

READY TO PLAY SOCCER



It's the little things that make a big difference

ATTITUDE

We can win if we think we can and we can lose if we think we can.

The hour before a Soccer game is the most important time of the week and determines how well the players are going to perform. The first quarter of an hour should be free time so that kids can use their nervous energy to have fun and get all the gossip out of the way.

Some kids are never ready because they never develop a set routine that suits them. Every kid needs to be in their comfort zone before kickoff so that nothing can distract them from winning the game.

Some teams can lose a game before kickoff. They focus on their opponents and worry about their size or they recognise the referee and blame him for losing their last game. One kid says they're going to lose and that negative idea sweeps through the team like a bushfire. These kids are just preparing their excuses for when they lose.



FOCUS

The second quarter is critical to focus the kids on the game at hand. A large squad has too many distractions. One kid speaks and everyone

listens. So many teams warm up by standing in a circle and sharing one ball. These kids aren't warming up. They're standing flat footed and waiting for the ball which is just how they will play in the game.

The most effective way for kids to concentrate on the game is to work out in pairs with close repetition drills. These drills encourage kids to focus on the ball and stop looking around. Ballwork in pairs gives players 200 ball touches in a few minutes and enables them to reach the intuitive level where they stop making simple mistakes.

They can start with one and two touch close passing on the ground and gradually increase the distance, speed and degree of difficulty. Every kid knows what they need to work on. They need to duplicate the moves they make in the game and they want to become more familiar with the playing surface and the weather conditions.



GAME PLAN

There's a limit to how much kids can remember during a game

By the third quarter of an hour, the kids have a good feel for the ball and are ready to absorb and understand what the coach has to say.

Some coaches give insufficient guidance before a game and become inundated with a barrage of questions from worried players. Some coaches give a 15 minute lecture and expect kids to remember it all. It's easy to give these kids a test after the game where they write down all the instructions they remembered. The results are surprising.

Teams need two general instructions before a game so that they all work off the same page. Each individual player needs two specific guidelines so they know what is expected of them. The coach can check with them at half time to see what works and what doesn't.



RESPONSIBILITY

Players are responsible for everything that happens in their games.

The fourth quarter of an hour is where kids can fine tune their preparations and sharpen up their reflexes so that they're ready to go flat out when the whistle blows. Too many teams use the first 20 minutes of the game to warm up and they play catch up for the rest.

Freedom is responsibility. Kids need freedom to think for themselves and create their own moves so they can develop self awareness and resilience. The coach doesn't play in the game so he doesn't need to feed the ball in group drills. Kids are old enough to feed themselves.

The team captain should take responsibility for the last quarter of an hour before kickoff and take the players for a run and stretch. He might decide to give them pushups and short sprints just before the whistle blows so that they're breathing heavy and ready to play hard.



FREEESTYLE KIDS

Freestyle kids get out of the game what they put into it

All kids are different and they all have different strengths and weakness, skills and talent, fears and needs. They all have different levels of intelligence, experience, motivation and confidence. They all play different positions and all have different skills they can practice.

Ordinary kids will always do just enough and Freestyle kids will always do more than enough. They will always look at what the coach gives them and make sure they can do it stronger and faster. Most Freestyle kids will usually juggle at home before they go to the game so that they know they've had at least 200 touches of the ball. The most effective way to motivate Freestyle kids is to tell them what they can't do and then stand back and watch how they do it. Kids who train because they want to train are always up for a challenge.



POSITIONS

Every position is different and requires a different mindset

Most Soccer kids have no idea what position they're going to play in a game till a few minutes before kickoff. Conscientious players think a lot about their game and want to practice skills that are relevant. A winger will mentally rehearse sprinting down the line and crossing the ball at speed to the target player he has already identified. If kids are really serious about playing to their full potential, they want to know at training where they are going to play so they can better prepare.

Similarly, with interchange, kids who are going onto to the field need advance warning so they can warm up properly. If we take a defender off the field, and then put them back on ten minutes later as a striker, we shouldn't be surprised if they stand around marking an opponent.

Every position requires a different preparation. Strikers need to work with the keeper. Defenders need to practice passing on the ground and in the air and midfielders need to practice sharp control on the move.



READY FOR THE BIG BOYS

The future of Australian Soccer is great because there's so much room for improvement and so many different ways we can improve.

Australia is ready to challenge the leading Football nations of the world. We have the coach and we have the players. All we lack is confidence in our system and belief in our ability. There's no reason why we can't aim for Top 20 by 2020. We just have to overcome fear.

There are no leading Football nations of the world who need to copy other countries. They develop a system to suit the national character of their players. There are no leading Football nations of the world who believe that the vast majority of their children lack the talent to reach the top. They have faith in the natural ability of their youth. A mature nation is ready to question old ideas and listen to new ideas.

