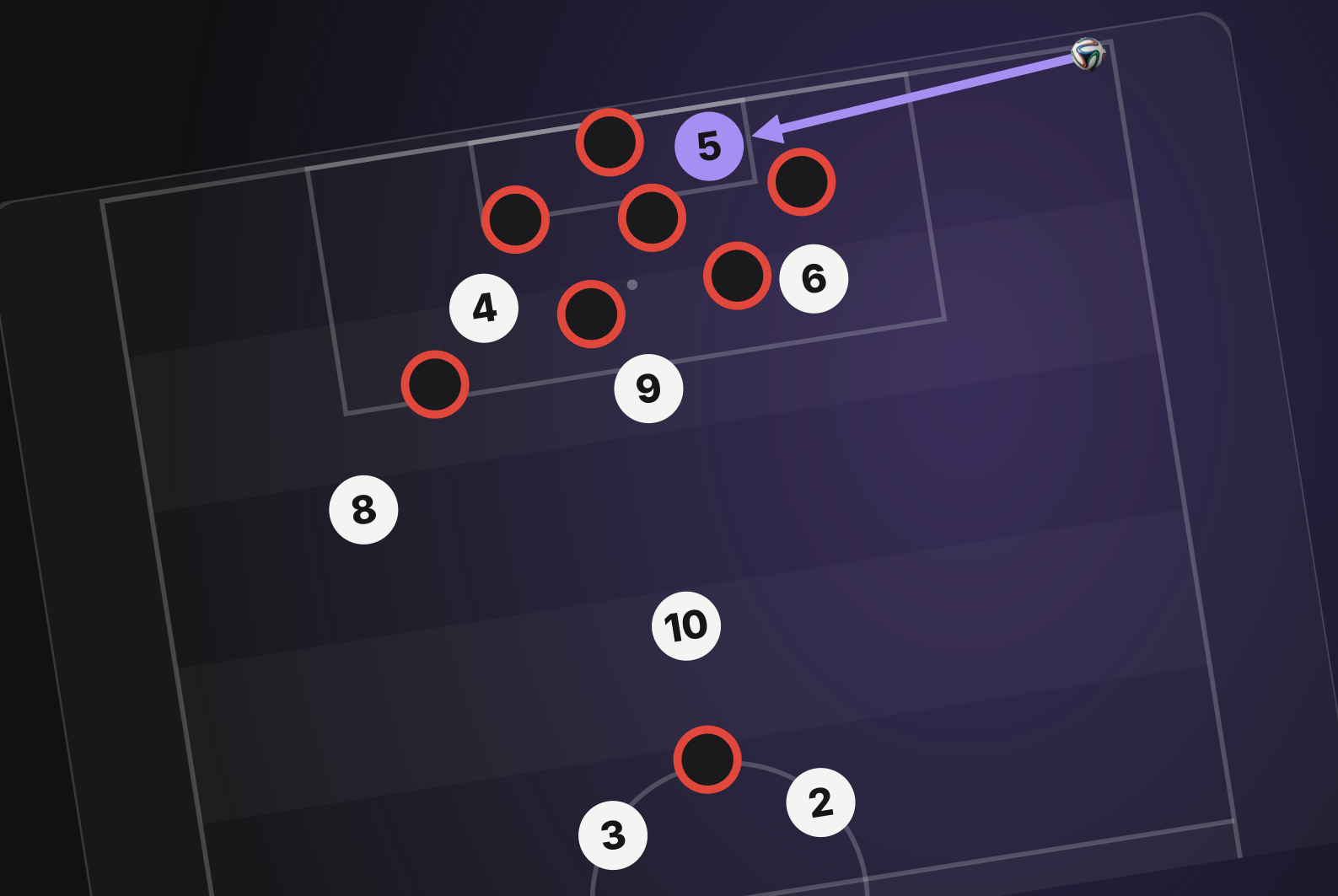




The Set-Piece Playbook

Every restart, attacked and defended: corners, free kicks, throw-ins, kick-offs, goal kicks and penalties.



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By the Total Football Studio coaching team



Total Football Studio

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The Set-Piece Playbook

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The Playbook Series, No. 05

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The numbers. Every statistic is quoted from the public sources listed at the back, as published at the time of writing. Distances on the boards are measured at real scale on a 105 × 68 m pitch.

Training safety. The sessions are guidance for qualified coaches. Adapt the area, the load and the contact to the age, fitness and ability of your players, check the surface and the equipment, and follow your club's and your federation's safeguarding rules. The publisher accepts no liability for injury or loss arising from the use of this material.

Corrections. Found a mistake? Write to totalfootball@naurra.ai and we will fix it in the next version.

Written and designed by the Total Football Studio coaching team. Diagrams drawn with the Total Football Studio board engine. Set in Inter.

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

A field guide to set pieces, written for the people who coach them.

A set piece is the only moment in football that you can rehearse exactly: the ball is still, every player is where you put him, and nothing happens until your taker decides. This book turns that moment into a system for every restart, at both ends of the pitch.

Who it is for

Head coaches, assistants, set-piece coaches, analysts and academy staff, at any level of the 11-a-side game. The professional data explains why a routine works; every routine also says what to change for an amateur side.

How every chapter works

Problem, principle, picture, session, cost. Every routine is drawn on a real-scale pitch, every pattern links to a session in [chapter 12](#), and every choice ends with what it costs you when it goes wrong.

About the numbers and the Laws

Every figure comes from a named public source: Opta via The Analyst, FIFA's own tournament analysis and peer-reviewed studies. Every board is checked against the IFAB Laws of the Game 2026/27 at the moment of the kick: the 9.15 m, the 2 m at a throw-in, the 1 m from a wall, the penalty area at a goal kick and offside at a free kick.

THREE WAYS TO USE IT**1 • Build your system**

Chapters 3 to 8 build the attacking routines, chapters 9 to 11 the defence. Read them in order once.

2 • Prepare for Saturday

Count how the opponent defends corners ([chapter 9](#)) and pick two routines that beat it ([chapter 5](#)).

3 • Plan the week

Use the session finder in [chapter 12](#). Every session trains one step and names the problem it solves.

THUMB TABS

The coloured tabs on the right edge of every page match the six steps. Flip to a colour to find a step.



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BEFORE YOU START

Reading the boards

Every board is drawn to scale on a 105 × 68 m pitch. We always attack up the page, so our corners are taken at the top and theirs at the bottom. Opponents are the white chips with a red ring. Every board with a dead ball shows the moment of the kick, and every player on it stands where the Laws of the Game allow.



Our player and role number



Opponent



A wall: one dot per player



Pass along the ground



Run without the ball



A defender's run or challenge



Man-to-man: a marker and his man



Cones and mini-goals (sessions)



The key players in the routine



Their goalkeeper



Where a player started, or should not be



Delivery or lofted ball, bent as it flies



Screen: the runner stops on the bar



The line steps up or drops



Target zone and its number

Role numbers

Our numbers stay the same in every chapter: **1** keeper, **2** right-back, **3** left-back, **4** left centre-back, **5** right centre-back, **6** and **8** the central midfielders, **10** the attacking midfielder, **11** the left-sided and **7** the right-sided wide player, **9** the striker. In chapter 3 the letters name the set-piece roles instead.

Words we use

Delivery: the ball from the taker. **Target zone:** one of six numbered spaces in the box. **First contact:** the first touch after the delivery. **Screen:** standing in a marker's path, inside the Law. **Rest defence:** who stays back. Full glossary at the back.



Drawn in Total Football Studio

Every board in this book was built in our tactics board, at real scale. Open it and draw your own routines the same way, one phase at a time.

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INTRODUCTION

The only moment you can rehearse.

In open play, nobody knows where the ball will be in five seconds. At a set piece, you decide. The ball is still, the players stand where you put them, and the routine starts when your taker is ready. No other moment in football gives a coach that much control.

In the 2025/26 Premier League, 27.4% of all goals came from set pieces other than penalties, the second-highest share in the competition's 34 seasons. Goals from corners reached an all-time high of 18% of all goals.¹ The champions, Arsenal, scored 25 set-piece goals without counting penalties, 19 of them from corners, a Premier League record.⁴

Yet a single corner is still a long shot. In 1,139 corners at two major tournaments and a Champions League season, just 2.2% ended in a goal.⁸ The teams that score from set pieces do not have a trick. They have a system: the same zones, the same roles and the same signals, every week, for every restart, at both ends.

This book is that system. It is built on six steps. We call it the spine. Every chapter answers one of them, every routine belongs to one of them, and every session trains one of them.

Plan the zone. Deliver to it. Move to free the target. Finish first. Recover the second ball. Guard your own box.

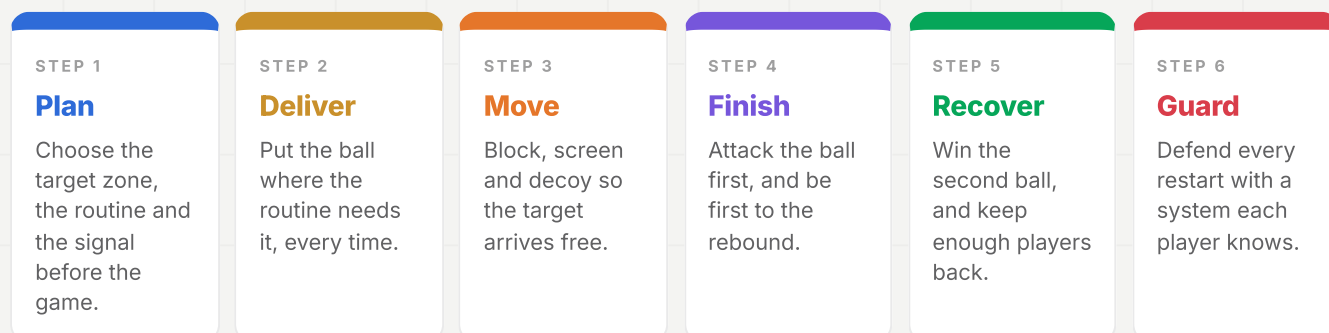
THE WHOLE BOOK IN ONE LINE

27.4%

Of Premier League goals in 2025/26 came from set pieces other than penalties, up from 20.6% the season before.

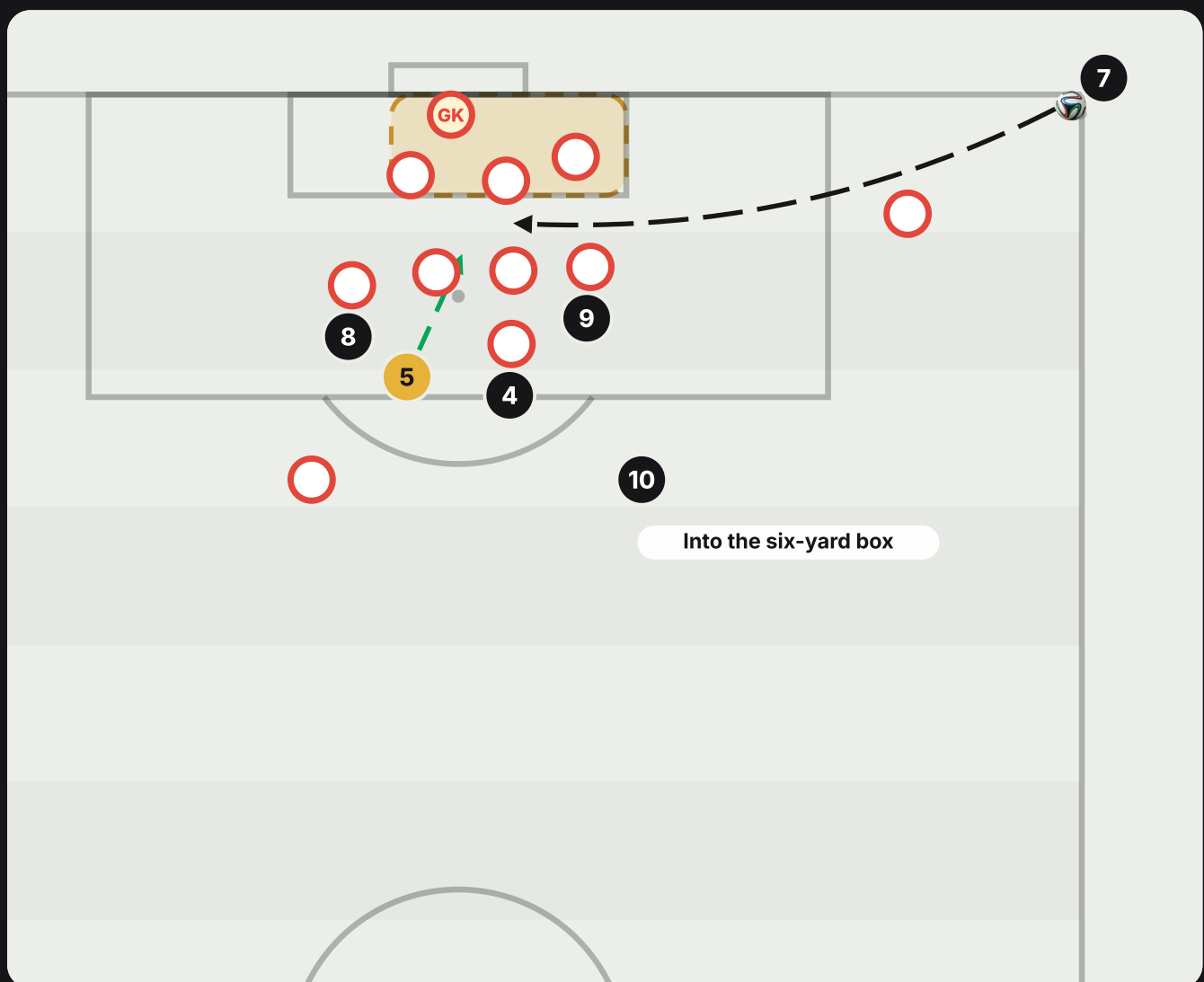
THE ANALYST · OPTA

THE SPINE: SIX STEPS, IN ORDER



Why set pieces

Set pieces have never been worth more. This chapter shows what they are worth, who has learned to use them, and how to measure your own without a data department.



The corner that won a title: an inswinger into the six-yard box, with the target arriving from the penalty spot.

IN THIS CHAPTER

01 What a dead ball is worth

02 The specialists

03 What one corner is worth, honestly

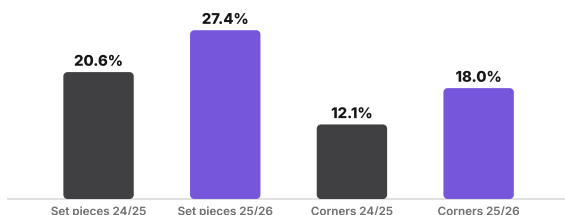
THE DATA

What a dead ball is worth

In 2025/26 the Premier League scored more of its goals from set pieces than in almost any season before.¹

Share of all goals

PREMIER LEAGUE



Set pieces here exclude penalties. 27.4% was the second-highest share in the competition's 34 seasons; 18% from corners was the highest ever.¹

0.5

Goals from corners per game after 210 games of 2025/26, up from 0.35 per game in 2024/25.

THE ANALYST · OPTA

11.3%

Of corners taken short at the same point of 2025/26, down from 18% in 2024/25. Teams put the ball into the box.

THE ANALYST · OPTA

Fewer short corners, more balls into the box

The rise is not luck. Teams stopped playing so many corners short and put the ball into the box instead, where the keeper has to come through bodies to reach it. In 2024/25 Arsenal already sent 77.2% of their corners into the six-yard box.^{2,6}

Long throws came back too

After 210 games of 2025/26 there were 3.97 long throws into the box per game, and 18 goals from them, one every 11.7 games. A long throw here means one that travels at least 20 metres and ends in the box.² Chapter 7 shows how to use one and chapter 10 how to defend it.

THE POINT

A set piece is a chance you can plan. A team that does not plan them is giving away a quarter of the goals.

58.8%

Of set-piece goals came from corners in the 2024/25 Premier League, by April.

THE ANALYST · OPTA

36.3_s

The average corner from the ball going out to the kick, Premier League 2025/26 by October.

THE ANALYST · OPTA

54.8%

Ball-in-play time at the same point, the lowest on record. Restarts take time.

THE ANALYST · OPTA



THE DATA

The specialists

The clubs that score most from set pieces employ someone whose whole job is set pieces.

Most goals from corners in one season

PREMIER LEAGUE

TEAM	SEASON	CORNER GOALS
Arsenal	2025/26	19
Oldham	1992/93	16
West Brom	2016/17	16
Arsenal	2023/24	16
Man City	2021/22	15
Liverpool	2021/22	15

Arsenal also scored 25 set-piece goals without penalties in 2025/26, the most in the division.^{4,5}

One coach, three clubs

Nicolas Jover was set-piece coach at Brentford from 2016 to 2019 and at Manchester City from 2019 to 2021, then joined Arsenal on 5 July 2021.⁷ Three of the six seasons in the table belong to clubs he worked for, two of them while he was there.

Specialists for every restart

Liverpool hired a throw-in coach, Thomas Grønnemark, in 2018. Under pressure, they kept the ball from 45.4% of their throw-ins in 2017/18, 18th of 20 teams, and from 68.4% in 2018/19, the best in the league.¹² At Brentford, Michael Kayode took 94 of his team's 100 throws into the box in the first 21 rounds of 2025/26.²

19

Corner goals for Arsenal in 2025/26, a Premier League record.

ARSENAL · OPTA

68.4%

Throw-ins kept under pressure by Liverpool in 2018/19, up from 45.4%.

ESPN

100

Throws into the box by Brentford in the first 21 rounds of 2025/26.

THE ANALYST · OPTA

WITHOUT A SPECIALIST

You do not need a specialist to copy the method. You need one person on the staff who owns set pieces, the same zones and words every week, and twenty minutes of the training week. [Chapter 3](#) shows how.

MEASURING

What one corner is worth, honestly

A season of set-piece goals is a lot. A single corner is still a long shot, and your players should know both.

2.2%

Of 1,139 corners became a goal at the 2010 World Cup, Euro 2012 and the 2010/11 Champions League.

CASAL ET AL., 2015

1 in 35

Corners scored at the 2022 World Cup. One free kick in 27 was scored.

FIFA TRAINING CENTRE

76%

Of matches with a corner goal ended in a win or a draw for the team that scored it.

CASAL ET AL., 2015

Small odds, big moments

Most corners end in nothing. But a corner goal tends to decide the game: in the study above, the team that scored from a corner won or drew 76% of the time.⁸ Because every set piece is a small chance, the gain comes from taking many of them well, not from one clever routine. At the 2022 World Cup, set pieces gave 19% of all goals without own goals and penalties.¹¹

What raises the odds

Casal and his colleagues found that goals were linked to the number of attackers involved and how the attack was organised. Three or four attackers, a moving rather than a static attack, and an indirect delivery to the far post (in the study's terms, a ball not sent straight into the box from the corner) all made a shot more likely.⁸ Chapters 5 and 8 are built on that.

Count your own

WHAT TO COUNT	WHY
Corners and free kicks into the box	Your chances: how many you earn
First contacts won	Did the delivery reach your zone and your man?
Shots within three touches	Did the routine create a chance?
Second balls won at the edge	Did you keep the attack alive?
Set-piece goals for and against	The bottom line, at both ends
Counters conceded after your corners	What the routine costs you

Count them from video after every game. Ten games are enough to see whether a routine works.



Clip it, then draw it

Draw each routine in Total Football Studio as it should be, next to the clip of how it went.

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SESSION 1 · DELIVER

Hit the zone

The habit every routine depends on: a taker who can put the ball into a named zone, from either corner, with either swing.

TAKERS + KEEPER

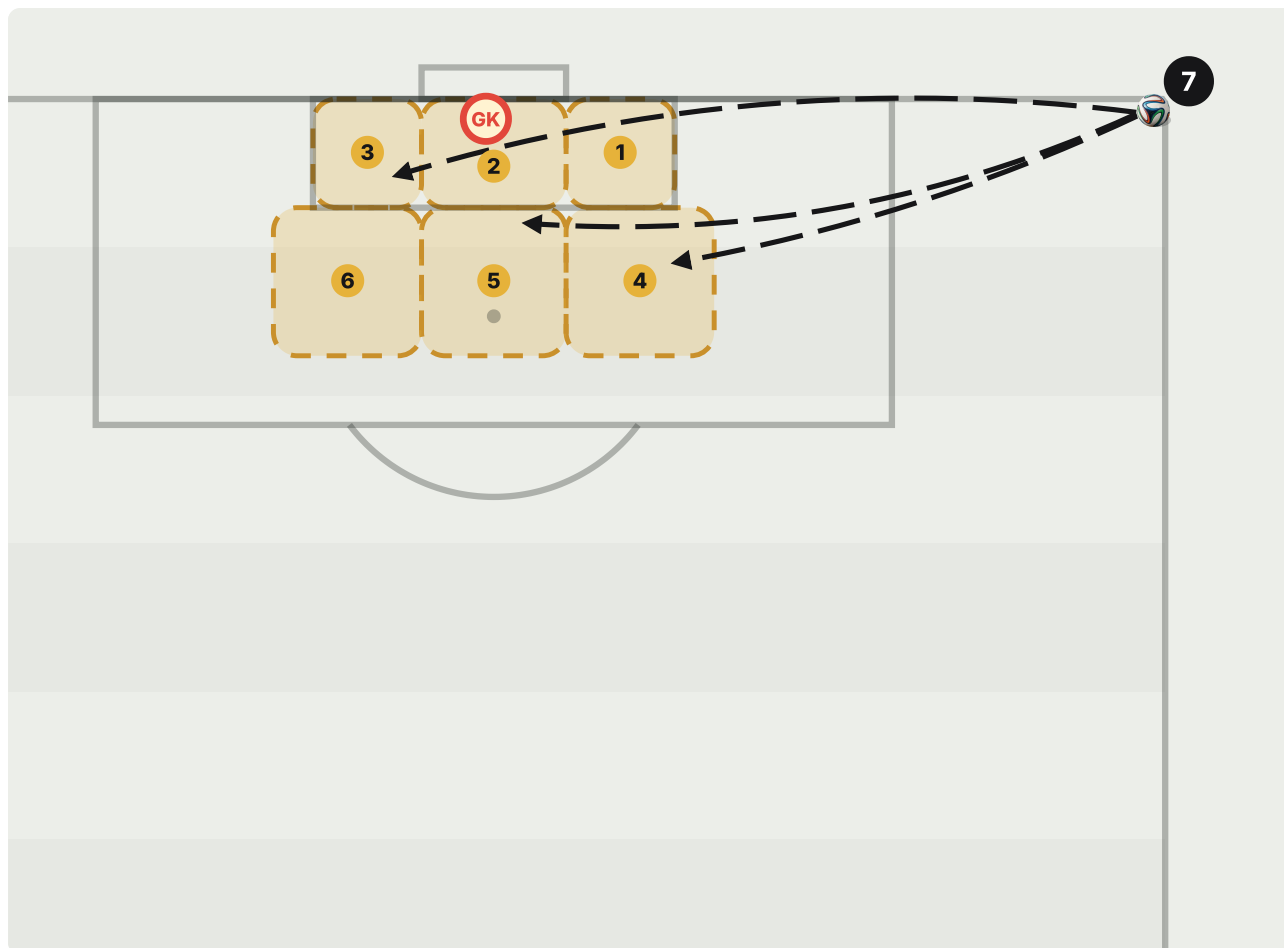
BOX, SIX ZONES MARKED

10 BALLS A SIDE

LOW

Setup

BOX AND BOTH CORNERS



The six zones are marked with cones or flat discs. The coach calls a zone; the taker delivers into it.

HOW IT RUNS

- 1 Mark the six zones with flat discs.
- 2 The coach calls a zone and a swing before each ball.
- 3 Ten balls from the right, then ten from the left.

RULES

- A ball that lands in the zone scores 2.
- A ball the keeper catches without moving scores 0.
- A ball short of the near post scores minus 1.

COACHING POINTS

- 1 Same placement, same run-up every time.
- 2 Eyes on the zone, not on a player.
- 3 Watch where it lands: that is the feedback.

PROGRESS

Add a passive keeper who comes for every ball.

REGRESS

Use zones 4 to 6 only, with a floated ball.

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

Seven of ten balls land in the called zone, from both corners.

"Zone!"



More than a quarter of the goals. None of them from open play.

A set piece is the only moment in football you can rehearse exactly. This playbook gives your staff a system for every restart at both ends: who delivers, where it lands, who blocks and who attacks it, how to defend it zonal, man-to-man or mixed, and who stays back. Every board is drawn to scale and checked against the Laws of the Game.

INSIDE

- 01** What set pieces are worth, and the Laws that shape them
- 02** Roles, target zones and signals: a system, not a trick
- 03** Corner delivery: inswing, outswing, driven and short
- 04** Corner routines: stacks, screens, decoys and the far post
- 05** Free kicks direct, wide and quick, and the long throw
- 06** Kick-offs, goal kicks and penalties
- 07** Defending zonal, man-to-man and mixed, the wall and the line
- 08** 20 sessions, from delivery to 11 v 11



Five books, one way of drawing the game. The Playbook Series from Total Football Studio.