

# THE FREESTYLE CONNECTION



*We need to connect kids with more Soccer balls*

## DISCONNECT

*A poor connection stops the flow of energy and communication.*

In the English Premier League, there are top clubs with top managers and some of the most brilliant players and they still fail to achieve their full potential because they don't connect with each other.

In an ordinary game of Soccer, when the ball player has control of the ball, he looks for support and listens out for the best option. There are talented forwards who stand with their markers and wait to see where the ball goes before they make a run for it. They don't call and they don't move and they don't connect with the ball or the ball player.

At a training session, a group of talented individuals get into a circle to juggle a ball between them. They stand dead still and remain dead quiet. Some of them seem dead scared of making the wrong move. No matter how skilful these kids are, they don't connect with their mates.





## BALL

***Anyone can tell a kid to kick a ball. The challenge is to discover those players who want to kick a ball without being told.***

Any kid can kick a ball away. Freestyle kids learn to connect with the ball so they can keep it with them and make it do whatever they want. Juggling is the most effective way to connect a kid with a ball. Kids can't fake juggling. They can only develop that skill through time and effort. Coaches don't have time to teach individuals how to juggle.

A coach can connect kids with their skill but a ball will connect kids with their natural talent. All the great players started as little kids with a ball in the back yard before anyone took any notice of them. A ball forces kids to get up on their toes and exercise their minds and bodies. Control on the move connects the natural skills with the Soccer skills.



## TEAM

*Every kid in the team needs to connect with their team mates*

All kids are different and they all have different levels of intelligence, experience, motivation and talent. Calling is the simplest and most effective way to connect eleven individuals and turn them into a team.

Calling connects control with support which are the key elements of possession. Listening is the critical part of calling. In a democratic team, players tend to treat others the same way they are treated. If we ignore the support runs, and don't play the calls, the connections will break down and players will stop calling and stop passing to us. A team is only as strong as its weakest link. If players only pass to their friends, and ignore the weaker players, they weaken the whole team. Support players don't have to wait or spectate. They can dictate a move or dominate the game just by making intelligent runs and calls.





## COACH

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

A team coach teaches techniques and tactics so that teams can win games. In a game, the coach follows the bouncing ball so he can monitor control and possession. With a large squad, he doesn't have time to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each individual or observe what they do for the 95% of the game when they don't have the ball. A coach needs to learn about players to connect with them.

In every team, kids should have an older brother or sister who can help to connect the coach with the players. The teenage mentor is a two-way connection. They can assist the coach as a second set of eyes and also connect with the players by running drills and demonstrating skills. The teenage mentor of today is the coach of tomorrow.



## TALENT

*We can connect kids with their talent by learning about them.*

Coaches connect kids with skill because they teach them. They don't connect kids with talent because they don't have time to learn about them. All kids have talent. The really talented players are different which makes them unpredictable in games. When kids are different, we don't connect that with talent. We connect that with being wrong.

We can connect kids with their talent by observing them, learning about them, measuring their performance and improvement and identifying their strengths and weaknesses, fears and needs.

Talented players see things in a game that ordinary players take for granted. They use their intelligence to constantly look around and think about the play. They see moves before they happen. To activate natural talent, we need to give kids the freedom to try things, fail and keep trying, so that they don't give up or become ordinary.





## CONFIDENCE

### *Fear of failure is the greatest obstacle to the development of players*

The first step in connecting kids with their confidence is to tell them to make as many mistakes as they like. That relaxes them and gives us a chance to identify the underlying cause of the mistakes. All kids make mistakes. A lot of them make mistakes because they worry about making mistakes. Strikers quickly learn to avoid mistakes by passing the ball to a team mate so they don't have to shoot and miss.

The most effective way to connect kids with confidence is to measure their performance and improvement so that they can see how well they're going. Confidence should be based on facts not compliments. Freestyle kids (surfers, skaters, riders, ball jugglers) make mistakes all the time but they usually discover the underlying cause because they don't have to look for excuses or find someone else to blame. Soccer is a challenging game. We can play it safe or play it to our potential.





## GOALS

*Strikers only miss big because they aim big. They will only miss small when they learn to aim small.*

There's a loose connection between strikers and goals. We don't know how to shoot because we don't have goal scoring academies and we don't have goal scoring academies because we don't know how to shoot. Strikers need to practice until it makes perfect.

Every club should have a shooting gallery where kids can spend as long as they like learning how to shoot and understanding how to miss. Cricketers practice one on one in the nets. It should be the same for Soccer. Every goalkeeping academy should be connected with a goalscoring academy so they can challenge and motivate each other.

Vision is the most effective way to connect strikers with goals. Most kids take their eyes off the ball when they strike it so they can see the net bulge. They need to pick a small target, on the ground and wide of the keeper, and then keep their eyes firmly on the ball as they shoot.





## OTHER SPORTS

*Every sport has different solutions to the same challenges.*

Everyone knows that one kid who can play any sport even if they lack the technical training. They connect with their natural abilities. Soccer kids can learn a lot from other sports. Golf gives players the control to swing smoothly through the ball and aim for the smallest target. In professional shooting, marksmen aim for the bullseye not the target.

Some kids can kick a ball 40 metres with either foot, look and move in any direction, mark tightly or lose their marker and develop the confidence in the air to compete for a difficult 50-50 ball without taking their eyes off it. These kids play Australian Rules.

Some upper body sports like tennis, cricket and basketball practice specific fast footwork drills so they can speed up their reflexes and improve their positioning before controlling the ball. Soccer kids can develop agility from martial arts, strength from weight training, speed from sprinting and stamina from middle distance running. Any kid can connect with other sports to improve their Soccer ability.



## CULTURE

***Australia has the ability to play at the top level. We better believe it.***

In the top Football nations of the world, Soccer is not just a game. It's part of the culture. Millions of kids practice with a ball every day because they want to, not because they're told to. The average Australian Soccer kid trains for about 100 hours a year. Kids in the leading Football nations train for about 500 hours a year and by their teenage years they are already 1,000,000 steps ahead of Aussie kids.

To connect all the elements of Australian Soccer, we need a common purpose whether it's making money, winning games, improving ability or just having fun. It's possible to achieve all four if we can put our priorities into perspective. The game is not just about teaching. It's about looking, listening, learning, questioning and understanding. It's about discovering natural talent, establishing shooting academies and skills parks, developing close repetition drills and creating skills specialists. The most effective way to connect players with the game is to believe in their talent so that we can discover and develop it.





## FREESTYLE KIDS

*Freestyle kids connect with other kids who have a common purpose*

In Australia, there are thousands of Freestyle kids who practice and improve their skills every day because they challenge themselves and compete with their mates without any direction, correction or protection from well intentioned adults. When there's nobody else to guide or decide for them, Freestyle kids connect with innovation.

These are the basketball players, surfers, skaters, skateboard riders, bike riders and Soccer kids who have the freedom to swap tricks and skills with their mates and the confidence to be original and intuitive.

Freestyle Soccer kids aren't good at learning where to stand or how to kick and shoot. They want to learn where to move and how to pass and score goals. They intuitively learn about possession, space and support. When we put Freestyle kids in a juggling circle, they can automatically connect. Any club can connect with their Freestyle Soccer kids by identifying those kids who keep pushing themselves.



## LIFE

*A coach prepares a kid for one season. The aim of Freestyle Soccer is to prepare a kid for all seasons.*

Soccer connects kids with their life skills. Coaches can easily direct, correct and protect kids from losing but Soccer is a great opportunity for kids to learn how to win, lose, make mistakes and bounce back so that they can develop self awareness, resilience and their confidence.

Coaches can teach techniques and tactics but they can also stimulate intelligence, inspire confidence, encourage innovation and activate natural energy. Team sports give kids a chance to develop character, work ethic, health and fitness, sportsmanship and team spirit. When kids have an opportunity to think for themselves, and make their own decisions, they become more responsible and connect with their team.

