



## **BELWEST FOXES SOCCER CLUB INC.**

### **“BASIC SKILL SET”**

Junior players will invariably want to juggle the ball before they can control it, just as they will try to perfect the Cruyff turn before they can hit a sidefoot pass. Such youthful exuberance should not be deterred, but as well as working on their repertoire of attacking skills, children should be encouraged to practise the basics too. It is the fundamental arts of ball control, passing and heading that dominate the average junior soccer match, rather than any more sophisticated skills. A child who has mastered the basics will be an asset to any team.

P.O. BOX 155  
KIPPAX ACT 2615  
ABN 504 318 07345



## ENJOYMENT IS THE THING, NOT WINNING!

When children are training or playing games against other teams they need a fun environment where they can play without pressure. The game result, for younger players, should be irrelevant.

If the emphasis is on winning matches or the competition, the development process is doomed to failure and the fun of junior play is replaced by the pressures and frustrations of adult football.

A study of youth sport values showed that the most important values were:

- enjoyment
- personal achievement

The least important value was:

- winning

The junior coach must value, above all else, the individual development and welfare of every single player. Research has shown that the emphasis should be on the child experiencing fun and excitement. Children at this age are still sampling many sports and activities; football coaches can have an impact on which sport the child will choose.

### AGE-GROUP GUIDELINES

MAIN FOCUS	AGE GROUP & COMPETITION FORMAT	TEAM GUIDELINES	TIC EMPHASIS
Learning to master the ball	U/6-U/7 4v4	No formation / tactics consist of only very general instructions	Getting a 'Tic' for football
Learning to act with the ball purposefully	U/8-U/9 7v7	1-3-3 formation/basic tactical instructions/everyone plays all positions	<b>T</b>
Learning to play together purposefully	U/10-U/11 9v9	1-3-2-3 formation/limited tactical instructions/talent for specific positions more clear (but still flexible)	<b>T</b>
Learning the positions and basic tasks in 11 v 11	U/12-U/13 11v11	1-4-3-3 formation: Extending tactical instruction, explaining the positions and basic tasks	<b>TIC</b>
Learning how the basic tasks link together	U/14-U/15 11v11	1-4-3-3 formation: Choice/ specialising for a positions + corresponding tactical instruction	<b>TIC</b>
Learning how to play as a team	U/16-U/17 11v11	1-4-3-3 formation: Extending development on one position related to the team's output	<b>TIC</b> Football conditioning
Performing/Winning as a team	U/18-U/19 11v11	1-4-3-3 formation: Perfection per position and as a team; result-oriented teamwork	<b>TIC</b> Football conditioning
<b>T</b> : Technique <b>I</b> : Insight <b>C</b> : Communication			

## DIRECTING THE BALL

As players get more confident, they should begin to think about not only stopping the ball but also directing it into a desired position. For example, when controlling a ball in readiness to shoot, players should try to push the ball far enough in front of them so that they can take a stride forward before unleashing their shot. Similarly, when taking a pass on the run, players will need to knock the ball away from any nearby defenders so that they can continue moving forwards. Players should be encouraged to evaluate each situation on its merits and thereby determine how much weight to put behind their first touch.

## AVOID THE OLD TRAP

In the past, soccer coaches talked about 'trapping the ball'. However, the technique of stopping a moving ball by placing your foot on top of it is seen today as both risky and ineffective. A far better way for a footballer to bring a ball under control is to cushion it, and the beauty of this approach is that the fundamental technique remains the same whether using foot, thigh, chest or head.

# CUSHIONING THE BALL

The aim is to absorb any pace on the ball by meeting it with a cushioned touch. The ball should be given as large an area as possible to land upon and, where possible, the chest, head, thigh or foot should be withdrawn as contact is made. By doing this, the ball is slowed down sufficiently to fall at the feet of the player.



## ← SIDEFOOT CONTROL – INSIDE OF THE FOOT

The easiest way to control the ball is by using the inside of the foot.

**1** The player must stand in a relaxed fashion, with his or her eyes firmly on the ball. As it approaches, the player may need to adjust position to remain in the line of flight. The non-kicking foot is positioned slightly ahead of the other foot, which meets the ball and is then immediately withdrawn at the moment of impact.

**2** It is this action of bringing the foot back that cushions the ball into the player's stride. Controlling the ball with the inside of the foot will generally push the ball away from the player's body.





## SIDEFOOT CONTROL – OUTSIDE OF THE FOOT ↑

The technique used to control the ball with the outside of the foot is similar to that outlined for the inside of the foot (see opposite). However, greater precision is required as the player has a smaller area of the foot to aim at.

- 1 The player must turn his leg to offer the ball as flat and large an area as possible to land against.
- 2 Just as before, the foot is brought back sharply at the moment of impact.
- 3 This technique is best used to bring the ball in toward the body.

## CHECKLIST

### CUSHIONING THE BALL

Players must:

1. Stand 'lightly' as the ball approaches.
2. Position themselves in the ball's line of travel.
3. Assess their options and decide which area of the foot or body they will use to control the ball.
4. Look directly at the ball.
5. Position their non-kicking foot ahead of the ball.
6. Use arms for balance.
7. Bring the striking foot back at the moment of impact.



## SIMPLE PRACTICE ROUTINE

The easiest way to practise cushioning the ball in a training-session scenario, is for a coach or team-mate to serve the ball from the hands in to a player. The flight of the ball can be varied to make sure that each player is comfortable controlling the ball with foot, chest and thigh. In addition, by varying the pace of the throw, players will have to adjust their body position accordingly, taking a step forward if the ball is served in slowly and stepping back when it comes faster.



## ↑ CHEST AND THIGH CONTROL

**1** The techniques for controlling the ball with chest and thigh are similar. The key to both skills is watching the ball and adjusting your body position to meet it with the appropriate area of the body. Players will also need to show good balance and body strength when using these techniques in a game situation.

**2** When using the chest, players should stand on the balls of their feet. The player must get in position early and, at the moment of impact, he must lean back slightly to cushion the ball into the desired position. Thigh control requires an identical set-up, and players must position the thigh at an angle of 45 degrees to the ground. Once contact is made, the leg is lowered slightly to cushion the ball.

**3** As the ball drops down, the player must look to regain his or her balance. Quick reactions are vital now, as opponents will look to profit from any hesitancy and sneak in as the ball drops to the ground. The player should endeavour to take a second touch as quickly as possible.



## WATCH-THE-BALL DRILL

Whichever technique is used to control the ball, one common requirement is that players must keep their eye on the ball throughout. For youngsters, who are invariably preoccupied with the opponent closing in, or with the top corner of the goal that they are about to score in, looking at the ball is not always that appealing. It is the job of the coach to make sure that keeping an eye on the ball becomes a habit for junior players, and this simple drill will help.

- Three players or more stand in a 10m x 10m (11yds x 11yds) square, which is marked with cones or discs.
- The players stand at equal distances in a circle (or triangle if there are only three) and throw the ball, using chest passes, between themselves.
- They should be encouraged to disguise their passes, as this will help promote concentration and ensure that they remain focussed on the ball throughout.



## TOP OF THE FOOT ↑

Cushioning the ball with the top of the foot is a difficult skill to perfect and only the most able players will feel sufficiently confident to attempt it during a match.

- 1 The top-of-the-foot cushion employs a small area of the foot, and the potential for miscontrolling is great.
- 2 A steady head is required, while eyes must remain focussed on the ball.
- 3 At the moment of impact the foot is brought towards the ground, pulling the ball out of the air and to a halt ahead of the player.

# STRIKING THE BALL CORRECTLY

As any parent knows, children instinctively strike the ball with the toe of their boot or shoe. The 'toe punt', however, is an inaccurate, unreliable and often painful way of kicking a ball. Any junior player wishing to progress beyond a friendly kickaround in the park must quickly learn to strike the ball properly, using a variety of techniques and kicking areas. Children must feel comfortable in possession of the ball and confident that they can deliver a pass accurately to a team-mate.

## KICKING AREAS OF THE FOOT

### THE TOP OF THE FOOT

The most powerful contact area of the boot. The sweet spot, as some coaches call it, is used for driving the ball long distances, shooting and clearing.

### OUTSIDE OF THE FOOT

Used for bending the ball around opponents. High margin of error compared with the inside of the foot, so usually used only in attacking situations.



### THE INSIDE OF THE FOOT

This is the safest area of the foot to use for passing. The wide area on the side of the foot offers improved control and reduces the chances of a poor contact being made with the ball. Whenever possible this is the area of the foot that should be used for passing.

### THE INSTEP

Frequently used for passing, crossing, chipping and shooting. The instep offers a good combination of power and accuracy.





## ← SIDEFOOT PASS

The sidefoot pass – or push pass as it is also known – is best used for passing over short distances along the ground. The technique is simple, although it should still be practised until it becomes second nature.

- 1 The non-kicking foot is placed alongside the ball.
- 2 The kicking foot is turned out at right angles to the direction of the pass.
- 3 The ball is played with the side of the boot, using a firm ankle.
- 4 Players should aim to strike the middle of the ball to keep the pass on the ground.
- 5 A full and steady follow-through should be employed.





## THE DRIVE ↓

Junior players are usually desperate to kick the ball hard and long. Yet they often fail to appreciate that a powerful strike is the result of good technique rather than brute force. Players should be encouraged to take their time as they approach the ball. A smooth swing and a clean contact with a full follow-through should generate sufficient power without compromising control.



- 1 As the player approaches, he positions his standing foot alongside the ball. His head must remain steady and eyes focussed on the ball.
- 2 The toes of the striking foot point down toward the ground.
- 3 The player strikes right across the middle of the ball using the laces or instep.
- 4 A full follow-through maximizes power and can also aid direction.

## THE CHIP ↓

The chip is one of the most difficult techniques to master. It requires not only subtlety of touch but also supreme confidence. Before a player attempts to chip an opponent during a match, he or she should have practised sufficiently to be confident of clearing the person in their way. If a player misjudges a chip or underhits the pass due to a lack of confidence, the results can be embarrassing and costly.



1 Position the non-kicking foot adjacent to the ball.

2 Slide the striking foot underneath the ball, stabbing at it with a sharp motion that propels it up and away.

3 Keep both eyes firmly fixed on the ball.

4 A short follow-through should be sufficient to send the ball in the desired direction.

## THE VOLLEY →

The volley is usually used as a shot or a clearance, as in most other circumstances a player will opt to control the ball before playing it. However, in some situations, for example, in the attacking third of the field or when counter-attacking, a volleyed pass may be successfully employed.

### KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL VOLLEYED PASS

- It is vital to watch the ball as it descends, adjusting body position to compensate for any change.
- Position the non-kicking foot behind the expected point of impact.
- Aim to strike the bottom half of the ball in the middle, although be careful not to strike the ball underneath, as this would send it straight up into the sky.
- Point the foot and extend the ankle at impact.



## CHECKLIST

### KICKING A BALL

- Encourage children to use the sidefoot pass when possible.
- Practice sessions should work on both feet.
- The non-kicking foot should be set alongside the ball.
- Players should try to check where they are aiming the ball before striking, but they must also remember to keep their eyes on the ball when they make contact.