



SESSION 36 • STANDALONE PLAN

The Last Session — A Whole Hour That Belongs to Them

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	36.1 Their Choice
0:10 – 0:25	15	■ Technical practice	36.2 How Far We've Come
0:25 – 0:40	15	■ Skill game	36.3 The Players' Game
0:40 – 0:55	15	■ Conditioned match	36.4 Just Football
0:55 – 1:00	5	■ Reflection	End-of-season review with the players

USING THIS SESSION

This is a standalone plan, and it is the one built to close a season. Run it on the last night before a summer break, whenever your season happens to end — or at any point you want to hand a full hour over to the players and find out what has actually stuck. Nothing in it requires the other thirty-five sessions to have been run.

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

Training is an hour of being told what to do. Tonight they choose the warm-up, they design the skill game, they pick the teams and referee themselves, and the final fifteen minutes have no conditions, no scoring systems and no coaching at all. That is not a reward for good behaviour — it is a genuine test, and it is the most honest one in the curriculum.

Everything the squad has actually learned will appear tonight without being asked for, and everything they have merely complied with will vanish. Watch for the centre-back who splits wide at a goal kick because that is now simply where he stands. The midfielder who checks over her shoulder before receiving. The three who arrive in the box. The player who reacts in the first second after the ball turns over. Nobody will be telling them to do any of it. There is one more thing worth saying, and it is the reason the last five minutes matter more than the other fifty-five. **A season ends properly or it just stops.** Twelve-year-olds remember how things finished far longer than they remember what they were taught, and a squad that is told individually what they have got better at will carry that into next season in a way that no drill can match. Protect those five minutes. Do not let the football overrun them.

BY THE END, PLAYERS CAN

- **Play without instruction** and see what has actually stuck.
- **Take responsibility** for the warm-up, the rules and the refereeing.
- **Recognise their own progress** across a full season.
- **Finish a season deliberately** rather than letting it fade out.
- **Leave wanting to come back** in August.

KIT LIST

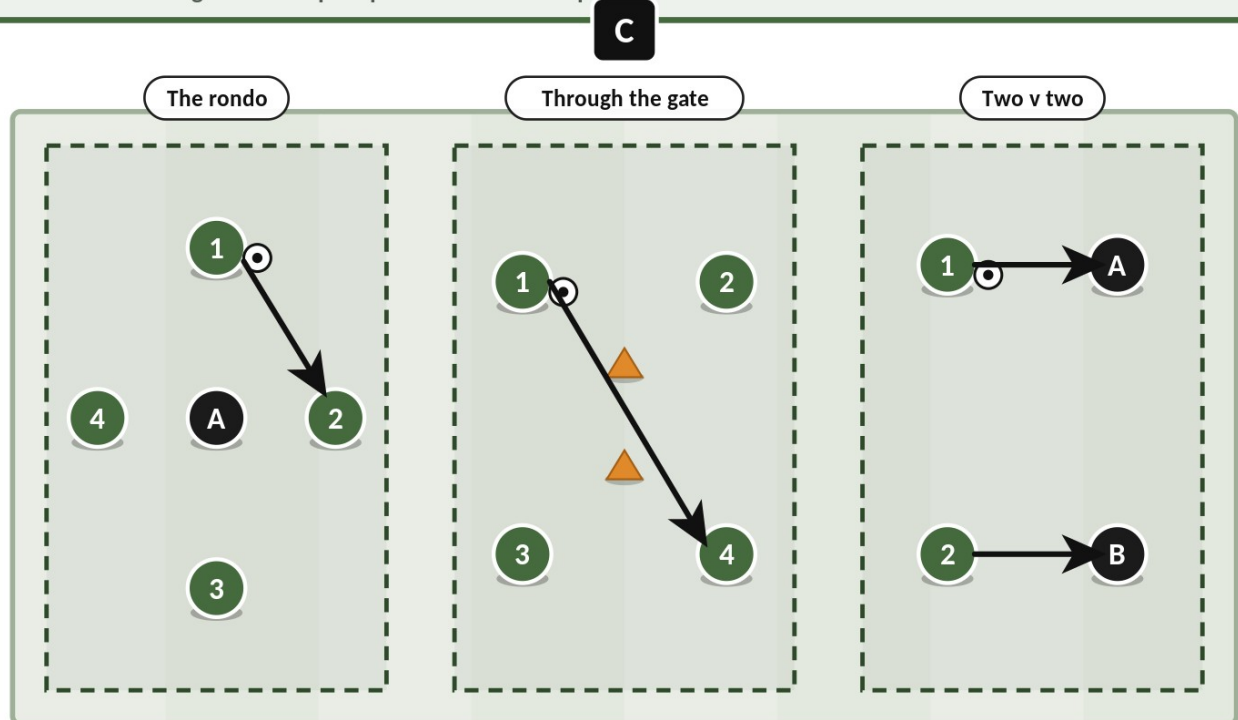
Ground needed: about 60 × 45 m. **Read back through any review pages you have filled in before this session.** You will have forgotten half of what individual players could not do in September, and the specific detail is what makes the final five minutes land — you couldn't turn on your left foot in October is worth a hundred times more than you've done really well. If you want to give the squad something to take away, a printed card with three lines each — one thing you have got better at, one thing to work on over the summer, and one thing you did for the team — costs nothing and gets kept. And one practical note: **finish on time.** A last session that drags because everybody is enjoying it sounds lovely and means the review gets rushed, which is the wrong way round.

ITEM	QTY	USED IN
Footballs (size 4)	20	All practices
Flat markers	50	Grids and zones
Bibs — red / blue / yellow	8 / 8 / 4	Let them pick the teams
Full-size goals	2	36.2 and 36.4
Your notes from any review pages you have filled in	1	The most important item on this list
Something for each player	14–16	Optional — see the setup note

36.1 THEIR CHOICE

The squad picks the warm-up. Offer three from the season, let them vote, and then let them set it up themselves while you stand back and watch how much they remember.

36 x 18 m • three grids • the squad picks which warm-up we do • 10 minutes



THIRTY-SIX WEEKS • THEY KNOW WHICH ONES THEY LIKE

Players
 In the middle
 Ball
 Gate
 Pass
 C Coach

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SET UP

- 36 × 18 m with three grids marked, or let them mark them.
- Offer three warm-ups from the season — a rondo, a passing-through-gates practice, a two-against-two.
- They vote, they set it up, they explain the rules to each other.
- Balls and markers available; nothing pre-arranged.
- Coach standing back.

HOW IT RUNS

- Minutes 0–3 — arrival.** Greet each player by name, ball each. **Collect the Session 35 homework** — *which position would you like to try, and what would you need to get better at?* Write the answers down; they are useful in August.
- Minute 3 — the vote.** Name the three options, take a show of hands, and accept the result without editing it.
- Minutes 4–5 — they set it up.** Say nothing, even if it is slightly wrong. A grid that is two metres too big does not matter.
- Minutes 5–10 — they run it.** Your only job is to watch and to notice what has become automatic.
- One question at the end, twenty seconds:** *why did you pick that one?* The answer is usually *because it's fun*, which is a perfectly good reason and worth saying so.

RULES & SCORING

- **The squad chooses**, by vote, and the vote stands.
- **They set it up and explain it themselves.**
- The coach does not correct the organisation unless it is unsafe.
- Everybody plays; nobody sits out.
- Ten minutes and then it stops, whatever is happening.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Whatever the chosen practice contains. Note the quality rather than coaching it.
Tactical	Nothing tonight.
Physical	A warm-up. Make sure they actually warm up rather than standing about voting for five minutes.
Psychological	Being trusted to organise is a bigger deal to a twelve-year-old than it looks. Some will take to it immediately and some will find it uncomfortable.
Social	Watch who leads the set-up. It is frequently not the best player and frequently not the loudest one.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Who organises	The most interesting thing in the ten minutes.
Whether the explanation is clear	Explaining a practice is a real skill and some of them will be good at it.
Arguments about the rules	Let them resolve it. Only intervene if it stalls completely.
What has become automatic	Body shape, scanning, first touch — all of it visible without being asked for.
Somebody being left out of the decision	The one thing worth stepping in for.

ASK THEM

- Why did you pick that one?
- Who set it up?
- Is it the same as we used to do it, or have you changed it?
- What would you change about it?
- Which one did you nearly pick?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
No options offered — they propose the warm-up themselves.	Two options rather than three.
Two groups running two different warm-ups.	Coach sets it up , squad runs it.
One player nominated to run it entirely.	Coach names the rules , squad plays.
They must include something from each half of the season.	Shorter — five minutes if the organising takes too long.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

The squad organising it themselves.

Somebody explaining it clearly.

Technique visible without instruction.

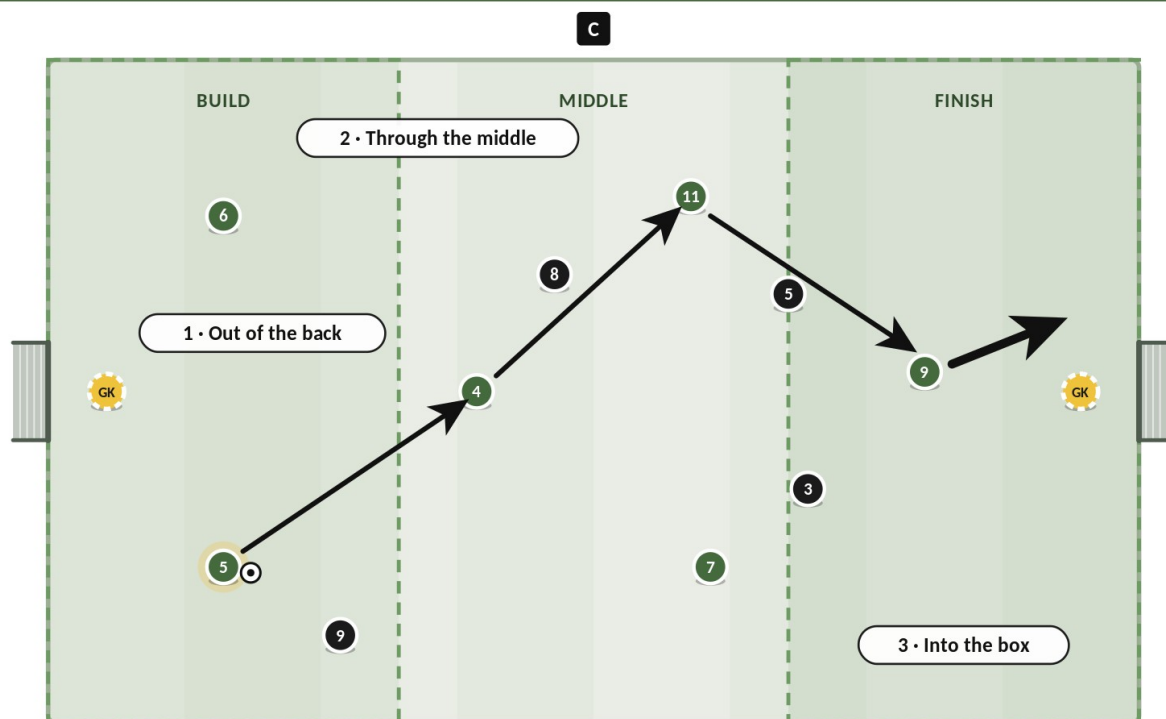
Nobody excluded from the decision.

It starting within two minutes of the vote.

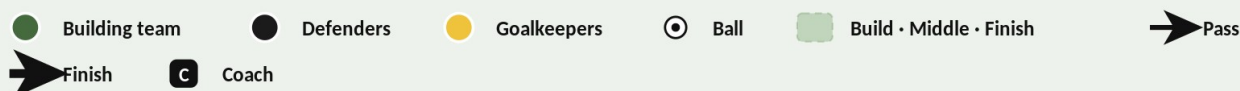
36.2 HOW FAR WE'VE COME

One practice containing a full season. Build out of the back, cross the middle third, finish in the final third — Blocks 5, 4 and 8 in a single move, with the transitions of this theme whenever it breaks down.

56 x 34 m • build out, cross the middle, finish • one practice containing nine months • 15 minutes



EVERY BLOCK OF THE SEASON, IN ONE MOVE



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SET UP

- 56 x 34 m divided into three zones — build, middle, finish — with a full goal and goalkeeper at each end.
- Six against four, with the four defenders spread across the middle and finishing zones.
- Twelve to fourteen players. Rotate the defenders every three minutes.
- Every attack starts with the goalkeeper.
- Coach beside the halfway line.

HOW IT RUNS

1. Set it up in 90 seconds. Start with the keeper. Get out of the back, cross the middle, score. Same as always.
2. Minutes 0–5 — no coaching at all. Watch which theme shows up strongest and which has faded.
3. Minute 5 — one question: *which bit of that was hardest?* Their answer tells you what to start with in August.
4. Minutes 5–11 — scored. 1 point for getting out of the build zone, 1 for crossing the middle in control, 2 for a goal. Announce all three totals.
5. Minute 11 — add the transition: when the defenders win it, they have eight seconds to score in the far goal, and the attackers have five seconds to win it back. Blocks 6 and 7 join the practice.
6. Minutes 11–15 — full speed with rotation, and no coaching beyond the score.

RULES & SCORING

- Every attack starts with the goalkeeper.
- 1 point for leaving the build zone in control, 1 for crossing the middle, 2 for a goal.
- From minute 11: **defenders score 2 for a counter within eight seconds**; attackers score 1 for winning it back within five.
- Twenty seconds per attack.
- Rotate four players into defence every three minutes.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Everything. This practice is a technical audit and you should treat it as one — watch rather than correct.
Tactical	The whole season is one move. Say it once at the end: getting out, getting through, getting in. Every block fits into one of those three, and the squad now has an answer for all three.
Physical	Demanding but familiar. Rotate on schedule.
Psychological	Some squads will play this beautifully and some will be scrappy on the last night of the season. Neither means very much — tiredness, weather and end-of-term excitement all play a part.
Social	Listen for the vocabulary. Nine months of phrases — <i>man on, time, switch it, press, follow it in</i> — should be audible without prompting.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Which block is strongest	It is usually the one you enjoyed coaching most, which is worth knowing about yourself.
Which block has faded	That is August's starting point.
The vocabulary	Count how many of the fifty phrases you hear.
Who organises the build-up	Your captain, one more time.
Reaction at the turnover	this theme, unprompted.
Bodies in the box	this theme, unprompted.

ASK THEM

- Which bit of that was hardest?
- Which bit do we do best?
- What would you want to work on first next season?
- How many of our words did you hear?
- What's the difference between this and September?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Six against five.	Six against three.
Fifteen seconds per attack.	Thirty seconds per attack.
Two touches in the middle zone.	Remove the transition rules.
Both transitions live from the start.	Two zones rather than three.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Recognisable build-up from the goalkeeper.

The middle third being crossed in control.

Bodies arriving in the box.

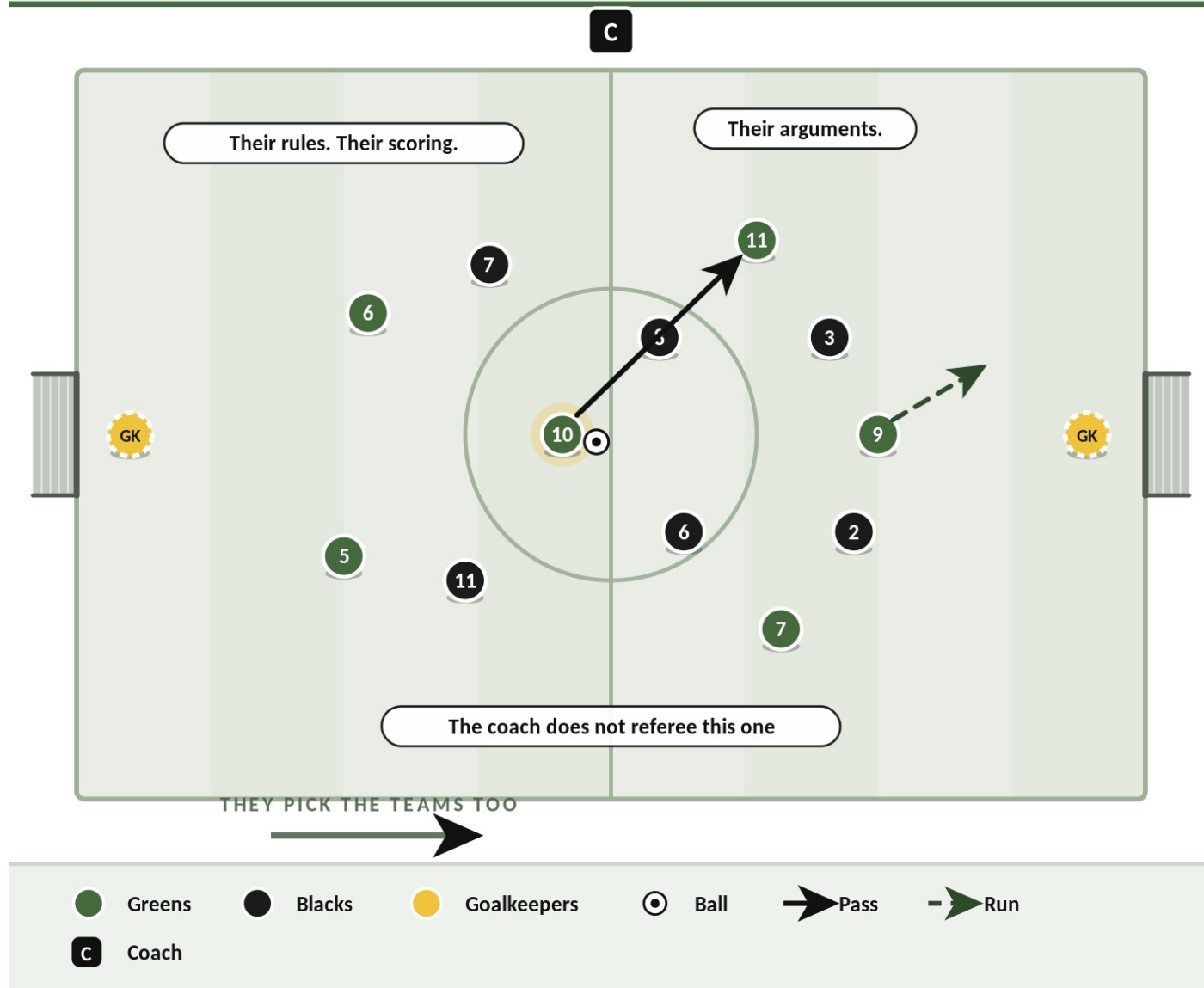
Transitions being reacted to without instruction.

The season's vocabulary audible throughout.

36.3 THE PLAYERS' GAME (6 v 6 + GKs)

They design it. Pitch size, teams, rules, scoring, and refereeing — all of it theirs. Your entire job is to time it and to keep your mouth shut, which is considerably harder than it sounds.

44 x 30 m • they choose the rules, they referee it, and it counts • 15 minutes



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SET UP

- One pitch, roughly 44 × 30 m, both goals with goalkeepers.
- **The squad picks the teams** — and it is worth insisting the two captains are chosen by lot rather than by reputation.
- **The squad chooses the rules:** any conditions from the season, any scoring system, any pitch adjustment.
- **The squad referees.** You do not.
- Coach with a stopwatch and nothing else.

HOW IT RUNS

- 1. Minutes 0–3 — the design.** Two captains drawn at random pick teams; the group agrees the rules. Give them three minutes and hold the line on it.

2. **Minutes 3–13 — they play.** No coaching, no refereeing, no comment on the rules however odd they are.
3. **Minute 8 — one intervention only**, and only if the game has broken down entirely. Otherwise nothing.
4. **Minutes 13–15 — one question to the group:** *was that a good game? What would you change?* Then let them finish it.
5. **Expect the rules to be strange.** *Goals only count from outside the box* is a real thing an under-12 squad will vote for, and letting it happen is the point.
6. **Note who resolves disagreements**, because that is a genuine leadership signal.

RULES & SCORING

- **The squad decides everything** except the pitch and the time.
- **The squad referees.** The coach does not adjudicate anything.
- Captains are drawn at random, not chosen.
- Three minutes to design it, then it starts whether or not it is finished.
- The coach may intervene once, and only if the game has stopped.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Nothing.
Tactical	Nothing.
Physical	Nothing.
Psychological	This is the practice where you find out what kind of squad you have. How they pick teams, how they treat the weakest player in the selection, and how they handle a disputed decision all happen in the next fifteen minutes.
Social	Everything. Watch the team selection especially closely — it is the moment that most reveals a squad's culture, and if it goes badly it is worth a quiet conversation another day.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
How they pick teams	The single most revealing thing you will see all season.
Who is picked last and how they are treated	
Who resolves arguments	Leadership, unprompted.
Whether the rules they choose are from the season	Most squads pick two or three conditions they enjoyed, which tells you what landed.
Whether they can referee themselves	Most can, better than adults expect.
Your own urge to intervene	Notice it and resist it.

ASK THEM

- Was that a good game?
- What would you change about the rules?
- How did you decide the teams?
- Did the refereeing work?
- Which of our conditions did you pick? Why that one?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
No coach present at all — stand thirty metres away.	Coach picks the teams , squad picks the rules.
They must use three conditions from the season.	Offer a menu of five conditions to choose from.
They must include everybody equally and work out how.	Coach referees , squad does everything else.
Two smaller games designed independently.	Two minutes to design rather than three.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Teams picked without anybody being humiliated.

Rules agreed within three minutes.

Disagreements resolved by the players.

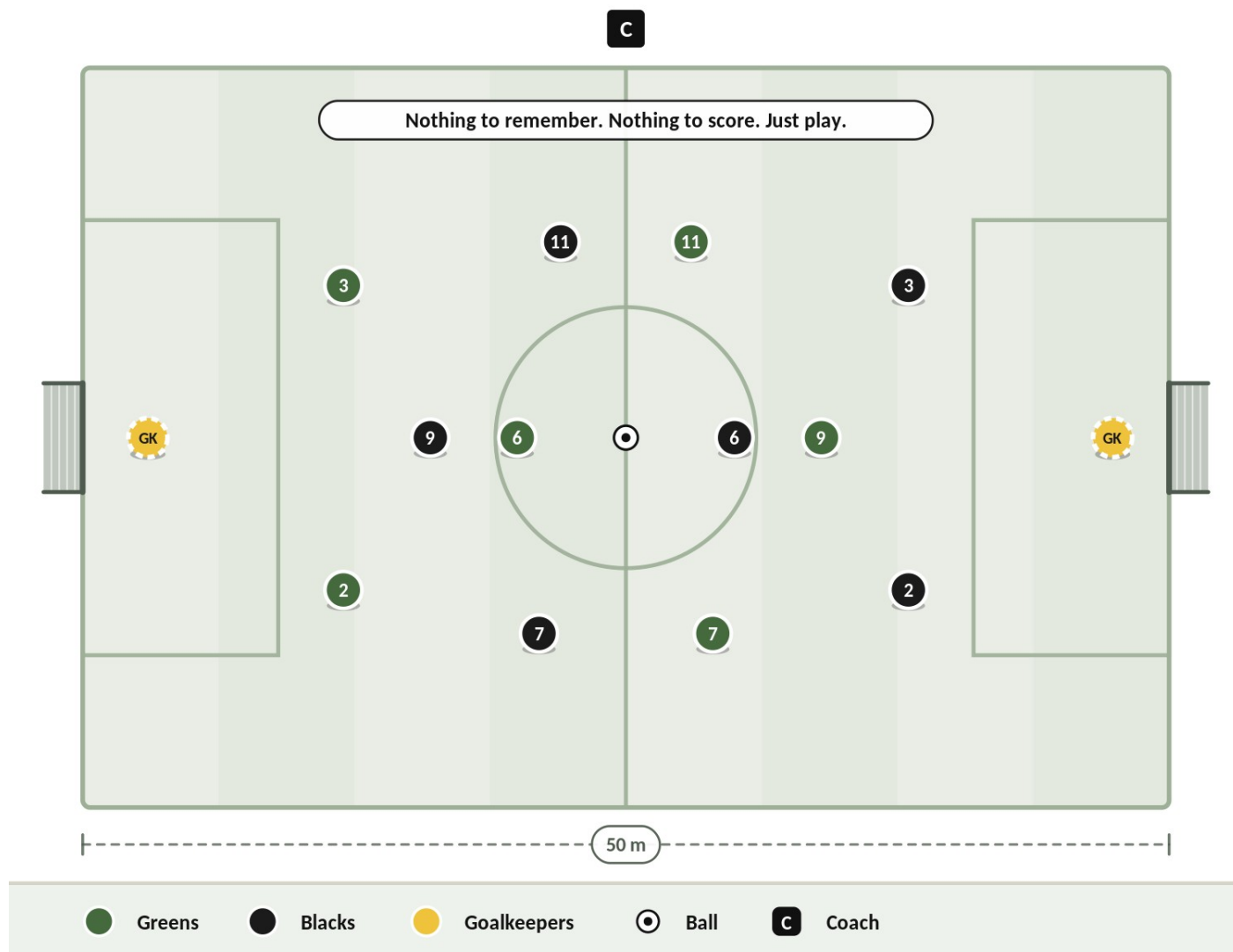
A game that actually works.

The coach saying nothing for ten minutes.

36.4 JUST FOOTBALL (7 v 7)

No conditions. No scoring systems. No coaching. Fifteen minutes of football on the last night of the season, and the most informative fifteen minutes of the whole year — because everything that appears now, appeared without being asked for.

50 x 34 m • no conditions • no scoring systems • no coaching • 15 minutes



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SET UP

- 50 × 34 m with full-size goals and marked boxes.
- 7 v 7 including goalkeepers (14). With 15–16, play 8v8 or roll substitutes freely.
- **No shape assigned.** Let them arrange themselves.
- Spare balls behind both goals.
- **Coach on the halfway line with a notebook, and silent.**

HOW IT RUNS

1. **Teams in 30 seconds** — keep the ones from 36.3 if they worked.
2. **Say one sentence:** *That's it. Just play.* Then stop talking for fifteen minutes.

3. **Minutes 0–15 — write down everything you see that they were not taught to do tonight.** Split centre-backs. A scan before receiving. Somebody following a shot in. A full-back holding width. Three in the box. A reaction in the first second after a turnover.
4. **Do not stop it, do not correct anything, and do not celebrate anything either.** Just watch.
5. **Finish exactly on time**, with five minutes still available.
6. **Then bring them into the middle of the pitch and sit them down** for the review. Do not do it standing by the bags.

RULES & SCORING

- **No conditions at all.**
- Normal football, normal restarts, normal goals.
- **The coach says nothing for fifteen minutes.**
- Substitutions handled by the players.
- It stops on time.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Everything, unprompted. Write it down.
Tactical	Everything, unprompted. Write that down too.
Physical	Last session of the year — expect it to be either flat or wild. Both are fine.
Psychological	Fifteen silent minutes at the end of a season is a strange and rather good experience for a coach. Use it.
Social	Listen to how they talk to each other now compared with September. It is usually the biggest change of all and the one nobody plans for.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
What appears without being asked for	The entire point. Every item on that list is something they have genuinely learned.
What has vanished	Equally useful, and it is August's plan.
The vocabulary	
How they treat each other after a mistake	The single best measure of a season's coaching.
Who has changed most since September	Have the name ready for the review.
Whether they are enjoying it	If the last fifteen minutes of the season are joyless, that is worth thinking about over the summer.

ASK THEM

- Nothing during the game.
- Afterwards: *did you notice how much of that you did without anybody telling you?*
- *What are you best at now that you couldn't do in September?*
- *What do you want to work on in the summer?*
- *What was the best session of the year?*
- *What do you want more of next season?*

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Twenty minutes if the light and the legs allow.	Ten minutes and a longer review.
Bigger pitch to carry Session 35 forward.	Smaller pitch if the squad is tired.
Let them play 8v8 with rolling subs and no coach involvement at all.	Two shorter games with a break between.
Play until somebody scores five.	Mixed teams rather than the ones from 36.3.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

A long list in the notebook.

Habits from every block appearing unprompted.

The squad talking to each other constantly.

Mistakes met with encouragement rather than groans.

It finishing on time with five minutes left for the review.

Finish, match day & homework

REFLECTION — 5 MINUTES, SITTING DOWN

- **Sit them down in the middle of the pitch.** Not by the bags, not while packing up.
- *What can you do now that you couldn't do in September?* Take an answer from every single player, however short.
- *What was the best session of the year?* — and remember the answer for next season.
- *What do you want to work on over the summer?*
- **Then give each of them one specific thing you have seen them get better at.** Use your review notes so it is precise: *you couldn't turn on your left foot in October and now you do it without thinking.* Every player, by name, no exceptions.
- **Then one thing they have done for the team** that has nothing to do with ability — turning up, encouraging, running back, being kind to a new player.
- **Finish with the truth:** thirty-six sessions, a lot of running, and a squad that plays a completely different game from the one they played in September. Then tell them when pre-season starts and let them go.

MATCH-DAY LINK

MATCH OBJECTIVES	WATCH FOR	ASK AFTERWARDS
- Play. There is nothing to prove and nothing left to add. - Enjoy the last one — say so out loud before kick-off. - Thank the referee and the opposition properly, because it is the last chance this season.	- Everything that appears without instruction. It is the honest record of the year. - How the squad treats each other in a match that does not matter. - Which players you are already looking forward to coaching again.	- <i>What are you proudest of this season?</i> - <i>What was the best thing that happened?</i> - <i>What do you want to be better at by August?</i>

HOMEWORK — "THE SUMMER" · WHATEVER THEY LIKE, AS OFTEN AS THEY LIKE

- **Play.** In a park, in a garden, in the street, at a summer club, with older cousins, against a wall. Unstructured football over a summer does more for a twelve-year-old than any programme, and the players who come back sharpest in August are almost always the ones who played most for fun.
- **One thing each.** Every player has been given one thing to work on. Fifteen minutes, three times a week, is plenty — and the whole point is that it is theirs rather than the team's.
- **Watch a tournament.** If there is a major tournament this summer, watch some of it properly with one job in mind each time: the shape of a team without the ball, what a striker does when the ball is on the other side, how a full-back defends a winger.
- *And the real one:* come back in August. That is the whole homework.

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: **33** Game Management; **34** Adapting to the Opposition; **35** The Bridge to Eleven-a-Side.

Run this one as a season finale, a mid-season checkpoint, or a first night with a new group. It is built to be the session where a squad plays rather than practises, and where the coach finds out what has actually stuck. The review page at the back works at any point in a year — it is a picture of where a squad stands, not a school report on a term.

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.

Review — where the squad stands on match intelligence

Take an hour on this, on your own, within a day or two of running it — and do it with your review notes in front of you. It is the most valuable hour a grassroots coach spends all year, and almost nobody does it. Two honest questions govern the whole thing: are they better players than they were in September, and do they still want to play?

WHAT YOU SHOULD BE SEEING

AREA	WHAT YOU SHOULD NOW BE SEEING
this theme • The Individual	Scanning, first touch, passing with purpose, travelling with the ball. The foundation. If it is not automatic now, it is the first month of next season.
this theme • The Duel	One against one attacking and defending. The most personal block of the season and the one that most changes a player's confidence.
this theme • The Partnership	Wall passes, overlaps, third-man runs, combinations. Two players solving a problem together.
this theme • The Team in Possession	Width, depth, support angles, playing forward, keeping it under pressure. The block that made them look like a team.
this theme • Building from the Back	The goalkeeper's feet, the first line, the six, and the nerve to go again. The block that most changes how a team looks.
this theme • Transitions	The three seconds either side of the ball changing hands. The block that connects all the others.
this theme • Defending as a Team	Press, cover, balance; the compact block; the wide areas; the box. The block that made them hard to play against.
this theme • Attacking and Finishing	Three ways in, the cutback, side-footing the finish, overloads, and chances rather than goals.
this theme • Match Intelligence	Reading the score, the clock and the opposition — and a first look at eleven-a-side.

SQUAD AUDIT — FILL THIS IN

QUESTION	PLAYERS
Which three players have improved most? What specifically changed for each of them?	
Which player has improved least, and is it ability, opportunity, enjoyment, or growth?	
Who is your captain — the player who organises without being asked? Do they know?	
Which block landed best? Which faded fastest? Why do you think that is?	
How many of the fifty phrases are in regular use?	
What is your chance count now compared with the first match you counted it?	
Is there a player who has quietly stopped enjoying it? What are you going to do about it?	
Which position does each player want to try next season? You	

QUESTION	PLAYERS
asked in Session 35 — read the answers again.	
What did you enjoy coaching most? And what did you avoid?	
Has anybody left during the season? Do you know why?	

IF THE SQUAD HAS THIS COMFORTABLY

- **Start next season with this theme again, briefly.** Two or three weeks of scanning and first touch after a summer off is never wasted, and the squad will be quicker through it the second time.
- **Carry the four measures forward:** short-to-long goal-kick ratio, reaction time at turnovers, players-to-the-ball when defending, and chances created. Four numbers, all countable from the touchline.
- **Rotate positions deliberately in pre-season.** Use the answers from Session 35 and let everybody try the thing they asked for at least once.
- **Add set pieces.** This curriculum has deliberately not covered corners and free-kicks, and at eleven-a-side they are worth real goals.
- **Introduce offside properly** in the first month, statically first and then in games. It takes longer than anybody expects.
- **Keep the homework habit.** The players who did it are visibly further on than the ones who did not, and it costs you nothing.

IF THE SQUAD IS STRUGGLING

- **Repeat a block rather than moving on.** There is no rule that says a curriculum must be finished. A squad that needs this theme again should have this theme again.
- **Check whether the squad is physically ready** for what you are asking. A lot of apparent unwillingness is tiredness, growth, or twelve-year-olds who have grown four inches since Christmas.
- **Look hard at enjoyment before anything technical.** A squad that has stopped enjoying it will not learn anything, and the fix is almost never a better session plan.
- **Consider the group size.** Fourteen to sixteen is a good number; if it has grown beyond eighteen, the sessions in this curriculum will need a second coach or splitting.
- **Be honest about your own coaching.** The themes you rushed are the ones that faded. That is not a criticism — it is just information, and it tells you what to prepare more carefully next year.
- **Talk to the parents once, properly, before next season.** The sideline undoes more coaching than anything on this list, and one clear conversation in August is worth a season of wincing.

CARRY THIS FORWARD

The three things that matter more than any of the football: that they still want to play, that they treat each other well, and that they are not frightened of making a mistake.

The measure that summarises the year: what appeared in Session 36.4 when nobody was coaching. That list is the real record of what you achieved.

Thirty-six sessions, nine themes, one squad. They started the season looking at their feet and finished it looking up. Whatever the results column says, that is the job done — and it is worth writing down somewhere before the summer takes the details away.