

# LIGHTEN UP



*The quickest and most effective way to improve Soccer kids*

## THE POWER OF ONE ON ONE

*Lighten Up activates talent, intelligence, energy and confidence*

In the 10 years it takes to teach the average Soccer kid, nobody will spend 15 minutes with that individual to learn about them or identify their strengths, weaknesses, skills, talents, fears or needs. We teach kids. We don't learn about them. A team coach doesn't have time to identify individual talent. Coaching organisations don't have time to visit ovals to observe, measure, evaluate or listen to Soccer kids.

Some sports have an assistant coach, a goalkicking coach, a fitness coach, a statistician or a nutritionist to look after players. Soccer has one team coach trying to do a bit of everything. Their priority is to teach techniques and tactics so that teams can win games. A personal trainer or an individual coach can improve any kid in 15 minutes because they take time to discover what each kid needs to improve.





## LIGHTEN UP

*Freestyle Soccer is all about a moving kid and a moving ball.*

Lighten Up is the most effective close repetition training drill in Soccer because it only takes five minutes to improve footwork so that kids can control the ball. This drill improves balance, coordination, timing and rhythm. It teaches kids to use both feet and alternate them.

The thrower stands 2 metres in front of the player and throws the ball continually to their head. Coaches look at the head because they teach techniques. They don't notice that the feet are glued to the ground. As soon as kids get up on their toes everything else just falls into place.



Once the player is moving comfortably, the thrower feeds the ball to the shoulders, then the thighs, the inside of the feet and each instep. The kids work through three sets. The first set (cognitive) is full of mistakes. The second set (associative) is a big improvement. By the third set (autonomous) kids are striking the ball with confidence and they can't believe how quickly they improve or how good they are.

## FOOTWORK

*We're teaching perfect striking technique to kids who can't move*

Soccer coaches are responsible for teaching teams how to play. The aim of Lighten Up is to learn as much as possible about individuals.

We spend so much time teaching Soccer skills that we never learn about the natural skills that all players have. Kids struggle to strike a ball because their feet are glued to the ground. They struggle to strike a target because they don't know what to look at when they kick. They struggle to juggle the ball because they try to hop on one foot.



*Coaches look at the heading technique and overlook the feet.*

Soccer skills depend on natural skills. Natural skills include looking, thinking, calling, listening and moving. We can spend years teaching the same techniques and correcting the same mistakes or we can spend five minutes discovering the underlying cause of the mistakes.



## NATURAL SKILLS

### *Lighten Up connects the natural skills with the Soccer skills*

Skill comes from the coach. Talent comes from the players. If we teach kids, we can develop their skill. If we learn about kids, we can develop their talent. Talent is the natural ability that everybody has.



A lot of coaches separate Soccer skills from natural skills and make kids practice ball drills when standing still or they run around the oval without a ball. They isolate the control surface to emphasise correct technique. There are kids who practice kicking while balancing on the one foot or they practice heading the ball while kneeling down. The secret to developing talent is to integrate Soccer skills with natural skills and coordinate technique with human movement. All kids have minds and bodies of their own and need to use them or lose them.

## MOTOR SKILLS

*Close repetition is the most effective way to develop motor skills*

Kicking a ball is a simple motor skill like walking and running. We develop basic motor skills at three levels. At the cognitive level, we think carefully before we do anything so that we get it right. At the associative level, we become more comfortable as we develop a feel for the ball. After a lot of practice, we can reach the autonomous level where we can control the ball easily without thinking.

Too many kids never get past the cognitive level because they spend so much time standing in line waiting to kick a dead ball to the coach. Imagine learning to walk by taking one perfect step every two minutes and then being corrected every time we put a foot wrong. Kids need close repetition drills to develop close repetition motor skills. Perfect doesn't make perfect. Practice makes perfect.





## 200 TOUCHES

*Some kids can make 100 decisions, take 100 steps and get 100 ball touches in one minute just by juggling a ball on their own.*

The average junior Soccer player gets 100 ball touches in a training session. It takes at least 200 touches to get a feel for the ball. Perfect control is a balance between too hard or too soft, too fast or too slow, too early or too late, too high or too low, too left or too right.

After 200 touches, players reach the intuitive level where the mistakes disappear and control becomes more consistent. Kids reach the zone where mental, physical and technical control become synchronised. All creative people start with a conventional foundation. Once they have the freedom to think for themselves, they develop the confidence to improvise their own style. Creative kids aren't faster or stronger. They're different and that's what makes them unpredictable in games.



*Up on toes, relaxed, arms balanced, eyes fixed firmly on the ball.*

## TALENT

*Kids need to think for themselves and make their own decisions.*

All kids are different. All kids have talent. All kids make mistakes. All kids can practice. All kids can improve. All kids need is a ball. We can't improve kids just by teaching them all the same drills. We need to learn about each kid so we can discover the specific skills they need to improve and the unique talents they need to develop.



*Lighten Up is designed to activate natural ability in all players.*

Every kid has a peak skill that they do better than anything else. Some kids have a peak talent that they do better than anyone else. We need to learn about players so we can identify their natural talents. The Next Generation Soccer kids won't want to stand around waiting to be told where to move and what to think. These players of the future will expect Australia to challenge for the Top 20 in the Football World.



## CONFIDENCE

*The most important goal for kids and teenagers is confidence.*

All kids are different. Some kids are in the dark because they never think for themselves. Some kids are too heavy because they stand flat footed like mechanical robots. Some kids are too serious because they worry about making mistakes. These kids all need to Lighten Up.

Kids make plenty of mistakes. Coaches stop the mistakes and correct the techniques. Kids spend years repeating the same simple mistakes and coaches spend years correcting the same simple techniques because they don't have time to discover the underlying cause. We need coaches who understand what to look at and what to look for. We need coaches who can appreciate players and connect with them.

*Coaches don't play in the game so they don't need to feed the ball at training. Kids are old enough to feed themselves.*



## TRAINING ACTIVITY

*If Freestyle kids go as far as they can, they can see a lot further.*

Lighten Up takes about 15 minutes to cover three full sets and it can provide kids with 200 ball touches so they're ready to play. It takes them from a cognitive, hesitant level to an intuitive, confident level.



*These are Next Generation kids who train because they want to.*

Kids make mistakes because they worry about making mistakes. The key to Lighten Up is to tell players to make as many mistakes as they like, so they stop worrying. As soon as they stop worrying, they stop making mistakes. Notice how quickly they smile and relax. Kids are the first to know when they make mistakes. They don't need an adult to constantly remind them that they got it wrong. They need someone to help them get it right. Lighten Up allows kids to persevere with the same drill until they crack the skill. That's what practice is all about.



## BUDDY SYSTEM

*Kids don't believe in best practice. They want better practice.*

After three sets of Lighten Up, kids are in control of the ball and in tune with their own agility, timing and rhythm. Players become tense when they try too hard. They find their game when they learn to relax. There's nothing wrong with their Soccer skills. Kids just need close repetition drills to integrate, coordinate and activate the natural skills.



*Lighten Up gives kids more responsibility for their own development*

As their confidence increases, and their eye/foot coordination reaches a peak, kids begin to develop more power in their kicks. The feeders will move back to give themselves more time and space to catch the ball. The third set looks good, feels good and sounds good. Perfect timing produces a deep sound, not a high slapping sound. The ball player now feels sharper, more focused and ready to play a game.

## LEARNING

*If kids believe in the coach, and the coach believes in the kids, the kids will believe in themselves.*

Belief is the key to the future of Soccer in Australia. If we don't believe that kids have the talent to reach the top we will teach them all to be the same so that they look, think, stretch, move, kick and play the same way. If we believe kids have talent, we will learn about them and search for that talent. We will visit ovals, watch how teams train, evaluate match preparations and discover what kids do in a game without the ball. We all have eyes, ears, mouths and minds. We just need to open them. We need to look, listen, ask questions and learn.

What we learn about our players depends on what we look at and what we look for. Kids don't lack talent. They lack footwork and vision, power and precision, movement and decision, belief and repetition, challenge and intuition. Lighten Up is the quickest and most effective way to discover how good our Soccer kids really are.

