



SESSION A1 • STANDALONE PLAN

Attacking Set Pieces — The Chances We Are Given

Set pieces • Reference format: U12 9v9 • 60 minutes • 14–16 players

AT A GLANCE

TIME	MINS	PHASE	PRACTICE
0:00 – 0:10	10	■ Warm-up	A1.1 Striking the Dead Ball
0:10 – 0:25	15	■ Technical practice	A1.2 The Corner
0:25 – 0:40	15	■ Skill game	A1.3 Wide Free-Kicks and Long Throws
0:40 – 0:55	15	■ Conditioned match	A1.4 The Restart Match
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

The main curriculum deliberately leaves set pieces out, on the grounds that thirty-six sessions are better spent on the game than on routines. That is the right call for a season — and it leaves a real gap, because **a corner is the only moment in football when you get a free delivery into the box with everybody in position and nobody allowed to touch the ball first.** At nine-a-side a meaningful share of goals come from restarts, and almost none of them are planned.

Watch a typical under-12 corner: one player hits it hopefully, three stand still on the penalty spot, nobody is on the near post, nobody is on the edge, and nobody at all has stayed back for the counter that follows. The whole thing is solvable in a single session, and it stays solved, because a routine that four players know is a routine that survives the summer.

There is a design principle worth stating before you start. Do not build clever routines. Build one corner, one wide free-kick and one long throw, with four named jobs each, and drill them until everybody knows their own. Complexity is what makes set pieces fail at this age — not lack of imagination.

BY THE END, PLAYERS CAN

- **Strike a dead ball two ways** — driven and whipped — with some accuracy.
- **Know the four jobs at a corner** — near post, middle, back post, edge.
- **Attack the ball** rather than waiting for it to arrive.
- **Deliver a wide free-kick and a long throw** to the right area.
- **Always leave one player for the counter.**

KIT LIST

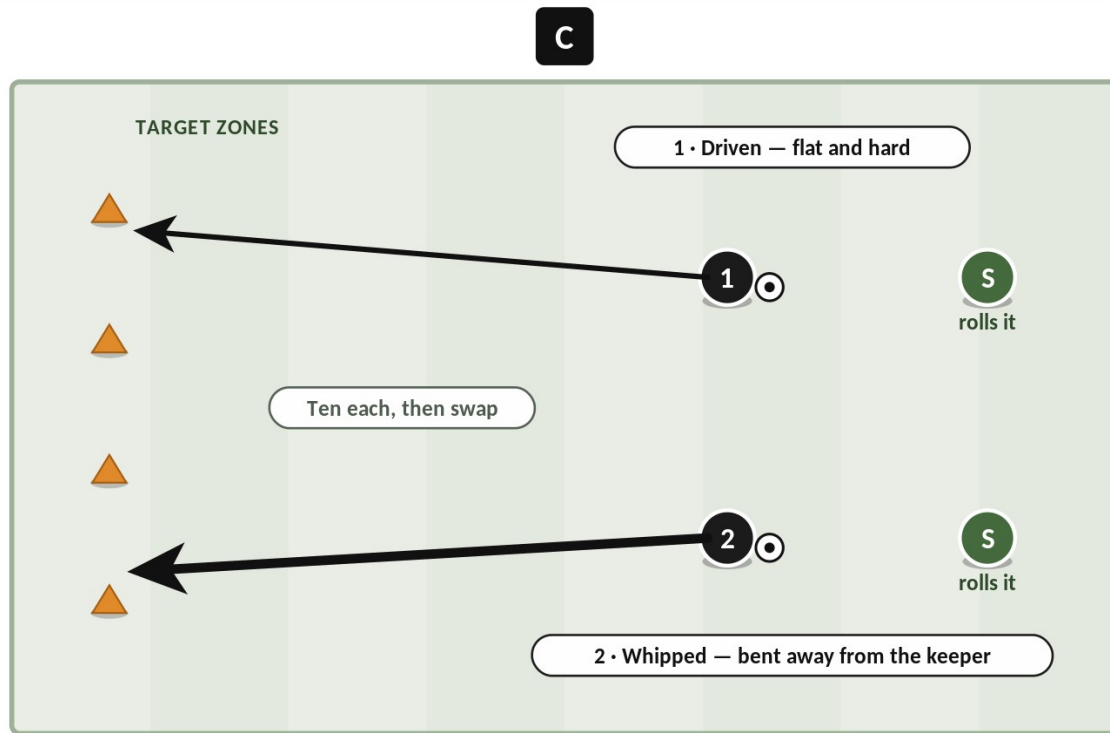
Ground needed: about 55 × 40 m, and ideally a properly marked penalty area — set-piece work is much harder to coach on a blank field. **Where to use this session:** it slots in anywhere from about Session 20 onwards, once the squad can strike a ball with some range and knows what a near post is. It also works perfectly as a pre-tournament session, and as the session you run when the pitch is half frozen and you need something with less running in it. **One warning.** Set-piece sessions can become fifty minutes of standing about. Keep two balls moving at every station, keep the queues to three, and if a routine is not working after four attempts, simplify it rather than explaining it again.

ITEM	QTY	USED IN
Footballs (size 4)	20	Set-piece work eats balls — bring every one you have
Flat markers	44	Target zones, box markings and the danger area
Bibs — red / blue / yellow	8 / 8 / 4	Two clear teams plus goalkeepers
Full-size goals	2	A1.2, A1.3 and A1.4
Cones	8	Target zones in the warm-up
Goalkeeper gloves	2 pairs	Both keepers are busy tonight

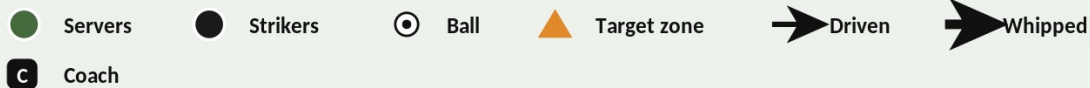
A1.1 STRIKING THE DEAD BALL

Two techniques, twenty repetitions each. The driven ball — flat, hard, across the box — and the whipped ball that bends away from the goalkeeper. Most under-12 players have never been shown that these are different skills.

34 x 20 m • pairs • the only ball in football nobody is allowed to disturb • 10 minutes



A DEAD BALL IS THE ONLY FREE SHOT YOU EVER GET



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SET UP

- 34 × 20 m with four target zones marked with cones along one end.
- Pairs — one rolls the ball out, one strikes it from a standing start.
- Three or four pairs working at once, at least 8 m apart for safety.
- As many balls as you can find; a bucket at each striking point.
- Coach walking between pairs.

HOW IT RUNS

- Minutes 0–3 — arrival.** Greet each player by name, ball each, dribbling and gentle striking. **Ask one question at the door:** *when did we last score from a corner?* Most squads cannot remember, which sets the session up.
- Minute 3 — the driven ball, ninety seconds.** Non-kicking foot beside the ball, laces through the middle, head still and over it. Flat and hard. Ten each.
- Minute 5 — the whipped ball, ninety seconds.** Inside of the foot across the bottom half, non-kicking foot slightly behind, follow through across the body. It bends away from the keeper.

4. **Minute 7 — one question, twenty seconds.** *Which one do you use for a corner?* Either — but a whipped ball away from the keeper is safer, because a driven ball that goes wrong ends up in his hands.
5. **Minutes 7-10 — scored.** 1 point per ball landing in a target zone, 2 for the whipped one. Both feet if anybody can.

RULES & SCORING

- **Dead ball, standing start** — no rolling deliveries.
- **1 point** for a driven ball in a target zone, **2** for a whipped one.
- Ten repetitions of each technique before scoring starts.
- Strikers and servers swap every ten balls.
- Nobody strikes a ball until the area in front of them is clear.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Driven: laces, through the middle, head over it, follow through low. Whipped: inside of the foot, across the bottom half, follow through across the body. The difference is where on the ball you strike it, not how hard.
Tactical	Away from the goalkeeper, every time. A ball that bends towards the keeper is a catch; the same ball bending away is a header. It is the single most useful thing to say about corner delivery at this age.
Physical	Light. Watch for anybody striking dead balls repeatedly with poor technique — it is one of the few genuine overuse risks at this age.
Psychological	Everybody wants to be the taker. Let everybody try, and choose the takers on evidence at the end of the session rather than on reputation.
Social	Servers should be counting and calling the score. It keeps the queue engaged.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Trying to hit it as hard as possible	<i>Accuracy first. A perfect ball at half pace beats a rocket into the stand.</i>
Leaning back	The cause of every ball over the bar. <i>Head over it.</i>
No follow-through	<i>Finish the swing. That's where the bend comes from.</i>
Everybody wanting to be the taker	Fine — but everybody does the reps.
Balls being struck into a queue	Stop it immediately. Safety first at every set-piece station.

ASK THEM

- Which one would you use for a corner? Why?
- What's the difference between the two techniques?
- Where do you strike the ball for each?
- Why away from the keeper rather than towards him?
- Which foot is your better one for this?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Smaller target zones.	Bigger target zones.
Weak foot only for two minutes.	Shorter distance (14 m).

HARDER	EASIER
Longer distance (25 m).	Driven ball only.
Moving target — a teammate arriving rather than a cone.	A stationary teammate to aim at rather than a zone.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Two visibly different techniques.

A reasonable proportion landing in the zones.

Heads staying down through the strike.

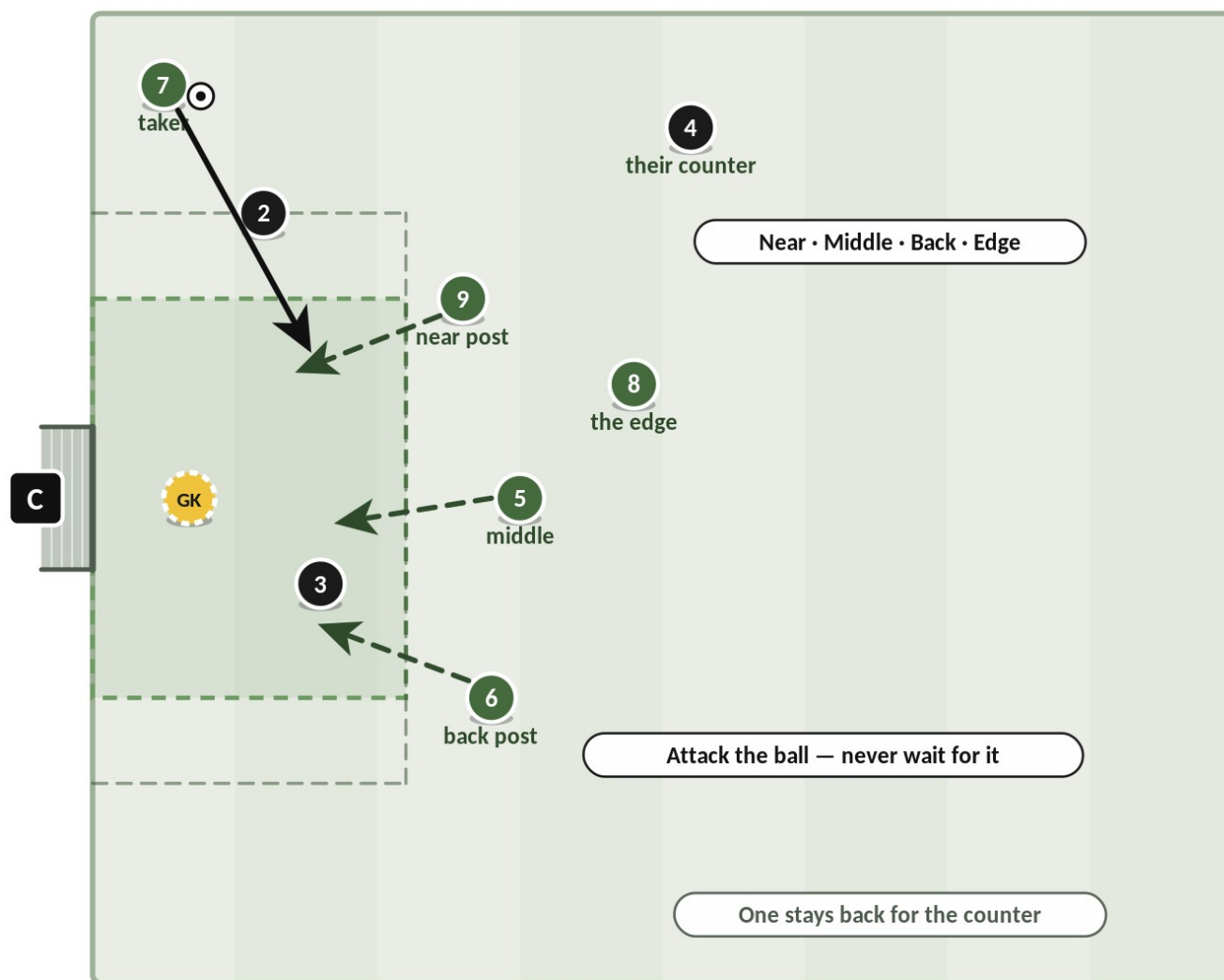
Everybody getting the same number of repetitions.

Two or three genuine takers identifying themselves.

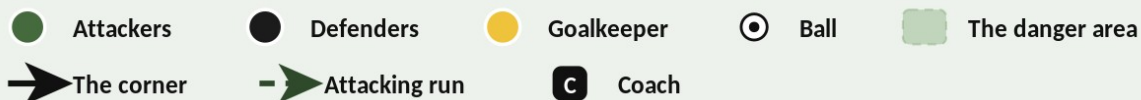
A1.2 THE CORNER

One corner routine with four named jobs. Near post, middle, back post, edge of the box — plus one player who stays back. Repeat it until everybody knows their own job without being told, and then stop.

40 x 34 m • four jobs, one taker, and a routine everybody knows • 15 minutes



FOUR JOBS • ONE ROUTINE • EVERYBODY KNOWS THEIRS BEFORE IT'S TAKEN



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SET UP

- 40 × 34 m with a **full goal and goalkeeper** and a marked penalty area.
- **Five attackers, three defenders, a goalkeeper**, and a taker.
- **Mark the danger area** — the six-yard box extended to the penalty spot — so the delivery has a visible target.
- Balls at both corners; alternate sides.

- Coach behind the goal where you can see the whole box.

HOW IT RUNS

- Minutes 0–3 — walk it once, statically.** Put the four attackers in their positions and name each one out loud: **near post, middle, back post, edge**. Then walk their runs, slowly, twice.
- Minute 3 — the fifth job.** One player does not go in the box at all — they stay on the halfway line for the counter. Say why: a corner conceded on the break is the most demoralising goal in youth football.
- Minutes 4–9 — live at three-quarter pace,** alternating sides. Ten or twelve repetitions. Attackers score 1 for a header or shot on target, 2 for a goal; defenders score 1 for a clearance beyond the edge.
- Minute 9 — one question:** *when do you start your run?* The answer is *as the taker strikes it, not before* — an under-12 box is full of players who arrive early and stand still.
- Minutes 9–13 — add a second routine:** a short corner, two players, and a cutback. It is the most effective corner in youth football because nobody defends it.
- Minutes 13–15 — swap the defenders and attackers** so both groups get the picture.

RULES & SCORING

- **Four jobs, named, every time:** near post, middle, back post, edge.
- **One player stays back** for the counter. Always.
- **Runs start as the ball is struck** — anybody standing still when it is delivered scores nothing.
- **Attackers 1** for a header or shot on target, **2** for a goal. **Defenders 1** for a clearance beyond the edge of the box.
- Alternate sides every repetition.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Attacking the ball — meeting it moving, and heading or striking through it rather than letting it hit you. Also the taker's consistency, which matters more than their power.
Tactical	Near post and edge are the two jobs that win corners at this age. A ball flicked on at the near post beats everybody, and the edge of the box collects everything that gets cleared. And the short corner is the most underused weapon in youth football — two players and a cutback beats a box full of taller children more often than a floated ball does.
Physical	Jumping and short sprints. Comfortable.
Psychological	Smaller players assume corners are not for them. Give them the near-post flick and the edge — both are about timing rather than height, and both score goals.
Social	By the end of this practice every player should be able to say their own job without hesitating. Test it by asking three of them at random.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Everybody standing on the penalty spot	The default. Name the four positions again and put them in them.
Nobody on the near post	The most valuable job and the one nobody volunteers for.
Nobody on the edge	Same lesson as Session 27 — the second ball.
Runs starting too early	<i>As he strikes it. Not before.</i>
Nobody staying back	Be strict. A counter conceded from your own corner is the worst goal there is.
Deliveries into the goalkeeper's hands	Back to the warm-up: <i>away from him</i> .

ASK THEM

- What's your job?
- When do you start your run?
- Who's staying back? Why?
- Which of the four jobs is most likely to score?
- Why does the short corner work?
- Where should the ball land?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Five defenders.	Two defenders.
Two routines, called by a signal from the taker.	One routine only.
Headers only count as goals.	Walk it twice more before adding pace.
A defender starts on the near post.	Mark the four positions with cones and let them stand on them.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

All four jobs filled, every corner.

Runs starting as the ball is struck.

Somebody always staying back.

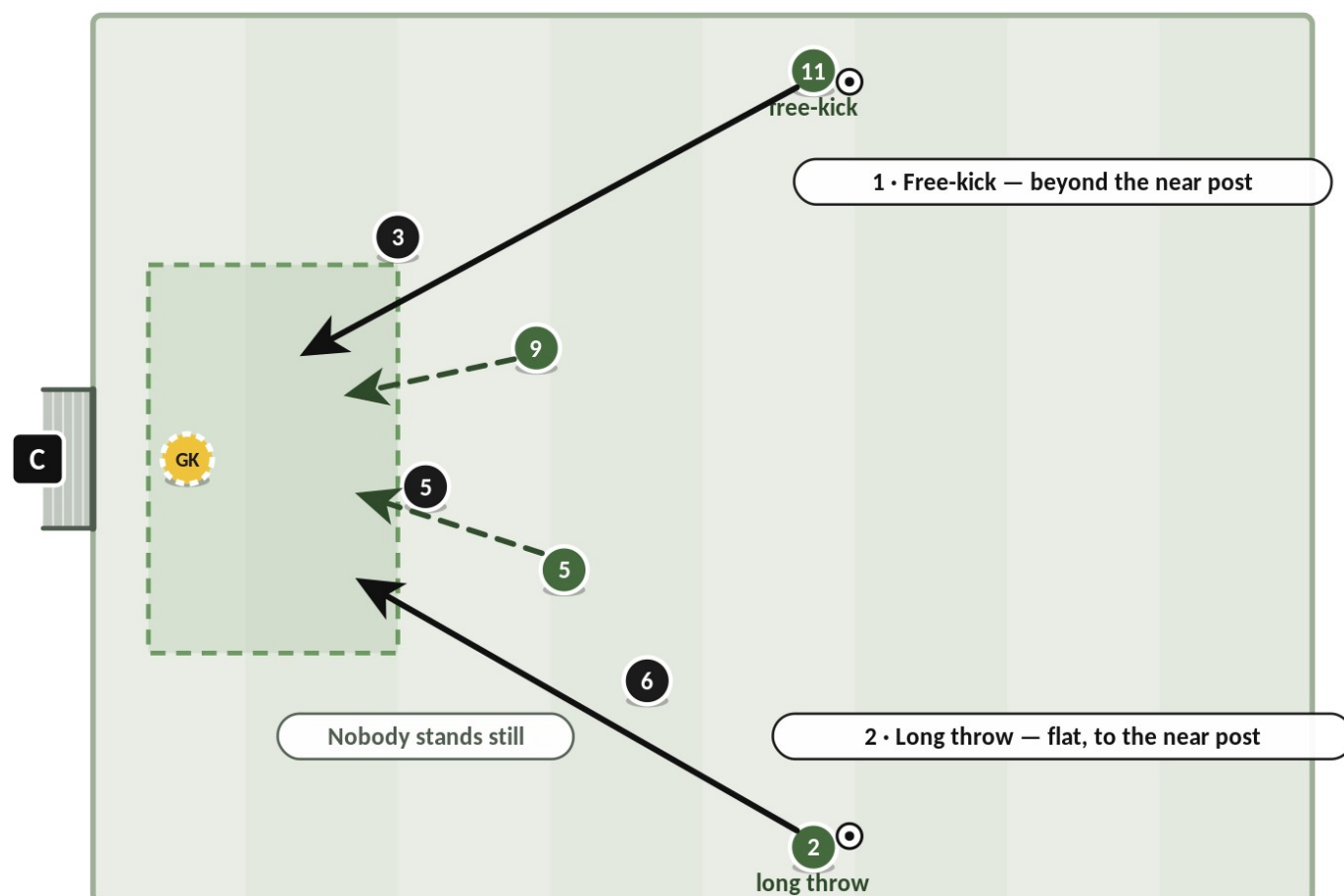
Deliveries landing away from the goalkeeper.

Everybody able to name their own job.

A1.3 WIDE FREE-KICKS AND LONG THROWS

The two restarts under-12 teams waste most often. A wide free-kick is a corner with a better angle; a long throw is a corner that cannot be offside. Both need a target area and two players attacking it.

44 x 32 m • the two restarts under-12 teams waste most often • 15 minutes



A RESTART IS A CHANCE WE ARE GIVEN FOR NOTHING



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SET UP

- 44 x 32 m with a full goal and goalkeeper.
- Mark the landing area — a 9 x 14 m box between the penalty spot and the near post.
- Five attackers against three defenders, with a designated taker and a designated thrower.
- Free-kicks served from 25 m wide; throws from the touchline about 22 m out.
- Coach beside the goal.

HOW IT RUNS

1. Set it up in 60 seconds. Same four jobs as the corner. Different delivery.

2. **Minutes 0–5 — wide free-kicks only.** Ten deliveries, alternating sides. The target is beyond the near post and short of the goalkeeper — say it once and mark it.
3. **Minute 5 — one question:** *why is this easier than a corner?* Because the ball comes across the defenders rather than along their line, so it is much harder to defend and much easier to attack.
4. **Minutes 6–11 — long throws.** Find your two longest throwers and let everybody try. **Flat and to the near post** is the only instruction that matters.
5. **Minute 11 — the flick-on.** One player at the near post, one behind them. It is the whole point of a long throw and it takes two minutes to teach.
6. **Minutes 11–15 — scored, alternating deliveries.** 1 for a shot on target, 2 for a goal, 1 to the defenders for a clearance.

RULES & SCORING

- Deliveries must land in the marked area to be scored.
- The same four jobs as the corner — near post, middle, back post, edge.
- 1 point for a shot on target, 2 for a goal, 1 to the defenders for a clearance beyond the box.
- Everybody attempts at least two long throws.
- No offside from a throw — say it out loud, because most of them do not know.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	The long throw: both feet on the ground, ball behind the head, a run-up, and a flat trajectory rather than a lob. It is a technique and it improves quickly with practice.
Tactical	A wide free-kick is easier to attack than a corner because the ball crosses the defenders' line of vision rather than running along it. And a long throw cannot be offside , which makes it the safest attacking restart in football and the reason it is worth having one player who can do it.
Physical	Long throwing is hard on the back and shoulders. Ten or twelve each is plenty.
Psychological	You will discover a long thrower nobody knew about, and it will probably not be the biggest player. Watch for it.
Social	Identify and name your two takers and your long thrower by the end of the session. Being given a job is a real thing at twelve.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Deliveries too deep	<i>Beyond the near post, short of the keeper. That's the space.</i>
Throws lobbed rather than driven	<i>Flat. It has to arrive quickly or they'll all get there first.</i>
Nobody flicking on	Two minutes to teach and it doubles the value of every long throw.
The same three players attacking everything	Rotate the jobs deliberately.
Anybody straining to throw	Stop them. Technique before distance, always.
Players not knowing there is no offside from a throw	Genuinely useful information that most of them have never been told.

ASK THEM

- Why is a wide free-kick easier to attack than a corner?
- Where should the delivery land?
- Can you be offside from a throw-in?

- What's the near-post player's job?
- Who's our long thrower?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Five defenders.	Two defenders.
Deliveries must be first time from a rolled ball.	Shorter free-kick distance (18 m).
A smaller landing area.	A bigger landing area.
Headers only count.	Remove the goalkeeper for the first five minutes.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Deliveries landing in the marked area regularly.

Flat long throws rather than lobs.

At least one flick-on working.

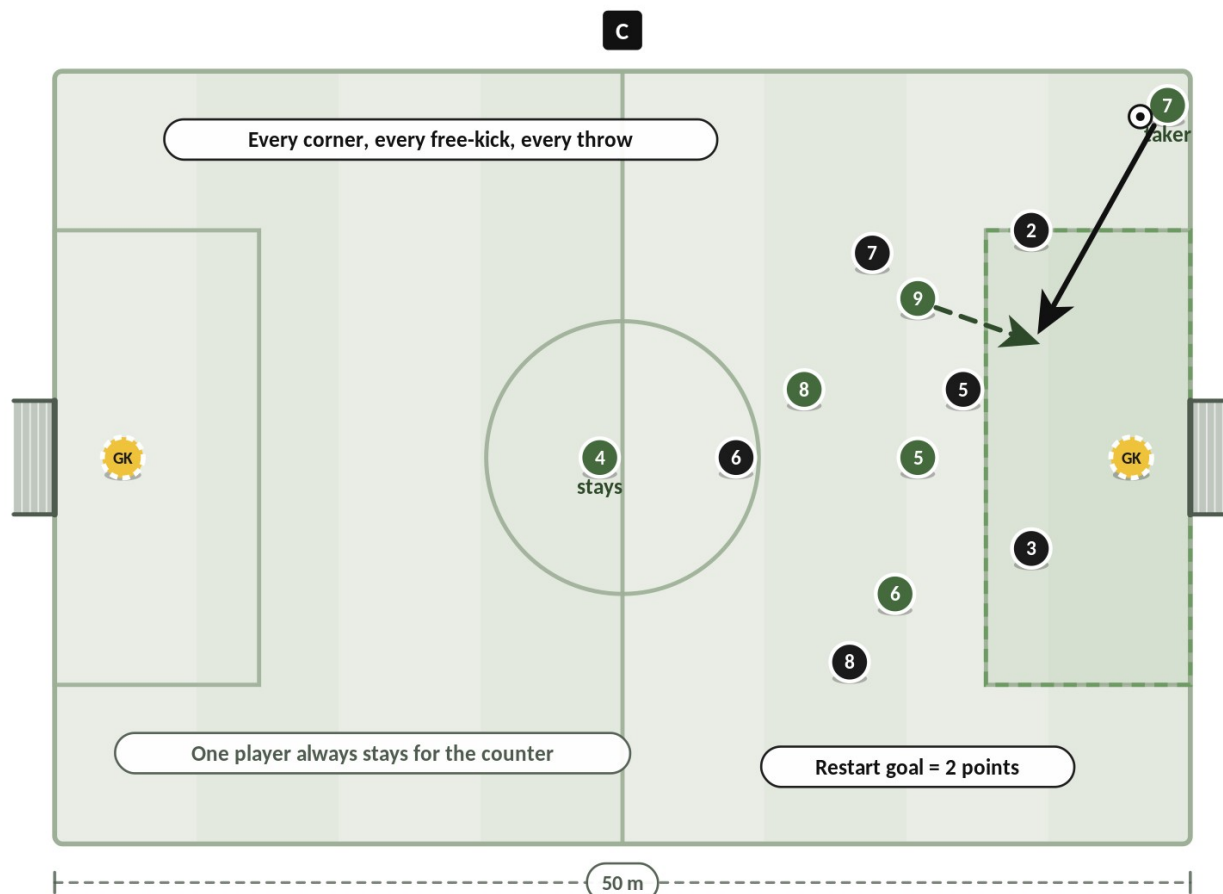
Everybody attempting a long throw.

Two takers and a thrower identified by name.

A1.4 THE RESTART MATCH (7 v 7)

A match in which every stoppage becomes a set piece and goals from restarts count double. It produces about four times the normal number of corners and free-kicks, and it is the only way to practise them at match speed.

50 x 34 m • every stoppage is a set piece • goals from restarts count double • 15 minutes



● Greens (attack right) ● Blacks ● Goalkeepers ● Ball The box
➔ Delivery ➡ Run C Coach

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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 every two minutes.
- **Every ball out of play on the byline is a corner**, whoever put it out — which is artificial and produces the repetitions you need.
- Free-kicks given generously.
- Coach on the halfway line.

HOW IT RUNS

1. **Shape and teams in 60 seconds.**
2. **Explain in two sentences:** *Every ball out on the byline is a corner to the attacking team. A goal from any restart is worth two.*
3. **Minutes 0–6 — play.** Expect eight or nine corners in six minutes, which is the point.

4. **Minute 6 — drinks and one question:** *are we getting into position quickly enough?* Most squads take fifteen seconds to organise a corner, which in a real match is fifteen seconds of the opposition also organising.
5. **Minutes 7-13 — add the ten-second rule:** a corner must be taken within ten seconds. Now the routine has to be automatic rather than discussed.
6. **Final two minutes — normal restarts**, and see whether the four jobs still get filled.

RULES & SCORING

- Every ball out on the byline is a corner to the attacking team.
- A goal from any restart — corner, free-kick or throw — counts double.
- From minute 7: corners must be taken within ten seconds.
- One player must always stay back on a set piece; a goal conceded on the counter while nobody stayed counts double against them.
- No offside.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Delivery under fatigue, which is much harder than delivery in a static practice.
Tactical	Speed of organisation is worth more than the routine itself. A corner taken in eight seconds against a disorganised defence beats a perfect routine taken after twenty. And the one who stays back is the whole difference between a set piece being free and a set piece being a risk.
Physical	Lighter than a normal match because of the stoppages. A good session for tired legs or a hard pitch.
Psychological	Set-piece goals are enormously satisfying for the players who do the unglamorous jobs. Name the near-post flicker and the edge-of-the-box player every time one goes in.
Social	Watch who organises the set piece. It is often a different player from the one who organises open play.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Slow organisation	The ten-second rule fixes it. Count out loud.
Four jobs collapsing under match pressure	Expected. Two reminders, then let the scoreline teach.
Nobody staying back	Give the doubling penalty once and it stops.
Short corners being ignored	<i>You've got a two-against-one down there. Use it.</i>
The same player taking everything	Fine if they are the best at it — but check the other side is covered.
The last two minutes	Do the four jobs survive with nothing extra scored for them?

ASK THEM

- How quickly are we getting organised?
- Who's staying back?
- What's your job at a corner?
- Did anybody try a short one?
- How many of our restarts came to nothing? Why?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Eight seconds to take a corner.	Fifteen seconds.
Only restart goals count.	Corners only — drop free-kicks and throws from the doubling.
Two players must stay back.	6 v 6 on 44 × 30 m with rolling substitutes.
Larger pitch (58 × 38 m) so the counter is a real threat.	Remove the stay-back sanction and just remind them.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Corners taken within ten seconds.

Four jobs filled most of the time.

Somebody staying back on every set piece.

At least one short corner attempted.

Restart goals actually being scored.

Finish, match day & homework

REFLECTION — 5 MINUTES, SITTING DOWN

- *What are the four jobs at a corner?* Near post, middle, back post, edge.
- *When does your run start?* As it's struck.
- *Where should the delivery go?* Away from the goalkeeper.
- *Who stays back? Why?*
- *Can you be offside from a throw-in?*
- **Name your takers and your long thrower** out loud, in front of everybody. Being given a job matters.
- Finish with the honest point: *we get eight or nine of these a match and we've never scored from one. That changes now.*

MATCH-DAY LINK

MATCH OBJECTIVES	WATCH FOR	ASK AFTERWARDS
- Four jobs filled at every corner. - One player stays back at every set piece. - Every corner taken within ten seconds.	- How many corners and wide free-kicks we get. Count them — most coaches are surprised. - How many produce a shot. - Whether anybody stays back.	- <i>How many corners did we have?</i> - <i>How many turned into a shot?</i> - <i>Did we ever get caught on the break from one?</i>

HOMEWORK — "THE DEAD BALL" · 15 MINUTES, THREE TIMES

- **Fifty dead balls.** Against a wall or into an empty goal from 20 m, alternating driven and whipped. Count how many hit the target. It is the most improvable skill in football and almost nobody practises it.
- **The long throw.** Both feet down, ball behind the head, and a short run-up. Twenty throws for distance and flatness, not height. Stop immediately if your back or shoulders hurt.
- **Watch a game with a job.** Fifteen minutes of any professional match, watching **only the corners**. Count how many players go in the box, how many stay out, and where the ball lands. It is almost always the near post.
- *Optional extra:* watch a short corner and work out why the defending team could not deal with it.

WHERE TO GO NEXT

Same theme — set pieces. These cover the same ground from other angles and can be run in any order, before or after this one: **A2** Defending Set Pieces; **A4** Throw-Ins.

A natural follow-on. Session A2 — Defending Set Pieces. The other half, and the more valuable one at this age — because under-12 teams concede far more from set pieces than they score. Zonal or man, who takes the near post, who stands on the edge, and the goalkeeper's territory. Plus defending the long throw, which is the restart that frightens young defenders most and is the easiest of all to defend once somebody has shown them how.

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.