US YOUTH SOCCER

Skills School

Fundamental Ball Skills

US Youth Soccer Technical Department

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The key coaching points of each major technique in soccer are presented here. There is an example training activity for each technique. Major training concepts for learning specific physical movements are discussed.

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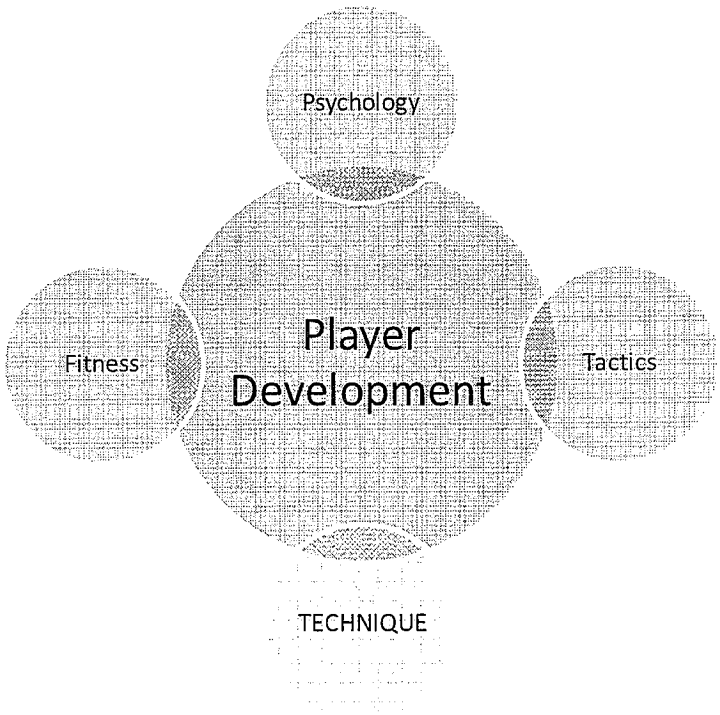

Figure 1 The Four Components of Soccer

COACHING TECHNIQUE

The game will show you what the player needs to practice.

In this manual the coach will find the basics of all ball skills. From this core set of techniques the growing player will be able to add on many variations and subtleties to the techniques. This is most likely applies to players fifteen years of age and older as they fully mature athletically and come to understand how to use a variety of skills in varying game situations. Do not let the developing player's game become obsessed with frills or skills that, while useful, are used rarely. Be competent in the basic orthodox techniques first. But once that standard has been reached then embroider the player's skills with the less orthodox techniques as they are serious, positive skills which will help the team and not just please spectators.

During the first fourteen years of a young player's career the coaching emphasis must be on technique. The actual execution of a movement is always in the realm of technique. The challenge of "when and why" to use a movement is one of tactics. In this manual the focus is the "how to"; that is on technique. Technique is the body's mechanical execution to affect the ball; for example receiving, catching, shooting, dribbling, deflecting, etc. It is one of the four components of the game and leads to ball skill. Skill is being able to execute a technique under the pressure of opponents in tight space and most likely on the move. Without ball skill a player cannot execute tactics. Some players will:

- be able to do a technique in an activity but fail to apply it as skill when under pressure from opponents
- be competent with the ball but not outstanding
- be technical but not skillful, while others will be skillful but not technical
- be capable of executing some skills against one level of opponent but not another

Players gain more trust and respect for a coach who can help them improve their technique. The result is confident use of new skills in matches. Motivated players spend time working on their skills. Players will appreciate the importance and thrill of learning new techniques and refining existing ones if the coach creates the proper training environment. Then the players begin to equate fun with improvement.

Novice coaches often find themselves in a Catch 22 at training sessions. They can influence young players by helping them develop techniques, but some coaches don't know enough about the techniques they are teaching to offer relevant advice.

The execution of a technique is broken down into three phases:

PREPARATION – the movements leading up to contact with the ball.

- focus on the feet first as they will impact what happens with the rest of the body and they must get the body to the ball
- look at the distribution of body weight (body posture), the angle of the approach to the ball, the position of the body and limbs in relation to the ball, the position and steadiness of the head, the position and shape of controlling surfaces and the rotation of the body into contact with the ball

- eyes on the ball

CONTACT – the placement of the feet and the posture of the body upon contact with the ball.

- look for the distribution of body weight and how it impacts balance
- observe the hip and shoulder positions, the position of the supporting leg(s), the contact point with the ball and the movement of the limbs
- eyes on the ball

FOLLOW THROUGH – the movement occurring after contact with the ball.

- again focus on the distribution of body weight and posture
- is the follow through complete or halted too soon
- eyes on the ball

Technique should be taught in a progressive manner throughout a player's career. Every technique coached at one age must be reinforced at the next age. Techniques taught at U6 must be reinforced at U8, U10, U12 and U14. What was learned at a previous age group or groups must be refined at the next age group. During the childhood years of soccer the general progression of the child's experience with the ball is for the U6 age group ~ manipulating the ball, for the U8 age group ~ propelling the ball and for the U10 age group ~ mastering the ball.[1]

U6— dribbling; shooting; balance; running; jumping; movement education

U8— ball lifting & juggling; block tackle; receiving ground balls with the inside & sole of the foot; shoot with inside of the foot; toe pass & shot; introduce the push pass; throw-in; agility; eye-foot & eye-hand coordination; movement education

U10— range of motion flexibility; running with the ball; passing; instep drive; receiving ground balls with the instep & outside of foot; receiving bouncing balls with the instep (cushion) and sole or inside or outside of foot (wedge); fakes in dribbling; introduce heading & crossing. For goalkeepers: ready stance; how to hold a ball after a save; diamond grip; catching shots at the keeper; punting & introduction to goal kicks & throwing

U12— feints with the ball; receiving bouncing & air balls with the thigh & chest; heading to score goals & for clearances while standing or jumping; outside of foot pass; bending shots; crossing to the near post space & the penalty spot space; heel pass; flick pass; introduce chipping to pass; introduce half volley & volley shooting; introduce slide tackle. For goalkeepers: footwork; W grip; bowling; low dives & forward diving; angle play; near post play; introduce deflecting & boxing; sidewinder kick

U14— chipping to pass; bending passes; crossing to the far post & top of the penalty area; half volley & volley shooting; slide tackles; heading to pass; diving headers; flick headers; receiving with outside of the instep;

[1] Dave Simeone, Technical Director for Space City Football Club

outside of foot shot; receiving bouncing & air balls with the head; dummy the ball; shoulder charge; introduce chipping to shoot. For goalkeepers far post play; medium & high diving; deflecting over the crossbar & around the posts; boxing & catching crosses; half-volley (drop kick); kick saves; long over arm throws; saving penalty kicks

Yet before a player can learn soccer skills the child must first learn how to control the body's movement, so the foundation to ball skills is physical education. Motor skills (physical movement/body mechanics) are refined from early, gross actions to highly coordinated and complex movements. This developmental trend of simple to complex and gross to fine is the basis of all motor development. Motor movement is the collective action of the muscles and tendons to move the ligaments and bones. Gross motor skills refer to movements of the entire body or major segments of the body. Fine motor skills refer to movements requiring precision and dexterity, such as manipulative tasks done with the feet or hands. Basic motor patterns of the body are established in the gross motor phase and motor skills emerge in the fine motor phase.

"Early and consistent training of basic coordination skills as the foundation for any kind of technical movement is an important part of player progress and success." – Detlev Brüggemann, FIFA Instructor

Motor Patterns and Motor Skills

Motor pattern – basic movement involved in the performance of a task. The emphasis is on the movement composing the task.
Motor skill – focuses on the proficiency of completing the task. Motor skill looks at accuracy, precision and economy of the performance.

Athleticism and technique from one age group are utilized to build more advanced skills later in the continuum. It is important to note that a deficit in one stage of the development process will tend to influence acquisition of more complex skills. Here are key motor skills to be emphasized:

- eyes on the ball
- appropriate joint locked
- smooth movement of the appropriate limb
- head steady
- balance
- muscle group control – when to tense and when to relax
- when to bend joints
- center of gravity
- contact surface of the body level with the ball contact surface area

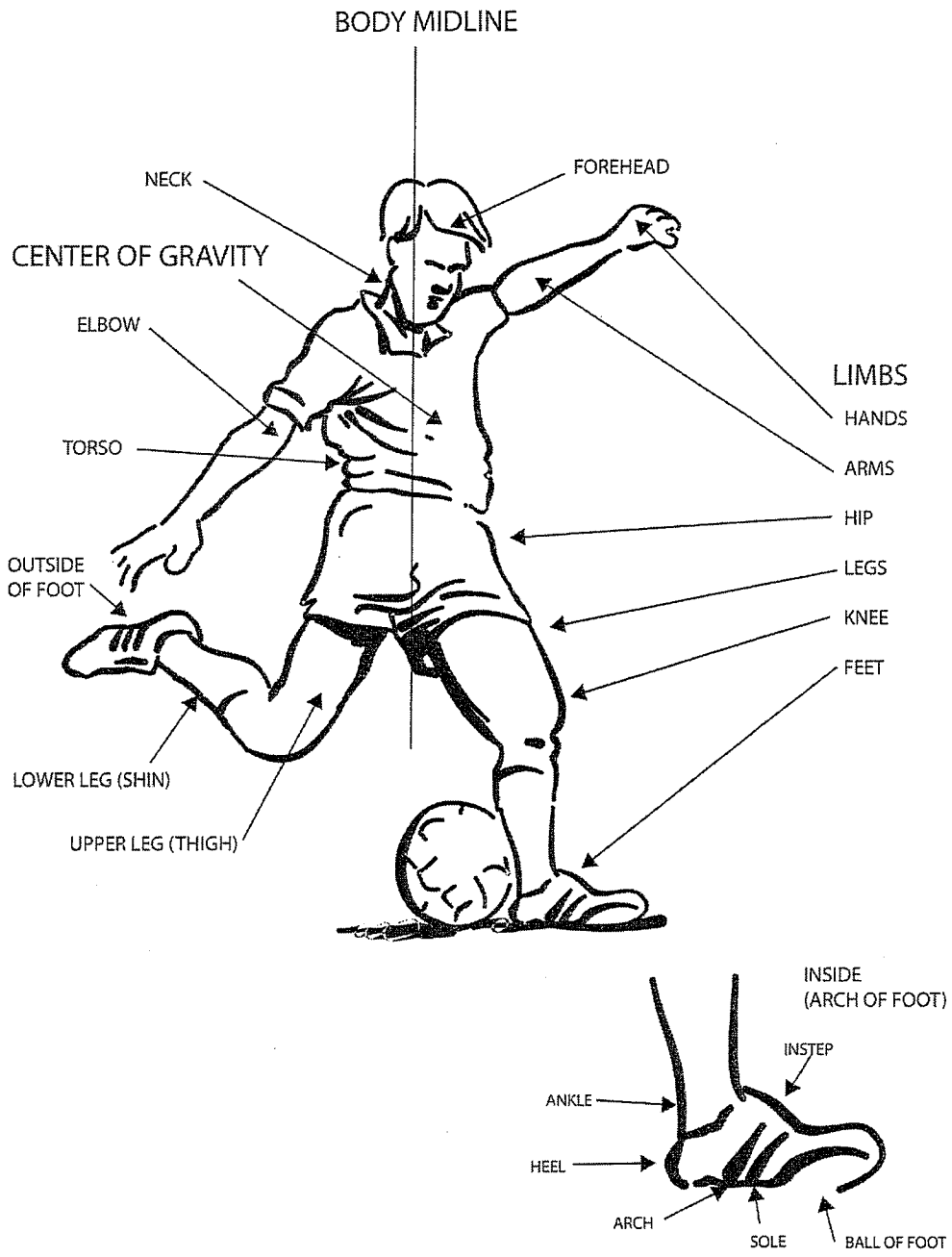

Figure 2 Key Body Parts

In general when analyzing a player's technique start with observing the feet and work up to the head. Correct body mechanics increase the likelihood of proper ball contact. Body posture plays a large role in skillful control of the ball. The "position of readiness" cannot be overemphasized in its importance to executing ball skills. The "position of readiness" is the preparation phase mentioned previously. The body posture and alignment with the ball are crucially important and often overlooked by coaches and players alike who

focus too much on the contact phase. The foundations to any "position of readiness" are the non-locomotor and locomotor actions. They are balance, agility, twisting, bending, along with stretching and eye-limb coordination among others.

Before a player can be expected to learn ball skills the child must first be under control of the body. This growth in athleticism, from gross motor skills to fine motor skills, is a long term growth process. It is imperative for children to acquire a base of general balance, coordination and agility before soccer skills. How can coaches expect them to control the ball before they can control their bodies? So it is essential that youngsters be exposed to movement education. This requirement is of primary importance to the youngest players and ball skills are of secondary importance. Running and jumping are the two most often executed movements in soccer.

Running

Basic running mechanics, figure 3, must be taught and reinforced as part of movement education in the U6 and U8 age groups and those motions can be reinforced during warm-up or cool-down activities with the U10 and older age groups. The following basic mechanics of running serve as a good foundation to this skill for the soccer player. Coaches must note that a player's running style will change in the match when in contact with the ball or opposing players or when reacting to the movement of teammates or opponents. Here then are the basics upon which to build proper running:

- maintain a balanced and upright posture
- control speed by how much force is applied with each foot strike
- the quicker the foot strike, the faster the player runs
- strive to get the feet on and off the ground as quickly as possible
- leg locomotion and stride length determine the speed at which a player runs
- position with the torso and head aligned with the hips
- strike the ground with the ball of foot while bringing the foot back under the body
- lean forward slightly, bending the ankles until body weight is centered on the balls of the feet
- head in a neutral position, looking forward with the facial muscles relaxed (glance sideways or turn the head only when needed to tactically scan the field)
- lift the heel and push off with the ball of the foot
- bend the leg at the knee and drive it forward
- bend the arms; swing the arms forward and back (the movement will be diagonally across the front of the body in order to be able to change direction) to maintain poise
- attempt to keep the center of gravity near the ground (this aids in stopping or sudden change of direction)

Figure 3 Running Motion

Jumping

Teach jumping to improve performance and to reduce the possibility of knee injury. The jump can occur from a stationary position or while on the move.

- Approach run before take off

The approach run should be made in the direction in which the player intends to receive the ball from or propel the ball towards. Lengthen the final stride and the center of gravity should be lowered somewhat. Press against the ground with the heel of the foot of the take off (drive) leg. By straightening the trail leg the body weight is transferred onto the lead leg which is slightly bent at the knee. By straightening the take off (lead) leg and by pulling up the knee of the trail leg vigorously the body will leave the ground. The arms can help in the upward momentum by swinging upwards close to the torso. If the take off space is tight because of the presence of other players then the final two strides should be stutter steps to be able to change the momentum from horizontal along the ground to vertical into the air.

- Landing from the jump

The legs should be held in a lunge position. To ensure a soft landing the knees should bend a little as the balls of the feet touch the ground; followed by the arch of the foot and then the heel.

Players jump in a soccer match to hurdle over another player on the ground, to avoid a tackle, to receive or strike the ball; to head the ball or for a goalkeeper to catch, punch, or deflect the ball. The ability to judge the speed and the arc of the ball, while making a split-second decision on the timing and takeoff point of the jump, will mark the above average player. Undoubtedly the basis of good play in the air is jumping mechanics.

Acquaintance with locomotor and non-locomotor activities lays the foundation for all of the movements and skills in soccer. This requires an underpinning of physical education during the first ten years of a youngster's soccer life. That foundation is non-locomotor (not moving from one space to another), locomotor (moving from one space to another) and manipulative (controlling a ball with the hands or feet) actions.

Categories of Movement Patterns

Locomotor – body moving through space, such as walking, jumping and running, hopping, turning, rolling, skipping, diving, twirling, shuffling, kneeling, loping or leaping and stopping

Nonlocomotor – specific parts of the body are moved, such as pushing, pulling, dipping, stretching, bending, tucking and twisting

Manipulative – patterns in which the ball is "moved", such as throwing, catching, passing, dribbling, shooting and other actions involving propelling or receiving the ball

A youth soccer coach should be able to observe a player's movements and assess the quality of those movements, which in turn affect the caliber of ball skills. It stands to reason that as athleticism grows within a player then too the odds for good performance of ball skills increase. This means for the

soccer coach ball skills and physical education go hand in hand. One must be able to observe and assess motor movement when children play soccer.

Assessing Motor Patterns and Skills – Process and Product

When assessing the quality of performance the process of movement deals with the technique of completing a specific movement in terms of its components (hip rotation, arm action, etc.) and the specific elements of the performance (angle of takeoff in a jump, length of lever arms, etc.). The product of movement concerns the result of the action, the height the child jumps, the time elapsed in a dash, as examples. In general, but not always, the process and product of a motor performance are related. Good performers in terms of the product usually demonstrate proficiency in the movement process. In other words the player in good control of his or her body motion is more likely to be skillful. This is why movement education is important during the soccer player's childhood years.

A knowledgeable coach realizes that every player goes through a sequence of learning and performing the movement patterns mentioned above while on the pathway to achieving adult patterns. The achievement of developmental milestones cannot be predicted based on age, size, weight or strength. The rate of mastery of skills varies widely. From infancy, development progresses from the head to arms to torso and then to the legs. So proficient ball skills can only come after full control of the lower limbs is reached. For example if a kick is divided into its various separate yet combined movements, certain distinct phases can be differentiated. Separation of this kind is very difficult since a kick is a continuous series of movements. However it is important to deal with the components of the basic action of kicking, since if a coach is familiar with them it is easier to observe and correct faults or to reinforce correct patterns. Here then are the stages in growth from kicking a soccer ball to passing or shooting one.

Developmental Sequence of Kicking in Early Childhood

Stage 1: *Initial position – with two legs together, ball in front of a foot.* With no leg windup or arm movement the child pushes the ball from a stationary position. After the kick he or she steps backward to regain balance. By age two most boys and girls reach this stage.

Figure 4 Stage 1 Kick

Stage 2: *Initial position – with two legs together, ball in front of a foot.* The child begins the kick from a stationary position, but in preparing to kick, there is both a leg windup to the rear and some opposition movement of the arms and legs. Balance is recovered by stepping backward or to the side. Most boys achieve this stage by age three and a half and most girls by age four.

Stage 3: *Initial position – several steps behind the ball.* The child takes one or more steps to approach the ball. The kicking foot stays close to the ground until the moment of contact. After the kick the child steps forward or to the side to regain balance. The forward momentum used during the run

up propels the body forward after the kick. Most boys achieve this stage by age four and a half and most girls by age six.

Figure 5 Stage 2 Kick

Stage 4: *Initial position – several steps behind the ball.* The child approaches the ball with several rapid steps, leaps before the kick and usually hops during the plant onto the support leg after the kick. The body generally reclines during the windup. Most boys achieve this stage by age seven and most girls by age eight.

By contrast here are the mature kicking features of the older player.

- ❖ run up to the ball
- ❖ balance on the plant leg (forces are on the support foot)
- ❖ location of the plant foot immediately adjacent to the ball (not behind ball)
- ❖ swing leg movement during the back swing and forward swing (hip extension to hip flexion, knee flexion to knee extension)
- ❖ hip rotation while striking the ball (swing begins in the legs, continues through hip rotation and ends with torso and arm involvement)

Regardless of the type of kick the basic action is identical:

a) the position taken to the ball (preparation)
b) the back-swing of the kicking foot (preparation)
c) the kick proper (contact)
d) the follow-through

A talented soccer coach guides a player's development both athletically and technically. Therefore the coach must be familiar with not only the sequence of physical growth, but also the properties of the ball.

Properties of a Ball

Coaches must teach the qualities of a rolling ball, bouncing ball and the flight of the ball, in that order! The teaching progression is a ball rolling away from the player, a ball rolling towards the player and a ball rolling across the player's body – first from the player's dominant to non-dominant side and then the reverse.

The same progression applies to a bouncing ball. Coaches need to get across when to play a bouncing ball, which for field players is once it has dropped below knee height or to jump in order to get level with the ball (line A in figure 7) to play it sooner. A bouncing ball may also have spin to it which makes reading the direction and height of the bounce difficult. Additionally a ball hitting the ground may take on new properties of pace, spin, height or roll depending upon the surface conditions of the field.

Teach how to read the spin and swerve of a flighted ball. For example a ball in the air that spins to the left will fly to the left. The teaching progression for spin is right to left, left to right, back to front and front to

back. With swerve the teaching progression is flat flight, arc flight, out-swing, in-swing and dip.

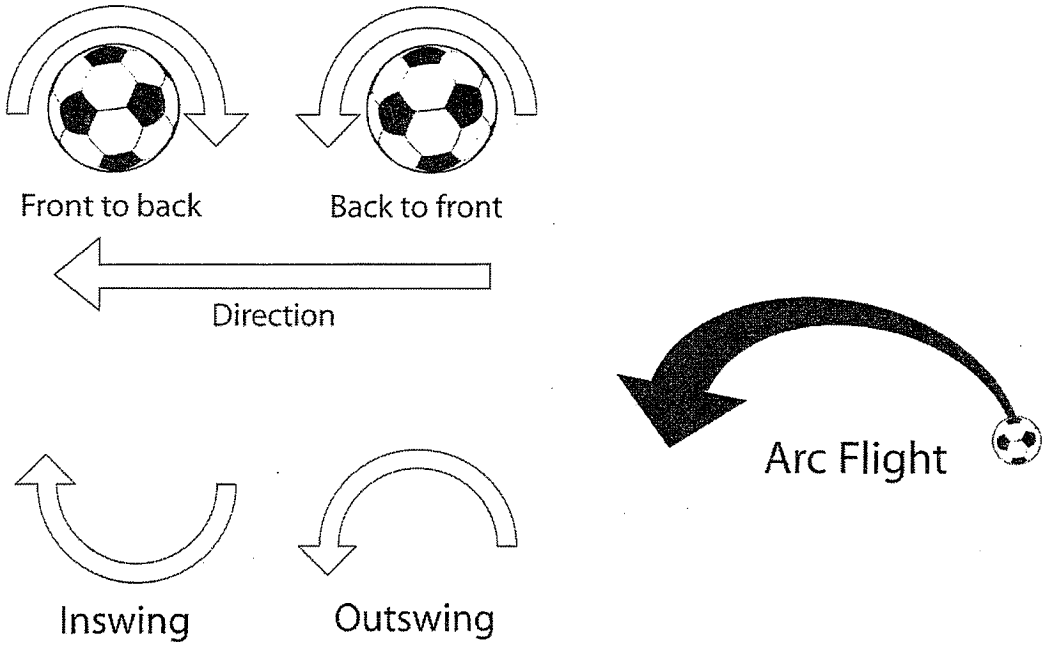

Figure 6 Ball Action

Understanding which part of the ball to contact is crucial to the execution of many techniques. In figure 7 the ball has been divided by two lines A and B. They are the axis lines of a sphere. When the ball is struck above line A then it will be propelled downward, which could be important in a side volley shot on goal as an illustration. When the ball is struck below line A then it will rise and this is important for a lofted pass for instance. When the ball is struck to either side of line B then the ball will swerve, which is important in bending passes for example.

The better a coach understands the properties of the ball, its sections and aspects of its movement, then the coach will be able to read the movement of the ball as the player propels or receives it. By reading the ball action the coach can then guide the player toward improved technique.

A ball will travel in a straight line only if it has been kicked exactly at its center point and exactly in the correct direction. Direction (accuracy) and height of the ball when passing or shooting become quite important factors as players mature within the game. The following factors determine the height of the ball:

- The position of the support leg
- The position of the kicking foot
- The movement of the upper torso
- Whether the ball is hit above or below the center point (intersection of lines A & B)

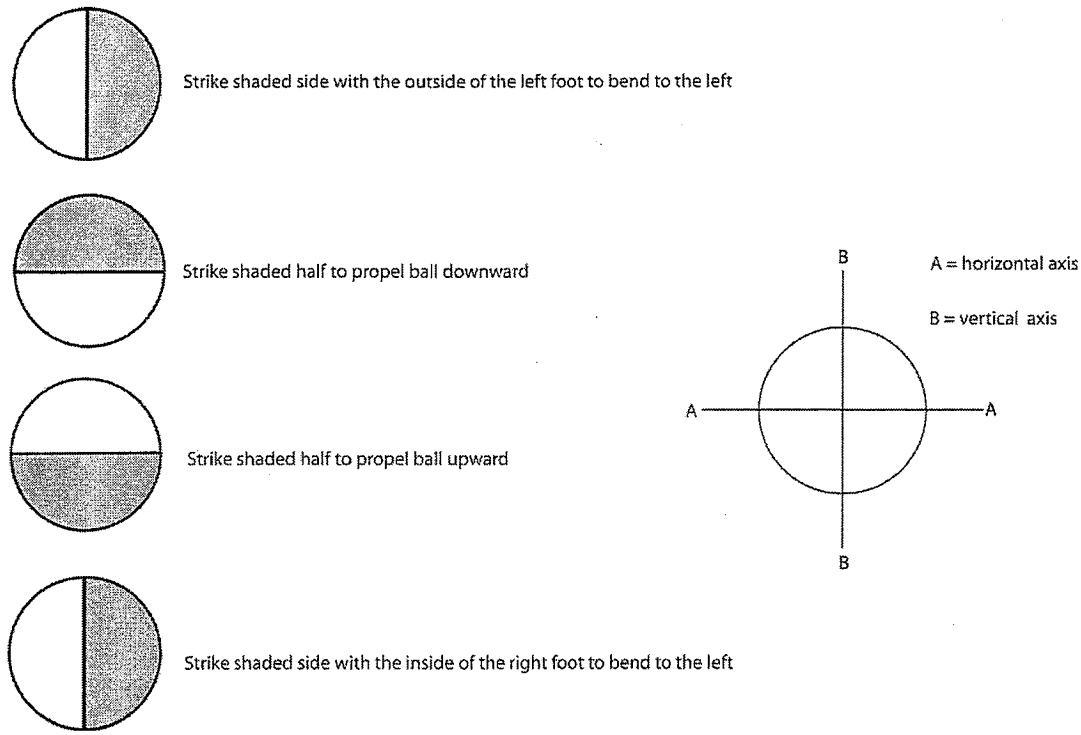

Figure 7 Ball Axis

Even within game-like activities there can be a progression for gaining a feel for the ball. While such a progression is not always necessary it may be useful when presenting a new ball skill in this format:

i. The ball and the player are stationary while the ball is propelled to a stationary target
ii. The ball and player are stationary while propelling the ball to a moving target
iii. The player is dribbling or moving while propelling the ball to a stationary target
iv. The player is dribbling or moving while propelling the ball to a moving target

A ball rolling on the ground has an immediate backdrop to it. This backdrop makes it easier to judge the pace and spin of the ball. A bouncing ball infrequently has an immediate backdrop; at the moment it touches the ground. A ball in the air has no backdrop. Prior to age 9 visual tracking acuity is not fully developed. Players have difficulty accurately tracking long kicks or the ball off of the ground. Beginning at approximately age 10 the visual tracking acuity achieves an adult pattern.

Armed with the knowledge of motor development and the properties of a ball the coach is now ready to teach activities which bring out the game in the child.

BALL SIZE BY AGE GROUP
U6 & U8 – SIZE 3
U10 & U12 – SIZE 4
U14, U16 & U19 – SIZE 5

Guide to Selecting Developmental Activities

When making the decision whether one training session activity is more or less difficult than another activity, a direct comparison approach is effective. In order to do that the coach must know that, generally:

A. It is easier to control a ball when remaining in a space as compared to controlling the ball while moving to another space or moving to a ball before it is received.
B. It is easier to strike a stationary ball than a moving one and when standing still or moving slowly as compared to moving fast.
C. It is easier to accurately propel the ball to a close target (teammate or space) than a distant target.
D. It is easier to accurately strike a large ball than a small ball.
E. When catching/receiving with one hand/foot it is easier to catch/receive a ball that fits the hand/foot as compared to a large ball.
F. It is easier to catch/receive a straight, slow moving soft ball than a curving, fast moving hard ball.
G. It is easier to do an activity with the dominant hand or foot than with the non-dominant hand or foot.
H. It is easier to move at ground level than to move when airborne.
I. It is easier to perform alone than to move in synchrony with a partner or group.
J. It is easier to perform an activity with few or simple rules as compared to activities with many or complex rules.

By using this information a coach begins identifying easy and complex activities. The identification of activity difficulty is important in planning movement experiences and making adjustments to movement experiences when the activities planned for the training session are judged by the coach to be too difficult or too easy. The selection of activities with appropriate levels of difficulty is an important part of developing a progression for an effective training session.

Principles of Learning Motor Skills

- Principle of Interest

A player's attitude toward learning a skill determines for the most part the amount and kind of learning that takes place.

- Principle of Practice

Practicing the motor skill correctly is essential for learning to take place.

- Principle of Distributed Practice

In general short periods of intense practice will result in more learning than longer, massed practice sessions.

- Principle of Skill Specificity

A player's ability to perform one motor skill effectively is independent of his/her skill ability to perform other skills.

- Principle of Whole–Part Learning

The complexity of the skill to learn and the player's ability determines whether it is more efficient to teach the whole skill or break the skill into component parts.

- Principle of Transfer

The more identical two tasks are the greater the possibility that positive transfer will occur. Practice conditions should match the conditions in which the motor skill is going to be used.

- Principle of Skill Improvement

The development of motor skills progresses along a continuum from least mature to most mature. The rate of progression and the amount of progress within an individual depends upon the interaction of nature and nurture.

- Principle of Feedback

Internal and external sources of information about motor performance are essential for learning to take place.

- Principle of Variable Practice

Block practice aids performance while variable practice aids in learning. Variable practice causes an increase in attention.

Foundational Skills

Developing the athletic abilities of soccer players is an ongoing process. Yet the crucial foundations must be laid during childhood. Improved athleticism aids the refinement of ball skills.

Balance – Stationary

1. stand on one leg – stand back on two feet and then switch to standing on the other leg
2. cross leg over – a limb now crosses the midline
3. star
4. standing on one leg then extend other leg forward, then backward and then out to the side … repeat on opposite side

Balance/Agility

1. hop in one place on one leg, then stop and repeat on the opposite leg, then switch while hopping
2. twirl in place – 180°/360°
3. happy star – arms and legs diagonally to the side; one leg back and one arm forward (both sides after a reset)
4. jump and kick heels towards buttocks

On the Move

1. hop and move (forwards/backwards/sideways) double leg; then single leg
2. skipping
3. galloping
4. leaping
5. jump forward and plant (backward/sideways/diagonal)
6. run – forward, backward

Twisting – Stretching – Bending

1. alphabet shapes
2. trunk twist
3. reach to stars on your toes
4. roly poly

Additional Exercises:

- jump from one training bib on the ground to the next
- go around & over disc cones while walking, hopping, jumping, walking backwards, skipping, twirling, lunging, loping, running & side step
- stomp like a giant
- tiny steps & then tiny steps with fast feet
- body shapes: letters, geometric shapes, animals
- jump straight up double leg & then single leg (left/right)
- broad jump double leg & then single leg
- jump forward/backward and spin in the air 180° and then 360°

- forward shoulder roll
- single person log roll
- randomly placed vertical sticks, players weave in and out
- somersault

Training Activity: *Dynamic Movement*
The diagram below shows a variety of movements that players could do alone, with a ball or other equipment. What implements are used depends on the age group, as the children grow older the equipment becomes slightly more challenging.

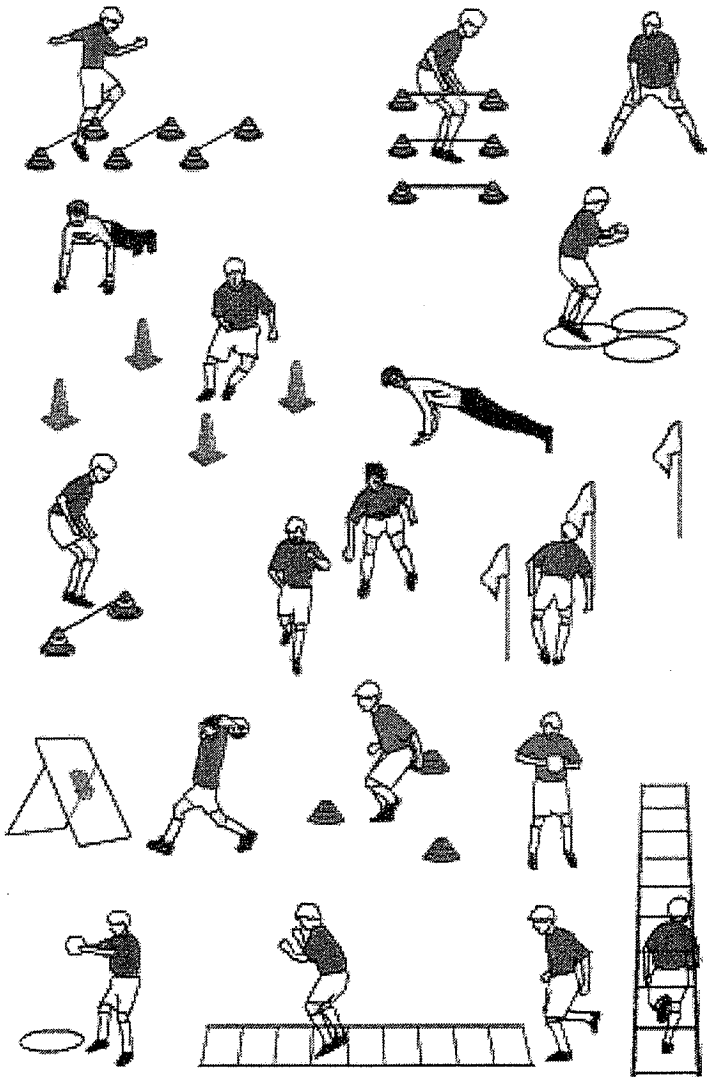

Figure 8 Samples of Movement Exercises

Dribbling

A change of direction and change of speed are crucial to successful dribbling. Change of direction is the ability while dribbling to alter course to the left or the right or a 180° turn. Change of speed while dribbling could be from slow to fast or fast to slow, to come to a complete stop or to move from a standing start.

Dribble

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: stay on the balls of the feet; knees slightly bent; lean a little forward at the waist; arms out somewhat for balance; head steady; eyes **glance up** to see the dribbling path
2. Contact: eyes **glance down** to ensure proper contact with the ball; touch the ball at the horizontal midline (line A) with the instep or the inside or outside of the instep (front of the foot near the toes); the ball can be touched at the vertical midline (line B) or slightly left or right of that line to change direction with the ball
3. Follow Through: the sole of the foot can be used to stop the ball or to change direction

Running with the Ball

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: **balance** and good running motion
2. Contact: push the ball forward with the instep; each push of the ball should go several yards and then run to catch up with the ball; touch the ball forward in the **natural running stride**; when touching the ball with the instep look at the ball
3. Follow Through: **look up** and search for any passes or shots that might be on while the ball is rolling forward; when the ball is a few strides away the head is up and the eyes scan the field

Shielding

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: take up a side position to keep the ball **away from the opponent at the furthest point**; stand on the leg closest to the opponent with the knee slightly bent for balance; the arm closest to the opponent should be to some extent up and locked for balance and to hold off the opponent (do not push); lean with the shoulder closest to the opponent; head steady; use the foot away from the opponent to turn away thus screening the ball
2. Contact: eyes on the ball; **center of gravity lowered** to help balance; the leg furthest from the opponent should be extended to hold the ball as far away from the opponent as possible; place the sole of the foot of that leg on top of the ball (alternately form a wedge by the inside of the foot and the ground)
3. Follow Through: firm base provided by supporting foot; if the opponent commits to one side then roll in the opposite direction

Training Activity: *Dribble Attack*
Play 3v3 in a 30 x 20 yard grid. Put the two groups of three into different colored training bibs. Each player in one group has a ball. Attacking players must dribble past defending players. The defending players should try to gain possession and (if they do) then dribble past an opponent. Players may dribble in any direction inside the grid to start. The activity can progress when the coach gives the attack a direction (e.g., dribble to a specified goal line). Play a round for a set amount of time. After a round the groups switch roles.
U6: play one minute rounds
U8: play two minute rounds
U10: play three minute rounds
U12: play four minute rounds
U14: play five minute rounds

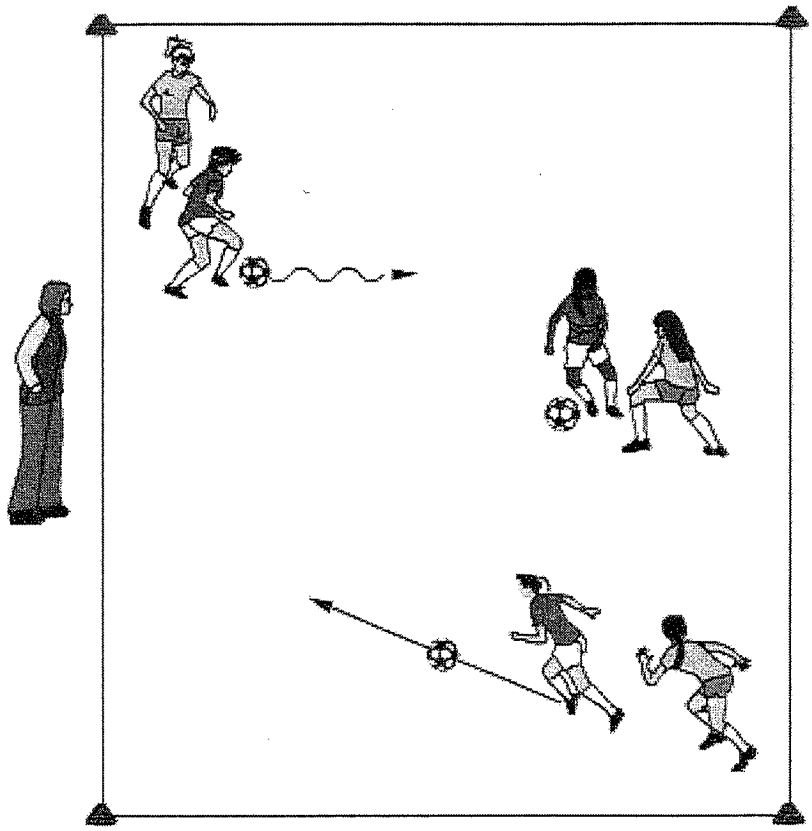

Figure 9 Dribble Attack

Coaches will try to teach and players will try to learn 'moves' for dribbling through the use of fakes and feints. Yet what is the distinction between a fake and feint? A fake is a move that is done with the ball; actually moving the ball. A feint (body swerve) is done only with the body, no contact with the ball until the player in possession finally plays the ball. A fake is done with the feet. A feint could be done with almost any part of the body. The goal of either a fake or a feint is to get the opponent off balance (wrong

footed) or going in the direction opposite of where the player in possession of the ball really plans to go.

When using either a feint or a fake subtle control of the body is required. The center of gravity should not be moved too far sideways from the body's midline. If the body weight is unnecessarily shifted in the direction of the swerve, the player will find it difficult to make a fast second move. Changing direction quickly during a fake requires the player to keep a low center of gravity until the second move is started.

Coaches must be cautious with the systematic instruction of feints and fakes. In coaching, the main thing is to develop the abilities that will help the players in making effective 'moves', such as speed, mobility and a sense of how to shift the center of gravity economically. Once a player is comfortable with the basics of dribbling then cunning must become a part of the skill.

CUNNING – EXHIBITING SKILL, CRAFTY, ARTFUL, CLEVER, SLY, DEXTERITY, KNOWLEDGE

Figure 10 Basic Inside of the Foot Dribble

Passing

The thread that ties together all types of passes is crafting good passes that make the receiver, the passer's teammate, look first rate. This thread then ties the team together.

Ground

- Push pass
- Toe poke pass
- Flick pass
- Heel pass straight
- Heel pass cross over
- Instep pass
- Crossing
- Inside of foot bent pass
- Outside of foot bent pass
- Chip pass

Half-Volley & Volley

- Inside of foot
- Instep

Clearance

QUALITIES OF A GOOD PASS ACCURACY, PACE, ANGLE, HEIGHT, TIMING, DISGUISE

High Ball		**Low Ball**
behind the ball	Support Leg	**near or in front of the ball**
long follow through	Kicking Leg/Foot	**hits the ball hard and sharp**
lean backwards	Upper Torso	**lean over the ball**
below the center point	Point of Contact with the Ball	**above or at the center of the ball**
after the ball has bounced	Timing of Kick	**the moment the ball touches the ground**

Table 1 Features of a High or Low Pass

Push Pass

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: run up approach to the ball is a straight line; plant foot is beside the ball about 6" away and the **toes are pointed in the direction of the pass**; knee of the standing leg is bent; hips facing the direction of the pass; turn the kicking leg outwards from the hip; the toes of the kicking foot point out and the sole of that foot should be parallel to the ground; lean a bit forward at the waist; head down with the eyes on the ball; arms out for balance; a medium backswing of the kicking leg
2. Contact: lock the ankle of the kicking foot; toes of the kicking foot up slightly; hit across line A (equator) preferably where lines A & B cross; the kicking foot is turned out and pushes through the middle of the ball; contact the ball **near the arch of the foot**; the downswing of the kicking leg comes from the hip; upon contact with the ball the knee and ankle of the kicking leg should be locked to provide a firm striking surface and more power; push through the ball towards the target
3. Follow Through: keep the kicking foot in place; follow through with the foot towards the target; the knee of the kicking leg should **come up** on the follow through so that the thigh ends parallel to the ground; the upper torso becomes more upright on ball contact and the follow through; the head should remain down until the kicking foot lands once again

Toe Poke Pass

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: feet in a balanced position; kicking foot **locked** at the ankle joint
2. Contact: take a **short stab** at the ball from the knee joint; contact the ball at the point of intersection of lines A and B
3. Follow Through: follow though only to the extent of straightening the kicking leg; finish the movement with the sole of the kicking foot **parallel** to the ground

Training Activity: *Cliffhanger*
Mark off a grid in the shape of a square or rectangle. The dimensions will vary depending upon the age group involved in the activity. Every player has a ball and lines up on one end of the grid. Each player makes a pass so that the ball stops as close as possible to the opposite line without going over the cliff. Players can pass all at once or take turns.
Depending upon the distance between the end lines the activity can be used to teach long or short push pass technique. If the grid is small then toe or heel passes can be made.

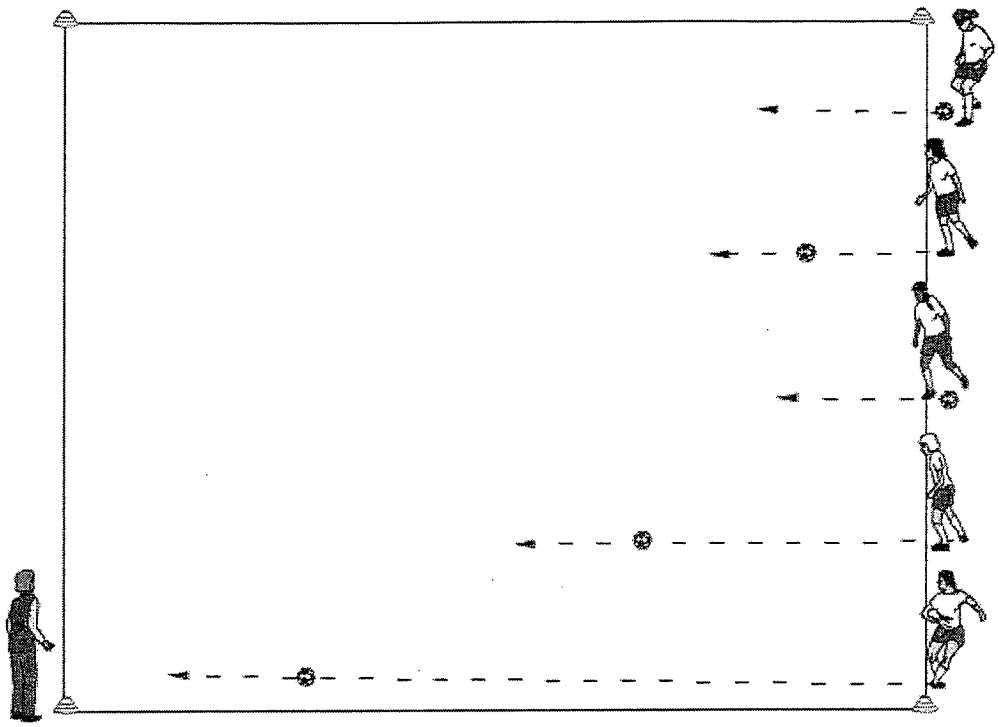

Figure 11 Cliffhanger

Flick Pass

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: plant foot **alongside** the ball; arms and upper body poised for balance
2. Contact: hit the ball around line A and on the near side of line B; use the long outside surface of the foot; **flick** the foot from the ankle joint
3. Follow Through: the toes of the kicking foot **come up** on the follow through and pointed in the general direction of the target

Heel Pass

Straight

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: plant foot as with the push pass; knees a little bent for good balance; the kicking foot is passed **over the top** of the ball and then lowered in front of the ball
2. Contact: eyes on the ball to ensure a clean and central contact; a **short and sharp backswing** of the lower leg from the knee joint; the sole of the kicking foot is parallel with the ground and the toes are turned slightly up; the heel contacts the ball at the intersection of lines A and B
3. Follow Through: the heel **goes up** towards the back finishing at almost a 45° angle

Cross Over

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: plant foot as with the push pass; knees a little bent for good balance; the kicking foot is passed in **front of the ball** and over the support leg
2. Contact: a **short and sharp backswing** of the lower leg from the knee joint; the rear of the shoe provides the striking surface; again the ball must be struck centrally if it is to go straight or to either side of line B if swerving is required
3. Follow Through: **step onto** the kicking foot and bring the support leg around to continue in stride

DISGUISE THE INTENTION ONCE HAVING DONE THE BACK-HEEL BY CONTINUING TO MOVE QUICKLY IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION

Instep Pass

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: in the approach to the ball the last full stride of what will become the standing leg must be a long one; plant foot beside the ball about 6" away and with the **toes pointing toward the target**; bend the knee slightly; the angle of approach can be straight on or diagonal; the backswing of the kicking foot takes the heel towards the buttocks; toes of the kicking foot are pointed down; ankle is locked; eyes on the ball; lean forward slightly over the ball; arms out for balance
2. Contact: on the downswing the leg swings fully from the hip; keep the **toes of the kicking foot pointed down**; strike through the ball at the point of intersection of lines A & B; knee of the kicking leg is over the ball; keep the head down; watch the foot connect with the ball
3. Follow Through: the arm of the standing leg side comes across the torso; the arm of the kicking leg side stays back slightly; the kicking foot follows through in the same plane as the flight of the ball for a medium or high pass; for a low pass the follow through of the kicking leg is across the midline of the body so that with the leg on one side coming across and the arm on the opposite side coming across the body ends up in a **corkscrew shape** momentarily

Crossing

Instep

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: during the dribble down field sight the target space across the field to pass the ball to; from the dribble the next to last touch of the ball should be to push it **slightly and diagonally** towards the inside of the field (prep touch); on the last stride the plant foot should go beside the ball about 6" away from the ball with the toes pointed across the field toward the opposite touchline; the knee of the

standing leg should be to some extent bent for balance; the heel of the kicking foot should rise sharply towards the buttocks; the entire kicking leg should go back from the hip; the head should now be a bit forward and the eyes on the ball; arms out slightly from the sides for balance; on the downswing of the kicking foot the toes of that foot should be pointed down and the ankle locked

2. Contact: strike the center of the ball, where lines A & B meet, with the instep (for an out-swinger strike the ball to the outside of line B and for an in-swinger strike the ball to the inside of line B); connect with the ball a little below the horizontal midline (line A) of the ball to increase height (or on the midline for a flat flight); **watch the foot connect with the ball**
3. Follow Through: follow through with the kicking leg forward and slightly across the midline of the body; hips should now be **square with the opposite touchline**; come down on the kicking foot at the end of the follow through swing and then look up

Training Activity: *Wingers*
The training area dimensions can vary from 35 x 25 yards to 60 x 40 yards depending upon the age group. Use two age group regulation goals on each goal line. In the activity are two goalkeepers (yellow), two wingers (white), two defenders (blue) and three attackers (red). Flank zones (dark grey area in the diagram) should be marked off with flat or disc cones. Only the wingers play in the flank zones and they are confined to it. The defenders and attackers play in the middle zone (white in the diagram) and they are confined to that space. Each time a goalkeeper has possession of the ball he should distribute (1) to either of the wingers. The winger in possession of the ball dribbles (2) towards the opposite goal and crosses (3) the ball to the attackers. The goalkeeper and defender contest the attackers for the ball. The attackers try to win the cross and score (4) from a header, volley, half-volley or shot from the ground. The attackers could also set up shots from a knock-off. The defenders stay in their half of the field. The attackers go end to end as do the wingers. After two to five minutes have the field players switch roles. Play to ten goals scored.
U6 & U8: inappropriate activity
U10: use the smallest dimensions written above
U12: use a variety of training area dimensions to get practice at crossing the ball to either the near post or far post space
U14: use the largest dimensions described

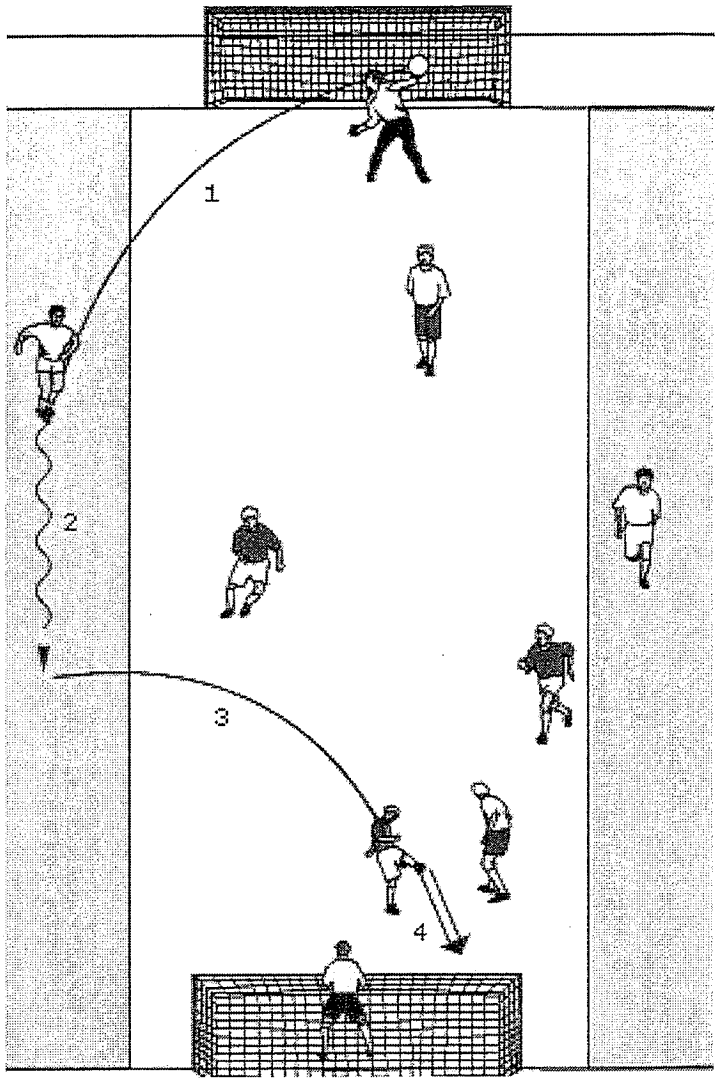

Figure 12 Wingers

HEIGHT OF PASS CATEGORIES
LOW – KNEE HEIGHT OR LOWER
MEDIUM – KNEE TO HEAD HEIGHT
HIGH – ABOVE HEAD HEIGHT

Bending (swerve) Pass

Inside of Foot

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: plant foot beside the ball about 6" to the side with the toes pointed toward the target; knee of the standing leg slightly bent; lean forward a bit at the waist; head down and eyes on the ball; the arm opposite to the kicking leg should be out from the torso and the arm on the kicking leg side should be nearer to the torso; the heel of

the kicking foot goes up towards the buttock on the backswing; on the downswing the **toes of the kicking foot should be up** and the ankle locked
2. Contact: strike the ball to the outside of line B (above, at or below line A depends on the height of the pass desired)
3. Follow Through: the toes of the kicking foot stay up on the follow through; bring the kicking leg **across the midline** and slightly upward; the arm opposite the kicking leg comes across the chest; the head should stay down and steady

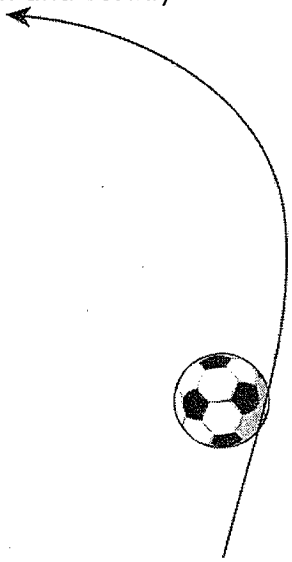

Figure 13 Flight of the Ball when Struck with the Inside of the Right Foot

Outside of Foot

1. Preparation: plant foot beside the ball about 8" to the side with the toes pointed toward the target; knee of the standing leg slightly bent; lean forward a bit at the waist; head down and eyes on the ball; the arm opposite to the kicking leg should be out from the torso and the arm on the kicking leg side should be nearer to the torso; the heel of the kicking foot goes up towards the buttock on the backswing; on the downswing the toes of the kicking foot should be down with the **little toe angled down** toward the ground and the ankle locked
2. Contact: strike the ball to the inside of line B (above, at or below line A depends on the height of the pass desired)
3. Follow Through: the toes of the kicking foot stay down on the follow through; bring the kicking leg **across the midline** and slightly upward; the arm opposite the kicking leg comes across the chest; the head should stay down and steady

Chip Pass

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: plant foot beside the ball about 6" to the side with the toes pointed toward the target; knee of the standing leg should be

flexed; the **hips** should **face the target**; the kicking leg bends sharply at the knee; heel of the kicking foot must rise sharply toward the buttock; head down and eyes on the ball

2. Contact: the lower leg of the kicking foot snaps downward; to get backspin hit the ball under line A; 'squeeze' the ball between the foot and ground; a good snapping action is needed from the leg below the knee and it must be brought down hard; the toes of the kicking foot should **wedge at a 45° angle** between the ground and the bottom of the ball; the instep should actually hit the portion of the ball resting on the ground
3. Follow Through: the sole of the kicking foot should stop **completely flat** under the ball and thus make a grazing divot in the turf; no further follow through, which causes a backspin on the ball; the head should stay down and steady; the kicking foot stays in place

Training Activity: Outside Goals
Play 2v2 up to 4v4 inside a grid with four goals on the outside. The grid should be rectangular in shape with dimensions of 15 x 20 or 25 x 40 dependent upon the age and/or number of players involved. A goal is scored with a pass or shot from inside the grid on the goal outside. This activity allows for the possibility of instep pass, bent pass, chip pass and/or flick pass.
U6: inappropriate activity
U8 to U14: play as described

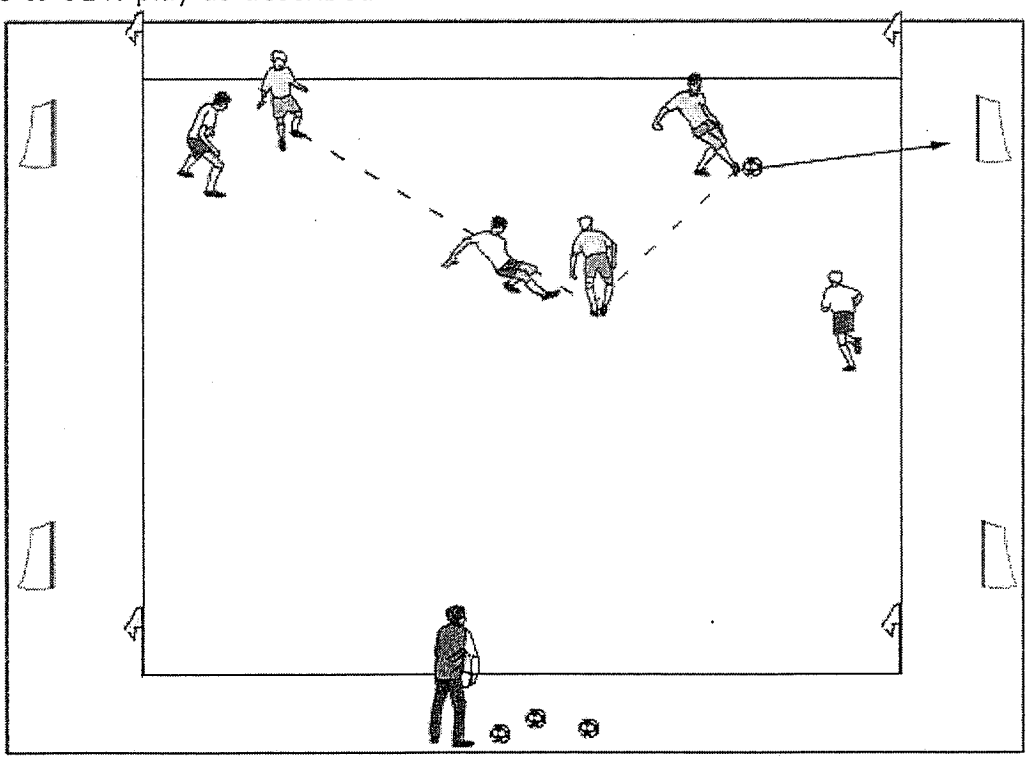

Figure 14 Outside Goals

Half Volley & Volley

The technique for passing with the inside of the foot and the instep on the half-volley and the full volley are essentially the same as when the ball is on the ground. The main difference is getting the **kicking foot level with the ball** to try and strike it through line A. This requires the passer to wait for the ball to have just bounced from the ground for the half-volley or to let the ball drop below knee height for the full volley. To strike the ball sooner the foot needs to be raised to the ball and sometimes this requires a jump. Other minor differences are the same for both parts of the foot, instep and inside, and are noted below.

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: **backswing is shorter**; no essential alteration in the posture of the body and arms
2. Contact: strike **through** the proper line of the ball
3. Follow Through: **shorter** follow through

Clearances

Make the clearance pass with the leg closest to the touchline where the ball will be redirected.

With the Foot

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: **plant foot pointed toward** the target space; knee of the standing leg slightly bent; upper body reclines somewhat; arms slightly out to the side for balance; head steady and eyes on the ball; kicking leg should swing from the hip; knee of the kicking leg to some extent bent
2. Contact: ankle locked for a steady contact surface; use the **inside of the foot** for a flat and large contact surface to strike the ball; connect with the ball just below line A
3. Follow Through: follow through with the kicking foot in a fairly straight swing of the leg toward the target space; finish with **hips squared** to the target space

Training Activity: *Bombs Away*

The target grids should be in the flank channels 5-10 yards in from the touchline. The distance of the target grids from the goal line will vary according to the age group. The grids should get increasingly further away with each progressive age group. A player can make a longer clearance of the ball with the foot than the head. When making a clearance with the foot the inside of the foot should be used the majority of the time. Occasionally the instep can be used, but beware that the ball can 'roll' off the top of the foot in this maneuver and go backwards toward the defender's goal. All clearances should be high, wide and long.

High = above the heads of opposing players
Wide = towards the flanks of the field
Long = as far away from the defending team's penalty area as possible

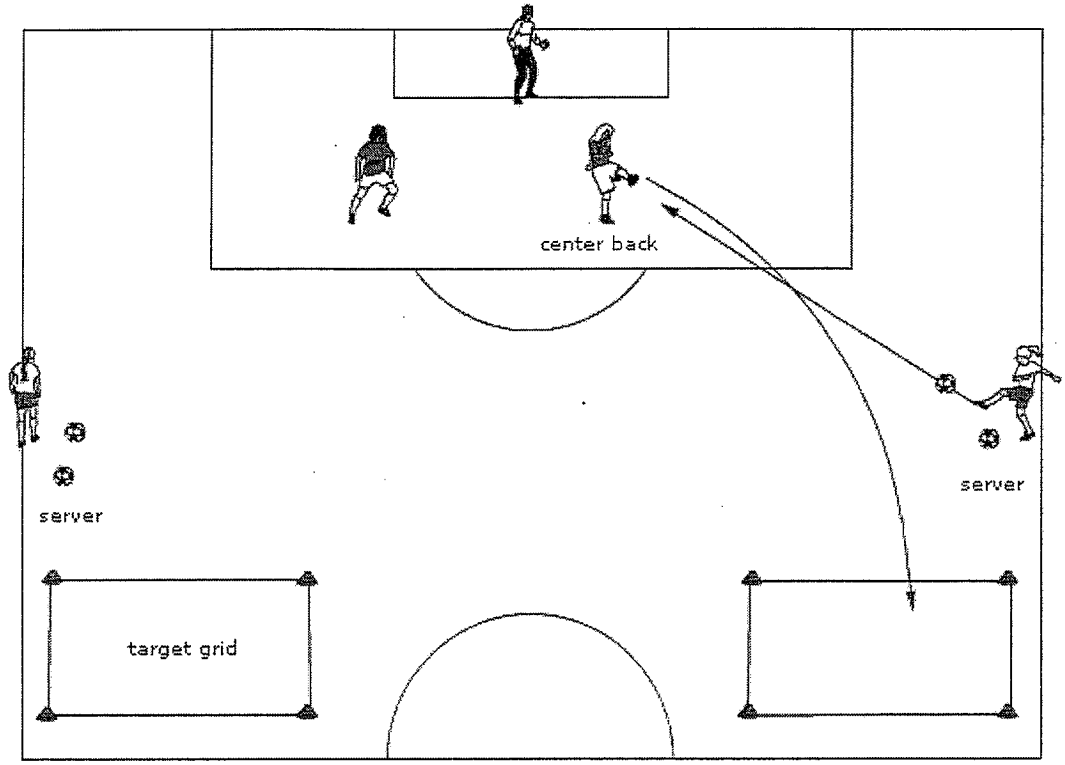

Figure 15 Bombs Away

Play in one half of an age appropriate field. Mark off two target grids as noted by the shaded areas in the diagram. Place one server on each touchline with a supply of soccer balls. Put two center backs in the penalty area and a goalkeeper. The servers play a pass on the ground or in the air to the center back who clears the ball on the first touch to the target area. The goalkeeper should collect any ball missed by either center back. The center back makes a decision to clear the ball with the foot or head depending on the service of the ball. Servers and center backs can play simultaneously or take turns. Center backs should switch sides after eight repetitions in order to practice clearances with either foot. One set is eight repetitions on each side for a total of sixteen repetitions.

U6: inappropriate activity

U8: practice clearances with the feet only from ground passes – 1 set then switch places between center backs and servers

U10: practice clearances with the feet only from passes on the ground or a bouncing ball – 1 set then switch roles

U12 & U14: clearances with either the foot or the head from passes on the ground or in the air or off the bounce – 2 sets then switch roles

Receiving

Controlling the ball is the glue that keeps the team cohesive. When this technique is strong throughout a team then ball possession becomes a tactical reality. Without good receiving techniques a player is reduced to a kick and run style of play.

Ground

Cushion
- Inside of foot
- Outside of foot
- Instep
- Sole

Wedge
- Sole

Bounce

Wedge
- Sole of foot
- Inside of foot
- Outside of foot

Cushion
- Inside of foot
- Instep
- Outside of foot

Out of the Air

Wedge is the same as receiving a bouncing ball with the feet

Cushion
- Instep
- Thigh
- Chest

These techniques need to be shown first stationary and then redirecting the ball.

Ground

Inside of Foot

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: feet about shoulder width apart; toes of the standing foot pointing forward; bend both knees a bit; arms out slightly for balance; turn the toes of the receiving foot out so that the arch of the foot is facing the oncoming ball; **extend the receiving foot** slightly forward; watch the ball onto the receiving foot

2. Contact: with the flat inside area of the foot (centered at the arch of the foot); as the ball makes contact with the foot **gently pull the leg backward** to absorb the pace of the ball; keep the sole of the foot parallel with the ground
3. Follow Through: bring the **receiving foot back** just beyond the standing leg; eyes on the ball

Outside of the Foot

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: feet somewhat less than shoulder width apart; knees gently bent for balance; arms out a little for balance; toes of the standing foot pointing forward; turn the toes of the receiving foot in so that the outside of the foot is facing the oncoming ball; extend the receiving foot slightly forward; **watch the ball onto the receiving foot**
2. Contact: with the outside area of the foot (turn the little toe down so that the outer edge of the instep makes contact with the ball); as the ball makes contact with the foot **gently pull the leg backward** to absorb the pace of the ball
3. Follow Through: bring the receiving foot back to a point level with the ankle of the standing foot; **eyes on the ball**

Instep

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: feet somewhat less than shoulder width apart; knees gently bent for balance; arms out a little for balance; toes of the standing foot pointing forward; toes of the receiving foot pointing down; **ankle locked**; extend the receiving foot slightly forward; watch the ball onto the receiving foot
2. Contact: with the instep (shoe laces) meet the ball; **gently pull the leg backward at the knee joint** to absorb the pace of the ball; keep the toes down and ankle locked
3. Follow Through: bring the receiving foot back **just beyond** the standing leg; eyes on the ball

Wedge

Sole

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: get the **body behind the path** of the ball; knees flexed; eyes on the ball
2. Contact: make a wedge from the sole of the trapping foot and the ground (45° angle with the toes up); use the opposite leg to give a firm point of balance; **gently press** the ball between the foot and the ground to stop its motion

With receiving ground balls show receiving to redirect, as follows:

- With inside of the foot to outside of the body

- With the inside of the foot across the body
- With the inside of the foot turn around (180°)
- With the outside of the foot to outside of the body
- With the outside of the foot across the body
- With the outside of the foot turn around (180°)
- With the inside of the foot and behind the standing leg

Training Activity: *Four Goal Mayhem*
Play 4v4 up to 6v6 in a 30 x 20 yard grid when not using goalkeepers and in a 40 x 30 yard grid when using goalkeepers. Begin the activity with a drop ball in the center of the grid. Teams defend two goals (one on an end line and the other on a sideline) and attack the opposite two goals – variation: one team defends the two goals on the end lines and attacks the ones on the sidelines. One point is given for each properly received pass and for each goal scored. After a goal is scored restart with a drop ball in the center of the grid. When the ball goes out-of-bounds the activity is restarted with a kick-in.
U6: inappropriate activity
U8: play 4v4 without goalkeepers for 5 minute rounds
U10: play to 5 points scored
U12 & U14: play to 10 points scored

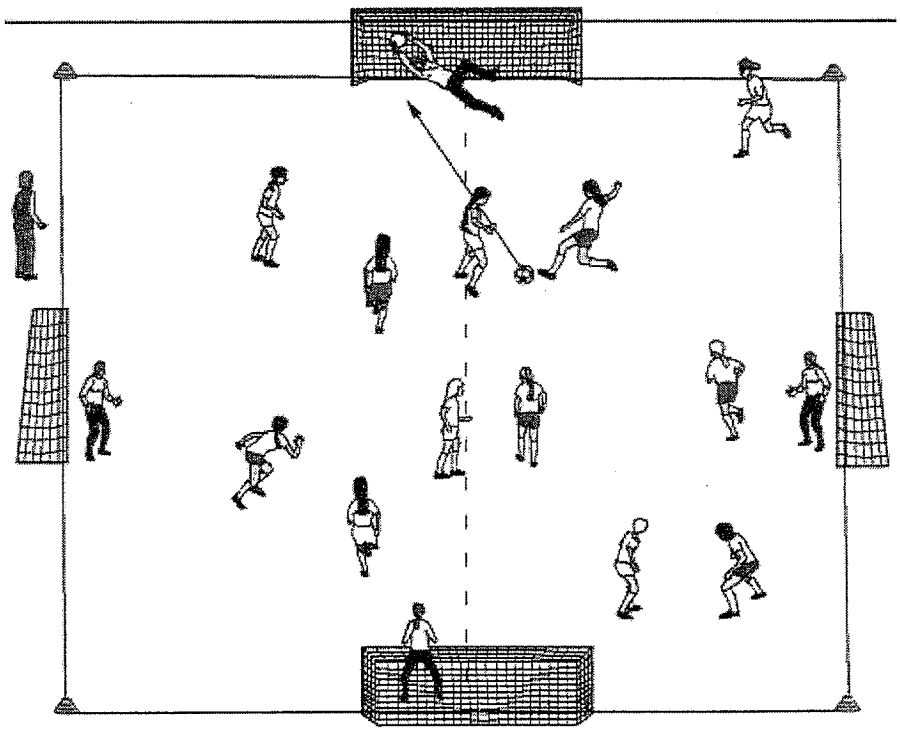

Figure 16 Four Goal Mayhem

Bounce

Wedge

Sole of Foot

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: let the ball bounce or drop **below mid-shin height**; lift the controlling foot up over the ball; the knees should be bent on both legs for balance; arms out a little from the sides; eyes on the ball
2. Contact: **gently** press down on the top of the ball with the sole of the foot; the body weight must be on the standing leg
3. Follow Through: once the ball is stopped then **stand balanced** on both feet

Inside of Foot

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: move into the path of the ball; standing leg planted and the knee slightly bent; raise the receiving foot so that it is over the **top half** (above line A) of the ball; knee of the receiving leg over the ball; toes of the receiving foot pointed forward; ankle locked; eyes on the ball
2. Contact: as contact is made with the ball gently press it to the ground; the **lower leg is at a 45° angle** to the ground; lean forward a bit; arms out for balance; eyes on the ball
3. Follow Through: **smoothly** bring the receiving foot down while pressing the ball toward the ground and across the body; finish moving with the ball toward the standing leg side

Outside of Foot

All components of receiving with this part of the foot are the same as with the inside of the foot with the exceptions that the outside of the instep is used to press the ball to the ground and the final movement is away from the standing leg.

Cushion

Inside of Foot

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: move into the path of the ball; standing leg planted and the knee slightly bent; raise the receiving foot so that it is **level** with line A of the ball; knee of the receiving leg opened; toes of the receiving foot pointed out; ankle locked; eyes on the ball
2. Contact: as the ball makes contact with the arch of the foot area **withdraw the foot smoothly** to absorb the pace of the ball; bring back the entire leg moving from the hip until the receiving foot is perpendicular to the heel of the standing foot
3. Follow Through: once the ball is stopped then stand **balanced** on both feet

Instep

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: move into the path of the ball; standing leg planted and the knee slightly bent; raise the receiving foot so that the laces are aligned with line B of the ball; **knee** of the receiving leg **over** the ball; toes of the receiving foot pointed down; ankle locked; eyes on the ball
2. Contact: as the ball makes contact with the instep of the foot **withdraw the foot smoothly** to absorb the pace of the ball; bring back the lower leg moving from the knee until the receiving foot is perpendicular to the heel of the standing foot
3. Follow Through: once the ball is stopped then stand **balanced** on both feet

Outside of Foot

All components of receiving with this part of the foot are the same as with the inside of the foot with the exceptions that the outside of the instep is used to **absorb** the ball.

Out of the Air

Wedge is the same as above with the feet.

Cushion

These techniques need to be shown first stationary and then redirecting the ball.

Instep

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: get in line with the path of the ball; the body should rest on the non-receiving leg which is bent at the knee; the receiving leg should be **relaxed** and bent at the knee; raise the receiving foot as high up in the air from the hip as possible; watch the ball all the way onto the foot
2. Contact: the ball should come into contact with the full instep; lock the foot in place to provide a **steady** receiving surface; receiving leg is lowered smoothly and fairly quick (first at almost the same pace as the ball – slow the speed as the leg comes closer to the ground); arms out slightly for balance
3. Follow Through: the **ball and the foot should remain in contact** for as long as possible to reduce the pace of the ball as the leg is gradually slowing its speed toward the ground; the ball should land on the ground gently without bouncing

Thigh

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: move into the line of flight of the ball; body weight is on the standing leg with the knee bent; the receiving leg is **raised from**

the hip with the knee bent so that the thigh is at an angle of 50° to 60° to that of the shin; eyes on the ball
2. Contact: essentially the same as receiving with the instep; ball contact should be near the **center of the thigh**; lower the thigh at roughly the same speed as the ball; the thigh muscles will absorb the impact of the ball
3. Follow Through: lower the knee of the receiving leg as though **stepping down** from a ladder; the ball should drop in front of the player's foot; balance normally

Chest

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: get in line with the path of the ball; prepare for contact by pushing the chest towards the ball; **tuck the chin in** towards the chest to protect the throat and to watch the ball onto the chest; bring the arms upward slightly to make the chest a bit concave and to help relax the upper body
2. Contact: on impact relax the chest muscles to absorb the ball; exhale upon contact to better absorb the energy of the ball; watch the ball all the way onto the chest; **lean slightly backwards** from the waist and the knees in the action of bending as ball contact is made; the ball then drops neatly under control
3. Follow Through: regain a **natural posture** to now dribble, pass or shoot the ball

Training Activity: *Windows*

The grid should be 20 x 20 yards or smaller. Have an equal number of players inside and outside the grid, but no more than twelve total. Players inside the grid each have a ball. They dribble inside the grid to find a player on the outside that is available to receive a pass. Players on the outside should return the pass to the inside player within three touches (less if the players are skillful enough to make good immediate return passes). The inside player may now practice various ways of receiving the return pass. After a set amount of time the players switch places. With U10 and older players the return pass could be bouncing or rolling. With U12 and older players the return pass could be in the air, bouncing or rolling.

U6: inappropriate activity
U8: rolling balls only, play for 1 minute rounds
U10: 2 minute rounds
U12 & U14: 3 minute rounds

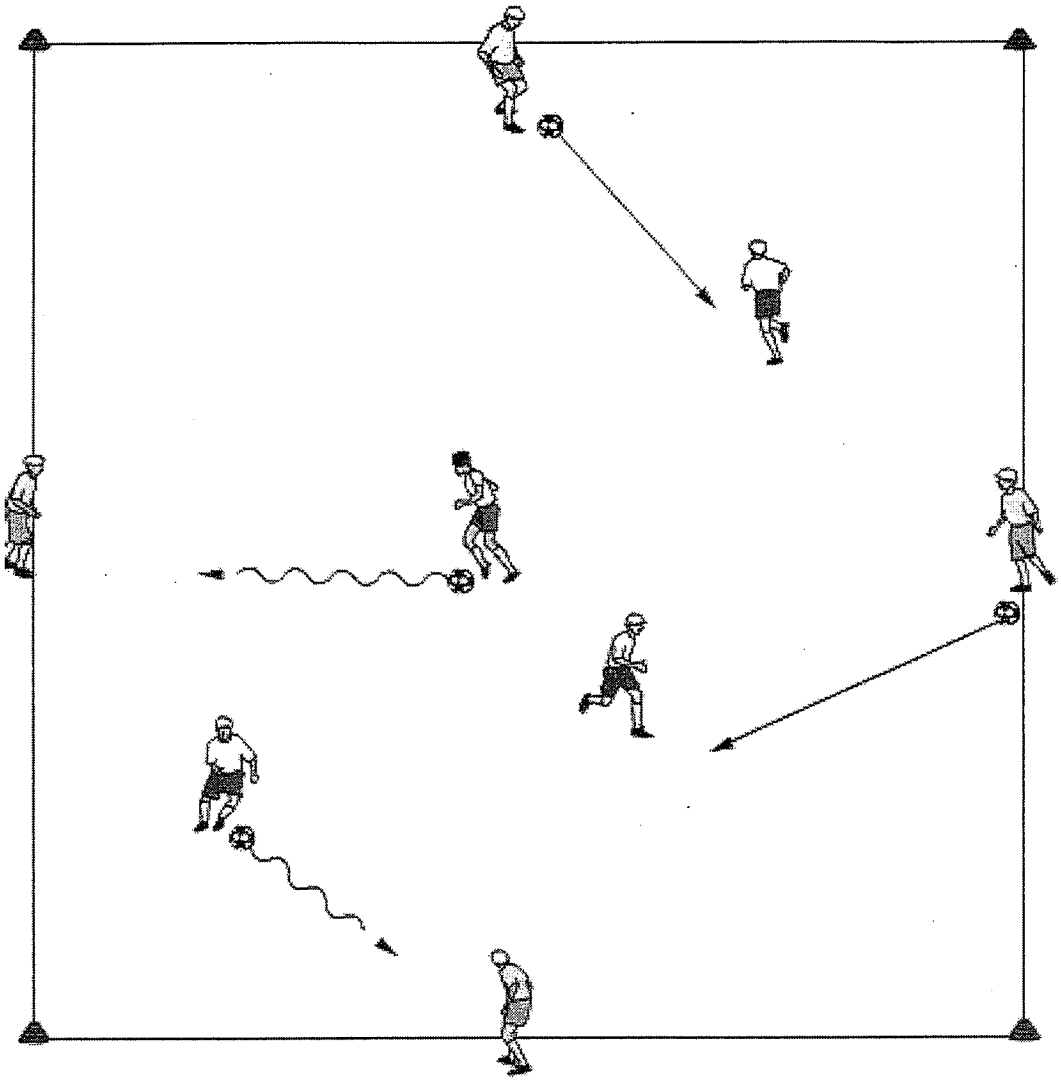

Figure 17 Windows

Throw-in

Remember that the throw-in is a pass and so it should have the same qualities as a pass made on the field of play. As with any pass a throw-in made into the field of play must be for penetration or possession.

Standing

- Feet flat
- One foot flat & up on toes of the other foot

Moving

- Plant feet
- Drag one foot

Standing

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: feet flat and square on the ground (about shoulder width apart) or feet staggered with one foot forward and flat on the ground and the other behind with the heel raised; knees bent for good balance; sight where to throw the ball; **turn the hips** in that direction; the palms of the hands while holding the ball should face the direction the thrower wishes the ball to take; the grip of the ball is similar to the W grip of goalkeepers
2. Contact: hands should be at the back of the ball (the diamond grip works well for small hands); ball behind the head with the elbows bent; lean the upper torso backward at the waist and knees bent forward for counterbalance; throw with both hands coming forward **simultaneously**; the legs straighten now; the upper torso snaps forward; head steady for balance; weight is evenly distributed to both feet; if one foot is in front of the other the weight should be transferred from the rear to the front foot during the course of the throwing action; the ball should not leave the hands until the ball is over or just beyond the head
3. Follow Through: **follow through smoothly** with the hands towards your target (finish with the fingertips pointing towards the target); keep the feet touching the ground; keep both feet pointed toward the target; do not step forward until the ball has left the hands

Moving

- Plant feet
- Drag one foot

Moving

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: start one or two yards back from the touchline; move forward with **quick, short steps**; sight where to throw the ball; turn the hips in that direction; the back is fully arched after the run up
2. Contact: all points are the same as with the standing throw plus at the end of the run up to the touchline the feet can plant together firmly on the ground with a small forward hop or one foot in front of the other while dragging the toe of the trail leg; toes of the lead leg or both feet **pointing towards** the target; throw with both hands coming forward simultaneously
3. Follow Through: follow through **smoothly** with the hands towards the target; keep some part of the feet touching the ground; do not step forward until the ball has left the hands

Training Activity: *On the Mark*

Practice the throw by having a competition with your teammate to see who can hit the target (use cones or corner flags) placed at different distances. First one to knock them all down in the fewest tries wins. It must be a legal throw-in to count.

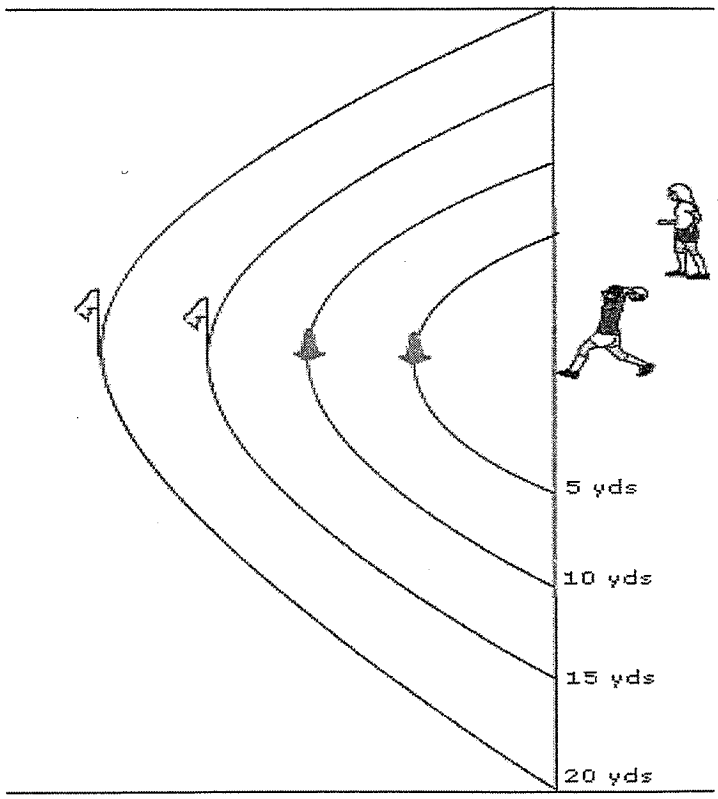

Figure 18 On The Mark

Shooting

While velocity does improve accuracy it is technique that makes the ball fly more so than raw power. The technique of shooting with accuracy must be established before power is added to the player's repertoire. Shooting of some nature must occur at every training session for the preadolescent age groups.

Ground

- Inside of the foot
- Toe
- Instep drive
- Bent with the inside of the foot
- Chip
- Bent with the outside of the foot

Shooting – half volley

- Inside of the foot
- Forward instep drive

Shooting – volley (standing)

- Forward instep drive
- Inside of the foot
- Side volley

Shooting – volley (airborne)

- Scissors forward
- Scissors side
- Scissors overhead (bicycle)

Inside of Foot

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: non-kicking (plant) foot is alongside the ball about 6" away; toes of the plant foot pointed toward the target; knee of the plant foot leg is slightly bent; shoulder on the kicking leg side is in-line with the ball; the backswing of the kicking foot is approximately 45°; the ankle of the kicking foot is now with the toes pointing away from the kicker; the head is steady and looking down at the ball; the hips must now be **facing the target**; on the downswing of the kicking foot the sole of the foot is parallel to the ground
2. Contact: strike the center of the ball at the horizontal line A (equator) with the inside (arch) of the foot; the toes of the kicking foot turned slightly **upward**
3. Follow Through: the knee of the kicking leg should come upwards on the follow through; the inside of the kicking foot should be flat to the target on the follow through; the **kicking foot should go towards**

the target on the follow through; keep the head down until after the kicking foot has landed on the ground

Toe

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: from the dribble the toe poke shot is a close range shot with little wind up of the kicking leg; the hips must square up with the goal; the plant foot lands next to the ball with the toes pointed towards the target; a short backswing of the lower leg from the knee joint; followed by a **sharp snap of the lower leg**
2. Contact: toes of the kicking foot strike the **center** of the ball where lines A & B intersect
3. Follow Through: land with a **forward step** onto the kicking foot

Instep Drive (figure 19)

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: non-kicking (plant) foot is alongside the ball about 6" away; toes of the plant foot pointed toward the target; knee of the plant foot leg slightly bent; heel of the kicking foot should come up towards the buttocks on the back swing; **lock the ankle** of the kicking foot during the backswing and keep it locked on ball contact and during the follow through; knee of the kicking leg over the ball; chest forward and over the ball, bending at the waist slightly; arms out for balance; head steady and down with eyes on the ball; on the downswing of the kicking foot point the toes down, lock the ankle and curl the toes back (curling the toes back makes a firmer striking surface of the instep...make a fist with the toes and foot)
2. Contact: watch the foot strike the ball in the center (where lines A & B intersect); **strike through the ball**
3. Follow Through: keep the toes of the kicking foot **pointed down** on the follow through; the head must remain looking down at the spot where the ball was and **steady in line with the midline of the body**; the kicking foot comes across the standing leg; the arm opposite of the kicking leg comes across the torso to maintain balance; the arm on the kicking leg side remains slightly out from the torso for balance; the shooter should end up in a corkscrew posture and then land forward on the kicking foot

Figure 19 Instep Drive[2]

Bending (swerving) Shots

Swerving or bending a shot is essentially the same as the curved pass done with the inside or outside of the foot. The inner or outer edge of the instep can also be used to swerve a shot on goal by striking the ball **off center** of line B. In all cases more power is likely necessary to beat the goalkeeper.

Chip

Shooting with a chip is the same as passing with a chip. A very **sharp rise** of the ball will be needed to beat the goalkeeper.

Shooting – half volley

- Inside of the foot
- Forward instep drive

Inside of Foot

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: get the **kicking foot level with the ball** by raising the kicking foot; toes of the standing leg are pointed toward the target and the knee is flexed; the arm opposite to the kicking leg should be forward; the arm on the same side as the kicking leg should be to the side; head steady and eyes on the ball
2. Contact: swing the kicking leg forward from the hip; raise the upper leg enough to get the **kicking foot level** with the ball; make contact with the arch of the foot; keep the ankle firm and the toes pointed out; concentrate on keeping the eye on the ball and holding the head steady; pivot on the standing leg while striking the ball

[2] Photo by Aaron Duca

3. Follow Through: the arm on the same side as the kicking leg should go back to **counterbalance** the forward swing of the kicking leg; follow through with the kicking foot towards the target

Forward Instep Drive

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: the non kicking foot is placed alongside the ball as it bounces; keep the head and knee over it; swing the kicking foot back; snap the leg forward **just as the ball comes off the ground** (try to hit the ball when it is no more than 2" off the ground)
2. Contact: strike the ball through the point where lines A and B cross; **punch through** the point of contact; toes down and curled back
3. Follow Through: the follow through is most important for power; to help keep the ball below crossbar height **raise the knee** of the kicking leg on the follow through and the foot goes generally forward

Shooting – volley (standing)

- Forward instep drive
- Inside of the foot
- Side volley

Forward Instep Drive

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: first get the chosen kicking foot behind the line of the ball; get the kicking foot level with the ball by letting the ball drop below knee height; get the **hip and knee above and over the ball** as it comes through the air (an alternate method is to raise the knee so that the thigh is parallel with the ground, thus getting the kicking foot level with line A); the kicking leg is lifted back and up so that it can swing down and through to give the required power for distance
2. Contact: hit the ball low (at and slightly below line A) if height is required or higher (at and slightly above line A) to keep the ball lower; toes of the kicking foot pointed down; ankle locked; **eyes on the ball** (watch the foot connect with the ball); arms out as needed for good balance; the kicking leg swing can come from the knee joint or the hip joint dependent upon the distance the shot must travel
3. Follow Through: keep the head steady; follow through with the **kicking foot towards** the target; look up only after the kicking foot is back on the ground

Inside of the Foot

All of the key points are the same as with the inside of the foot half-volley with the exception that the ball is struck **before** it touches the ground.

Side Volley

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: stand almost facing the descending ball; the upper torso is **bent sideways** over the support leg (almost horizontal); keep the head steady in alignment with the midline of the body; the arm on the same side as the kicking leg is well out from the side for balance; the arm opposite the kicking leg is across the front of the torso; knees are bent; raise the kicking leg up toward the ball from the hip; toes of the plant foot are pointed toward the shooting target; eyes on the ball
2. Contact: shoulder on the kicking leg side is held firm and not swung away as this helps accuracy; strike firmly with the instep; keep the knee well up to direct the ball down; **pivot** as needed on the standing leg; watch the ball closely and keep the head steady; watch the ball and foot make contact and strike the ball at or above line A
3. Follow Through: strike through the ball; the greater the **extent of the turn** on the standing (axis) leg the more power there will be in the shot; upper body, head and knee are leaning forward to control the rise of the ball; follow through with the kicking foot toward the target

Shooting – volley (airborne)

- Scissors forward
- Scissors side
- Scissors overhead (bicycle)

Volleying requires a sure touch and total confidence. Remember to get into the line of flight and to meet the ball quickly. Aim to hit the ball cleanly and try to crack the ball down onto the target.

Forward Scissors Volley

Essentially this technique is the same as the forward instep drive done on the volley. The additional piece is the jump to get the kicking foot level with the ball. This is done so that the shot can be hit sooner. The **timing of the jump is crucial** so reading the flight of the ball correctly is imperative. Jump up off the shooting leg so that the non-kicking foot goes up and forward first. Next the kicking foot snaps forward and the opposite leg comes back and hence the scissors movement of the legs. This backwards movement of the non-kicking leg as the kicking leg comes forward to meet the ball maintains balance. The landing is on both feet.

Scissors Side Volley

Fundamentally the technique is similar to the side volley described above. The additional aspect of the technique is getting airborne to strike the ball sooner and with greater velocity. Again the take off foot is the kicking foot so that the non-kicking foot rises into the air sooner and away from the torso so that the body begins to go sideways in the air. A sharp rise of the knee of the non-kicking leg will aid in **lifting the body weight** off the ground. Next the kicking leg comes up and forward with a snap of the entire leg from the

hip. At this point the entire body is almost parallel with the ground. Keep the head up with the **neck muscles locked** and the eyes on the ball. Landing is with the low arm and leg helping to lower the body to the ground. Be sure to **keep the head up** by locking the neck muscles so that the head does not snap towards the ground. The impact of landing should be spread along the entire length of the body from foot to shoulder on the low side.

Bicycle Kick

Tremendous athleticism and timing are required to execute this skill.

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: the shooter is standing with his or her back to goal or sideways onto goal; the ball is in an arced flight; push off the ground with the kicking foot; the **non-kicking foot goes into the air first** with a strong upward thrust and brings the body to a position almost parallel with the ground
2. Contact: make a scissors jump and movement in the air to change legs so that now the kicking leg is swinging upwards; judge the drop of the ball and swing the kicking foot up to meet the ball above head height; strike the ball with the full instep as the kicking leg **straightens fully**
3. Follow Through: use the arms to help lower the body to the ground; next the feet touch down and use the legs as well as the arm muscles to help **control the landing**; keep the head up with the neck muscles locked so that the head does not touch the ground

Training Activity: *World Cup*

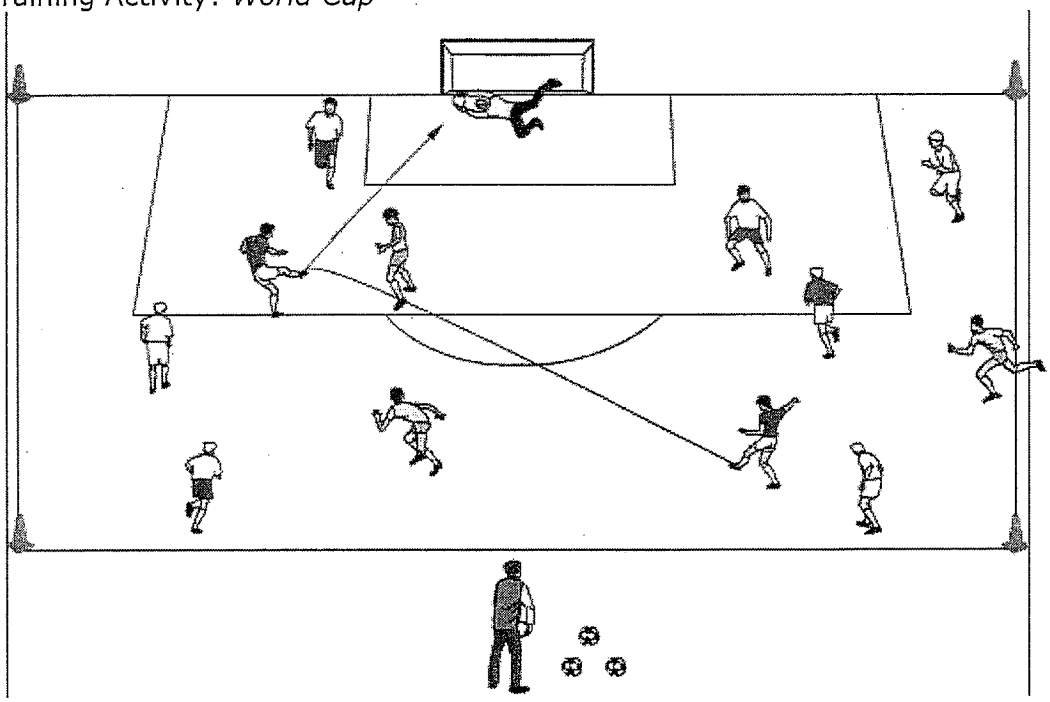

Figure 20 World Cup

Play on an age appropriate size field and goal. Grid off a playing area that is 5 to 10 yards past the side of the penalty area on each side and out from the goal line 15 to 30 yards depending upon the age group. A neutral goalkeeper in goal (if two keepers are present then they rotate in and out of goal every three shots). Divide the field players into groups of three and each group chooses the name of a national team. The coach is stationed at the top of the playing area with the spare balls. If a ball goes out of play the coach puts in a spare ball. Each World Cup team plays against the other and they all try to score a goal. If a team scores a goal they go onto the next round and they come off and rest while the other teams continue until the team that hasn't scored a goal is eliminated. Then the teams that have scored go back on to compete in the next round. This continues until the last two teams play and a winner is declared. Teams that are off may rest or practice their juggling or set up a small sided match until the World Cup winner has been decided. Teams then reshuffle players if they wish and change National Team names if they wish and play the competition again. By being in groups of three crossing is possible and so now finishing off a cross or a knock-off can be done. In this activity every type of shot is possible.
U6 & U8: inappropriate activity
U10 to U14: play as described within an age appropriate penalty area

Tackling

Strength, courage and skill as well as technique all play a part in the successful tackle. Tackling is the core skill of defending to regain the ball for one's team.

Tackling – possession

- Block & hold
- Slide trap

Tackling – dispossession

- Toe poke
- Slide tackle with far leg
- Slide tackle with near leg

Block (tackling from the side)

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: get as close to the ball as possible to get a **firm pull** onto the ball; eye on the ball; step in close to the ball; support foot square to the ball; weight rests on the standing leg which is slightly bent at the knee; toes of the standing foot are pointed forward; the tackling foot should be turned outward; the tackling leg is bent somewhat; the tackling foot is swung backwards as in the push pass technique although somewhat less
2. Contact: contact the ball with the inside of the foot (arch of the foot) as opponent touches it; **step into the tackle**; with muscles and joints well tightened place the tackling foot in front of the ball; weight carried through the center of the ball and supported by the standing leg behind and to the side of the ball with the knee bent; push the tackling foot slightly forward at the moment of contact the upper torso is inclined slightly forward; balance is maintained by the arms
3. Follow Through: follow through by **rolling the ball over the opponent's foot**; tackler's shoulder to opponent's shoulder contact will help to press forward and maintain balance

Slide Tackle[3]

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: approach the dribbler from behind at an oblique angle; look for the moment when the dribbler has **just pushed the ball forward** and then spring into the tackle; the leg furthest from the dribbler is the tackling leg; lower the center of gravity by bending both knees; the last step is with the plant leg (the one nearest to the dribbler); lunge and now fully extend the tacking leg; the arm nearest

[3] Please be cautious with teaching slide tackling techniques at U12 and U14 age groups. Injury research shows injuries happen when the person initiating the tackle leaves their feet. To prevent injuries and protect the kids, players should stay on their feet. Maybe this technique should be taught at the U16 and older age groups and really elite level, but the masses need to stay on their feet. FIFA and the IFAB have given referees the authority to immediately eject players for illegal two footed, studs up slides.

the dribbler goes high (almost straight up); the arm opposite to the dribbler goes out and down; reach in front of the ball with the tackling foot; eyes on the ball

2. Contact: the near leg collapses; the foot of the near leg now drags behind as the lower leg bends completely back with the heel going towards the buttocks; the tackling foot should contact the front of the ball at and slightly above line A; **push down and back** with the tackling foot and this will block the ball; as the dribbler's momentum carries him forward and over the ball plant the tackling foot; bend the knee of the tackling leg; eyes on the ball
3. Follow Through: **pushup off the tackling foot** that is now the plant leg; stand up; the ball will now be at the feet; dribble away

Tackling – dispossession

- Toe poke
- Slide tackle with far leg
- Slide tackle with near leg

Poke

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: approach from the side of the dribbler; keep the **near arm down at the side**; eyes on the ball; look for the moment when the dribbler has just touched the ball to time the tackle
2. Contact: when the **ball is just in front of the dribbler** stretch forward the near leg; poke the ball away with the toe
3. Follow Through: regain a **normal** running stride

Slide

With Far Leg

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: get near the opponent; time the tackle **when the ball is away from the opponent**
2. Contact: use the foot furthest away from the opponent to **push the ball away** using the instep
3. Follow Through: **regain footing** to reposition as necessary

All other points are the same as with the slide tackle trap.

With Near Leg

All coaching points are as with the far leg slide tackle but now the last stride is with the far leg and the near leg slides forward as the body is lowered to kick the ball away with the instep. The tackler should end up in almost a **sitting position** so as to not have the head too near the dribbler's knees for the safety of both players.

Training Activity: *Leave It*

Every player has a ball and is inside the grid. Players dribble around and when the coach calls "leave it" players leave their ball and go get somebody else's. After a bit, take away two balls and now there are a couple of players

without a ball. When the coach says "leave it", players leave their ball and get someone else's, but two players will now challenge other players for possession of a ball. Tackling for possession situations are now created. Any ball that goes out of bounds for any reason is out of play and now more battles for possession will take place.
Variations: after the coach yells "leave it" and possession has been gained of each ball then the players without a ball jog backwards until the coach yells again or the challenges for possession can be constant. That is any player without a ball may challenge any player in possession of one for the ball at any time.
U6: same activity concept except no ball is taken out of play, so that there is always a ball for each child
U8 to U14: play the activity as described

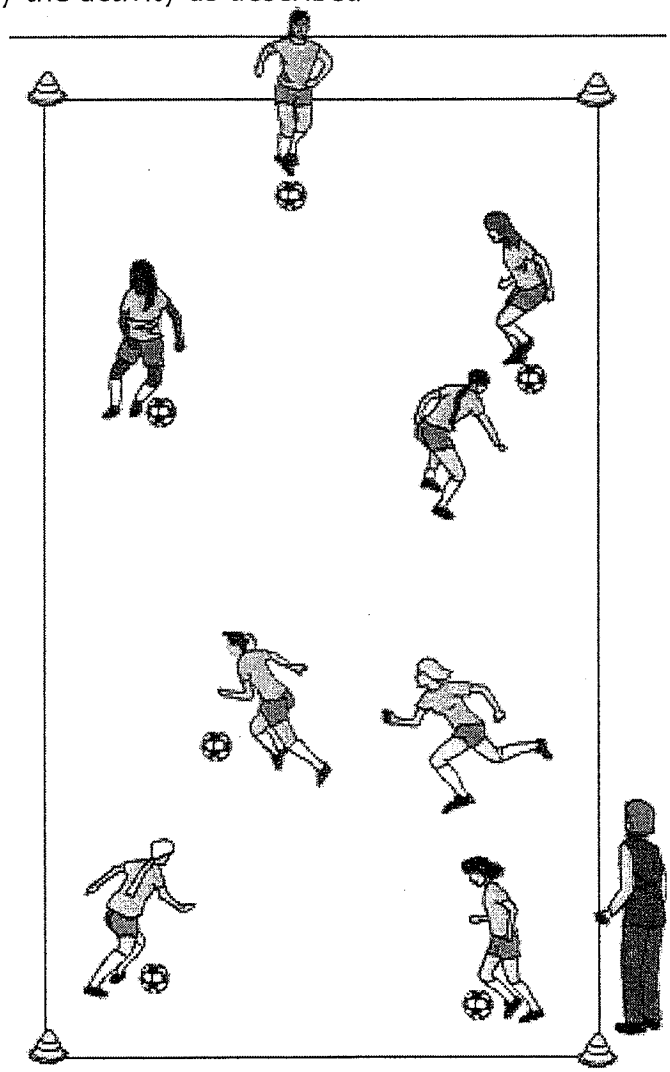

Figure 21 Leave It

Heading

Perhaps the most unique of techniques in all of team sports heading the ball takes courage, timing and precision. Few players truly master this skill and those that do contribute significantly to the team.

Standing or on the run

- Forward to score goals off the half-volley
- Forward to score goals off the volley
  - Contact the center to the top half of the ball
- Forward to pass
- Redirected pass
- Flick backwards
  - Contact the horizontal midline (equator) of the ball
- Forward to clear
  - Contact the bottom half of the ball

Airborne from a stationary jump or on the run

- Jumping double leg
- Jumping single leg
- Diving
- Twisting to flick

To Score

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: move to get the body in line with the flight of the ball and preferably with the **hips squared to the ball**; the feet should be about shoulder width apart (alternately they can be in a staggered stance) and the toes pointed toward the target area; knees slightly bent; lean backwards at the waist while simultaneously bringing the arms up and forward for balance; eyes on the ball; neck muscles locked to keep the head steady
2. Contact: once the ball is within a yard distance from the head snap the upper body forward from the waist with the arms simultaneously snapping backward; keep the arms slightly bent at the elbows and a little out from the sides of the body for balance and protection; at the moment of contact the knees should straighten (if the feet are staggered then the rear foot should come forward now) to add body weight to the force impelled to the ball; strike the ball on the forehead – close to the hair line; it is important to **strike through the ball** and not merely let the ball rebound off the head
3. Follow Through: lean the upper body forward on the follow through; throw the eyes (follow through) **towards the target spot** as this will increase contact time between the ball and the forehead thereby increasing accuracy; the power for heading the ball comes from the legs, lower back and abdominal muscles; strike the top half of the ball to guide it toward the goal line or the middle of the ball for a flat flight

Airborne from a stationary jump or on the run

- ❖ Jumping double leg
- ❖ Jumping single leg
- ❖ Diving
- ❖ Twisting to flick

The first phase is with the ball moving towards the player. Second phase is with the ball moving across the body of the player.

To Score

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: move to get the body in line with the flight of the ball and preferably with the **hips diagonally set to the ball and goal**; the feet should be about shoulder width apart for a double leg take off or staggered for a single leg take off; bend both legs; swing the arms backwards obliquely; upper torso is inclined forward; keep the eyes fixed on the ball
2. Contact: swing the arms suddenly upward and forward; legs straighten out vigorously at the knees and ankles to push off the ground; keep the head steady with the neck muscles locked; **strike the ball with the forehead** at the height of the jump; the upper torso is reclined moderately and then snaps forward to put power into the header
3. Follow through: follow through with the head towards the target; land on both feet; on landing the knees and ankles should **bend low** to absorb the shock of the landing; straddle the legs wider than in the preparation phase to maintain balance

Diving Header

The actual heading technique is the same as described previously. The swing of the arms is not so pronounced and they are moved only forward. The torso is inclined slightly when the arms are swinging and at the moment of straightening the knees and ankles. During flight the body is directed obliquely forward. Consequently landing is on the hands and feet **under control**.

To Pass (standing or jumping)

All points are the same as with the To Score section (standing or jumping respectively) above with the exception that the ball is contacted at line B. To pass the ball sideways rotate the upper torso in the required direction **immediately before contact** so that the surface of the forehead and the torso finish at a right angle to the direction the player wishes to redirect the ball. Simultaneously with the upper torso rotation the trunk sways slightly back in order to help in the striking action of the head.

To Clear (standing or jumping)

All points are the same as with the To Score section (standing or jumping respectively) above with the exception that the ball is contacted below line B. Additionally the forehead should be **tilted upwards**. All clearances should be high, wide and long.
High = above the heads of opposing players
Wide = towards the flanks of the field
Long = as far away from the defending team's penalty area as possible

With the Head (standing)

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: feet pointed in the direction of the target space; knees slightly bent for balance; **lean** upper body **back** at the waist before ball contact; neck muscles locked to keep the head steady; eyes on the ball
2. Contact: **snap forward** from the waist to impact the ball; strike the ball with the forehead; arms slightly to the side for balance and protection
3. Follow Through: follow through with the upper body **towards** the target space

With the Head (jumping)

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: single or double leg take off; heels come up towards the buttocks; lean upper body back at the waist before ball contact; neck muscles locked to keep the head steady; eyes on the ball; **time the jump** according to the flight of the ball
2. Contact: **snap forward** from the waist to impact the ball; snap the feet forward during the striking motion; strike the ball with the forehead; arms slightly to the side for balance and protection
3. Follow Through: follow through with the upper body **toward the target space**

Flick (standing or jumping)[4]

A flick header is a simple redirection of the ball without any additional impetus being added to the ball. The flick can be done while stationary, on the move or while in the air. **As the ball touches the forehead** turn the head with the neck muscles in the direction for the ball to be redirected. While the ball can be flicked backwards with a backwards motion of the head it is preferable to turn the head over the shoulder and to twist at the waist to flick the ball backwards as in this way the eyes can move with the ball on the follow through to improve the accuracy of the flick.

[4] Never do a flick on header when backing up. The risk of serious head/neck/dental injury to either the person heading or the defender (or both) is great. Flick on headers should only be done when the header separates (runs toward the ball) from the defender, but never when backing up.

THE BODY MECHANICS TO HEAD THE BALL ARE EASIER WHEN FACING THE INCOMING BALL. IT IS POSSIBLE, WITH EXCELLENT TIMING, TO HEAD THE BALL, WHEN IT IS BEING CROSSED, WITH THE HIPS FACING THE GOAL LINE, BUT THE UPPER TORSO MUST BE TWISTED TO FACE THE BALL AND THEN TWIST BACK TOWARDS THE GOAL UPON CONTACT WITH THE BALL.

Training Activity: *Heads Up*

Play 3v3 + GK in a 20 x 20 yard area with one goal set up in the center of one goal line. The goalkeeper plays for the defending team. The activity begins with the attacking team in possession of the ball at the goal line opposite the goal. The attackers attempt to score as many goals as possible in 6 minutes. A kicked goal is worth one point. A goal scored off a header is worth two points. After a goal the attacking team restarts with the ball at the far goal line.

Teams play normally in minutes 1, 3 and 5. During minutes 2, 4 and 6 the coach calls, "Heads up!" and 1 minute of heading by the attacking teams begins. The ball is now tossed by hand to teammates who may pass or shoot the ball with a header. The goalkeeper is active at all times, but the defending field players are frozen during this time. Switch teams after 6 minutes of play or when ten points have been scored.

U6 & U8: inappropriate activity

U10: play using a volleyball and a 6 yard wide goal

U12: use a 6 yard wide goal and a size 4 soccer ball

U14: use a 8 yard wide goal and a size 5 soccer ball

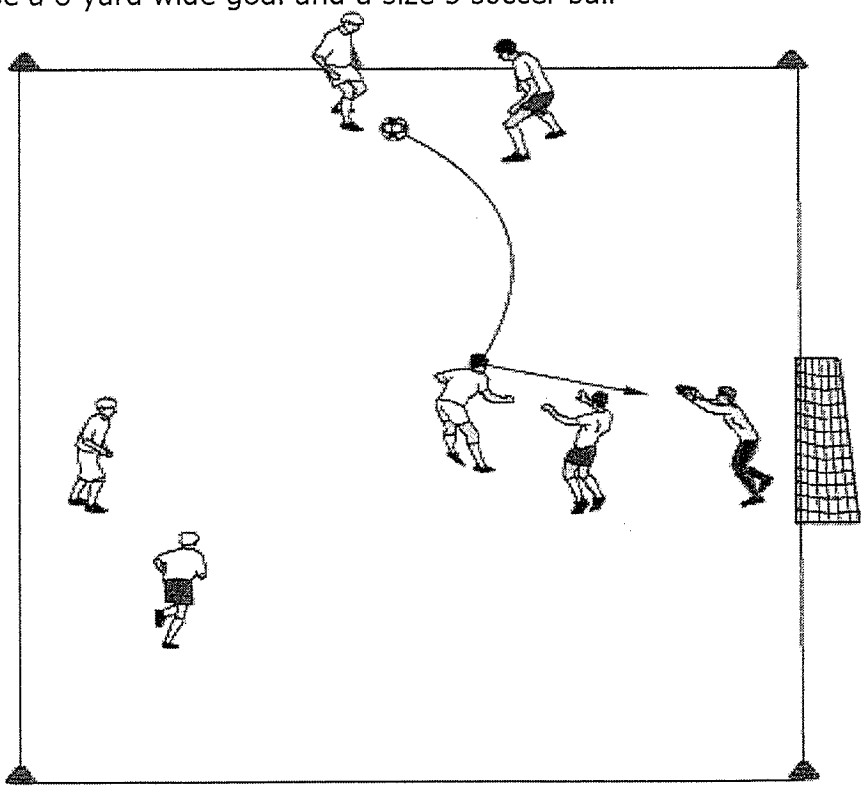

Figure 22 Heads Up

Goalkeeping

Not only is a strong body needed to be a goalkeeper, but a strong mind as well. Over decades of development a keeper's skills must become instinctual. Truly the last line of defense and the first line of attack the goalkeeper has a unique skill set in soccer.

- Ready Stance
- Diamond Grip
- W Grip
- Holding the Ball after a Save
- Angles
- Catching
  - Ground
  - Below Waist Height
  - Chest to Head Height
  - Above Head Height
- Distribution
  - Goal Kick
  - Over Arm Throw
  - Bowling
  - Punting
  - Kicking Off the Back Pass
  - Dropkick
- Boxing Double Fist
- Boxing Single Fist
- Deflecting Around the Post
- Deflecting Over the Crossbar
- One on One
- Diving
  - Forward Dive
  - Lateral Dive
    - Low
    - Medium
    - High

Ready Stance

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: **feet shoulder width** or slightly less apart; up on the balls of the feet; knees bent with the center of gravity lowered; lean forward at the waist somewhat; arms extend forward from the trunk at chest height, but with the arms fairly close to the body; elbows bent; palms of the hands facing forward with the fingertips up; the hands must be relaxed with the fingers bent; the head is steady and eyes forward

It is appropriate to teach this starting position, figure 23, from U10 and up.

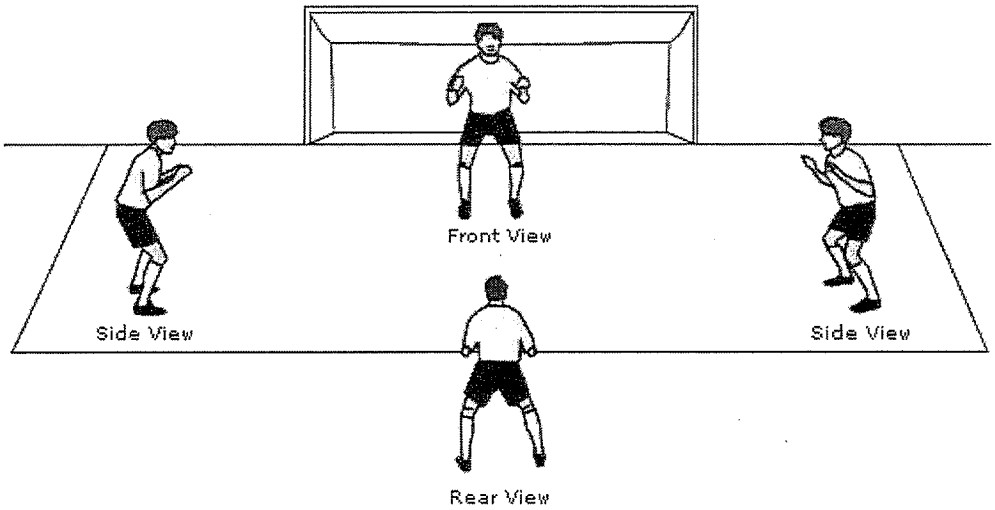

Figure 23 Ready Stance

Grips

Diamond

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: hands extended forward from the torso with the elbows of the arms bent; palms of the hands facing toward the ball with the fingers relaxed and gently curled; **eyes on the ball** and watch it all the way into the hands
2. Contact: to absorb the ball **catch with the fingertips** not the palms of the hand; bend the elbows deeply upon catching the ball; the tips of the thumbs should just touch behind the ball and the tips of the index fingers too (thus forming a diamond shape); **fingers spread wide** to cover as much surface of the ball as possible

THIS GRIP WORKS WELL FOR SMALLER HANDS

W

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: hands extended forward from the torso with the elbows of the arms bent; **palms of the hands facing toward the ball** with the fingers relaxed and gently curled; eyes on the ball and watch it all the way into the hands
2. Contact: to absorb the ball catch with the fingertips not the palms of the hand; **bend the elbows deeply** upon catching the ball; the tips of the thumbs should just touch behind the ball; the index fingers are up and diagonally away from the thumbs (thus forming a W shape); fingers spread wide to cover as much surface of the ball as possible

THIS GRIP WORKS WELL FOR LARGER HANDS

Holding the Ball after a Save

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: from the catch **wrap** the fingers around the ball and slide them to the front of the ball
2. Contact: the **fingers should be spread wide** and to the front of the ball without overlapping one another; the forearms should contact the front of the ball; the upper arms contact the bottom of the ball and the back of the ball is against the chest
3. Follow Through: hold the ball **firmly against the chest** and keep the elbows close together

Angles

Apart from the penalty kick the goalkeeper is rarely found stationed on the goal line in the goalmouth. The keeper must constantly reposition to an angle facing the ball, figure 28. Once the goalkeeper gets into a good angle to the ball he or she must take up a good body posture to better execute a skill to make a save. This means the right ready stance as in figure 23 is required. Furthermore footwork is a vitally important aspect of goalkeeping. It is the feet that get the hands to the ball. A keeper might have very good catching skill, but that talent is wasted if the keeper cannot move quickly to the ball. Ultimately the goalkeeper should be able to move smoothly in all directions; laterally (post-to-post), forward (straight and diagonally) and backward.

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: horizontal axis of the feet facing the ball; **head steady**, eyes on the ball; arms out slightly from the torso for balance
2. Follow Through: sideways movement to reposition (footwork); the center of gravity remains constant in height; reposition through a number of **quick short steps** rather than one or two long strides; proper stride makes it easier to transfer the body weight from one leg to the other (nimbleness)

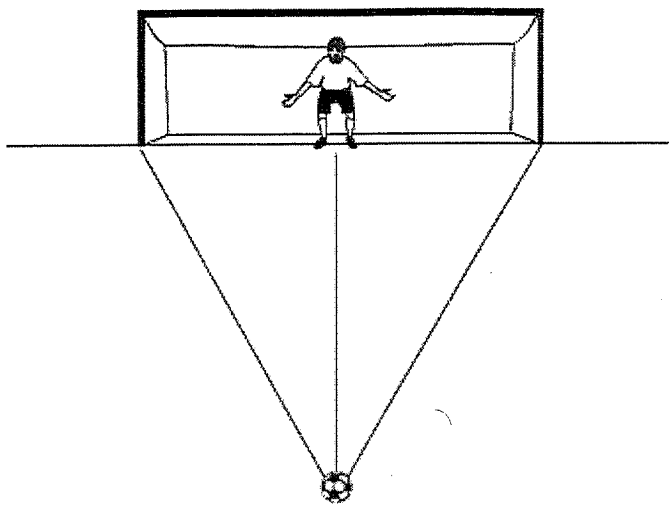

Figure 24 Basic Angles

Training Activity: *Narrow Enough*
Play 2v1 + GK in a 30 x 30 yard area with a 6' x 18' goal (8' x 24' for U14) at one end. Two are attacking field players; the one is a defender and a goalkeeper. The attackers pass among each other and try to score. They should try to shoot from the side forcing the goalkeeper to narrow the angle to stop the shot. The attack earns 1 point for a goal scored head-on and 2 points for a goal scored from either side. The keeper earns a point for every save made. Rotate the goalkeepers every ten shots.
U6 & U8: inappropriate activity
U10-U14: play as described

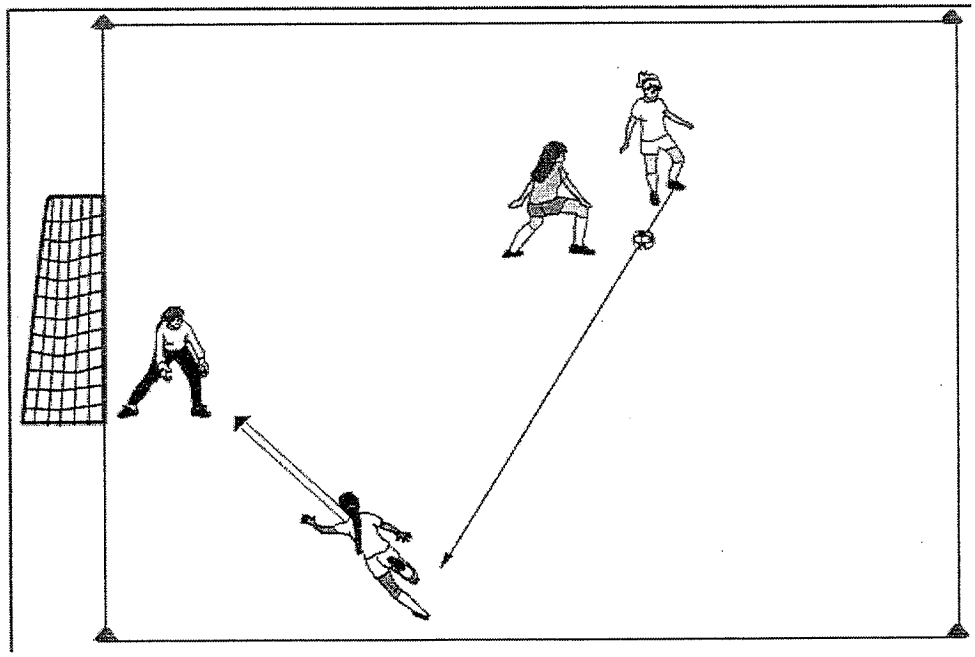

Figure 25 Narrow Enough

Catching

Whenever possible the goalkeeper should move to get the body behind the hands and ball as a second barrier in case a clean catch is not made the first time. Any catch (save) made between the ground level and head height has the body behind the hands as insurance in case a ball slips through the hands. Any ball above head height does not have that secondary barrier. So the progression in teaching catching shots to young goalkeepers must be from the ground to above head height so that their confidence and technique in catching can improve before they must deal with the difficult above the head ball.

Key Coaching Points

Ground

1. Preparation: for a ball rolling along the ground the goalkeeper must first position in the path of the ball; the hands come down to meet the ball with the fingers pointed to the ground; the outside edges of the **little fingers should just touch together**; spread the fingers wide apart as the ball comes into the hands in order to cover as much surface of the ball as possible; legs behind the hands with the feet and knees together; keep the legs straight; watch the ball all the way into the hands
2. Contact: **scoop the ball** into the hands and then up into the arms; bring the ball to the chest and hold it as noted in the section on holding the ball after a save as the body moves into an upright position
3. Follow Through: from a fully upright position and holding the ball correctly **scan the field** for a possible distribution

Below Waist Height

1. Preparation: begin in the ready stance with the palms of the hands facing the ball; the fingers should be **relaxed** and **slightly bent**; the arms need to be bent somewhat; eyes on the ball
2. Contact: catch the ball with the fingertips; absorb the pace of the ball with the palms of the hands and by **pulling the arms back** towards the legs; the energy of the ball can also be absorbed by sliding gently backwards in the shape of a V on the balls of the feet (the feet start at the top of the V figure and finish together at the bottom of the V form)
3. Follow Through: watch the ball all the way into the hands and arms; **exhale at the moment of wrapping the arms around the ball** to relax the upper torso as this helps to cushion the ball; bring the ball to the chest and hold it as noted in the section on holding the ball after a save

Chest Height

1. Preparation: begin in the ready stance with the palms of the hands facing the ball; the fingers should be relaxed and slightly bent; the arms need to be bent somewhat; **hands out in front of the body** to meet the ball; eyes on the ball

2. Contact: catch the ball with the fingertips; absorb the pace of the ball with the palms of the hands and by **bending the arms back** towards the chest; watch the ball all the way into the hands; keep the elbows shoulder width apart or less
3. Follow Through: **exhale** at the moment of wrapping the arms around the ball to relax the upper torso as this helps to cushion the ball; bring the ball to the chest and hold it as noted in the section on holding the ball after a save

Above Head Height

1. Preparation: position into the flight of the ball; the head is angled up toward the ball; eyes are focused on the ball; **extend the arms above head height** to catch the ball at the highest point possible
2. Contact: catch the ball with the fingertips; absorb the pace of the ball with the palms of the hands and by bending the arms back towards the chest; **watch the ball all the way into the hands**; keep the elbows shoulder width apart or less
3. Follow Through: exhale at the moment of wrapping the **arms around the ball** to relax the upper torso as this helps to cushion the ball; bring the ball to the chest (during the descent); hold it as noted in the section on holding the ball after a save

WHEN LEARNING TO CATCH BALLS SHOT STRAIGHT AT THE KEEPER – THE PROGRESSION IS ROLLING, BOUNCING AND THEN IN THE AIR

Training Activity: *What's the Scoop*
In a 20 x 15 yard grid play 2v1 with an age appropriate goal on one end line. While passing between one another 2 attackers try to score on the goalkeeper. The keeper is given points for a clean save (scoop it for a low shot 2 points or catch it for a high shot 1 point). The attackers earn a point for each goal scored. Keep score between the attackers and the goalkeeper. After a save or a goal play is restarted by the keeper tossing the ball back out to the attackers. Rotate the player in goal after five shots.
U6 & U8: inappropriate activity
U10 to U14: as described

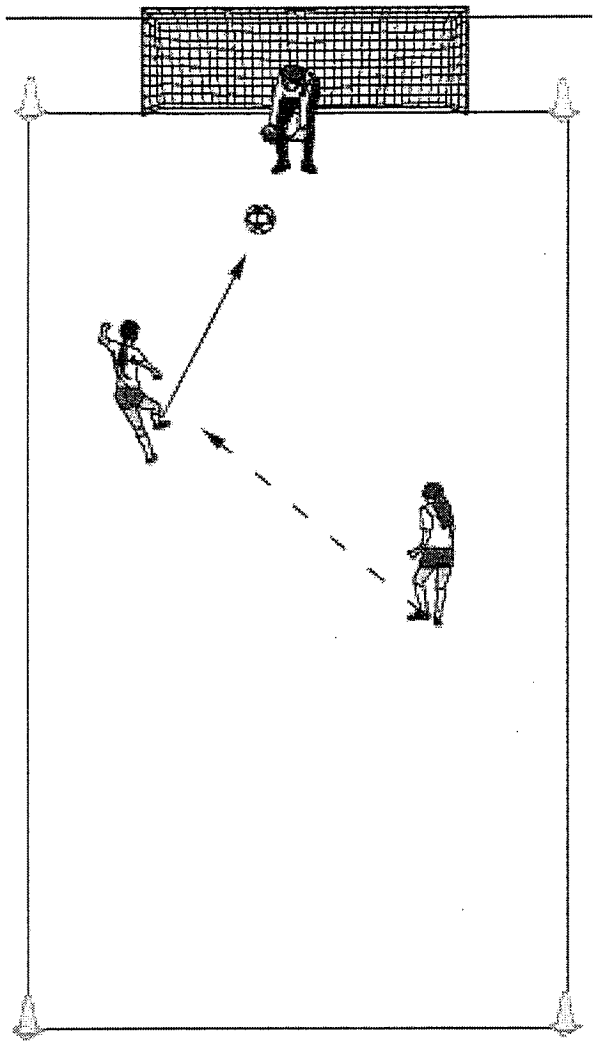

Figure 26 What's the Scoop

Distribution

Once the goalkeeper has taken possession of the ball, he or she must attempt to use it in a way that an attack on the opposite goal can be set up. The keeper must give the distribution (pass) the same tactical considerations as any player. This means that the ball must be thrown or kicked so that it can be easily controlled when passed over short distances or so that it gives teammates an advantage when played over long distances.

Goal Kick

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: the plant foot of the standing leg should be beside but slightly back from the ball about 6" with the toes pointed toward the target space; bend the knee of the standing leg for stability; backswing of the kicking leg with the heel of the kicking foot going

towards the buttocks; the toes of the kicking foot should be pointed down with the **ankle locked**; the upper torso is leaning slightly backward; arms out for balance; eyes on the ball

2. Contact: downswing of the kicking leg is from the hip and the leg straightens out during the downward motion; the instep of the foot should strike the ball along line A and slightly below line B; **the big toe should strike low on the ball** almost at ground level (be sure that the instep drives through the middle of the ball in order to give the kick distance as well as height); keep the ankle locked upon contact; watch the foot strike the ball; the arms have come in a bit towards the side of the body, but are still out enough to maintain good balance
3. Follow Through: keep the head down watching the spot where the stationary ball was; swing through the ball and the kicking foot would go in the direction of the target space; the follow through of the kicking leg is in a generally straight direction; look up only **after** both feet are planted once again on the ground; the ball should have a diagonal flight

Over-arm Throw

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: the ball is held at approximately head height; the **palm supports the ball** from behind with the fingers spread moderately wide; the opposite arm is held low and obliquely to counterbalance the upper body; the weight is on the rear leg; knees are bent a bit; the opposite leg and shoulder move forward in preparation for the throw; eyes forward on the target
2. Contact: the throwing arm is **brought forward from the shoulder** simultaneously with the forearm flinging forwards and downwards; the final impetus is given by moving the wrist vigorously to ensure guidance and accuracy; if the ball comes off the fingertips at the last possible moment then it will have some backspin to it which will make it easier for the receiver to control
3. Follow Through: as the ball leaves the hand bodyweight is transferred to the front foot; while the hand follows through the rear leg comes forward a step as a result of the swing; finish with the **fingers pointing toward the target** to ensure a full follow through of the throwing arm

Training Activity: *On the Money*

Play 3v3 in a 30 x 20 yard grid with a goal at one end. The attacking team earns a point by intercepting a distribution by the goalkeeper and by scoring goals. The defending team earns a point each time they can control a distribution by their goalkeeper. If the defenders gain possession the game stops and the attackers resume regaining the ball at that spot in the grid. Play 5 to 10 minute rounds depending upon the age group.

Variation: any player who catches the ball while making a save is then the goalkeeper and gets to throw the ball out or utilize a keeper as one of the players on the defending team.
U6 & U8: inappropriate activity
U10 to U14: as described

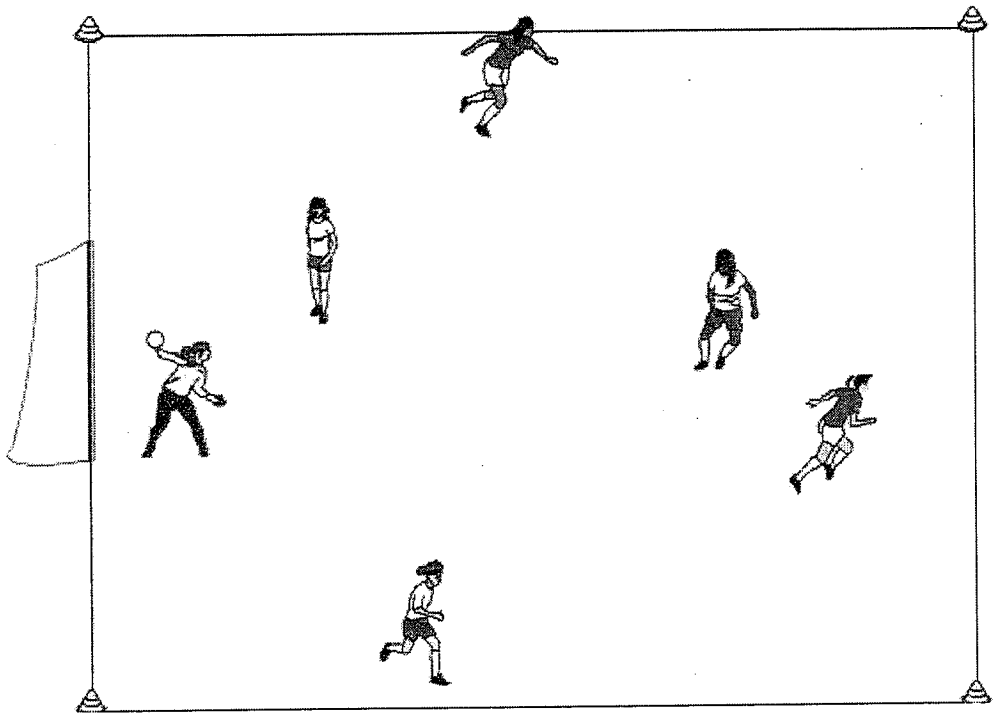

Figure 27 On the Money

Bowling

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: the palm of the bowling arm supports the ball from below; the inner surface of the forearm is behind the ball (keepers with small hands may need to also stabilize the ball with the other hand on top of the ball until the backswing of the bowling arm begins); the **fingers are held loose and outspread**
2. Contact: the bowl begins with a step forward by the leg opposite to the bowling arm; the bowling arm swings back from the torso at the shoulder; the elbow straightens; the ball is cradled in the palm of the bowling hand; the opposite arm comes forward to counterbalance; the upper torso leans forward; the knees are deeply bent; on the forward swing the body weight is transferred to the front leg; the bowling arm accelerates; the ball leaves the hand when the **straightened arm** is at right angles to the ground
3. Follow Through: the toes of the front foot point toward the target; the forearm and the hand follow through toward the target to add accuracy and pace to the ball; finish with the fingers of the bowling hand pointing towards the target; **the throwing arm should now be**

fully extended; the knee of the rear leg is now almost touching the ground

Training Activity: *Bowling Balls*
Set up a 25 x 20 yard grid with a 4 yard wide goal on one end and play 2v3. One of the three defending players goes in goal. The defending players take turns playing in goal. The attackers try to score goals to earn points. If the goalkeeper makes a save then distribute by bowling the ball to a teammate. If the teammate is able to control the ball from the distribution the defending team earns a point.
For U6 & U8 play 3v3 and any player who catches the ball while stopping a shot is then the goalkeeper and gets to bowl it out. To increase the chances for successful bowling of the ball add an extra player to the defending team.

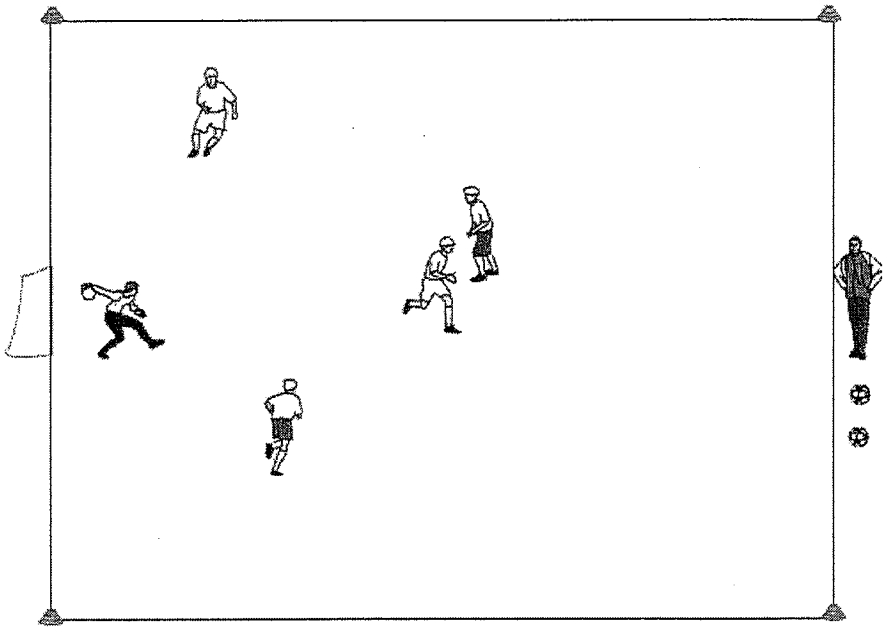

Figure 28 Bowling Balls

Punting

This is a technique that is often taught incorrectly resulting in goalkeepers punting for height rather than distance. If the keeper hits the ball well below line A then the ball will go too high and lack distance. The tactical intent of punting the ball is to gain maximum yardage for a breakaway or to relieve pressure from the defense by sending the ball as far away from the defensive third as possible to buy time to reorganize. In both cases the punt needs a height of only about ten to twelve feet. Distance can be added to the punt as well as height by driving forward through the ball with the kicking foot to give the ball a trajectory angle of approximately 45°.

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: cradle the ball in the palm of the **hand opposite to the kicking foot**; bring the hand and ball into the midline of the body;

sight the target before beginning the motion to punt; now lean the head slightly forward and focus on the ball; take a step forward with the leg opposite the kicking foot to plant; bend the knee a bit; toes of the plant foot pointed toward the target; hips facing forward; during the forward step the kicking leg begins the backswing; once the plant foot is set then the hand cradling the ball comes forward and is lowered to basically bellybutton height; eyes on the ball

2. Contact: let the ball roll forward off the fingertips (do NOT flick the ball upward); the downswing of the kicking leg has begun; let the **ball drop just below knee height** and then the kicking foot makes contact; the foot should be at a 45° angle so that the instep strikes the ball along line B and mostly below line A; the top of the instep (near the knot of the shoe laces) should strike through line A; toes down and ankle locked; drive through the ball; watch the foot strike the ball
3. Follow Through: **drive** the kicking foot **forward through** the ball; toes stay down and the ankle stays locked in position; the kicking leg comes forward on the follow through; step forward onto the kicking foot and only then look up to see the flight of the ball

Training Activity: *Over the Top*

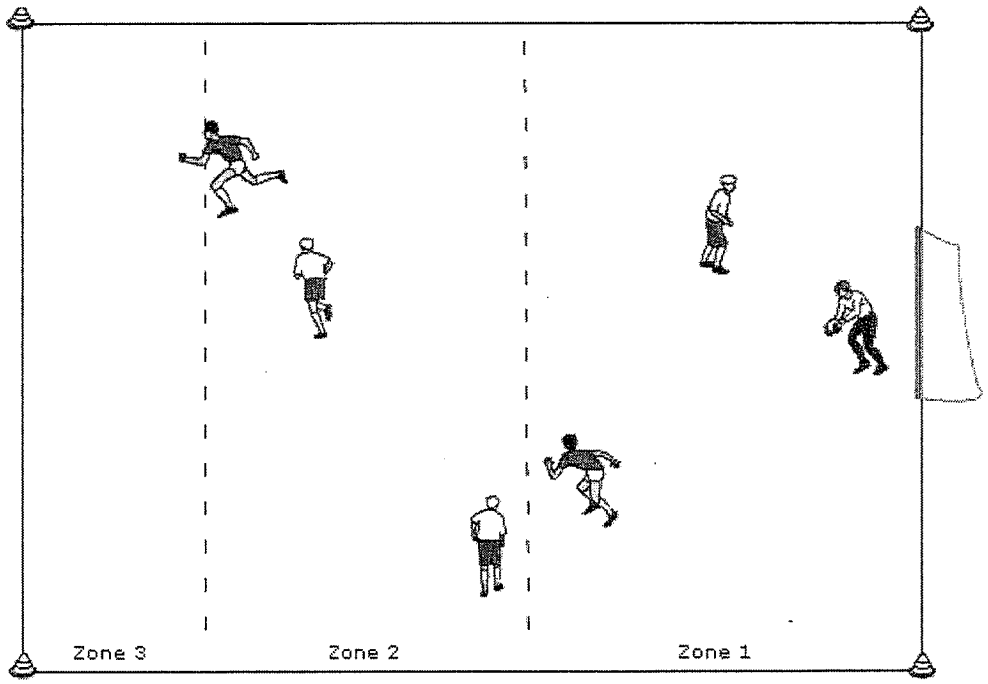

Figure 29 Over the Top

The training area is 40-60 yards long and 30 yards wide. The goal is 6-8 yards wide depending upon the age group involved. Play 3v3 with the defending team designating one player as goalkeeper. The attackers earn points by scoring goals. The defenders earn points from saves made and successful punting of the ball into the zones. One point is given for a ball

landing from the goalkeeper's punt in zone 2 and two points for landing in zone 3. One additional point is earned for any punt controlled by one of the goalkeeper's teammates. Play two minute rounds. At the beginning of each round the defending team has a new keeper from its group of three.

Kicking Off the Back Pass

Key Coaching Points

Same as for clearances made by other players as described in the section on passing.

Dropkick

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: **hold the top of the ball** with both hands; fingers spread wide to cover as much surface area of the ball as possible; take a stride forward with the non-kicking foot; begin the backswing of the kicking leg now; hold the ball in front of the midline of the body at approximately waist height; eyes on the ball
2. Contact: as the ball is dropping the downswing of the kicking foot has begun; swing the leg from the hip joint; let the ball hit the ground and **just as the ball begins its rise from the bounce strike the ball** along line B with the instep of the kicking foot; hit both at line A and below it in order to drive the ball forward at approximately a 45° angle; watch the foot strike the ball
3. Follow Though: the kicking leg follow through is straight; **halt the follow through** of the kicking leg relatively short, so that the kicking foot ends up only about a foot off the ground; look up only after both feet are back on the ground; the flight of the ball should be low and fairly flat

Boxing

Key Coaching Points

Double Fists Punch

1. Preparation: the head is tilted upward, steady and with the eyes on the ball; the tips of the thumbs must be below and behind the index fingers; **clench for a tight fist**; press the two fists together firmly; fists start at the chest; single leg take off to gain height in order to meet the ball at the highest point possible; bring up the knee of the opposite leg in a snapping motion to add weight and momentum to the vertical jump and for protection
2. Contact: fists and arm motion is diagonally forward and upward (45° angle) with explosive force to meet the ball; elbows stay close together; punch the center of the ball with the **flat top area of the fists**; eyes on the ball as the fists make contact; arms straighten out sharply (in this way the arms act like springs) to add power to the punching action of the fists

3. Follow Through: keep the fists together on the follow through; **keep the elbows close together on the follow through**

Single Fist Punch (forward)

1. Preparation: head is tilted upward, steady and with the eyes on the ball; the **tips of the thumbs** must be **below the fingers**; clench for a tight fist; start the fist at shoulder level; single leg take off to gain height in order to meet the ball at the highest point possible
2. Contact: fist and arm motion is diagonally forward and upward with explosive force to meet the ball; punch the center of the ball with the flat top area of the fist; eyes on the ball as the fist makes contact; arm straightens out sharply to add power to the punching action of the fist; **twist the upper body sideways and reach with the striking fist** to fully extend to meet the ball
3. Follow Through: **fully extend** the arm; follow through with the fist toward the target

Single Fist Punch (side motion)

1. Preparation: head is tilted upward and slightly towards the ball side; keep the head steady and with the eyes on the ball; the tips of the thumbs must be below the fingers; clench for a tight fist; single fist punch starts with the **fist at shoulder level**; single leg take off to gain height in order to meet the ball at the highest point possible; the take off leg must be the one opposite to the ball side; the knee of the leg on the ball side should thrust upward to add momentum to the jump and for protection
2. Contact: fist and arm motion is in an **arcing motion over the head** with explosive force to meet the ball; punch the center of the ball with the flat top area of the fist; eyes on the ball as the fist makes contact
3. Follow Through: follow through with the fist towards the **opposite shoulder** to carry the ball along on its flight path toward the opposite side of the field

CLEARANCES SHOULD BE HIGH, WIDE AND LONG
HIGH = ABOVE THE HEADS OF OPPOSING PLAYERS
WIDE = TOWARDS THE FLANKS OF THE FIELD
LONG = AS FAR AWAY FROM THE GOALKEEPER'S PENALTY AREA AS POSSIBLE

Training Activity: *Boxing Day*
In the defensive third of an age appropriate size field the coach sets up at the top of the penalty area arc. The goalkeeper starts in the goal area. Two target players position themselves near on either flank of the defensive third. The coach serves the ball in the air to the goalkeeper via an underhand toss or by chipping the ball. Each time the goalkeeper should come out to the ball to meet it at the highest point possible and punch it to one of the target players. The goalkeeper decides to which side of the field to punch the ball based on the original flight of the ball. One dozen services equal one round. Goalkeepers should alternate rounds.

To practice single fisted punches of a ball coming in from the side the coach should serve from the side of the penalty area and the target players should move closer to the goal line.
Once the goalkeeper is comfortable with both double fisted and single fisted punches add an opponent for realistic pressure.
U6 & U8: inappropriate activity
U10 to U14: as described

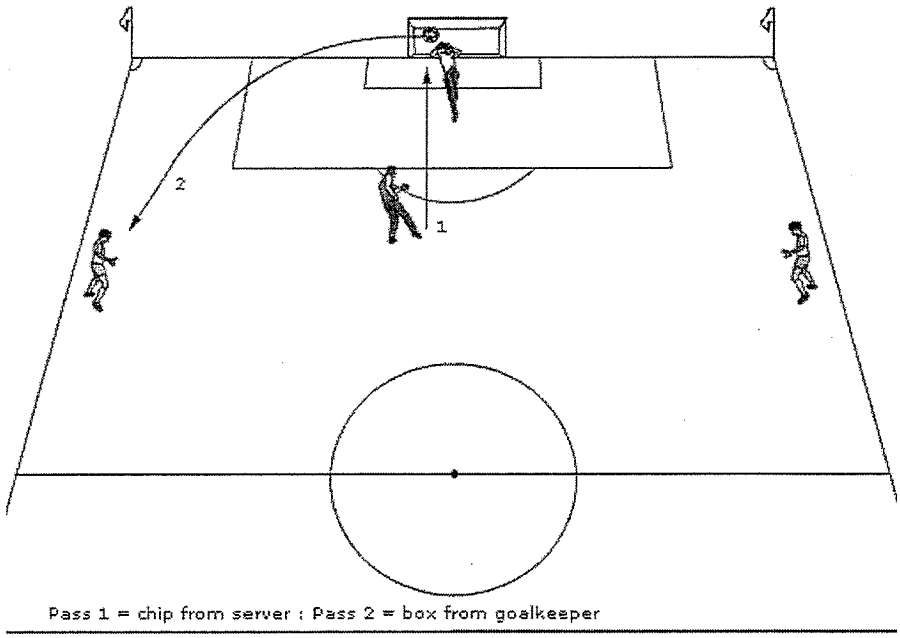

Figure 30 Boxing Day

Deflecting

When a shot is going just outside the goalkeepers reach for a safe catch then deflecting the ball around a goalpost or over the crossbar is the next choice. It is better to push the ball out-of-bounds and give up a corner kick than to make a partial save where the keeper is unlikely to be able to hold the ball and it is now loose and still inside the penalty area. Whenever possible use the heel of the palm of the hand to deflect, but often only the fingers will reach the ball. When a ball is turned around a post it is almost always done so at the end of a dive.

Around the Post

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: **shuffle** towards the ball side in preparation to dive across the goalmouth; dive toward the ball; stretch the low hand toward the ball; eyes on the ball
2. Contact: use the low hand to deflect the ball so that the torso stays facing forward to see the ball clearly; try to get as much of the hand on the ball as possible, but just the fingertips will do if the ball is at the end of the full reach; **lock the wrist** so that the hand is not pushed

back by the ball; with a somewhat curved motion push the ball around the post and over the goal line
3. Follow Through: **watch the ball** all the way out of bounds; follow through with the fingers of the low hand toward the ball; land as done with a low or medium height dive

Over the Crossbar

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: move in line with the flight of the ball; take a step back toward the goalmouth with the leg on the ball side; turn the hip of that far leg toward the goalmouth; take a small hop upward from the far leg; now the hip of the near leg is turned out toward the ball; thrust upward with the knee of the near leg; **extend the near arm up** toward the ball; eyes on the ball
2. Contact: use the near/high hand to push the ball over the crossbar; try to get the full ball of the hand onto the ball if possible, but even the fingertips can be used to deflect the ball if it is at the end of the reach of the keeper; the hand and arm should **move in an arcing motion** (similar to a swimmer's backstroke arm motion); watch the hand push the ball over the bar
3. Follow Through: during the descent **keep an eye on the ball** to be sure it has cleared the crossbar; land on both feet or as with a dive

Training Activity: *Double Goal*

The grid should be 20 x 20 yards with an age group regulation goal on one end. A second smaller goal is made with corner flags inside the grid 6 yards forward of the regulation goal. The second goal should be at least 2 yards more narrow than the regulation goal. There is a goalkeeper in each goal. A shooter is in front of the smaller goal; 8 to 10 yards away. A second field player is in the area between the two goals. The coach is just outside the grid with spare soccer balls. A ball is played to the shooter who may shoot first touch or dribble and then shoot. He is shooting at the smaller goal. The keeper here attempts to make the save. If the ball gets through the first goal then the goalkeeper in the second regulation goal must make the save. The second field player in front of that goal may try to redirect (deflect) the ball. The goalkeepers should switch roles after eight shots. The field players should switch roles after 5 minutes.

U6 & U8: inappropriate activity

U10 & U12: the regulation goal is 6' x 18' and the small goal is then 12' or less wide

U14: the regulation goal is 8' x 24' and the small goal is then 18' or less wide

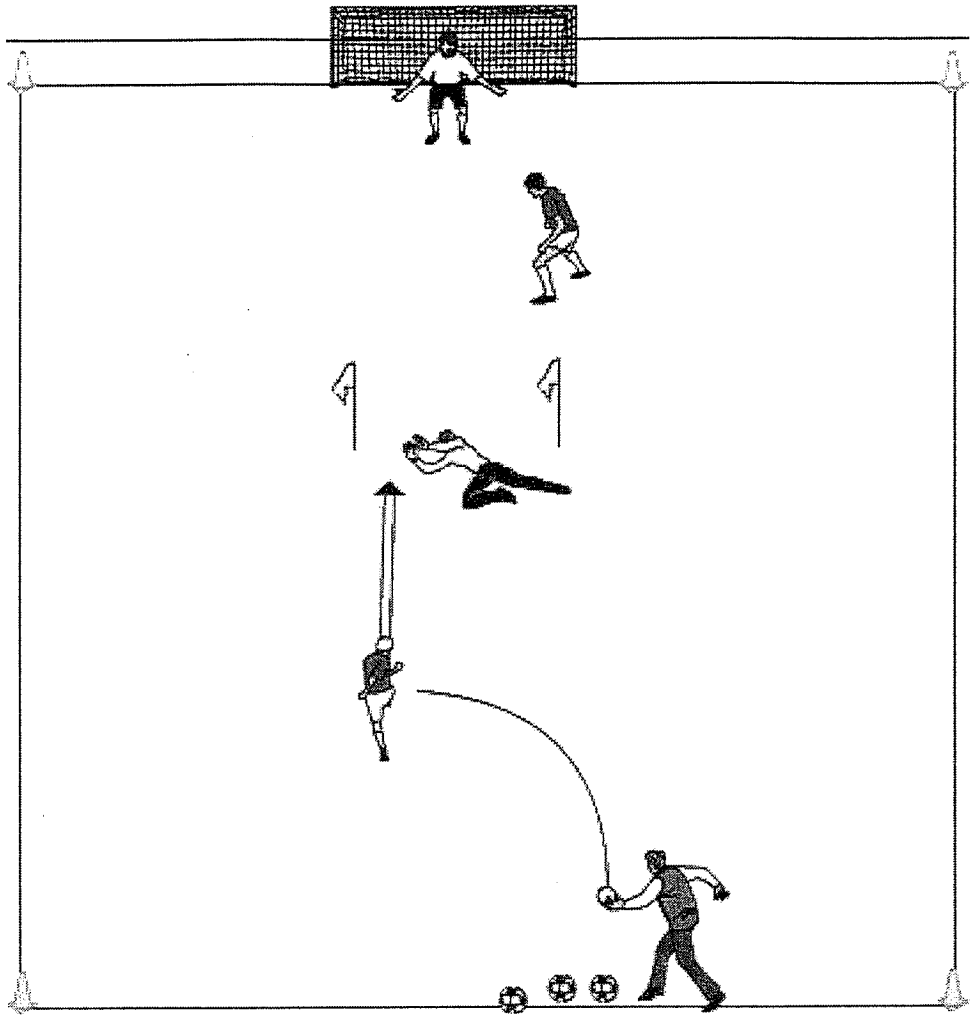

Figure 31 Double Goal

One-on-One Saves

Keeping in mind the principle of "narrowing the angle" the goalkeeper should exert every effort to meet the opponent as far away from the goal as possible.

Key Coaching Points

1. Preparation: the goalkeeper runs at top speed; but as the keeper closes on the opponent, reduce the pace; now spread the arms out wide to make the **body as large a target as possible**; eyes on the ball
2. Contact: use short quick steps now as it is possible to dive more accurately from a relatively slow movement; go to the ground with the chest lined up with the ball; hands go to the side the dribbler has the ball; throw the feet out in the opposite direction; go to the ground on the **side of the body** stretching the hands to the near post side and

the feet to the far post side; dive across the front of the opponent; do NOT roll over onto the stomach; if the ball comes into the chest then wrap the hands and arms around the ball; if the ball goes to the hands then the shoulder, elbows and wrist should be firm to hold the impact of the ball; eyes on the ball; as the opponent hurdles or makes contact tuck in the head for protection

3. Follow Through: pull the ball into the chest with the arms wrapped around it; tuck in the high leg toward the upper torso; **tuck the head down**

Training Activity: *One & Done*
Divide the team into two groups. Play in one half of the field. Both goalkeepers are at one goal and take turns in goal. One group of field players is behind the goal collecting the balls that go out-of-bounds and returning them quickly to the other group. The second group is staged in a grid 30 yards from goal. One at a time they attack the goal, thus setting up a one-on-one with the keeper. The next attacker may go after a shot has been taken. The attackers get a point for each goal scored and the goalkeeper gets a point for each save made and two points for taking the ball off the attacker's foot. The goalkeepers and attackers switch places after one minute. Keep score between the two groups of attackers and the two keepers.

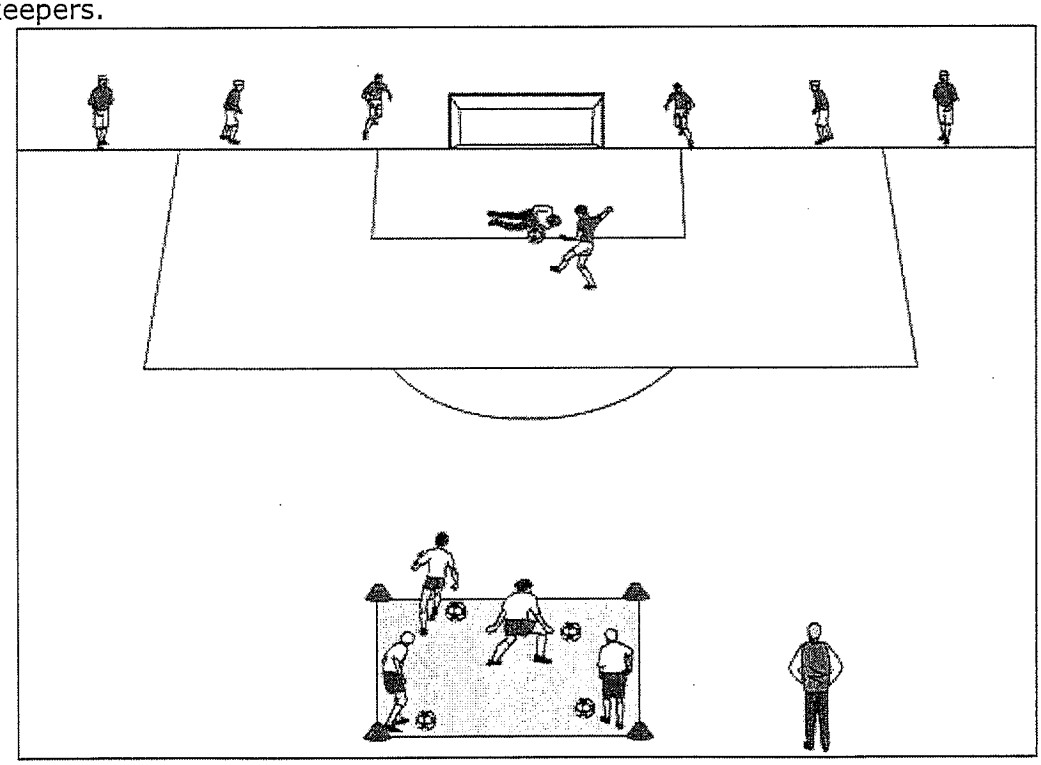

Figure 32 One & Done

Diving

In diving the three phases of preparation, contact and follow through are replaced with takeoff, flight and landing. Just as with flying a plane the most important part is the landing, so teach this phase first. Next in importance is the take-off; then the flight. However the three phases will be presented here in the order in which the skill is actually done. Some definitions will aid the coach and player in learning the skills of diving saves.

Low leg = the one closest to the ground when in a horizontal position
Low hand = the one closest to the ground when in a horizontal position
High leg = the one furthest from the ground when in a horizontal position
High hand = the one furthest from the ground when in a horizontal position
Take-off leg = the one on the side of the ball
Trail leg = the one opposite the ball side
Near leg = the one closest to the ball
Far leg = the one furthest from the ball

Forward

Key Coaching Points

1. Takeoff: get **squarely into the path** of the ball; feet shoulder width apart and take one step forward with the leg nearest to the ball; lean forward at the waist; arms bent with the hands approximately waist height; the fingers should point forward with the palms of the hands facing up; head steady and eyes on the ball
2. Flight: pounce on the ball with a **forward lunge**; the timing has to be right or the ball will be past the keeper; scoop the ball into the hands while immediately wrapping the arms around the ball; with a low ball simply fall forward; with a medium high ball dive forward with a spring from the legs
3. Landing: land first on the forearms and then the thighs; the lower legs should be bent slightly so that the feet do not drag; **slide forward with the body's momentum** to absorb the impact along the forearms, torso and thighs; the head should be up and kept steady by locking the neck muscles; the keeper may need to tuck the head to the side of the ball away from the opponent if being challenged

Lateral – low

1. Takeoff: take a sideways step towards the ball side; bend the knee of the leg on the ball side and lower the body; **collapse the near leg**; lower the body to the ground
2. Flight: body sideways on to the ball to follow the principle of getting the body behind the ball, which means the goalkeeper can see the ball all the way; **low hand** goes **behind the ball**; high hand goes on top of the ball; the low hand stops the ball's forward momentum and the high hand gently presses the ball into the ground
3. Landing: contact the ground with the outside of the leg, hips and side of the torso; **keep the head up** and steady by locking the neck muscles as contact is made with the ground; eyes on the ball

If the ball is deflected after the goalkeeper has already committed to a dive than a kick save may be required. The change of direction of the path of the ball could come from a shot or pass rebounding off a player or deflected by an uneven surface or a skip off of wet grass. If the goalkeeper's diving form is correct with the legs parallel to one another and not crossed over each other then there's a chance to clear the ball with a kick. This save may suffice or at the least gain the keeper time to get back onto his or her feet.

Lateral – medium

Key Coaching Points

1. Takeoff: from the ready stance shuffle (a series of quick, lateral glide steps) towards the shot; the first stride is taken with the near leg; face the ball on a diagonal before the takeoff to narrow the angle of flight; the takeoff is initiated by both legs; **push off the far leg** to shift the weight onto the take-off leg; deeply bend the knee of the takeoff leg and that hip; the initial push off causes the body to lean in the direction of the ball; push off strongly with the takeoff leg with a vigorous extension of the ankle, knee, and hip-joint; both arms forcefully thrust up toward the ball; the knee of the trail leg thrusts toward the chest
2. Flight: the hip joint of the trail leg should forcefully extend to add greater reach to the dive; the low (near) hand goes **behind the ball** and the high (far) hand goes on top of the ball; look at the ball in the 'window' between the arms; fully extend the arms; get the body parallel to the ground; head steady and eyes on the ball watching it into the hands
3. Landing: utilize the low leg to break the impact of the landing by contacting the ground in the order of foot, lower leg, thigh, hip, upper arm, trunk and shoulder; a rocking motion spread along the length of the side of the body softens the landing; it is crucially import to **lock the neck muscles** to keep the head steady, off the ground and with the eyes on the ball

Lateral – high

1. Takeoff: the near leg steps forward and sideways; the initial stride is as long as possible while adjusting to the shot; the far leg smoothly follows the near leg; the near hand leads the body into the dive; proper footwork keeps the body perpendicular to the shot; deeply bend the knee of the takeoff leg and that hip; **push off strongly** with the takeoff leg with a vigorous extension of the ankle, knee, and hip-joint; both arms forcefully thrust up toward the ball; the knee of the trail leg **thrusts** towards the chest
2. Flight: low hand behind the ball; high hand on top of the ball; see the ball through the 'window'; dive forward to **meet the ball**; arms bent at the elbows a little bit to help absorb the ball when caught; keep the body parallel to the ground throughout the flight; during descent the hands rotate slightly to be above the ball

3. Landing: the ball contacts the ground just before the goalkeeper lands along the **side of the body**; use the arms, shoulder and upper body muscles to 'lower' the body to ground; the force of the landing is absorb along the length of the body – ball, forearms, trunk, hips, thighs, lower legs and then feet; do not slap the feet against the ground but instead gently lower them to the ground; control the legs upon landing so that the feet do not slap together; keep the head up from the ground by locking the neck muscles; eyes stay focused on the ball

With all dives using the muscles of the arms, shoulders, upper back, chest and abdomen to control the landing is important to maintain control of the ball upon impact with the ground and to reduce the likelihood of injury. Psychologically teach novice goalkeepers that this is a safe landing not a crash landing.

DIVING – TEACH HOW TO LAND, THEN HOW TO TAKEOFF AND THEN HOW TO FLY. THE DIRECTION OF THE DIVE SHOULD BE PRESENTED IN THIS ORDER: FORWARD, LATERAL AND THEN BACKWARDS. THE HEIGHT OF THE DIVE SHOULD BE PRESENTED IN THIS ORDER: COLLAPSE, LOW, MEDIUM AND THEN HIGH.

Training Activity: *Triangle Goal*
Two teams of 3v3 play around a triangular shaped goal. Each side of the triangle has a goalkeeper. The two teams play against each other and try to shoot past one of the goalkeepers. If a keeper makes a save he or she distributes to the other team out towards the edge of the grid. The goal sizes should be based on the age group. The grid should be 25 x 25 yards. Rotate the players in goal with one of the teams after five minutes. Play until all nine players have been in goal.

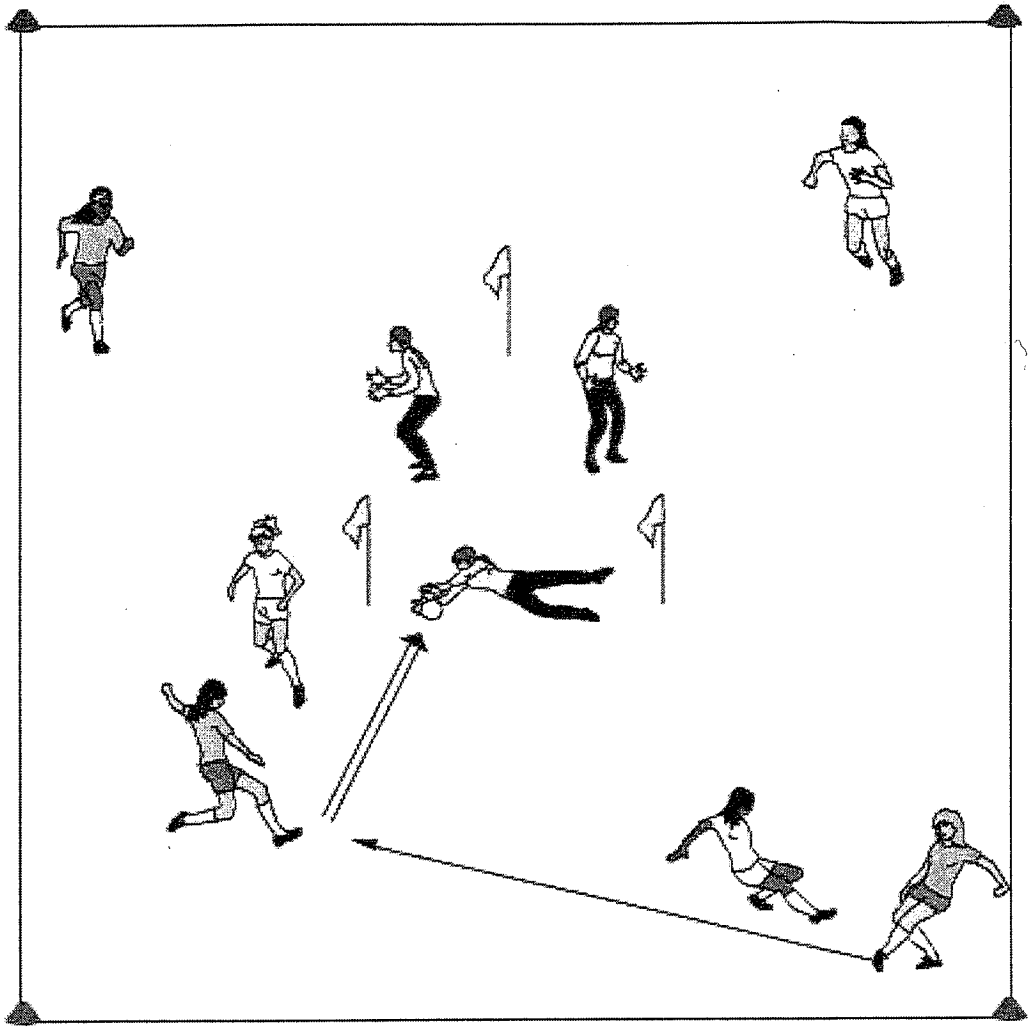

Figure 33 Triangle Goal

Technical – Tactical Radius

Techniques are the tools to execute tactics. Fitness is the engine that provides the physical ability to execute technique and tactics. Psychology controls the emotions during a match and allows players to think tactically. These components relate back to figure 1 placed in the table of contents. These four components are the building blocks of the game. All of them are important and must be developed in players throughout their soccer careers. Yet technique and tactics go hand in glove.

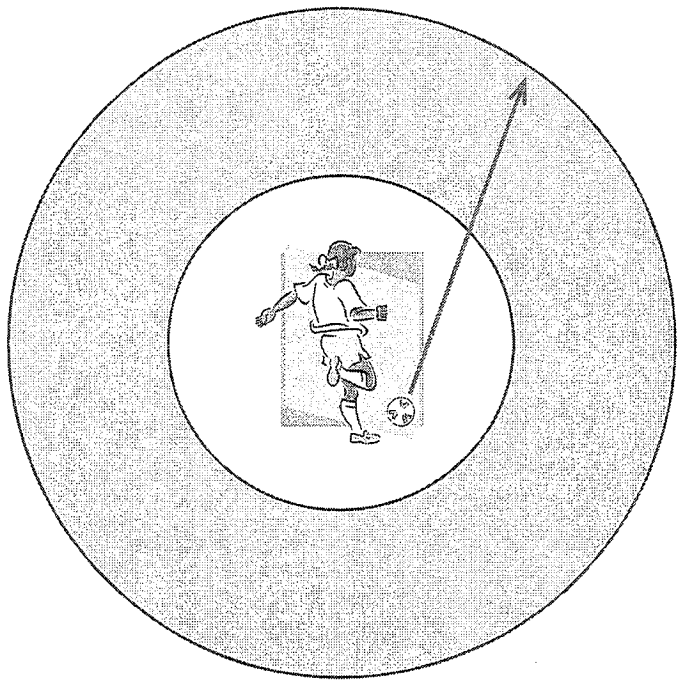

Figure 34 Technical-Tactical Radius

A player can only execute the tactics that he or she has the skill to pull off. If the best tactical option in a moment in the game is to cross the ball to the far post, but the player with the ball does not have the skill to make that pass then another tactical option must be chosen. No matter how well a player understands the game the tactical options chosen in an instant in the game are dictated by the techniques the player possesses. Every player has a technical-tactical radius.

The radius is the effective range around a player in which he or she can execute a technique. How wide the radius is will be impacted by age, quality of technique, power, tactical experience and awareness, vision, technical speed and quick thinking. It is expected and hoped that as a player matures, chronologically and soccer experientially, the

technical-tactical radius will expand. As that process evolves technique becomes skill.

Skill is the tactical application of technique under pressure of time, space and opponent in a match. In a sense it is using the right tool for the right situation in a match. To this end coaches must be sure to place a greater emphasis on teaching technique before tactics. Keep the horse in front of the cart so to speak. Particularly with preteen players the majority of time spent in training sessions should be on technique. Those techniques must be taught in game-like activities that should be fun for the kids. The fun provides the motivation to learn new skills. Players in the U12 and U14 age groups have learned to a good extent the 'how to' of technique and are ready to learn the why, when and where of the use of those techniques.

Players in the U16 and U19 age groups will continue their development within all four components of soccer. As they do their techniques will truly become ball skills.

As a coach grows in the experience of developing players and as he or she deepens his or her knowledge of soccer the trained eye that can observe and assess talent will emerge. Here are a few final reminders for the coaching eye.

"Coaching Eye"

Forever the sequence of technical assessment is the feet, the knees, the hip rotation, the position of the shoulders, hand movement and the position of the head.

Observe the player's approach to the ball – look at the stride and pace of the feet. Notice the position of the non-kicking foot and the action of the kicking foot. With skills where a body surface other than the foot plays the ball is the footwork correct?

Observe the angle of the joints (ankle, knee, hip, shoulder, elbow, wrist, fingers, neck) and whether they are bent sufficiently for the player's task at that moment.

The same ideas hold true for the hip or shoulder rotation and position as well as the way the head is positioned.

"You can observe a lot by watching." – Yogi Berra

While there is a great deal of information in this manual on the techniques of soccer please be aware that it is not an exhaustive listing. Coaches are advised to further study the techniques of soccer through DVDs, the US Youth Soccer TV Show on Fox Soccer Channel, via live steaming at the web sites of our 55 state soccer associations and most importantly at events such as coaching schools and clinics.

"Skill is executing great ideas. The rest is just technique." – Manfred Schellscheidt

GOOD LUCK, PLAY FAIR AND KEEP KICKING!

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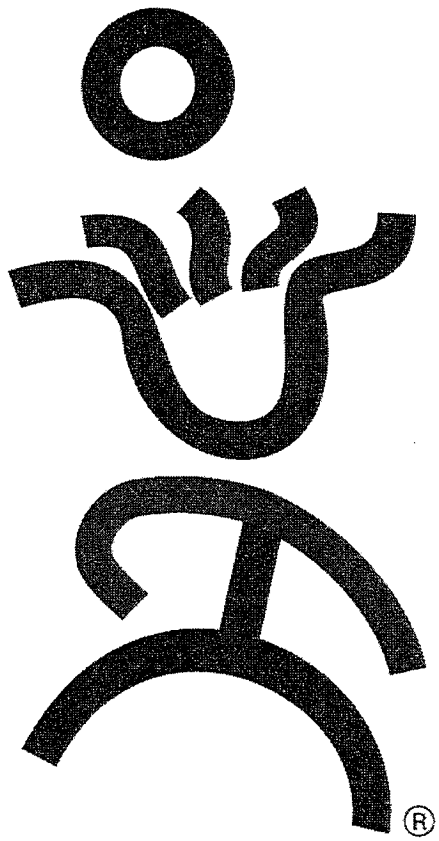

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