



SESSION A4 • STANDALONE PLAN

Throw-Ins — Forty Free Balls a Match

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	A4.1 The Technique
0:10 – 0:25	15	■ Technical practice	A4.2 Three Options
0:25 – 0:40	15	■ Skill game	A4.3 Defending the Throw
0:40 – 0:55	15	■ Conditioned match	A4.4 The Throw-In 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

A typical nine-a-side match contains somewhere around forty throw-ins. It is by a distance the most frequent restart in football and by a distance the least coached, and under-12 teams give away possession from most of the ones they take. The reasons are not mysterious. **Nobody moves.** The thrower looks up at four stationary teammates, throws it at the nearest one, and that player receives it facing his own goal with a defender behind him and the touchline beside him. **And the thrower then stands still,** having taken himself out of the game at the exact moment his team is a player short. Two ideas fix almost all of it. **The first: somebody has to move before the ball is thrown,** and the simplest version is one player checking short while another goes long — which occupies two defenders and frees at least one. **The second: the first touch goes away from the line.** A receiver who takes his first touch towards the touchline has trapped himself; one who takes it inside has beaten the whole situation. Neither idea takes long to teach and both hold up for the rest of a career. It is a cheap session with a large return, and it works in a small space and in bad weather, which is a useful thing to have available in January.

BY THE END, PLAYERS CAN

- **Throw legally and firmly** — both feet down, ball behind the head, flat.
- **Move before the ball is thrown** — short and long, so somebody is free.
- **Take the first touch away from the line.**
- **Be an option again** immediately after throwing it.
- **Defend a throw** by marking everybody, because there is no offside.

KIT LIST

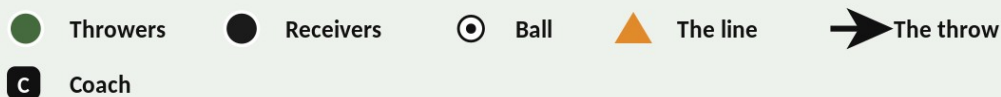
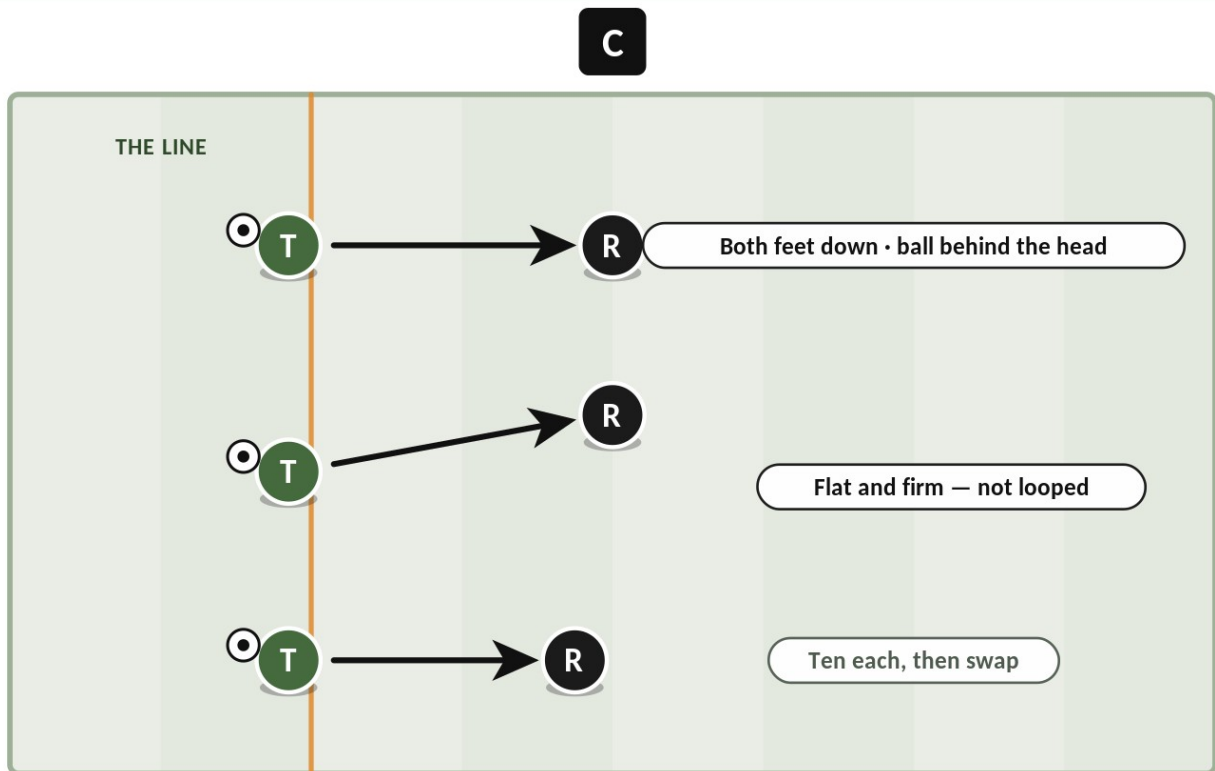
Ground needed: about 46 × 32 m, and rather less if you need it — **this is one of the most space-efficient sessions in the whole collection**, which makes it a good choice for a half-frozen pitch, a shared field, or a night when another team has taken the good half. **Where to use it:** any time from about Session 15 onwards, and particularly after a match in which you noticed the squad losing the ball from throw-ins, which is every match until somebody coaches it. **One thing to check first:** the laws. Both feet on or behind the line and in contact with the ground, ball delivered from behind and over the head, facing the field of play. Half your squad will be doing at least one of those wrong and none of them will know.

ITEM	QTY	USED IN
Footballs (size 4)	16	All practices
Flat markers	40	Channels and lines
Bibs — red / blue / yellow	8 / 8 / 4	Two clear teams plus goalkeepers
Full-size goals	2	A4.4 only — the rest needs no goals
Poles	4	Optional — marking the wide channels

A4.1 THE TECHNIQUE

Ten minutes on a technique nobody has ever been taught. Both feet down, ball from behind the head, delivered flat and firm — and two common faults corrected before they become permanent.

32 x 18 m • pairs • the two things everybody gets wrong • 10 minutes



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SET UP

- **32 × 18 m** with a clear line marked down it — a touchline if you have one.
- **Pairs**, one either side, 8 m apart.
- One ball per pair; the thrower stands at the line, the receiver in the field.
- Spread the pairs along the line so nobody is throwing into anybody.
- Coach walking down the line.

HOW IT RUNS

- Minutes 0–3 — arrival.** Greet each player by name, ball each, dribbling and passing. **Ask one question at the door:** *how many throw-ins do you think there are in a match?* Nobody guesses anywhere near forty.
- Minute 3 — the two faults, ninety seconds.** Show them: **a foot lifting** as the ball is released, and **the ball coming from in front of the head** rather than behind. Almost everybody does one of the two.

3. **Minutes 4–7 — ten throws each**, receiver stationary, thrower concentrating only on legality and firmness. Flat and firm, never looped.
4. **Minute 7 — one question, twenty seconds.** *Why does it have to be flat?* Because a looped ball gives the defender two seconds to arrive, and a flat one arrives before he does.
5. **Minutes 7–10 — add the receiver's first touch.** The receiver must control it **away from the line**, into the field. It is the single most valuable habit in the session.

RULES & SCORING

- **Both feet on the ground and behind the line.** A foul throw is a foul throw, even in a warm-up.
- **Ball from behind and over the head**, delivered with two hands.
- **Flat and firm**, not looped.
- **The receiver's first touch goes away from the line.**
- Ten throws each, then swap.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Feet either both behind the line or one behind and one on it; a short run-up if the player wants distance; hands spread behind the ball; the whole body throwing, not just the arms.
Tactical	Flat beats floated. A throw that arrives quickly gives the receiver time; a looped one gives the defender time. That single distinction is worth a lot of possession.
Physical	Light. Watch for anybody straining for distance and stop them — technique first.
Psychological	Being told you have been throwing illegally for three years is mildly embarrassing. Do it as a group, lightly, so nobody is singled out.
Social	Receivers should be calling for it. Nobody ever does at a throw-in, and it is free.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
A foot lifting	The most common fault. It is worth ten seconds each to fix.
Ball from in front of the head	The second most common.
Looped throws	<i>Flat. Get it there before he does.</i>
First touch towards the line	<i>Inside. Away from the touchline.</i>
Straining for distance	Not tonight — this is the short throw.

ASK THEM

- How many throw-ins are there in a match?
- What are the two rules about your feet and the ball?
- Why flat rather than looped?
- Which way does the first touch go?
- Did anybody know they'd been doing it wrong?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Receiver moving rather than stationary.	Shorter distance (6 m).
Throw to a specific foot.	Stationary receiver throughout.

HARDER	EASIER
One-touch return to the thrower.	Ignore the first touch for the first five minutes.
Longer distance (14 m).	Demonstrate the legal throw twice more.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Legal throws from everybody.

Flat, firm deliveries.

First touches going away from the line.

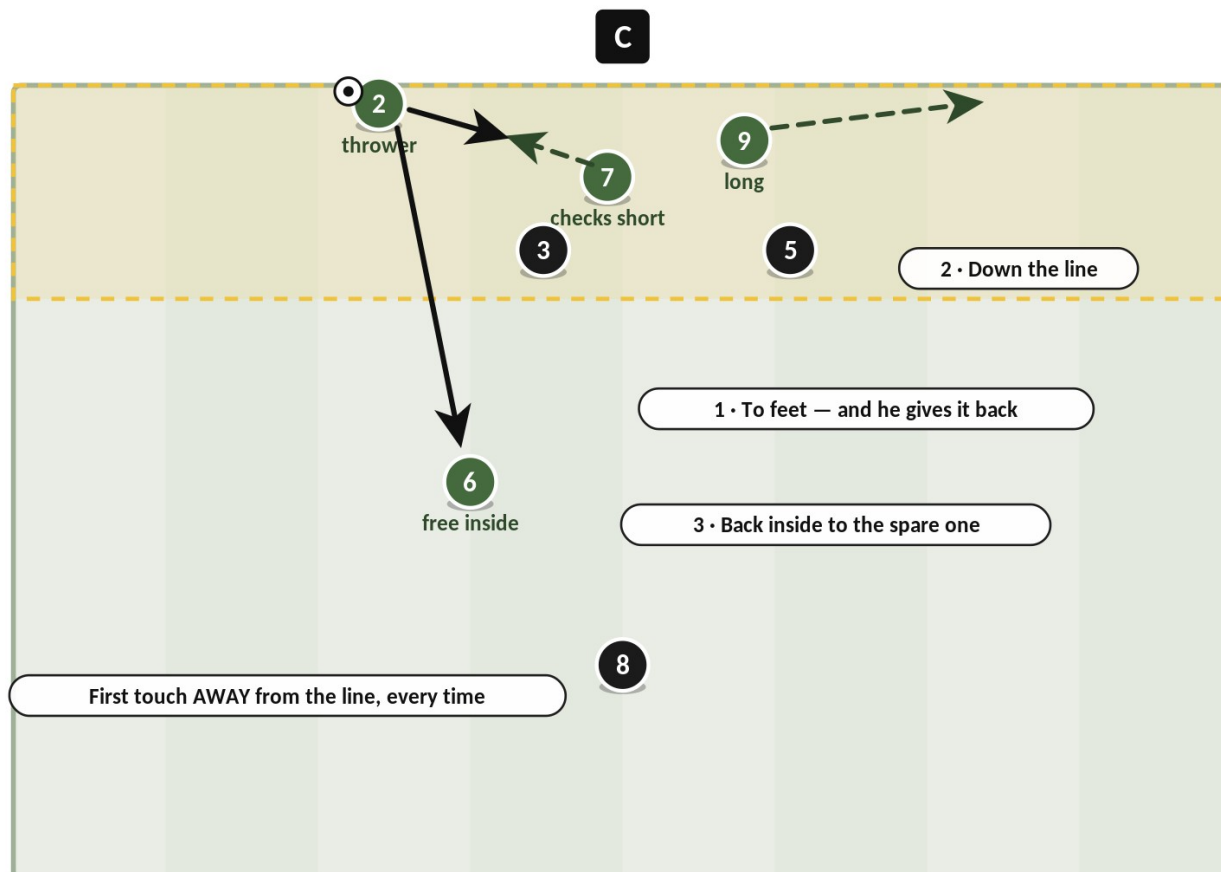
Somebody calling for it.

The squad slightly surprised at how much of this they were getting wrong.

A4.2 THREE OPTIONS

Three ways out of a throw-in, and one piece of movement that creates all of them. One player checks short, one goes long, and the ball goes to whichever of the three is free — including back inside, which nobody ever uses.

40 x 26 m • down the line, to feet, or back inside • 15 minutes



THE THROWER IS AN OPTION AGAIN THE MOMENT HE HAS THROWN IT



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SET UP

- 40 × 26 m with a **wide channel** marked along the throwing side.
- **Four attackers including the thrower, against three defenders.**
- Twelve to fourteen players; two groups working from opposite touchlines.
- Balls at each throwing point.
- Coach between the two groups.

HOW IT RUNS

- Minutes 0–3 — walk the movement.** One player checks short towards the thrower; one goes long down the line. That is it. Two runs, opposite directions, at the same time.
- Minute 3 — the three options, ninety seconds.** **To feet** (short, then he gives it back), **down the line** (long, into space), or **back inside** to the player the two runs have freed.

3. **Minutes 5–10 — live and scored.** 1 point for keeping the ball for three passes after the throw. **2 points if the throw goes inside** — because that is the option nobody uses and it is usually the best one.
4. **Minute 10 — add the thrower.** After throwing, he must step onto the pitch and be available. A team that forgets this is playing three against three instead of four against three.
5. **Minutes 10–15 — full speed with rotation,** both groups, alternating sides.

RULES & SCORING

- **Somebody must move before the ball is thrown.** A throw to a stationary player scores nothing.
- **1 point** for three passes kept after the throw; **2** if the throw went inside.
- **The thrower must step onto the pitch** immediately and can be used.
- **First touch away from the line,** always.
- Five seconds to take the throw.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	The receiver's first touch, taken across the body and into the field. And the thrower's accuracy to a moving target, which is harder than it looks.
Tactical	Two runs in opposite directions free a third player. The short run drags a marker forward, the long run drags one back, and whoever is left in between is free — which is why the pass inside is the most valuable and the least used. And the thrower is a spare player the moment he has thrown it, which is the cheapest overload in football.
Physical	Short repeated efforts. Very manageable.
Psychological	Throwing inside feels risky to a twelve-year-old. The double point is what gets them to try it.
Social	The two runners have to co-ordinate. Let them work it out rather than assigning it.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Nobody moving	The whole session. <i>If nobody moves, there's nobody to throw to.</i>
Both runners going the same way	<i>One short, one long. Opposite directions.</i>
The throw always going down the line	The default and usually the worst option. The scoring corrects it.
The thrower standing still afterwards	<i>You're free. Get on the pitch.</i>
First touch into the touchline	Back to the warm-up. <i>Away from the line.</i>
Slow throws	Five seconds. A quick throw is worth more than a clever one.

ASK THEM

- Who has to move first?
- Which two runs free the third player?
- Which option do we never use?
- Where does the thrower go after he's thrown it?
- Which way does your first touch go?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Four defenders against four attackers.	Two defenders.

HARDER	EASIER
Two touches for the receiver.	Walk the movement twice more.
Three seconds to take the throw.	Remove the three-pass requirement and score the receipt alone.
Only the inside option scores.	Ten seconds to take the throw.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Two runners moving before every throw.

All three options being used.

The throw inside appearing regularly.

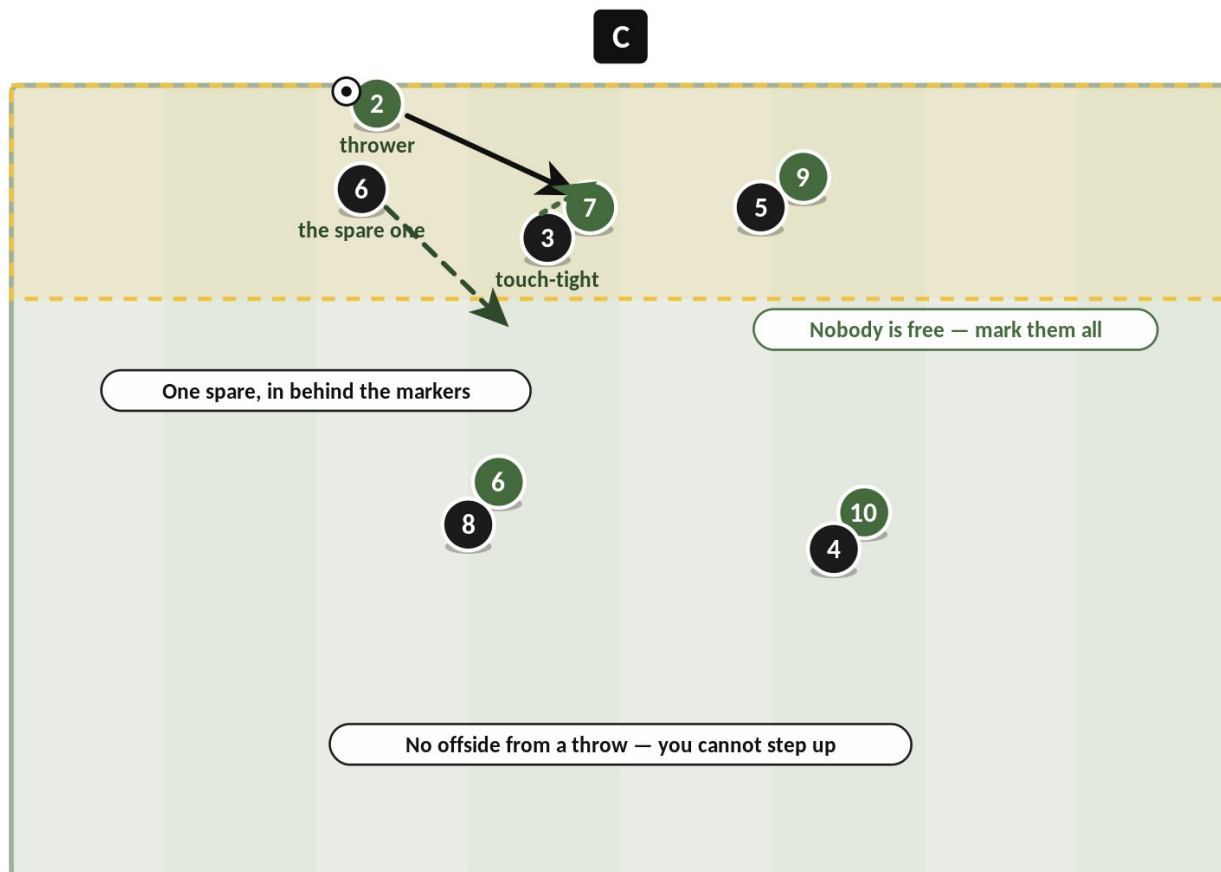
The thrower rejoining play immediately.

Possession being kept from most throws by minute 13.

A4.3 DEFENDING THE THROW

The other side of it, and a genuine free lunch — because the throwing team is briefly a player short and there is no offside, so a defending team that marks everybody wins the ball back more often than not.

40 x 26 m • mark everyone, and remember there is no offside • 15 minutes



THEY HAVE ONE FEWER PLAYER — THE THROWER CANNOT PLAY IT TWICE



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SET UP

- 40 × 26 m with the **wide channel** marked.
- **Four attackers including the thrower against four defenders** — even numbers, because the thrower cannot play it twice.
- Twelve to fourteen players; rotate the roles every three minutes.
- Balls at the throwing point.
- Coach in the middle.

HOW IT RUNS

1. **Set it up in 45 seconds.** They've got a throw. You've actually got a spare player — work out why. Give them thirty seconds to realise the thrower cannot receive it.

2. **Minutes 0–4 — live, no coaching.** Most defending teams will leave somebody free and concede possession comfortably.
3. **Minute 4 — the two rules, ninety seconds.** Mark everybody within throwing distance, and use the spare player to sit behind the markers where the ball will be flicked or laid off.
4. **Minutes 5–11 — scored.** Defenders 1 point for winning the ball within three seconds of the throw, 2 for winning it and keeping it.
5. **Minute 11 — say the thing about offside.** There is none from a throw-in, so a defending line cannot step up to catch anybody. It surprises most squads and it prevents a specific, silly goal.
6. **Minutes 11–15 — swap roles** so everybody defends and everybody throws.

RULES & SCORING

- **Even numbers** — the throwing team's advantage is that the thrower rejoins, not that they start with more.
- **Defenders 1** for winning it within three seconds, **2** for winning and keeping it.
- **Everybody within throwing range must be marked** — an unmarked receiver concedes the point.
- **No offside**, and the coach should say so out loud at least twice.
- Rotate every three minutes.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Marking touch-tight on the goal side, and intercepting a thrown ball — which is slower and easier to read than a passed one.
Tactical	Mark them all and keep one spare. The throwing team has one fewer player until the thrower gets back on, so an organised defence has a numerical advantage for about two seconds. And a thrown ball cannot be offside , which means the defensive line has no trap available and must simply be tight.
Physical	Short, sharp and stop-start. Comfortable.
Psychological	Winning the ball from a throw feels like a small victory. Announce it every time and defenders start looking forward to opposition throw-ins.
Social	Somebody has to organise the marking in the five seconds available. Watch who does it.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Somebody left unmarked	The whole practice. Point at them rather than explaining.
Marking too loosely	<i>Touch-tight. He's got his back to the game.</i>
Everybody marking and nobody spare	The spare player is what turns a block into a turnover.
Defenders stepping up expecting offside	Say it plainly, twice.
Defenders ignoring the thrower once he's back on	He is the spare player now. <i>Pick him up.</i>
Slow organisation	Five seconds is all they get. Count it.

ASK THEM

- Why have you actually got a spare player?
- Can they be offside from a throw?
- Who's marking the thrower once he comes back on?
- How tight should you be?
- Who organised that?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Five attackers against four defenders.	Three attackers against four defenders.
Two seconds to win it for the point.	Five seconds to win it.
A long thrower among the attackers.	Assign the marking before each throw.
Defenders must win it and complete two passes.	Announce the throwing team's plan in advance.

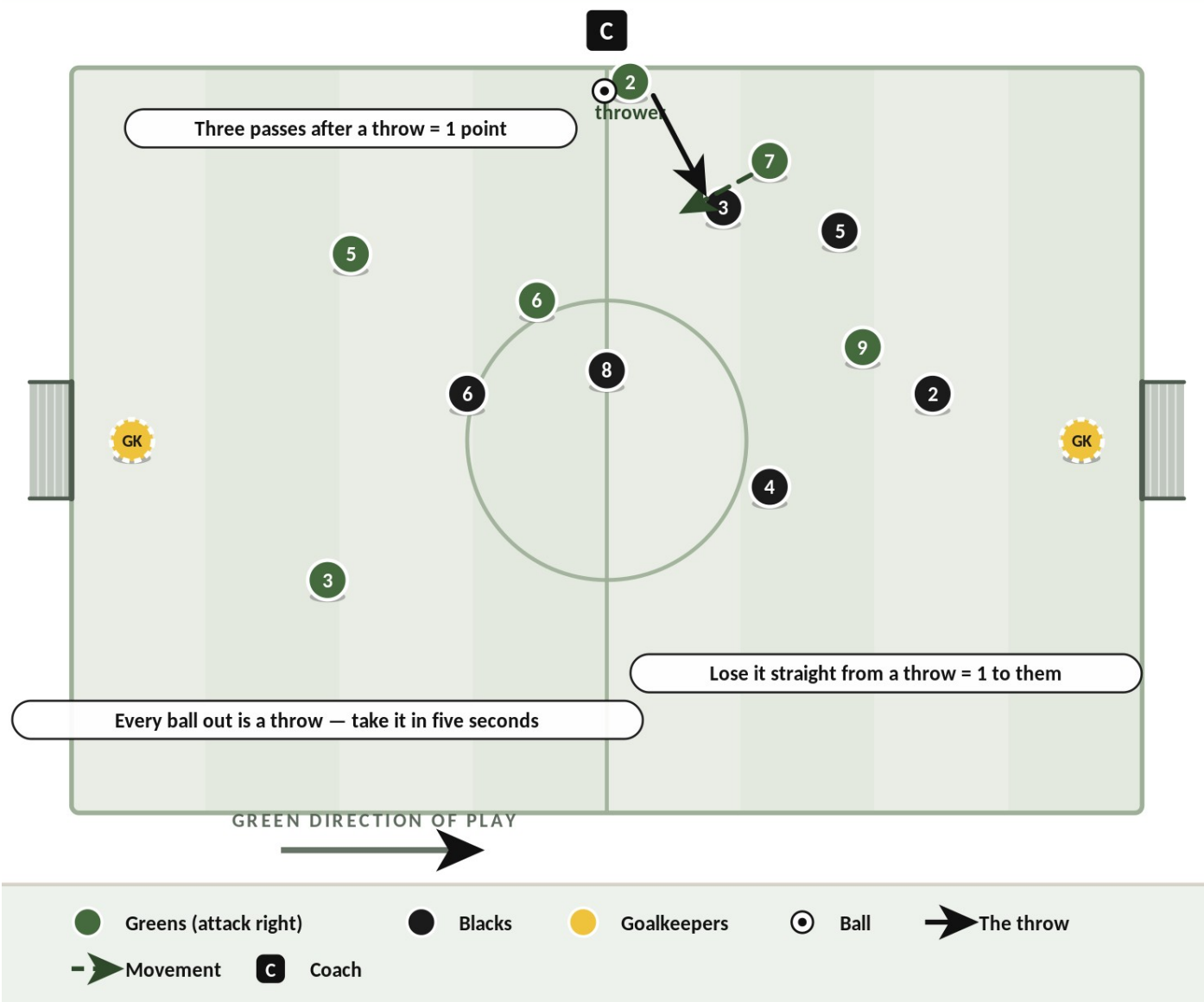
IT'S WORKING WHEN

Everybody marked within five seconds.
One defender spare behind the markers.
Balls being won back regularly.
Nobody stepping up expecting offside.
Somebody organising the marking out loud.

A4.4 THE THROW-IN MATCH (6 v 6 + GKs)

A normal match in which throw-ins are worth points to both sides. It produces the volume of repetitions that this restart deserves and never gets — probably twenty-five throws in fifteen minutes, all of them contested.

46 x 32 m • keep the ball from a throw and you score • 15 minutes



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SET UP

- One pitch, 46 x 32 m, both full goals with a goalkeeper in each.
- 6 v 6 outfield plus two goalkeepers (14). With 15–16, roll substitutes every two minutes.
- **Deliberately narrow** — a narrow pitch produces far more throw-ins, which is the point.
- Spare balls along both touchlines so throws are quick.
- Coach on the halfway line, calling the points.

HOW IT RUNS

1. Teams, bibs and keepers in 60 seconds.

2. **Explain in two sentences:** *Keep the ball for three passes after your own throw and that's a point. Win it straight from their throw and that's a point to you.*
3. **Minutes 0–6 — call both scores loudly.** The narrow pitch will produce a throw every thirty seconds or so.
4. **Minute 6 — drinks and one question:** *how many of our throws did we keep?* Most squads have never had the number and are startled by it.
5. **Minutes 7–13 — add the five-second rule:** a throw not taken within five seconds goes to the other team. Quick throws are worth more than clever ones and the rule proves it.
6. **Final two minutes — no scoring for throws,** and see whether anybody still moves before the ball is thrown.

RULES & SCORING

- Three passes kept after your own throw = 1 point.
- Winning the ball straight from their throw = 1 point.
- From minute 7: **throws must be taken within five seconds** or they change hands.
- Foul throws are given properly — it is the only session all year where you should be strict about it.
- No offside.

COACHING POINTS — THE FOUR CORNERS

Technical	Throwing accurately to a moving target under fatigue, and receiving with the correct first touch under pressure.
Tactical	A quick throw beats an organised one. The five-second rule exists because the biggest advantage a throwing team has is that the opposition are not yet set. And forty throws a match, kept rather than given away, is a genuinely large amount of extra possession — worth saying out loud with the number attached.
Physical	Standard game with frequent short stoppages. A gentle option physically.
Psychological	This is a session where the least athletic players can be extremely good — throwing well and moving cleverly are not physical gifts. Notice who thrives.
Social	Listen for calls at throw-ins. By minute 10 there should be two players shouting on every one.

WATCH FOR

WHAT YOU'LL SEE	WHAT TO DO
Nobody moving	Still the main fault, even after two practices.
Slow throws	The five-second rule fixes it entirely.
First touch into the line	One reminder, then let the turnovers teach.
The thrower staying off the pitch	<i>You're free. Get on.</i>
Foul throws	Be strict tonight. It is the only chance they will get to learn it.
The final two minutes	Does anybody still move before the throw?

ASK THEM

- How many of our throws did we keep?
- Who moved before the ball was thrown?
- Which way did your first touch go?
- Is a quick throw or a clever one better?
- How many throws do you think we've had tonight?

ADJUST IT

HARDER	EASIER
Four passes required after a throw.	Two passes required.
Three seconds to take it.	Eight seconds to take it.
Even narrower pitch (40 × 32 m).	Wider pitch so there are fewer throws.
The throw must go forward to score.	Warnings rather than turnovers for foul throws.

IT'S WORKING WHEN

Movement before most throws.

Throws taken inside five seconds.

First touches going inside.

The thrower rejoining play.

Possession kept from most throws by the end.

Finish, match day & homework

REFLECTION — 5 MINUTES, SITTING DOWN

- How many throw-ins in a match? About forty. Let the number land.
- What are the two rules about your feet and the ball?
- Who moves first — and which two directions?
- Which way does your first touch go? Away from the line.
- What happens to the thrower after he's thrown it?
- Can they be offside from a throw?
- **Name the player who moved most at throw-ins tonight** — it is invisible work and it is the whole session.

MATCH-DAY LINK

MATCH OBJECTIVES	WATCH FOR	ASK AFTERWARDS
- Somebody moves before every throw — one short, one long. - Every first touch goes away from the line. - Every throw taken within five seconds.	- How many of our throws we keep. Count ten of them and see. - Whether anybody moves before the ball is thrown. - How many foul throws we give away.	- <i>How many of our throws did we keep?</i> - <i>Did anybody move?</i> - <i>How quickly did we take them?</i>

HOMEWORK — "FORTY A MATCH" · 10 MINUTES, THREE TIMES

- **The legal throw.** Against a wall from 6 m, thirty throws, checking your own feet every time. Film yourself once on a phone if you can — almost everybody is surprised by what their back foot is doing.
- **Flat and firm.** Twenty throws at a target on a wall about a metre off the ground. If it arrives above head height it is too slow.
- **First touch away.** Have somebody throw to you beside a line — a kerb, a paving edge, anything — and take your first touch away from it, thirty times each foot.
- **Watch a game with a job.** Fifteen minutes of any match, watching **only the throw-ins**. Count how many the throwing team keeps. Then watch whether anybody moves before the ball is thrown — at professional level they always do, and that is the difference.

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: **A1** Attacking Set Pieces; **A2** Defending Set Pieces.

A natural follow-on. Session A5 — The Small Space Session. For the night the pitch is frozen, waterlogged, taken by another team, or replaced by a sports hall and a car park. A full hour of genuinely useful football in about a quarter of the usual area, with high ball-touches, no long running, and nothing that needs a full-size goal. It is the most practically valuable session in the supplementary set, because in an Irish or British winter you will need it six or seven times.

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.