

CASTLEWELLAN TOWN FC

Youth Coaching Curriculum — Coach's Manual

One binder for the material every youth coach needs beyond a single session: how the season starts, match-day safety and format, in-session troubleshooting, and what to hand parents. The 44 standalone sessions are indexed at the back — see the [appendix](#).

This manual is an index, not new writing: every section from here on is an unchanged copy of a document that already exists on the club site. Nothing here should ever be edited directly — update the source document and rebuild this file.

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Appendix — The 44 Sessions (by code, on the site)

Reference only — not embedded in this manual. Each one is used on its own night through the season, so it stays a separate file on the site rather than adding weight here. Open it from the site, or print it individually if needed.

Code	Title
S01	Scan, Open Out, Receive Across Your Body
S02	The First Touch That Travels
S03	Passing With Purpose — Weight, Surface and Both Feet
S04	Travelling With the Ball — Change of Direction and Speed
S05	The 1v1 Attacker — Approach, Feint, Accelerate
S06	Beating Your Player and Finishing
S07	The 1v1 Defender — Approach, Angle, Patience
S08	Defending the Wide 1v1
S09	The Wall Pass — Two Players, One Problem
S10	Overlaps and Underlaps — Making It Two Against One
S11	The Third-Man Run — The Pass You Never Touched
S12	Combination Play Under Pressure — Choosing the Right One
S13	Width and Depth — Making the Pitch Big
S14	Support Angles — Three Options, Always
S15	Playing Forward — When to Keep and When to Break
S16	Possession Under Pressure — Does It Survive Contact?
S17	The Goalkeeper Starts the Attack
S18	Beating the First Press — Three Ways Out

Code	Title
S19	The Back Three and the Pivot — Turning Rescues into Structure
S20	Building Under Real Pressure — No Help At All
S21	Counter-Pressing — The Three Seconds After You Lose It
S22	Counter-Attacking — The Three Seconds After You Win It
S23	Recovery Runs — What Happens When It Goes Wrong
S24	Transition Decisions — Nobody Tells You Which One
S25	Press, Cover and Balance — The First, Second and Third Defender
S26	The Compact Block — Making the Pitch Small
S27	Defending the Wide Areas — Where We Send Them
S28	Defending the Box — The Last Thirty Metres
S29	Penetration — Three Ways Into the Final Third
S30	Finishing — Putting Them Away
S31	Attacking Overloads — When We Have More Than They Do
S32	Creating and Taking Chances — Putting the Block Together
S33	Game Management — The Score and the Clock
S34	Adapting to the Opposition — Looking at Them, Not Just at Us
S35	The Bridge to Eleven-a-Side — What Actually Changes
S36	The Last Session — A Whole Hour That Belongs to Them
A1	Attacking Set Pieces — The Chances We Are Given
A2	Defending Set Pieces — The Goals We Give Away
A3	The Goalkeeper — The Player Who Never Gets a Session
A4	Throw-Ins — Forty Free Balls a Match
A5	The Small Space Session — Frozen, Flooded, or Somebody Else Has the Pitch
A6	Odd Numbers — The Night Eight Turn Up, and the Night Twenty-Two Do
A7	Four v Four — The Session Where the Coach Says Almost Nothing
A8	Movement, Landing and Growing Bodies



CASTLEWELLAN TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB

Pre-Season — A Four-Session Block

Four sessions, deliberate order, before results start • sequence, not content

WHAT PRE-SEASON IS FOR

Not fitness. Children get fit by playing, and running laps in August buys you very little by October. Anything you gain from conditioning work at this stage you would have got anyway from the last fifteen minutes of every session in the folder.

! FIRST — THE RETURN-TO-PLAY RAMP

After six weeks off, the first two nights are shorter and lighter than the sheet says, whatever is on it. Cut the conditioned match to ten minutes, keep high-speed running and sharp changes of direction down, and build back over a fortnight. Most pre-season injuries are load injuries in the first two weeks and they are largely avoidable. Watch for anyone who has visibly grown, and for knee or heel pain that has been there for weeks — that is a GP or a chartered physiotherapist, not something to coach around.

THE BLOCK — ORDER MATTERS FOR THE FIRST TWO

WEEK 1 **A7 • Four v Four**

You are not coaching this one, you are watching. Four v four strips the game back far enough that everything shows: who lifts their head, who hides, who goes past a player, who tracks back unprompted. Every intervention costs you information — write it down afterwards.

WEEK 2 **A8 • Movement, Landing and Growing Bodies**

Time-sensitive, and this is the week to run it. Bodies that landed fine in May do not necessarily land fine in August. Injury prevention rather than conditioning — landing, decelerating, turning without the knee falling in. Early means it is in place before the volume goes up.

WEEK 3 **1 • Scan, Open Out, Receive Across Your Body**

The individual habit everything else assumes. Head up before the ball arrives, first touch out of the feet, body open. If they come back receiving flat-footed with their back to the game, nothing in combination play or building from the back will land.

WEEK 4 **13 • Width and Depth**

The team habit, and the antidote to bunching. Six weeks of summer football in the street trains players to swarm the ball; this untrains it. Pair with Session 26 later in the year when the same problem returns, as it will.

READ A5 AND A6 BEFORE YOU NEED THEM — DO NOT RUN THEM

Read these, do not run them. Pre-season attendance is chaos — eight one night, twenty-two the next, and the pitch gone to the seniors half the time. A5 and A6 hold the four rules for scaling any session to any number of players and any size of space.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW BY THE END

- Who are the three players who consistently scan before receiving?
- Who is comfortable going past somebody, and who has never tried?
- Who defends when nobody is watching? Who talks, and who organises?
- Who has grown over the summer and is moving differently because of it?
- Who is smallest, and am I judging them on football or on size?
- Which two players do you not yet have a read on?

The last one is the useful question. There is always somebody who slips through pre-season without you forming a view, and they are usually the player who drifts by November.

IF YOU HAVE MORE THAN FOUR WEEKS

- A6 Odd Numbers — Run it properly rather than just reading it. Pre-season is the one time uneven numbers are guaranteed.
- 25 Press, Cover and Balance — The defensive habit that stops most goals at this age. Cheap to install early.
- A3 The Goalkeeper — Your keeper has had no coaching all summer, and probably none last season either.
- 5 The 1v1 Attacker — Confidence to take players on erodes fast once results matter. Bank it now.

THREE THINGS NOT TO DO

- No fitness test.** A beep test tells you who has hit puberty. Nothing you can coach, and it tells the slowest child something they need not learn about themselves at all.
- Do not pick a team in August.** The player who looks strongest in pre-season is often just the player who grew first. It evens out.
- Do not read a growth spurt as a drop in ability.** A player whose limbs changed length over the summer will have a worse touch for a few months. It comes back, and saying so out loud to them is worth more than any drill.
- Do not skip the reflection.** Five minutes sitting down is where it consolidates, and pre-season is when the habit gets set for the year.



CASTLEWELLAN TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB

Match Day

The sixty minutes that undo the forty-four hours

Everything in this folder is Tuesday work. None of it survives a Saturday spent shouting instructions. A player who has been trained to scan, decide and try things will stop doing all three the moment a familiar adult voice starts making the decisions for them — and the voice does not have to be angry, it only has to be constant. This page is about the other half of the job.

! HEAD INJURIES — THE ONE THING YOU DO NOT GET TO JUDGE

If a player takes a blow to the head and you are in any doubt, they are finished for the day. Not "see how they go", not "they say they're fine", not "it's a cup game". You are not qualified to clear a concussion at the side of a pitch and neither is the parent standing beside you.

- If in doubt, sit them out. Remove them immediately and do not let them back on that day.
- Nobody returns to sport within 24 hours of a suspected concussion.
- Contact 111 within 24 hours of a suspected concussion.
- Minimum 21 days before returning to competition where there is a risk of contact — and only if symptom-free for the preceding 14 days.
- Symptoms lasting more than four weeks need assessment by an appropriate healthcare professional.
- Tell the parent what you saw, in plain words, and write it down the same evening while you still remember it.

BEFORE THE PLAYERS ARRIVE

- Walk the pitch before the players arrive. Glass, dog mess, holes.
- Check the goals are anchored. Every year, somewhere, a goal falls on a child.
- Know where your first aid kit is and who on the touchline is first-aid trained. If the answer is nobody, that is a club conversation for Monday.

THE NUMBERS, FOR YOUR FORMAT

Follows the team you picked at the top of the page. The full card for every format, and the rules for scaling a session between them, are under Formats.

U6 – U7 • 3v3	Round robin / festival — minimum 4 games × 10 min, maximum 7 on festival days. Pitch c. 20 × 16 m, goals 5 × 3 ft • four nets, ball 3 (soft touch). Referee: no — environment coordinators call fouls. Offside: no. Restart: dribble in or pass in (self-start). Powerplay applies. No league results. Maximum 2 substitutes.
U8 – U9 • 5v5	Round robin / festival — minimum 4 games × 12 min, maximum 7 on festival days. Pitch c. 40 × 25 m (max 42 × 33), goals 12 × 4 ft • two nets, ball U8 = 3 • U9 = 4. Referee: no — environment coordinators call fouls. Offside: no. Restart: dribble in or pass in (self-start). Powerplay applies. No league results. Maximum 3 substitutes.
U10 – U11 • 7v7	One game, three periods of 15 minutes. Pitch c. 55 × 35 m (max 60 × 42), goals 12 × 6 ft • two nets, ball 4. Referee: allowed from U10, recommended from U12. Offside: no. Restart: dribble in or pass in (self-start). Powerplay applies. No league results. Maximum 4 substitutes.
U12 – U13 • 9v9	One game — U12 2 × 25 min, U13 2 × 30, U14 2 × 35. Pitch c. 65 × 45 m (max 78 × 50), goals 16 × 7 ft • two nets, ball U12 & U13 = 4 • U14 = 5. Referee: yes — all laws of the game. Offside: yes. Restart: throw-in. League results from here. Maximum 5 substitutes.
U14 – U18 • 11v11	One game — U15 & U16 2 × 40 min, U17 & U18 2 × 45. Pitch c. 100 × 65 m (max 106 × 70), goals 24 × 8 ft • two nets, ball 5. Referee: yes — all laws of the game. Offside: yes. Restart: throw-in. League results from here. Maximum 6 substitutes.

- Every player plays at least half of the overall game time. Not a guideline — it is in the framework, and it applies at every age from U6 to U18.
- No substitute waits longer than half the game before getting on.
- No results-based football below U12. Scores, cups and tables begin at U12. Below that, do not report a score and do not keep one on the touchline.

THE DAY, IN ORDER

Before you leave the house

THE NIGHT BEFORE

Almost everything that goes wrong on a Saturday was decided on a Friday, by not deciding.

- Write the rotation down before you arrive. If you are picking substitutions in real time while losing, you will bench the same three children every week and you will believe you are being fair. Use the planner on this page.
- Every player knows they are playing, and roughly when. A text to the group the night before removes the worst hour of a child's week — the hour spent wondering.
- Check who you have quietly stopped picking. It is almost always the smallest, and it is almost always temporary — they are the players clubs lose before the advantage evens out.
- Decide your one thing. Pick a single idea from a session you have actually run and let that be the only thing you look for. Not five things.
- Check what you are asking of them is something you have trained. If you have not run Session 17, do not ask them to play out from the back on Saturday and then be disappointed.

The warm-up

20 MINUTES BEFORE

The same principles as any Tuesday: a ball each, no queues, warm within a minute. A match warm-up is not the day to introduce anything.

- A ball each for the first five minutes. Touches, not laps. Laps are a tradition, not a warm-up.
- Include what they will actually do — turns, short passes, a few shots. The keeper gets served properly rather than blasted at.
- Finish with something they enjoy. They should walk to the halfway line wanting to play, not already tired.

• Watch the ones who came out of the car stiff. A player who was fine on Tuesday and is guarding a knee today does not start.

The team talk

TWO MINUTES BEFORE KICK-OFF

Ninety seconds. Anything longer and they have stopped listening, they are just being polite.

- Three things maximum, and all three already trained. Kick-off is not the moment to install an idea.
- Name two players for something specific they did in training this week. Public, brief, accurate.
- Say out loud what they are allowed to get wrong. "I want you to try to turn. If you lose it trying to turn, that's fine, that's on me." This one sentence changes how a team plays more than any instruction.
- Do not talk about the opposition's best player. You will have created him.

Try to turn. If you lose it, that's on me.	Don't lose it at the back. —
Head up before it comes to you — like the Y-gate.	Concentrate!
Sam, your first touch on Tuesday was excellent. Do that.	Come on lads, big game.

The touchline

ALL GAME

This is the part that matters, and it is almost entirely about restraint. Instructions shouted from the side do not add information — they replace the decision the player was in the middle of making. Do it often enough and you train a child to look at you instead of at the pitch.

- The test, before every shout: is it an instruction or is it encouragement? If it is an instruction, swallow it. If it is encouragement, say it.
- "Man on" is you scanning for them. It feels helpful and it is the single most direct way to undo Session 1. If they cannot see the defender, that is the information you need — not something to paper over.
- Try a silent half. Not a gimmick. Say nothing but names and encouragement for a whole half and watch how much more they talk to each other. Session A7 is the training-night version of the same idea.
- Stand still, and stand beside the opposition coach. The framework asks that both coaches share one sideline, away from the spectators — deliberately, so the match does not look like a contest between two adults. It also makes it much harder to shout something you would not say in front of the other coach.
- Spectators stay two metres back from the pitch. That is in the framework too, and it is easier to establish in August than in November.
- Never coach from behind the goal. It puts you in the keeper's head and it looks exactly like what it is.
- Do not speak to the referee. At this level the referee is often a teenager doing you a favour. Whatever the decision was, your reaction is the thing the children will copy.
- Two named pieces of specific praise per player, per match. Written down afterwards if you have to. "Well done" to the group counts for nobody.

Good look, Erin.	MAN ON!
Well tried — again next time.	Just get rid of it! —
Nice and calm.	SHOOOOT!
(nothing)	Why did you do that?

Substitutions

PLANNED, NOT IMPROVISED

You are legally and morally obliged to get everyone at least half the match. Beyond that, the timing of a substitution says more to a child than anything you will say to them all season.

- Never substitute a player straight after their mistake. Wait two minutes at the absolute minimum. Otherwise it is a punishment and every child on that pitch will read it as one, including the ones on your own bench.
- Tell them why they are coming off and when they are going back on. "Ten minutes, then you're back on the left." That is the whole conversation and it costs you nothing.
- Rotate positions, not just minutes. A child who only ever plays right back is a child who has been quietly told what you think of them.
- The biggest player is not the best player, they are the earliest. In one age group the spread of maturity can be four or five years wide, so a rotation built on who looks strongest is a rotation built on birthdays and growth spurts. See Welfare → Growing players before you write next week's.
- Do not freeze the rotation to protect a lead. It is a youth football match. The plan you wrote on Friday was written by a calmer person than the one standing on the touchline at 2-1.
- The keeper is a player. Nominate two and give them outfield time, or you have chosen a specialist on the basis of who happened to be tallest a couple of years ago.

Half time

THE MIDDLE TEN MINUTES

The most commonly wasted ten minutes in youth football. A group of children who have just played half a match cannot absorb a tactical lecture, and they know whether it went well without being told.

- First sixty seconds: say nothing. Water, breathing, let them talk to each other. You will hear more in that minute than you will learn all half.
- Ask before you tell. "What's happening out there?" Their answer tells you what they can actually see, which is the only useful starting point.
- Two points maximum. One adjustment maximum. Anything more and none of it lands.
- Name someone for something specific. Every half, without fail.
- Last thirty seconds: the first five minutes. Give them one clear thing to do at the restart, and nothing else.

Full time

THE TWO MINUTES THAT GET REMEMBERED

Whatever the result, the children will remember your face before they remember the score. That is not sentiment, it is just how memory works.

- Handshakes first. Always, and including the referee. No exceptions, no matter what happened.
- Say nothing about the result for two minutes. Let it settle. Nothing said in the first two minutes after a defeat has ever helped anybody.
- One thing that went well, named and specific. Then let them go to their parents.
- The analysis is Tuesday, not the car park. A debrief in the car park is for you, not for them.
- Have one sentence ready for the parents. "Good performance, we'll work on the corners Tuesday." It ends the conversation kindly and it stops the touchline post-mortem.
- Never single a child out for the defeat. Not by name, not by look, not by who you do not speak to on the way to the car.

I loved watching you play.

You were unlucky — that keeper was miles offside.

What did you enjoy?

What went wrong out there?

I loved watching you play is worth passing on to the parents too. It is the line most often cited in youth sport as the one children actually want to hear in the car, and it is the opposite of what most of them get.

GAME-TIME PLANNER

Enter your squad and it builds a rotation that satisfies the framework: everyone at least half the match, nobody waiting more than half to get on, rolling substitutions. Shirt numbers or initials only — no names, and it stays on this device.

The planner is in the phone index: open it, tap Match Day, scroll to the planner. It works with no signal.

THE NINE RIGHTS, ON A SATURDAY

The Irish FA Youth Football Charter sets out nine rights every young player has. Most of them are decided on match day rather than in a policy document. This is what each one looks like at 10am on a wet pitch.

Play and recreation	They play because it is fun. The result is your problem, not theirs.
Protection	You know who your club welfare officer is, and you report concerns rather than weighing them up yourself.
To be heard	You ask them what they saw before you tell them what you saw.
Non-discrimination	Same minutes, same positions, same tone of voice — regardless of ability.
Health	Nobody plays hurt. Head injuries end the day, every time.
Education	How you speak to the referee is the lesson. Not the thing you said about respect on Tuesday.
Family environment	You talk to parents as partners, and you give them something useful to say in the car.
Rest and leisure	One match is a match. Three games in a weekend is an adult's decision serving an adult's purpose.
Privacy	You ask before you post a photograph, and you do not put a child's name beside their mistake anywhere.

WHERE THIS COMES FROM

- Irish FA Youth Football Framework — game formats — <https://youthfootball.irishfa.com/game>
- Irish FA Youth Football Charter — <https://youthfootball.irishfa.com/education/youth-football-charter>
- Irish FA safeguarding — <https://www.irishfa.com/irish-fa-foundation/grassroots-and-youth-football/safeguarding>
- UK Concussion Guidelines for Grassroots Sport — <https://sportandrecreation.org.uk/campaigns-and-policy/concussion/concussion-guidelines-for-grassroots-sport>

Checked August 2026. The framework is being phased in and the concussion guidance is periodically updated — re-check both at the start of each season, and always defer to your own league's competition rules.

When It Isn't Working

Minute twelve. The drill has collapsed, two players are wrestling, and the plan in your pocket suddenly reads like it was written for a different species. This page is for exactly now.

Every session in this folder was written to work. None of them work every night. Experienced coaches fix a dying practice without thinking about it; this page is that instinct, written down, for everyone still building it. Read it once at home — at the pitch you'll only have time for the bold bits.

The five-second diagnosis

Stand still and watch for five seconds. Nearly every failing practice is one of these six, and each has a fix you can make **without stopping the session** — announce the change while the balls keep rolling.

1. Queues have appeared. More than three waiting anywhere means the practice has stalled — and this folder's first rule is *no queues, ever*. **Fix: split it in two.** Same practice, two grids, half the players in each. No new cones needed — steal the neighbouring space. Every session's diagram works at half size.

2. Too easy — it works every time. Success rate near 100% teaches nothing and boredom arrives within two minutes. **Fix: read the session's harder line** — every practice has one. No time to look? The universal levers: shrink the space, add a defender, limit touches, add a time limit.

3. Too hard — it never works. Nobody has completed the thing even once; heads are dropping. **Fix: the easier line.** Universal levers in the other direction: bigger space, remove a defender, unlimited touches, walk-through pace, or let the weakest pairing demonstrate a success you engineer.

4. They don't understand the rules. Everyone is asking questions or wandering — the explanation was too long (it usually was; this folder budgets you about thirty seconds of talking). **Fix: stop explaining and play it.** Pick four players, run one rep at half speed while everyone watches, then everyone in. A demonstration is worth three explanations, and doesn't need to be perfect — a *wrong* demonstration you correct is even better.

5. The energy has gone. Rules understood, difficulty fine — but flat. **Fix: add a score.** Any score. First pair to five, team points on the board, winners stay on. Competition is the folder's built-in engine (the last fifteen minutes is *always* a game for a reason); pull that lever early when a night is flat. If it's the last practice anyway — skip ahead to the game. A shortened session with a great game beats a complete session everyone endured.

6. One or two players are wrecking it. Everyone else is fine. **Fix: give the wreckers a job,** not a punishment — serve the balls, keep the score, captain a team, demonstrate. Ninety per cent of youth disruption is a request for attention or a signal the practice is at the wrong level *for them* — the harder line applied to one player is also a behaviour tool.

When to abandon the plan entirely

Sometimes the right call is bigger than a fix. Three honest triggers:

- **The numbers are wrong for the session** — see *Session A6 — Odd Numbers*, built for exactly this, any night.
- **The space is wrong** — see *Session A5 — The Small Space Session*.
- **The group needs a different night than you planned** — after a rough school day or a heavy defeat on Saturday, ten minutes into a fight with the plan, surrender gracefully: 4v4 games (*Session A7*) with you saying almost nothing is never a wasted session. It is, in fact, one of the folder's best.

What never changes, whatever else does: finish with a game, finish on time, and finish with the reflection questions — even a session that collapsed produces a good sixty seconds of “what was hard tonight?” And afterwards, be kind to yourself: write one line about what happened, because that line is next week's session choice. The folder has forty-four; the one that suits *this* group *this* month is in there.

Castlewellan Town FC · Youth Coaching Plans · companion to the 44 sessions · written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI

For Parents and Carers

One page about how football works at Castlewellan Town FC — worth five minutes in August, and a season of fewer misunderstandings after that.

Your coach is a volunteer working from a club-wide plan: forty-four structured sessions built around touches, decisions, confidence and enjoyment, adapted to each age group under the Irish FA's youth framework. This page covers the questions that otherwise get asked across a touchline in the rain.

What we're trying to do

Develop players and keep them in the game — in that order, and ahead of results. At the youngest ages there are no league tables on purpose. The measure of a good season is a child who is a better, braver player in May and wants to come back in August.

Game time and selection

Every child plays. The club's match-day planner rotates the squad within the Irish FA's rules for each format, and coaches plan substitutions before the match rather than deciding them on emotion during it. Positions rotate too at the younger ages — the nine-year-old defender is not a defender; they're a footballer having a defending month. If you ever feel your child is consistently getting less than their share, ask the coach directly and away from the pitch — it's a fair question and coaches expect it.

The touchline

The Irish FA Youth Football Charter gives every child the right to play free from adult pressure, and most of that right is delivered — or taken away — by what the sideline sounds like. What helps: encouragement, applause for both teams, and silence while a child is making a decision. What doesn't: instructions ("pass it!", "shoot!"), even kind ones — a child listening to the crowd isn't reading the game. Leave the coaching to the coach; leave the refereeing to the referee, who at this level may be sixteen and learning too. The car home matters most of all: the best sentence in youth football is *"I loved watching you play."*

Heading, concussion, and safety

Deliberate heading practice is restricted in youth training under Irish FA guidance — the youngest groups don't practise it at all, and where it's introduced later it's a handful of careful repetitions, never volume. No child at this club is ever made to head a ball. Any blow to the head means coming off and staying off — *if in doubt, sit them out* — and the coach will tell you it happened. If your child seems "not right" in the days after any knock, tell the coach and see a doctor before they play again.

Growing bodies

Children grow at wildly different speeds, and the club plans for it: heel and knee pain in growing players (Sever's, Osgood-Schlatter) is common, real, and managed by adjusting load rather than pushing through. Tell the coach about pain that keeps returning, about a recent growth spurt, and about how much other sport your child is doing in the same week — it all counts toward the same pair of legs.

Safeguarding

The club follows the Irish FA's safeguarding policies and procedures. If your child tells you something that worries you, or you see something that doesn't feel right, contact the club's Designated Safeguarding Officer:

Designated Safeguarding Officer: _____ **Contact:** _____

You can also go to the Irish FA's safeguarding team directly at any time — details at irishfa.com under Safeguarding.

The practical list

Every session and match: **shin pads, water bottle, clothes for the weather** (sessions run in rain), and named kit. Please aim to arrive five minutes early — the first ten minutes are built to start the moment players do — and tell the coach in advance when your child can't make it, because session plans adapt to numbers.

Want to help?

Volunteer clubs run on parents. Linesman duty, kit washing, a lift rota, or doing your coaching badges alongside your child's football — mention it to the coach. Nobody has ever regretted the Level 1.

Coach: _____ **Contact:** _____ **Team/age group:** _____

Castlewellan Town FC · Youth Coaching Plans · please keep this for the season · written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI

Castlewellan Town FC — The Club Game Model

What a Castlewellan player looks like, from U6 to the senior team — one page, both sites.

The senior curriculum names the club's identity: **organised, adaptable, competitive, and brave**. A team that knows what it is doing without the ball, is willing to take risks with it, and can change its shape without losing its shape of mind. This page exists to say something the two coaching folders have never said out loud: *the youth sessions build exactly that player*. Every senior principle below has a youth session — usually several — where it is first planted, years before anyone calls it a principle.

None of this changes how a youth session is run. Youth football at this club is about touches, decisions, confidence and enjoyment — the sessions already say so, and the age-group guidance in the youth folder always wins. This page is for the coach who wants to know *why these forty-four sessions and not some other forty-four*: because they are the junior half of one idea.

The four moments, at every age

Moment	The club's way	Seeded in youth	Named in seniors
In possession	Hard to press — always an option short, wide and long; forward when forward is on, patient when it is not	“Support Angles — Three Options, Always” (S14)	Support & passing angles
Out of possession	Compact and collective — nobody presses alone; middle and box defended first	“Press, Cover and Balance” (S25)	Pressure, cover, balance
Won it	Think before you react — counter, find the free player, or keep it	“Counter-Attacking — The Three Seconds After You Win It” (S22)	Recognise the picture before playing
Lost it	The nearest players react first; everyone else recovers goal-side	“Counter-Pressing — The Three Seconds After You Lose It” (S21)	The nearest players react first

Where each senior principle is born

In possession. *Width & depth* starts life as “Width and Depth — Making the Pitch Big” (S13) — the same principle, the same words, seven years earlier. *Support & passing angles* is S14 (“Three Options, Always”). *Progression — through, around or over* is the whole arc of S15–S20: “Playing Forward” teaches when, “Building from the Back”, “Beating the First Press” and “Building Under Real Pressure” teach the three ways out. *Overloads* begin as “The Wall Pass” (S09), “Overlaps and Underlaps” (S10), “The Third-Man Run” (S11) and “Attacking Overloads” (S31). *Switching the point of attack* grows out of S13’s big pitch and S18’s third way out.

Out of possession. *Protect the centre, then the box* is “The Compact Block — Making the Pitch Small” (S26), “Defending the Wide Areas — Where We Send Them” (S27) and “Defending the Box — The Last Thirty Metres” (S28), in that order — the senior priority is literally the youth session sequence. *Pressure, cover, balance* is S25 by name. *Collective pressing triggers* and *defend the space in behind* are the senior-shaped versions of the reading and patience first taught in “The 1v1 Defender” (S07) and “Defending the Wide 1v1” (S08): approach, angle, patience — then, later, together.

Both transitions. The senior programme’s proudest idea — *transition is a decision, not a reflex* — is taught to eleven-year-olds as “Transition Decisions — Nobody Tells You Which One” (S24), flanked by S21–S23. A senior coach inheriting a Castlewellan youth player is inheriting someone who has been asked “counter or keep?” since primary school.

The player underneath it all. Brave in possession starts at “The 1v1 Attacker” (S05) and “The First Touch That Travels” (S02). Trusted to decide starts wherever a coach follows the folder’s standing instruction: *say less than feels comfortable* — the youth method (guided discovery, questions, planned non-intervention) **is** the senior method (“players are trusted to make decisions”), applied to smaller people.

What this asks of coaches

Youth coaches: nothing new. Run the sessions as written, at the age-appropriate format, with the enjoyment-first priorities the folder already states. If it helps, know that S13, S14, S21–S25 are the sessions the senior team will one day thank you for.

Senior coaches: assume the principles have been met before, and coach accordingly — a new signing from the club’s own youth section needs vocabulary connected (“this is the third-man run you know — here’s where it lives in our Tuesday”), not concepts introduced. The “New to the Squad” pathway does this; this page is its map.

Everyone: the formations differ, the pitch sizes differ, the stakes differ. The football is the same football.

*Castlewellan Town FC · one club, one idea · written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI.
Session numbers refer to the youth folder; principle names to the senior Season Architecture.*



Coach Reflective Practice Log

A single reusable page for the coach's own development — not the team's.

Every session in this programme already carries a "Coach Review" section, and every phase review carries an "Individual Development Focus" — both are about the players and the team. Nothing in the programme supports the coach's own development, despite the whole project being written from a coach-education standpoint. This page is that missing piece: a short Plan-Do-Review cycle, standard practice on any UEFA coaching course, aimed entirely at how you coach, not what the team learned.

This is one reusable page, not a new page per week — print several copies, or keep a running digital copy, and fill in a row or a short entry after any session worth reflecting on. It doesn't need to be every session.

The three questions

Plan — before the session. Name one specific thing about your own coaching you want to focus on tonight — not a tactical topic, a delivery skill. For example: *asking more and telling less in the guided-discovery moments, letting a practice run longer before intervening, giving the quieter players a specific individual word, keeping transitions between practices under two minutes.*

Do — during and straight after. A brief, honest note on what actually happened with that specific focus — not the session's results, your own delivery of it.

Review — the same evening or the next day, while it's fresh.

- What worked well in *how* you coached tonight?
- What would you change about your own delivery next time?
- What's the one thing about your coaching — not the team's tactics — that carries into next week?

A menu of focuses, if you're not sure where to start

Rotate through these across a season rather than reflecting on everything at once — one focus, held for a few sessions, teaches more than a different focus every night.

AREA	WHAT TO WATCH IN YOURSELF
Intervention timing	Are you stopping practices at the right moments — enough to correct, not so much that play never settles?
Question quality	Are your guided-discovery questions genuinely open, or leading players to the answer you already have in mind?
Tone under pressure	Does your tone change when a practice is going badly, and is that change helping or making it worse?
Session pace	Are transitions between practices tight, or is training time leaking away between activities?
Individual attention	Is the same two or three players getting most of your direct feedback, or is it genuinely spread across the squad?
Plan vs adaptability	Are you running the session as planned even after it's clearly not working, or adjusting live using the regressions/progressions already built into each practice?
Silence	Are you comfortable letting players organise a practice without your voice, even briefly — Week 5 and Week 36's deliberately coach-silent moments are a useful test of this.

Running log

DATE / WEEK	THIS SESSION'S FOCUS	WHAT WORKED	WHAT I'D CHANGE	CARRIES INTO NEXT WEEK
e.g. Wk 6, Tue	Asking more, telling less in guided discovery	Held back for the first two questions — players found their own answer	Jumped in too early on question three when the group went quiet	Give a genuine ten-second pause before rescuing a quiet moment

Castlewellan Town FC · Coaching Curriculum (Youth and Senior) · coach reflective-practice log · written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI