

SOCCER FEARS

...and how to overcome them



Fear of Failure is the Greatest Obstacle in Sport

FEAR

Confidence is the most important goal for any kid or teenager

Soccer fears are natural but they affect players and coaches. Generic fears include the fear of failure, fear of weakness and fear of the unknown. Specific fears for kids include the fear of heading, fear of getting hurt, fear of shooting, fear of missing, fear of losing, fear of being a loser, fear of making mistakes and the fear of being different.

We cope with fear in four ways. We can deny it, avoid it, ignore it or blame someone else. If we can't shoot, we soon learn to pass the ball to someone else. If we can't juggle, we just say that juggling isn't Soccer. If we lose a game, we blame the ref for poor decisions. If we can't coach a successful team, we blame kids for lacking talent. If we're scared of new and different ideas, we pretend they don't exist. We're scared of showing any weakness. The main reason kids and coaches make mistakes is because they worry about making mistakes.



HEADING

Girls are scared of heading the ball. Boys are scared of admitting it.

Fear is a powerful force. Kids are scared of juggling because they believe it's too hard. Kids are scared of shooting because they believe they'll miss. Kids are scared of heading because they believe it hurts. And they're right. It hurts because they let the ball hit them instead of them hitting the ball. They stand still, tense up and close their eyes.

The solution is simple. Close repetition drills in pairs will find the range that players are comfortable with and this can be gradually increased as they develop confidence. There are so many simple ways to improve every kid if we just learn what each kid needs to improve. Belief is a powerful force like fear. If we believe it, we can achieve it.



SHOOTING

Kids can't shoot because coaches don't know how to score goals

Goals are too big and kids try too hard to kick the ball too hard. They miss big because they aim big. They try too hard because they shoot from outside the penalty box. Players develop a fear of missing at training because the coach shouts at them and team mates laugh at them. They soon find the solution in games by passing the ball instead of shooting. Kids are very accurate which is why so many shots go straight to the goalkeeper. The only pressure is inside their minds.

Any kid can learn how to shoot when they practice the technique. Any kid can learn how to score goals when they understand about vision. It takes five minutes to show kids what to aim for and what to look at when they strike the ball. The real key is to tell kids to make as many mistakes as they like so they stop worrying and start scoring goals.

Freestyle kids learn more because they get to make more mistakes



JUGGLING

Kids don't need to juggle to play Soccer but they need Soccer skills to be able to juggle.

Kids who have a fear of juggling cope with it in three ways. Some kids avoid it. Some kids hate it and some say that it's got nothing to do with Soccer. Fear of juggling is just fear of failure. Any kid can pretend they can kick but they can't pretend to juggle. Kids who lack confidence won't learn to juggle. Juggling takes a lot of time, hard work and concentration. It identifies the kids who are self motivated.

Juggling is the key to freedom. It marks the first time that kids take responsibility for their own skill development instead of just doing what the coach tells them. Any kid can learn to juggle. If they keep a record of their juggling figures, they soon see how good they can be.



GETTING HURT

Kids who get hurt are often the ones who worry about getting hurt

Confident players make good decisions. They choose, commit themselves and call the moves so their team mates know what they're doing. Players who lack confidence will hesitate or make a move without calling their name. Two team mates will run into each other, going for the same ball, because neither of them looked or called.

Some kids hesitate because they lack familiarity with the ball. They need hundreds of ball touches to reach the intuitive level where ball control and decision making become second nature.

Some defenders develop a fear of tackling so they stick a foot out half heartedly and get hurt. Good defenders put their body behind a tackle so they can maintain momentum. We don't want a generation of meek kids who wait to be told what to do. We want kids to use their energy.

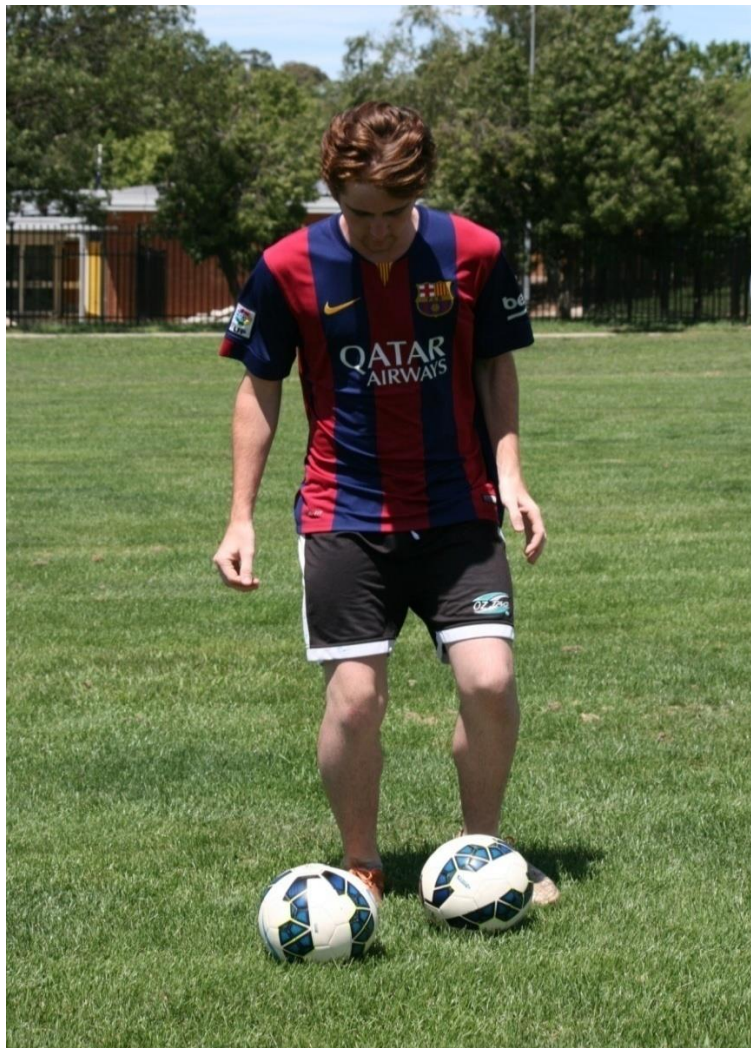


MOVING

Kids are scared to make a move in case it's the wrong move

Ordinary Soccer is very straight forward. Ordinary players run straight forward and pass the ball straight forward. Talented kids are different and unpredictable. They run where they can see a move. The ball player can easily pick out talented support players. They not only make square or diagonal runs but they call where they want the ball.

All kids have talent and intelligence. We need to encourage them to use their minds and bodies so they can achieve their full potential. The next generation want to think for themselves and create their own moves. They're already inventing moves that we can't think about. Kids have a mind of their own and they need freedom to develop it.



SPEAKING UP

Calling turns eleven individuals into a team and needs no energy

Kids are becoming too dependent on performance enhancing coaches. If you put 8 talented players in a circle, and ask them to juggle a ball, you'll notice that they don't move and they don't call. They look great when we tell them where to move and what to do but they look lost when they have to think for themselves and make their own decisions.



A good coach will stand on the sideline and call the shots so that kids know what to do. A better coach will let the kids call the shots so they can learn from experience and take responsibility for their actions. Kids need to know that their ideas about the game are important.

We need to encourage kids to talk. We need to ask them questions so we can discover their fears and beliefs. If you listen to any match, you'll hear one team calling for the ball because they're trying to win and the other team are quiet because they're trying not to lose. There are at least 20 calls that players can use in a game to increase team possession. Calling is a sign of confidence and requires no energy.

BEING DIFFERENT

Talented individuals are conforming to an ordinary coaching system because they want to be accepted by the group

Soccer Superstars aren't necessarily the fastest, strongest or most accurate. They're different and that's what makes them unpredictable.

Australian Soccer is full of talented, intelligent, athletic young players but we can't see them because we discourage young players from being different. We look for kids who train when we tell them to train and who wait to be told what to think and where to move.

Freestyle kids train when we don't tell them to train and they learn to think for themselves, make their own decisions, take responsibility for their own actions, make mistakes, learn from them and move on. Kids don't lack talent. They just lack the confidence to be themselves. Kids want to play their own game. That's why it's called Junior Soccer.



RESPONSIBILITY

The other team can only play as well as we let them

In Soccer, we're responsible for everything we do. If we play, we're responsible for every result. We're responsible for every loss, not just every win. If we coach, we're responsible for every kid. That includes the kids who can't play, not just the kids who are easy to coach. Sport should be a challenge. It means more when we choose the hard way.

If we can't see skill in a kid, we need to improve our coaching. If we can't see talent in a kid, we need to find better ways to identify talent. As a sporting nation, Australia should be aiming for the Top 20 Football nations of the world. If we're ranked close to 100, we can't blame the vast majority of Soccer players for being untalented. We need to look for more ways, better ways, smarter ways, faster ways and different ways to improve our own coaching system.



LOSING

Some coaches try not to lose instead of trying to win

The biggest fear for a coach is to lose a game. The biggest fear for a kid is to be a loser. It's part of the bullying culture that kids who lack confidence feel better if they can make someone else feel like a loser. Shooting practice is one of the most common ways to produce losers.

Kids don't know how to shoot because coaches don't know how to score goals. The default method is to shoot as hard as possible and hope that the goalkeeper makes mistakes. Most shots sail over the crossbar because kids try too hard to kick too hard. These kids aren't making mistakes. They're doing exactly what the coach tells them.

Kids can't shoot and miss at training without their mates laughing at them. They stop shooting because they're scared of being a loser. It's not the player who loses out but the whole team. A team is only as strong as its weakest link and it needs to look after the struggling kids because the elite kids are strong enough to take care of themselves.



MISTAKES

Players soon learn how to stop making mistakes. The easiest way to stop doing anything wrong is to stop doing anything.

Modern Soccer is a correctional system where well meaning coaches honestly believe they're helping kids by constantly pointing out their mistakes. Kids are the first to know when they make mistakes. They don't need an adult to constantly remind them how they got it wrong. They just need someone to show them how to get it right.

Kids make mistakes because they worry about making mistakes. Tell them to make as many mistakes as they like and they stop worrying. As soon as they stop worrying, they stop making mistakes. Most coaches are too scared to try it so they keep correcting the same mistakes instead of searching for the underlying cause. Soccer is the fear of the unknown for a lot of kids. They don't realise how good they are because we keep telling them how bad they are.

