

FREESTYLE SHOOTING DRILLS



The best time to shoot is when the keeper doesn't expect it

GOALS

Any kid can shoot. Freestyle kids learn how to score goals.

Goals are simply too big. You can fit 34 balls between two posts and 10 balls from the ground to the crossbar. That's 340 different places to shoot. Goals are huge. Players decide to aim for the whole target. Even junior goals are 8 balls high and 23 balls wide (184 places).

Kids miss big because they aim big and they try too hard to kick the ball too hard. If they aim small, they will only miss small. Freestyle kids practice hitting small cones placed inside the posts. These targets are on the ground and well away from the keeper so they condition the strikers to look for the empty corners of the net before they shoot.

Most kids don't realise how accurate they are. So many shots are blasted straight at the keeper because that's where the striker looks. Any kid can shoot. Shooting is a simple skill. Scoring goals depends on vision. Freestyle kids learn what to look at and what to look for.



FREE RANGE PRACTICE

Freestyle kids keep shooting until the skill becomes second nature.

The average Australian Soccer kid, regardless of ability, experience or position on the field, practices shooting for 15 minutes every week. This just gives them enough time to take a few shots from outside the 18 yard box so they soon learn how to blast the ball over the crossbar.

The secret to scoring goals is vision. Any kid can learn how to shoot effectively and score goals. They just need to understand what to aim at before they shoot and what to look at when they kick the ball.

Freestyle kids practice shooting for two hours using 100 balls so they develop a firm understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. They learn how to score goals because they discover how to miss. They understand why so many shots get blasted high over the crossbar, well wide of the post or go straight to the goalkeeper who just stands there. The kids run the drills because they need to read the speed of the feed.



CLOSE UP SHOTS

Freestyle kids learn how to finish because they know where to start

Gradual progression is the key to marksmanship. Kids start shooting inside the 6 yard box and then increase momentum. Skill development should be progressive. Shooting sessions last for two hours and use up to 100 balls so kids don't expect too much too soon. They develop patience, timing, rhythm, balance and coordination before they increase range. Scoring is a specialist skill needing specialist practice.

Close up shots are short and simple, slow and smooth, with two touch control on the ground. A good shot feels good, looks good and sounds good. The ball makes a deep sound if timing is perfect and a high slapping sound if timing is off. As kids develop a feel for the ball, they slowly increase the distance, speed and intensity of the shooting.

Freestyle kids learn to keep their eyes on the ball as they strike it



HEADING FOR GOAL

When kids head for goal, they get their whole body behind the ball

The aim of regular shooting sessions is to develop confidence. A lot of kids have a fear of shooting and missing in case their mates laugh at them or the coach shouts at them. Even more kids have a fear of heading the ball in case it hurts their head. Very few kids are willing to head a crossed ball and hardly any kids will try to head a goal kick.

Heading practice is a close repetition drill. Kids should always start their heading practice inside the 6 yard box so they can become comfortable with their timing. They can gradually extend the distance of the feed. At first the feeder will throw the ball to their head but after a while kids can practice running onto a high ball. Ball control in Soccer requires use of the whole body. When kids kick a ball, watch how they use their upper body for counterbalance. When kids head a ball, watch how they use their feet to increase power and momentum.

Freestyle kids aren't scared of missing shots or making mistakes



POWER SHOOTING

Strikers will discover their power when they stop looking for it

Power seems to be the biggest obsession with little kids and their Dads. Boys especially try too hard to kick the ball too hard while Dad shouts 'Big Kick, Big Kick'. Too many kids try to develop power first and then add timing. Force isn't the same as power. All they do is tense up and rush the shot. They just need to relax. If they develop their timing and rhythm first, their power will increase naturally.

Kids vary their power according to the size of their target rather than the distance to the target. When they aim for the whole goal, they use 100% power even inside the 6 yard box. If they use small cones as targets, they will learn to place their shots and aim for the corners of the net. Close up shooting stops kids from blasting the ball but every shooting session should end with power shots from outside the box.

Any kid can learn to hit a small cone with power and accuracy



PRECISION SHOOTING

Professional marksmen don't aim for the target. They aim for the bullseye which is the smallest part of the target.

The most important subject kids can learn about is themselves so they can understand what their limits are and then learn how to extend them. Kids don't know their own strength until they measure it and they don't realise how accurate they are until they aim for small targets. Striking a large goal isn't accuracy but hitting a small cone is.

Most strikers are so accurate that they put their shots straight at the goalkeeper. They just need to learn to aim at a small corner of the net. Freestyle kids can hit a small cone consistently from 30 metres away. As they gradually improve their range, they also increase their power.

We can teach kids to be the same or learn how good they really are



BACK TO GOAL

Freestyle kids never shoot without checking their target first

There's a reflex action in shooting that kids can't override. If players don't check the target just before they shoot, their brain makes them look up at the target as they kick the ball. The problem is not so much that they take their eyes off the ball but that they lift their heads.

Back to Goal shooting drills are specifically designed to emphasise the importance of vision. Freestyle kids learn to check the target as soon as they turn so they can concentrate 100% on striking the ball.

These drills also improve close control because the kids learn to turn the ball using their feet, thighs, chest or head. The challenge of the first touch is to put the ball goalside. Team mates vary the feed from low hard balls on the ground to spinning, bouncing, balls in the air.



VOLLEYING AT GOAL

The primary role of the striker is to connect with the net.

Once kids are happy with close two touch shooting on the ground, they're ready to advance to more difficult balls in the air. Freestyle kids love to volley because they get to use the full range of their agility and creativity and they want to emulate their super heroes.

Volleying practice should start in the 6 yard box as kids develop their confidence with their body and can make clean contact with the ball. It's important to feed one set from the left and one set from the right so kids can feel the difference between their intuitive foot and their conscious weak foot. Two touch volleying improves balance, agility and coordination. Kids start with chest/volley and thigh/volley and advance to double headers and two touch using feet only. They finish the move with side volleys and then repeat the drill from further out.



RAPID FIRE

There should be a reason for everything that kids do at training

Some kids can demonstrate perfect technical control in a sterile environment. As soon as pressure is increased they lose confidence and then their control. Freestyle kids excel in wet, muddy, difficult conditions because they always choose the hard way to train. They practice because they want to practice not because they're told to.

Rapid fire drills are designed to assess sharp reflexes by reducing the time and space kids need to think for themselves, make decisions and create intuitive moves. In rapid fire one twos, one player moves to the right and the next player moves to the left. Rapid fire close shooting tests footwork and vision. The rainbow is the ultimate rapid fire drill. Intelligent kids want to be challenged so they can show what they can do. They don't want to be choreographed or turned into predictable robots that can't think for themselves or improvise under pressure.



HORSESHOE

Freestyle kids are equally effective on the left and on the right

The Horseshoe is an intensive shooting drill designed to assess one player's ability to position himself and control 30 balls in 60 seconds from varying angles. The feeder provides high balls starting from the left hand post and gradually moving around to the right hand post.

Some strikers will start near the right hand post and finish in the same spot becoming more entangled and awkward. Freestyle kids are used to shooting from all angles so they intuitively improve their position. Kids often go through the motions without thinking. Some attackers ballwatch and get caught offside. Some strikers follow the fullbacks when they move. Freestyle kids learn to lose their markers so they can get into scoring positions. They learn how to play without the ball.

Every kid can benefit from individual shooting practice



RAINBOW

The Rainbow is a totally intuitive drill that enables coaches to assess the footwork and vision of all players. Using 100 balls and up to 8 players, the average striker gets about 12 shots in a 60 second drill. The aim of the exercise is to make shooting automatic so that kids can strike at speed without stopping to think. The key to consistent goals is familiarity. Too many kids panic because they lack regular practice.

With 12 shots each, it's easy to video the drill and analyse the vision of each player as well as the marksmanship. Kids get to see their own results. The aim of this drill is to watch the eyes of each player. Most kids don't check the target before they shoot so shots go wildly astray. Rainbow provides a great workout for any enthusiastic goalkeeper.

Confidence is the most important goal any striker can aim for



WALL PASS

Coaches don't play in the games so they don't need to feed the ball in every basic drill. Kids don't want to stand in a line waiting to kick a dead ball to a coach once every two minutes. Every Soccer kid should learn the fundamentals of the basic wall pass by feeding the ball in training drills. There's a good reason why it's called a wall pass. The first touch is always the most critical or the players won't get a return pass. Some kids rush their pass because they're already thinking about the shot. They take their eyes off the ball and kick it behind the 'wall'.

In a wall pass, the first pass is aimed at the receiver but the return pass is put into space for the striker to run onto. Every kid should take turns running the drill so they can judge the challenge of hitting a moving target. Kids need to read the speed of the feed. Variations include rapid fire passing and controlling the difficult high ball.



CROSS TRAINING

Just one touch of the ball might be enough to win the game

There are three common crosses in Australian Soccer. The most common cross is the ball that goes behind the goal line. The second most common cross is the ball that goes straight to the keeper. The third most common cross is the ball that gets cut back from the goal line. Kids need to understand the first two and practice the third one.

Cross training is essential to shooting practice. Strikers get frustrated when they lose their markers and get into good positions only to find that nobody can cross the ball into the box. Any kid can kick a ball. Freestyle kids learn to vary their kicks and practice crossing the ball while sprinting down the wing at full speed. They use the energy in the ball by kicking it first time instead of stopping it and hitting a dead ball. They use their vision to make decisions so they can float the ball to the far post or drive it low and hard to the near post.



CHIPPING AND LOBBING

Anyone can kick a ball. The key is to make it do what you want.

Some players wait to receive a ball and then they look up to see what their options are. Usually it's too late. Freestyle players know what they're going to do before they receive the ball. They coordinate their footwork and vision by practising intuitive juggling skills. Even when controlling a ball they're still looking around to assess their options.

Any kid can stick a foot out and kick a ball. Juggling teaches kids to connect with the ball and use their whole body for balance and coordination. If they notice that the keeper is off his line, they won't hesitate to lob the ball over his head and under the crossbar. By leaning their upper body backwards, they can get more height with their lobs. Most Soccer skills challenge kids to use their whole body not just the control surface. The most common chip is taken just outside the penalty area. Freestyle kids develop the power to chip the ball from outside the 18 yard box or they have the touch to lob it over the goalkeeper from inside the 6 yard box.



DEAD BALL MOVES

In a dead ball move, the ball should play dead not the players.

Some teams like to choreograph their moves. The problem with a lot of free kicks is that the other team will never stand where they're supposed to stand. Freestyle kids expect the unexpected so they learn to think for themselves and improvise at short notice. They don't limit themselves to one or two options. What they do is practice every type of chip, lob, drive, cross, volley and ball into space so they can adapt to any situation that arises in a game. Freestyle is the style of no style.

Players who do nothing, create nothing. Players who make a move, force other players to make a move. Freestyle kids hate to stand still with their markers waiting to see what happens. At corners, they make runs across the goalmouth to draw defenders out of position. At free kicks, and throwins, their aim is to disrupt the stability of the defence.

For every action, there's an opposite and equal reaction

