

# SOCCER MAGIC FOR KIDS



*Discover Hidden Talents and Secret Skills*

## INTRODUCTION

*There are no limits to how much you can improve and develop*



In the next few pages, we are going to change the way you play Soccer. We will change the way you move your feet, the way you control a ball, what you call out in a game, where you move on the field, what you look at and what you think about. We will show you everything you need to know about footwork, vision and motional intelligence. We will find new ways to increase your confidence. And we will treat you as a unique individual not just one part of a team.

We are going to change the way you train so you get more touches of the ball. We will improve the natural skills that you've always had and teach you some Soccer skills that you've never had. We are going to give you the freedom to make more mistakes so you can learn from them and lose your fear of failure. We will show you how to develop creative flair and play for fun. You will train more because you want to, not because you have to. You will have more energy in the games.

We will identify your hidden talents, measure your performance, build your confidence and challenge you to learn new skills. We will show you how to think for yourself and discover how good you are.

# YOU

*You can make Soccer fun and you can make Soccer work.*



The most important subject you can learn about in Soccer is **You**. What do you know about you? Do you know your strengths and weaknesses? Do you know how fit you are? Do you know how far you can throw or kick a ball? Do you know your fears and needs?

You have the potential to be a successful player but you just don't know it yet. You don't know what to look at when you kick the ball because nobody has ever told you. You don't know how many ball touches you need before you're ready for a game. You don't realise how accurate you are because you've never aimed at small targets. You don't know how to score because you aim at the whole goal.

Coaches know so much about the game and so little about the players. If we learn about you, we can develop a system to suit your natural talents rather than develop you to suit a system. You need to move if you want to improve and you need to believe if you want to achieve. There are so many simple ways you can achieve your full potential.



## FOOTWORK



As a Soccer kid, you are flat footed. All Soccer players are flat footed. The main reason you have trouble striking the ball is because you don't know anything about footwork and no coach has ever told you. As well as being flat footed, you are stiff legged and one footed and this makes you stab awkwardly **at** the ball instead of striking **through** it smoothly. In a few minutes you can learn how to move your feet and dramatically improve the way you control a Soccer ball.

All you need is a partner and a ball so you can practice close control in pairs. Your partner stands 2 metres in front of you and throws the ball continuously to your head, shoulders, thighs and feet. Your aim is to play the ball back into their hands. At first you feel stiff, awkward and flat footed. You just need to jog on the spot so the kick becomes an extension of your footwork. You do this three times. The first set is full of mistakes (cognitive stage), the second set is more comfortable (associative stage) and by the third set your control is nearly perfect (intuitive stage). You need at least 200 touches of the ball before the mistakes disappear and your muscle memory starts to kick in.

## VISION



You don't know what to look at when you strike the ball. Sometimes you look at the ball and sometimes you look at the target. Sometimes you never check the target at all. Coaches don't know what you look at because they worry about perfect and correct kicking technique.

Have you played golf? Imagine trying to hit a golf ball while looking at the hole. It's that simple. You have to keep your eyes on the ball when you strike the ball or you won't hit it cleanly. Most kids are more interested in what they get out of the kick than what they put into it so a lot of players look up to see the net bulge when they kick.

Once you understand the significance of vision, your accuracy will improve dramatically. There are three simple steps which you can practice repeatedly until they become automatic. Control the ball first, then look up and check your target and finally keep your eyes firmly on the ball as you kick it. Control, target, ball. Control, target, ball. Technique is the secret to shooting. Vision is the secret to scoring.



## BALLS



How many balls does your team use at training? How many balls are taken to the match? Is there just one ball for a whole squad or do you have at least one ball between two? How many touches do you get?

The quality of your ball control in a game is directly related to the quantity of your ball contact at training. The average kid gets 10 ball touches before kickoff so that they spend the first 20 minutes of the game making unforced errors. They need 200 touches to reach an intuitive level. Initial touches are 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.

The average Soccer player gets 200 touches of the ball in a training session. That's 8,000 touches in a season. A ball juggler gets 100 touches in one minute. That's 8,000 repetitive touches in two hours. There are never enough balls at training sessions or matches. Players never spend enough time on the ball. There is no value standing in a line and waiting for two minutes before you get your next touch.

## JUGGLING



Juggling is simply the quickest and most effective way for you to develop close ball control. It teaches you everything you need to know about footwork and vision and gives you hundreds of ball touches. It forces you to bend your knees and get up on your toes. It makes you use both feet and move with the ball. It teaches you to keep your eyes firmly on the ball as you control it. It encourages you to keep the ball close to you instead of booting it with too much force.

Juggling improves your concentration, gives you short term goals that you can easily achieve, measures your performance and develops your confidence. It makes you use your whole body when controlling the ball. It gives you the emotional freedom to relax and make as many mistakes as you like so you can learn from them. It helps you to read the bounce and spin of the high ball. A Soccer ball doesn't shout at you or keep you on the bench for making mistakes. It lets you think for yourself. What sort of a Soccer coach can achieve all that for you?



## MISTAKES



The main reason you make mistakes is because you worry about making mistakes. If I tell you to make as many mistakes as you like, you will stop worrying. As soon as you stop worrying, you will stop making mistakes. You're the first to realise when you make a mistake. You don't need an adult to constantly stop you and remind you.

The greatest obstacle in any sport is fear of failure. It makes strikers pass the ball in front of an open goal instead of shooting and it makes coaches try not to lose the game instead of trying to win the game.

Soccer is a correctional system where coaches honestly believe they're helping you by constantly pointing out your mistakes. We spend years correcting the same simple mistakes because we can't spare five minutes trying to identify the underlying cause. There's nothing wrong with your ball technique. It's more likely that you don't know how to move your feet or what to look at when you kick. Relax. Do you really think you're going to make more mistakes now?



## NATURAL TALENT



Soccer has little to do with kicking a ball. The average player has control of the ball for 5% of the game. It's more about the intelligence and the natural skills that you need for the other 95% of the game.

We spend so much time trying to develop Soccer skills that we overlook the natural skills that all players have. Natural skills include looking, thinking, calling, listening, learning, understanding and moving. These aren't Soccer skills; they're just your natural skills.

A talented striker is useless if he looks at the goal when he shoots. An enthusiastic defender is ineffective if he just watches the ball and never checks the blindside. A support player can't provide options if he doesn't know what to call. A ball player lets the team down if he doesn't listen to their support calls. An intelligent player is letting himself down if he just stands there waiting for the coach to tell him what to do. You always need to look for ways to improve. If you improve the natural skills, the Soccer skills will improve themselves.

## SMALL TARGETS



The main reason talented strikers fail to score is because the goals are too big. You can fit 34 balls between the two posts and 10 balls from the ground to the crossbar. That's 340 places you can score. Players miss big because they aim big. If you aim small you will miss small. Any kid can kick and shoot. The magic secret of passing and scoring is vision. That's why so many shots go straight to the goalkeeper.

Little kids blast the ball over the crossbar because they always want to use 100% power even if they shoot in the six yard box. Older players blast the ball over the crossbar because they know how strong they are and how big the target is and don't know anything about vision. Indoor players are more accurate because they aim for a smaller goal.

On a shooting range, professional marksmen never aim for the target. They aim for the bullseye which is the smallest part of the target. When you miss an open goal, there's nothing wrong with your skill. Goal scoring is all about footwork and vision. You just need to strike through the ball smoothly and pick a small part of the net to aim for.



## FREESTYLE SOCCER



A good coach will tell you **what** to do so that you learn to follow instructions. A better coach will show you **how** to do it so you can practice on your own. The best coach will explain **why** you do it so you can think for yourself and make your own decisions in a game. There should be a reason for everything you do in training sessions.

The principles of Soccer are simple and an understanding of them will help you put the theory into practice. Possession is the most important element of the game. If I tell players to score goals, they will rush forward and lose possession. If I tell them to keep possession, they will pass the ball around until they find an opening to score a goal.

A lot of kids get lost in a game and stand around waiting to be told what to do. Space is the key to clarifying any game under pressure. If your team has the ball, get into space so you can receive it. If your team loses the ball, close down space so your opponent can't receive it. You'll keep moving and the rest of your game will fall into place.

## INTELLIGENCE



Soccer is a simple game complicated by too much technical detail. We constantly look at the kick and overlook the kid. Any Soccer player can trap, pass, head, screen, dummy, dribble and shoot. The most difficult skill in Soccer is deciding when to choose which one. We all have intelligence and talent but don't always use them. If you just stand around waiting for instructions, you will never develop the intelligence to make your own decisions or the confidence to create your own moves. You need to think for yourself so you can learn.

Too many kids psyche themselves out before a game because they worry about the reputation of the referee or the size of the opposition. Never worry about the other team. Always let them worry about you. Don't think about it, talk about it or worry about it. Just do it right.

Ordinary players think 'ball and goal'. They chase the ball till they catch it and then rush towards goal till they lose it again. Intelligent kids think 'space and possession'. Use your brains to save your feet.



## CONFIDENCE



A lot of teenagers and kids are hesitant to admit it, but the most important goal they want to achieve is confidence. Once you develop confidence in yourself and your talent, everything else falls into place. Coaches teach techniques and tactics to create successful teams. We can learn enough about you to make you confident and successful.

The most effective way to develop your confidence is to use facts not sports psychology. We can do this by measuring your performance and improvement. We start with simple juggling skills. If you juggle the ball for 15 minutes every day and keep a record of your juggling figures, you will notice a steady improvement in your results. You can see in black and white that your skills are improving. You can't help increasing your confidence once you know how well you're doing.

We can use the same system to improve your fitness. If you start with 10 pushups/situps/abdominals on the first day, you just add one each day. The same applies with running. Build an endurance base first and then gradually reduce the distance while you increase the speed.

## SUPPORT



Possession is the most important element in Soccer. It consists of control and support. Each one depends on the other. A brilliant individual can't win the game without support from his team mates. Great support players can't win the game if their control is poor.

Imagine you're the midfield general with a ball at your feet and you're waiting for a run and call so you can pass the ball. You have three forwards who stand with their markers and wait for you to pass the ball so that they know where to run. This is common in Australian Soccer because we focus so much on the ball and the ball player. We need to learn what kids can do without the ball for 95% of the game.

The support player is more important and effective than we realise. If he does nothing, he will create nothing. But if he acts, he will always cause a reaction. If he makes a run, he will either lose his marker and find space for himself or he will drag his opponent out of his comfort zone and create space for his team mate. A skilful kid can control the game with a ball. A talented kid can control the game without a ball.



## COMMUNICATION



You don't call enough in a game and probably don't know what to call. If your team mate has possession, you shout out his name to show that you want the ball. He already knows his name. He needs more information than that. He needs to know where to pass the ball.

The aim of communication is to provide useful information. Effective calling can turn eleven individuals into a team. If you tell ball players where to put the ball, they can pass it into space for you to run onto.

The two most important calls are 'time' and 'man on' so that the ball player knows his situation. Tell him where you want the ball using calls such as 'left wing', 'right wing', 'near post', 'far post', 'through ball', 'square left', 'square right' and 'penalty spot'. If you listen to a game, you will notice that the winning team is noisy because they're hungry to win the ball and the game. They psyche out the other team who become a lot quieter. You don't need to be confident to call for the ball. Your call makes the other team believe that you're confident.

## MOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE



You don't move enough in a game because you've never been taught about motional intelligence. Motional intelligence is knowing where to move in a game and understanding why. It's tactical awareness that some kids learn intuitively in primary school just by playing chess.

Coaches like to tell players where to stand. Kids want to know where to move. When they first start playing, kids chase the ball in a herd so coaches give them positions and shout at them if they move out of position. 10 years later, some players are still too scared to move.

A lot of kids play straightforward Soccer. They run straight forward and kick straight forward because that's where the goal is. The intelligent kid looks and thinks 360 degrees. He's not scared to make a diagonal or square run to draw an opponent out of position. You have a mind and body of your own and you need to exercise them to achieve your full potential. You need freedom to think for yourself, confidence to create your own moves and the talent to take chances.



## POWER



The only reason you lack power is because you try too hard to hit the ball too hard. You probably try to gain power first and then improve your timing. It's the wrong way around. If you relax and develop your timing first, your power will increase naturally without you straining.

Notice how little kids stab at the ball as hard as they can instead of striking through it smoothly. They lead with their kicking foot instead of stepping into the ball with their support foot. The secret to gaining power is simple. You will discover it when you stop looking for it.

Too many teams start shooting practice outside the 18 yard box which just invites kids to blast the ball as hard as they can over the crossbar. The talented striker learns how to finish because he knows where to start. Power shooting begins in the 6 yard box so that players develop eye/foot coordination using short, simple, slow, two touch drills and keeping the ball on the ground. Once they feel comfortable with their technique, they increase the speed, power and degree of difficulty.

## CREATIVITY



Kicking a ball is a simple motor skill just like walking and running. You develop basic motor skills in three distinct stages. At the first level, you learn the skill consciously (cognitive level). With practice, you become more familiar with the skill (associative level). Finally, you reach a stage where you can do it without thinking (autonomous level). It takes a lot of close repetition drills to reach that top level.

The average Australian Soccer kid struggles to get past the cognitive level because they spend so much time standing in line waiting their next turn. Ordinary training produces ordinary players. Extra training produces extraordinary players. If you're really serious about reaching the intuitive level of skill, there's a lot more you can do on your own.

If you take responsibility for extra training, and play with a ball every chance you get, you will make decisions a lot faster in a game and react a lot sharper than ordinary kids who hesitate because they're trying to second guess what the coach wants them to do. Creative skill puts you in the zone where you can synchronise your mind and body.

## RESPONSIBILITY



Soccer Magic comes from within you not without you. You are the only one responsible for how much you can achieve in your Soccer. There are thousands of talented kids who believe they need elite coaching to take them to the top. Freestyle kids take responsibility for their own improvement so that they learn something new every day. Motivation, drive and determination can only come from inside you.

You are responsible for every match result. The other team can only play as well as you let them. If you win it's your fault and if you lose it's still your fault. When you lose, it means that you have to do more next time and you have to do it better. Kids who blame the referee for a loss overlook a good reason to push themselves a lot harder. If you have to rely on the referee to win a game, you're not good enough yet.

If an expert coach watches you for 10 minutes at a grading session and decides that you lack talent to reach the top, it should be enough motivation to make you try a lot harder and take **responsibility** for your future. Never let anyone impose their own limitations on you.



## SUMMARY



Sport should be a challenge. The aim of Freestyle Soccer is to learn about you and identify your individual strengths and weakness, skills and talents, fears and needs so you can achieve your full potential. All kids are different. There's a different key to every kid and a different drill for every skill. It only takes 5 minutes for you to lift your game.

Adults give up too easily because they know what they can't do. Kids achieve because they don't know what they can't do and so they're willing to listen and learn. If you go as far as you can, you'll be able to see a lot further and discover that you have no limits to your talent. Other people might put limits on you because they don't know you.

Your greatest challenge is to practice what you can't do, not what you can do. Never look for the easy way out. Take a ball with you every day and practice juggling, passing and dribbling. Find other Freestyle kids so you can practice close repetition drills with them and swap tricks. The most important player you can compete against is you. Set yourself short term goals and you will achieve your long term goals.