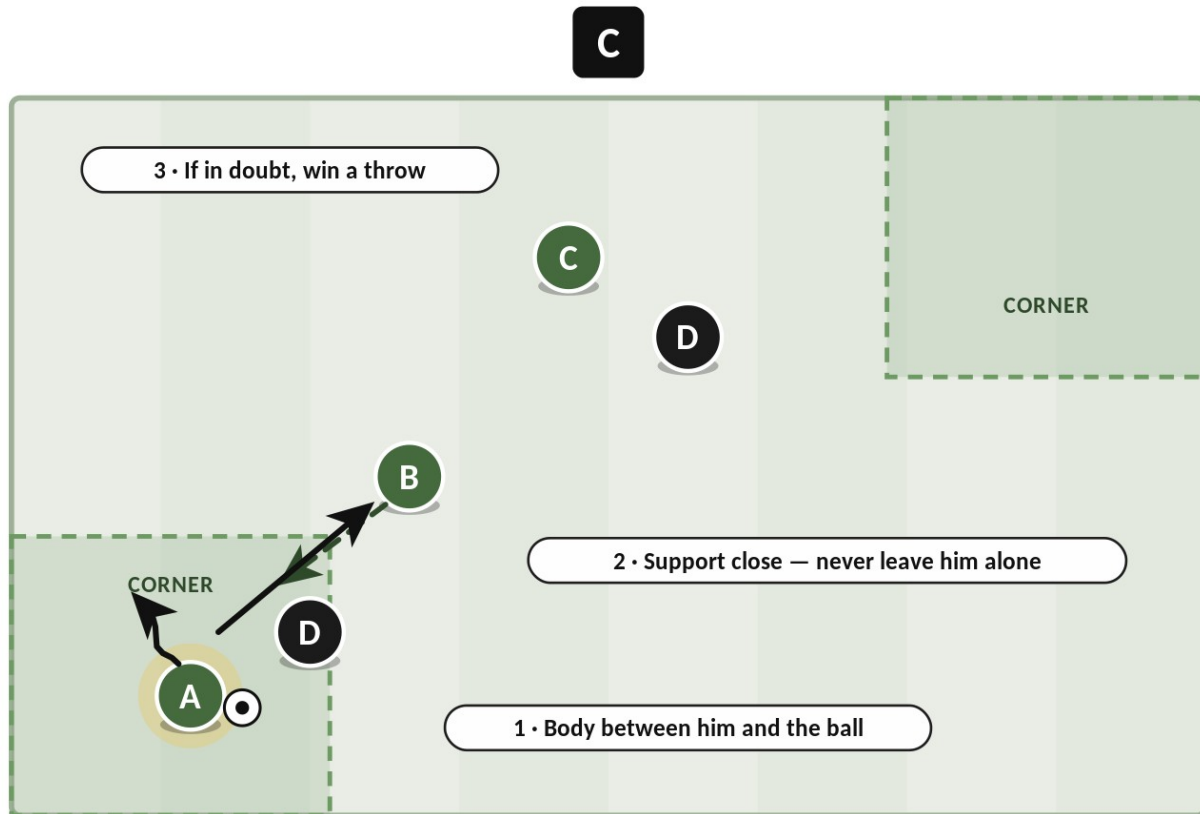
Ground needed: about 60 × 45 m. Say the caution about time-wasting in the first two minutes and mean it: **we keep the ball, we do not waste time**. No going down, no kicking the ball away, no arguing with referees. If a player tries any of it tonight, stop everything and deal with it — one clear conversation now is worth more than ten later. Beyond that, the practical requirement is simple: you need a visible score and a visible clock. Write them on a piece of paper and hold it up. The squad has to be able to see the state of the game without asking.

ITEM	QTY	USED IN
Footballs (size 4)	20	All practices
Flat markers	50	Corners, thirds and pitch edges
Bibs — red / blue / yellow	8 / 8 / 4	Two clear teams plus goalkeepers
Full-size goals	2	33.2, 33.3 and 33.4
Stopwatch or phone	1	Essential tonight — the clock is the whole session
Whiteboard or paper	1	For showing the score and time remaining

33.1 THE CORNER

Shielding and holding the ball in a corner, with support arriving. It is a proper technical skill, it is almost never coached at this age, and it wins matches.

30 x 18 m • threes • keeping the ball where it is safest • 10 minutes



THE CORNER IS THE SAFEST PLACE ON THE PITCH



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SET UP

- 30 × 18 m with a corner zone marked at two opposite corners.
- **Threes: two attackers against one defender**, working in a corner.
- Two groups per corner, rotating every ninety seconds.
- One ball per group.
- Coach in the middle with a stopwatch.

HOW IT RUNS

- Minutes 0–3 — arrival.** Greet each player by name, ball each, dribbling and turning. **Collect the Session 32 homework** — *how many chances per goal did the professionals make?*
- Minute 3 — show the shield once.** Body between the defender and the ball, arm across for balance not for pushing, ball on the far foot. Sixty seconds.

3. **Minutes 4–7 — live.** The pair must keep the ball inside the corner zone for fifteen seconds. The defender tries to win it or force it out.
4. **Minute 7 — one question, twenty seconds.** *What's the second-best outcome if you can't keep it? You want a throw-in to us* — and it is a genuinely new idea for most of them.
5. **Minutes 7–10 — scored.** 1 point for fifteen seconds kept; 1 point for winning a throw; 1 point to the defender for winning it cleanly.

RULES & SCORING

- **Fifteen seconds** in the corner zone scores 1 point.
- **Winning a throw-in** also scores 1 point.
- **No pushing or holding.** The arm is for balance; a foul concedes the point.
- The supporting attacker must stay within about five metres.
- Rotate the defender every ninety seconds.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Low centre of gravity, side-on, ball on the foot furthest from the defender, arm bent across for balance. Small touches, never a big one.
Tactical	The corner is the safest place on the pitch — it is furthest from your own goal, the touchlines do half the defending, and the worst realistic outcome is a throw-in. And the support player is what makes it work ; one player in a corner is trapped, two are in control.
Physical	Isometric and awkward rather than tiring. A good change of stimulus in a warm-up.
Psychological	Some players find shielding uncomfortable because it involves contact. Pair sensibly and be strict about fouls.
Social	This is a two-player skill. Watch for the support arriving and staying, rather than arriving and drifting.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Turning into the defender	<i>Away from him. Ball on the far foot.</i>
Standing upright	<i>Lower. You're twice as hard to move like that.</i>
Pushing with the arm	Free-kick, and say why: <i>balance, not a shove.</i>
The support player standing off	<i>Five metres. He needs an out.</i>
Big touches	<i>Small ones. Never let it get away from you.</i>

ASK THEM

- What's the second-best outcome if you can't keep it?
- Where should the ball be — near foot or far foot?
- Why is the corner safer than the middle?
- How close should your support be?
- What's the difference between shielding and blocking?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Twenty seconds in the corner.	Ten seconds.

HARDER	EASIER
Two defenders against two attackers.	Two attackers against one passive defender.
Smaller corner zone.	Bigger corner zone.
One touch only for the support player.	Add a third attacker.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Low, side-on shielding with the ball on the far foot.

Support arriving and staying close.

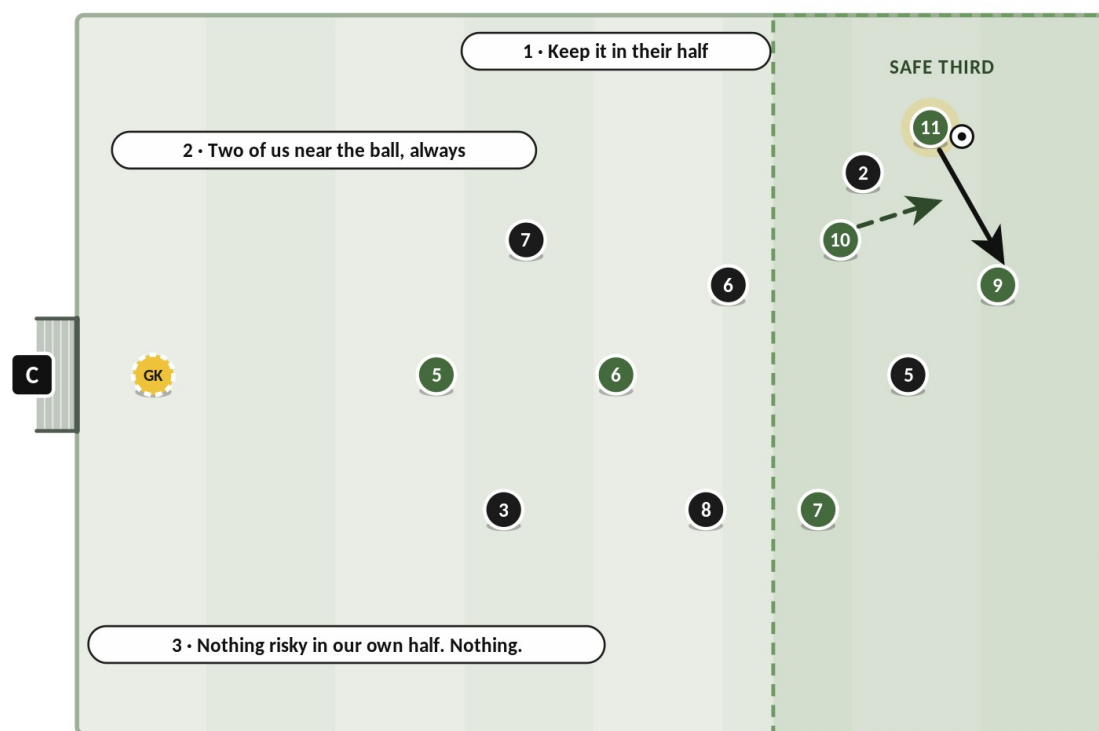
Throw-ins being won deliberately.

No fouls.

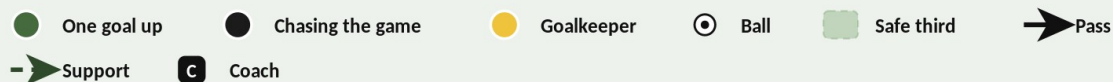
33.2 SEEING IT OUT

One team is a goal up with three minutes left. That is the entire brief. They have to work out — and then practise — what a team ahead and short of time actually does with the ball.

46 x 32 m • six v six • three minutes, one goal ahead, keep it away from your own goal • 15 minutes



AHEAD AND SHORT OF TIME • THE BALL IS THE BEST DEFENDER YOU HAVE



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SET UP

- 46 × 32 m with a **full goal and goalkeeper** at one end only.
- **Six against six.** Reds are a goal up and defending the goal; blues are chasing the game and must score.
- A **safe third marked** at the far end, away from the goal.
- Twelve to fourteen players. Swap roles at the halfway point.
- Coach with a stopwatch, calling the time remaining every thirty seconds.

HOW IT RUNS

- 1. Set it up in 60 seconds.** *Reds, you're one up with three minutes left. Blues, you have to score. Go.*
- 2. Minutes 0–3 — first round, no coaching.** Most red teams will defend deep, kick it away, and concede. Let it happen once.
- 3. Minute 3 — one question, ninety seconds.** *What went wrong?* Guide them to the answer: *we kept giving it back.* Then give them the three rules — keep it in their half, two players near the ball, nothing risky in our own half.
- 4. Minutes 5–10 — repeat with the rules.** Reds score 1 point for every thirty seconds of possession in the far half; blues score 3 for a goal.

5. Minute 10 — swap the roles.

6. Minutes 10–15 — final rounds, with the losing side of the first half getting the reds' job.

RULES & SCORING

- **Three-minute rounds.** Reds start one goal up; blues must score.
- **Reds score 1 point per thirty seconds of possession in the far half. Blues score 3 for a goal.**
- **No time-wasting.** Kicking the ball away, going to ground or delaying a restart concedes a free-kick and a point.
- Throw-ins and goal kicks are taken within five seconds.
- Swap roles at the halfway point.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Shielding, receiving on the back foot facing away from pressure, and the short pass under pressure. Nothing new, all of it under a different kind of stress.
Tactical	The ball is the best defender you have. A team with the ball in the opposition corner cannot concede. And the biggest error is going too deep — a team that drops onto its own box invites twenty minutes of pressure and eventually somebody scores.
Physical	Less running than a normal game for the leading team and much more for the chasing team. Swap on time.
Psychological	This is the most anxious situation in football and it is worth naming: <i>this feels horrible, and the way through it is to hold the ball, not to hide from it.</i>
Social	The leading team needs a calm voice. Notice who provides it — that player is captain material and it will not always be the loudest one.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Kicking it away	The instinct, and the thing that loses the game. <i>Every time you kick it away, they get it back.</i>
Dropping too deep	<i>Push up. Ten metres of grass in front of the ball is worth more than ten behind it.</i>
Playing out from the back when a goal up	Legitimate but risky. Ask them: <i>is this the moment?</i>
One player being isolated with the ball	<i>Two of us near it, always.</i>
Any time-wasting	Stop it immediately and explain the difference once, clearly.
The chasing team going long	Coach them too — a team chasing a game needs its own plan, and hopeful long balls are not one.

ASK THEM

- What went wrong that time?
- Where do we want the ball to be?
- What happens every time we kick it away?
- Should we push up or drop off?
- What's the difference between keeping the ball and wasting time?
- Chasing team — what's your plan?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Two minutes per round.	Four minutes per round.
Blues get a seventh player for the last minute.	Blues play with five.
Reds may not pass backwards.	Give the reds the three rules from the start.
Reds must complete five passes before entering the far half.	Bigger safe third.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

The leading team holding the ball in the far half.

Two players near the ball, consistently.

Fewer clearances and more possessions.

The team not dropping onto its own box.

No time-wasting at all.

44 x 30 m • the coach changes the score and the clock every two minutes • 15 minutes



- One pitch, **44 × 30 m**, both full goals with a goalkeeper in each.
- **Safe corners marked** at both ends of the pitch.
- 6 v 6 outfield plus two goalkeepers (14). With 15–16, roll substitutes every two minutes.
- **Write each new state on paper and hold it up** — *Reds 2–1 up, 5 minutes left.*
- Coach on the halfway line with the stopwatch and the paper.

1. Teams, bibs and keepers in 60 seconds.
2. **Explain in one sentence:** *Every two minutes I'll give you a new score and a new time. Play like it's real.*

3. **Announce five or six states across the fifteen minutes.** Suggested: 0-0, ten minutes • Reds 1-0 up, three minutes • Blues 2-0 up, eight minutes • Reds 1-0 down, two minutes • 2-2, one minute, and a draw is enough for both of you.
4. **Minute 8 — one question:** *what should you be doing right now?* Ask one player from each team and let them disagree.
5. **Minutes 8-15 — continue the states**, and add the awkward one: 2-2, one minute, a draw is enough. Watch two teams both refuse to commit and let them feel how strange it is.
6. **No coaching of the football at all** — only the announcements.

RULES & SCORING

- A new score and time is announced every two minutes and applies immediately.
- Goals count towards the announced score until the next change.
- **No time-wasting**, whatever the state.
- Keepers restart within six seconds.
- The coach says nothing except the announcements.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Note whether the technique changes under different pressures. It should — a team protecting a lead needs its best passing, not its worst.
Tactical	Every state has a right answer and the squad can find most of them. Ahead and short of time: keep it, high and wide. Behind and short of time: risk it, everybody up, press high. Level and content: both of the above, which is why 2-2 with a minute left produces the strangest football of the evening.
Physical	Chasing a game is exhausting. Substitute the chasing team more often than the leading one.
Psychological	The best moment is when a team behind with a minute left gets desperate and concedes on the counter. Do not intervene — say afterwards <i>what did that cost you?</i>
Social	Listen for who organises the change. A squad in which one player says <i>we're one up, keep it</i> has learned something no drill teaches.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
No change in behaviour when the state changes	The whole point. <i>You're one up with two minutes left. Is this how you'd play?</i>
Panic when behind	<i>You've got three minutes. That's ages. Don't throw it away in ten seconds.</i>
The leading team going deep	Same fault as 33.2.
Nobody noticing the announcement	Hold the paper up and say it twice. They will look next time.
Interesting disagreements between players	Let them run. This is exactly the thinking you want.
The 2-2 state	The most instructive two minutes of the session.

ASK THEM

- What should you be doing right now?
- You're two down with eight minutes — is that a lot of time or a little?
- You're one up with two minutes — where do you want the ball?
- A draw is enough for both of you. Now what?
- Who's telling everybody the score?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
A new state every ninety seconds.	A new state every three minutes.
Add a player sent off for one team as a state.	Use only three states — level, one up, one down.
Announce the state to one team only.	Discuss each state for twenty seconds before restarting.
Bigger pitch (50 × 32 m).	Smaller pitch (38 × 28 m).

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Visible changes in behaviour when the state changes.

The leading team keeping the ball high and wide.

The chasing team taking risks without panicking.

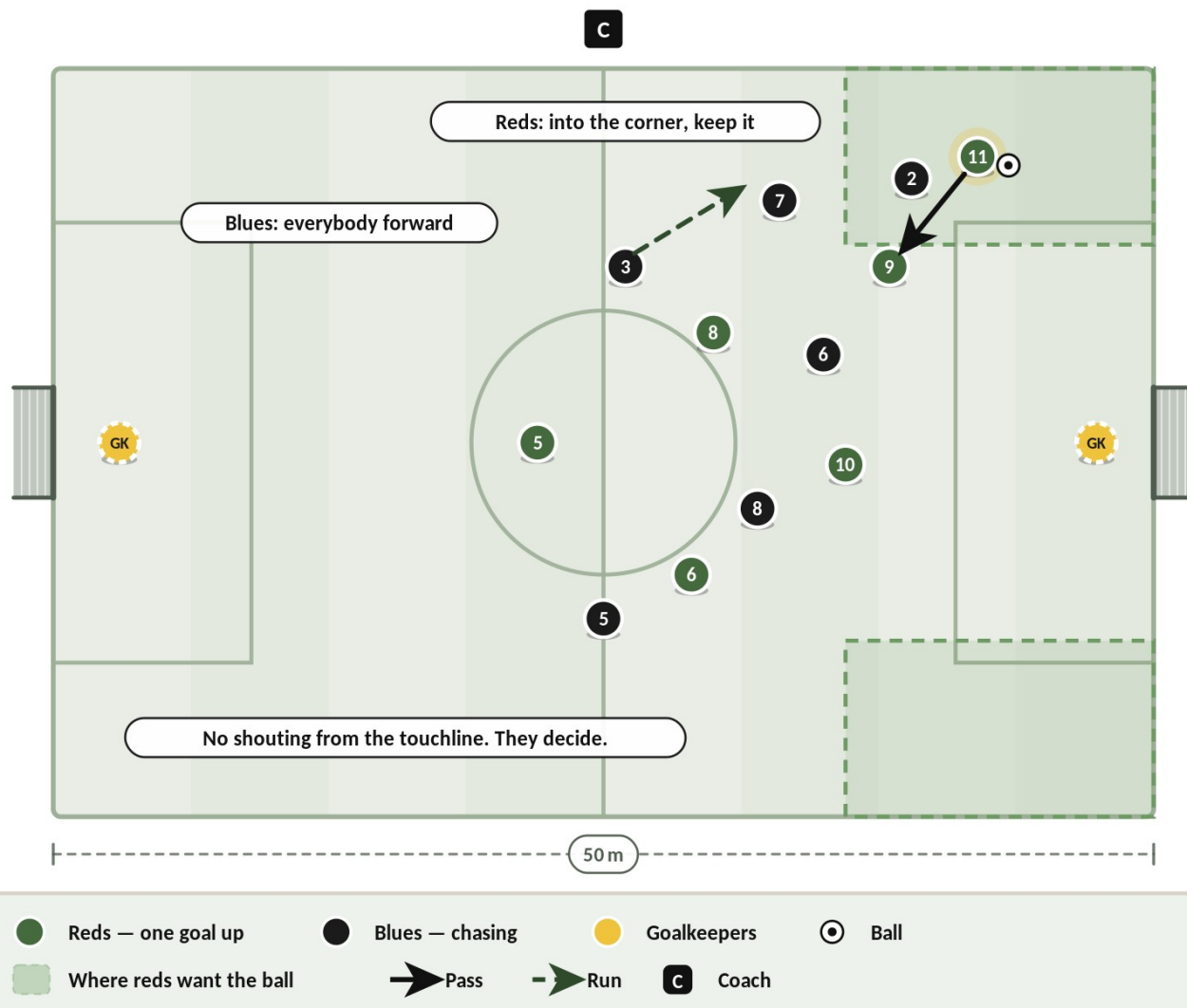
Players announcing the state to each other.

Interesting arguments about what to do.

33.4 THE LAST TEN MINUTES (7 v 7)

One state, ten real minutes, and complete silence from the touchline. Reds are a goal up. Blues have to score. Nobody gets any help, because on Saturday they will not get any either.

50 x 34 m • a real scoreline, a real clock, and no help from the touchline • 15 minutes



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SET UP

- 50 x 34 m with full-size goals and marked boxes.
- 7 v 7 including goalkeepers (14). With 15–16, play 8v8 or roll substitutes every two minutes.
- **Reds start 1–0 up with ten minutes on the clock.** Announce it once.
- **Corner zones marked** at the reds' attacking end.
- Coach on the halfway line, silent, with the stopwatch.

HOW IT RUNS

1. **Teams and state announced in 30 seconds.** *Reds are one up. Ten minutes. Off you go.*
2. **Minutes 0–10 — complete silence from you.** Count only how many times the reds give the ball away cheaply and how many times they hold it in the far half.
3. **Minute 10 — stop, whatever the score.** Read the two numbers out and ask: *what would you do differently?*

4. **Minutes 11–15 — run it again for four minutes** with the same teams and the same state, and see whether the second attempt is better.
5. **Choose the reds carefully:** give the leading role to the group that would find it hardest, not the group that would find it easy.
6. **If the blues equalise, let it stand** and let the reds sit with it. That is the lesson.

RULES & SCORING

- **Reds are one goal up.** Ten minutes, then four more.
- **No time-wasting.** Any of it and the goal is chalked off — the sanction has to be severe enough to be real.
- **The coach says nothing for the full ten minutes.**
- Keepers restart within six seconds regardless of the score.
- No offside.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Passing under anxiety, which is a different skill from passing under pressure. Note who keeps their technique.
Tactical	The three markers: possession in the far half, cheap giveaways, and whether the back line stays up or retreats onto its own goal.
Physical	Chasing a game for ten minutes is genuinely tiring. The blues will need more substitutions.
Psychological	The whole session is here. A twelve-year-old protecting a lead feels something close to fear, and the only cure is having done it before. That is what this fifteen minutes provides.
Social	Silence from you means somebody else has to organise. Whoever does it is your captain, and you should tell them so afterwards.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Cheap giveaways	Count them. It is the number that decides the exercise.
The back line retreating	The most common collapse. It always ends the same way.
Who takes responsibility	Under silence, leadership becomes visible in about ninety seconds.
Any time-wasting	Chalk the goal off. Once is enough.
The blues' plan	A chasing team needs structure too — watch whether they have one or just run forward.
The second attempt	Better or the same? That is the measure of whether the squad can learn inside a session.

ASK THEM

- How many times did we give it away cheaply?
- Where were we holding the ball?
- Did we go deeper as the clock ran down? Why?
- Who was organising?
- Blues — what was your plan?
- What would you do differently?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Fifteen minutes.	Six minutes.
Blues get an extra player for the last three minutes.	Reds two goals up.
Reds may not pass back to the goalkeeper.	Allow one instruction per team per two minutes.
Larger pitch (58 × 38 m).	6 v 6 on 44 × 30 m with rolling substitutes.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Fewer cheap giveaways in the second attempt than the first.

The ball being held in the far half.

The back line not collapsing onto its own goal.

Somebody organising without you.

No time-wasting.

The squad able to say what they would change.

Finish, match day & homework

REFLECTION — 5 MINUTES, SITTING DOWN

- *Where do we want the ball when we're one up with five minutes left?*
- *What happens every time we kick it away?*
- *What's the difference between keeping the ball and wasting time? Make them articulate it.*
- *You're two down with eight minutes — is that a lot of time or a little?*
- *Who tells everybody the score? Somebody has to own it.*
- **Name the player who stayed calmest tonight**, and say specifically what calm looked like.
- Finish with next time: *next time we look at what the other team are doing — and change what we do because of it.*

MATCH-DAY LINK

MATCH OBJECTIVES	WATCH FOR	ASK AFTERWARDS
- When we're ahead late, the ball goes high and wide — not into the stands. - Two players near the ball in the corners. - Somebody says the score out loud at every restart in the last ten minutes.	- Cheap giveaways in the last ten minutes. Count them. - Whether the back line pushes up or retreats when we're ahead. - Whether anybody manages the game — or whether it just happens to them.	- <i>How many times did we give it away at the end?</i> - <i>Where were we trying to keep the ball?</i> - <i>Who was organising us?</i>

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

- **Shield against a wall.** Stand with your back to a wall, ball at your feet, and move it between your feet for thirty seconds while staying low and side-on. Six repetitions. It builds the position, which is most of the skill.
- **Shielding with somebody.** With a family member or friend applying gentle pressure, keep the ball for thirty seconds using your body and small touches. Five repetitions each. Ask them to be a nuisance, not violent.
- **Watch a game with a job.** Fifteen minutes of the **end** of any professional match where one team is ahead. Watch **only what the leading team does with the ball**. Notice how often it goes towards a corner, and how rarely it gets kicked away.
- *Optional extra:* count how many seconds the leading team keeps the ball in the last two minutes. Then decide whether our team could do that.

WHERE TO GO NEXT

Same theme — match intelligence. These cover the same ground from other angles and can be run in any order, before or after this one: **34** Adapting to the Opposition; **35** The Bridge to Eleven-a-Side; **36** The Last Session.

A natural follow-on. Session 34 — Adapting to the Opposition. The other half of match intelligence. What to do when they press high, when they sit deep, when they have one player much better than everybody else, and when they are simply bigger than us. It is the session that teaches a squad to look at the team they are playing rather than only at themselves — and it is the session before the two that bridge to eleven-a-side.

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.