

AUSTRALIAN SOCCER TALENT



*All kids are different. All kids have talent.
All kids make mistakes. All kids can practice.
All kids can improve. All kids need is a ball.*



FREESTYLE SOCCER

We all have talent but we don't all use it. Every coach has the talent to improve any untalented kid in 5 minutes if they really want to.

Freestyle Soccer is a learning program that looks for better ways to learn about individual players. The biggest challenge in Australian Soccer is the failure of elite talent to emerge. Freestyle Soccer looks at five possible reasons: the lack of talent, the lack of belief, the lack of identification, the lack of development and the lack of use.

Lack of talent is just a lazy excuse, like blaming the referee for a loss. As Freestyle Soccer is based on the certain principle that all kids have talent, we can confidently search for individual talent not excuses. We can't identify talent by teaching skill and we can't develop natural ability until we learn what specific ability each player has. If we learn that a player like Tim Cahill has a particular talent for heading the ball, we can develop ways to take advantage of that talent in a game.

Coaching is a self fulfilling prophecy. Kids become what we expect them to become. If we believe that kids have talent, we put them in elite teams and we search for their talent. If we believe that kids lack talent, we put them in lower teams and that's as far as they ever go.



ALL KIDS ARE DIFFERENT

Imagine if everybody learned to walk by taking one perfect step every two minutes. That's how we teach Soccer kids to kick a ball.

Ordinary players train when they're told to train because they want to play on the weekend. Freestyle kids train when they're not told to train because they want to improve. Ordinary kids are result oriented. They focus on what they get out of the game not what they put into it. They look up at the net when they shoot. Freestyle kids keep their eyes on the ball. Ordinary kids laugh at team mates if they miss their shots because it covers their own lack of confidence. Freestyle kids make as many mistakes as they like so they can learn from every shot.

When we teach kids, they all look the same so we teach them all the same skills and drills regardless of experience, intelligence, ability or position on the field. When we learn about kids, we discover that they all have different skills, talents, strengths, weaknesses, fears and needs. The role of a coach is not just to put the best into each kid but get the best out of them. It's more rewarding to coach untalented kids who want to learn it all than talented kids who already know it all.



ALL KIDS HAVE TALENT

The more we learn, the more we discover how little we know.

Australian Soccer is a teaching system not a learning system. Coaches teach techniques and tactics so that teams can win games. They don't have time to learn about individual players or identify their natural talent. If we want to discover and develop talent, we need a learning system. We can't learn about talent by teaching skill. We can only learn about players if we look at them, listen to them, ask them questions, measure their performance and evaluate their talent.

Skill is technical ability. It comes from the coach. Talent is natural ability. It comes from the players. If we teach kids, we can develop their skill. If we learn about kids, we can develop their talent. We send our experts to the leading Football nations of the world to learn how to teach Australian kids. The answers are in front of us. Who visits ovals, observes training, evaluates match preparations, measures performance and improvement and assesses the effects of training drills? We need research and development teams to visit every club.



ALL KIDS MAKE MISTAKES

17 year old Soccer kids are making the same mistakes they learned when they were seven but now they can do it without thinking.

We see what we're trained to see. When we teach kids, we look at techniques and we look for mistakes to correct. When kids make a mistake, we stop the mistake and correct the technique. Kids spend years repeating the same simple mistakes and coaches spend years correcting the same simple techniques because nobody can spare five minutes to observe the mistakes or discover the real underlying cause.

When Freestyle kids train on their own, they don't know what to look for so they keep an open mind. They make plenty of mistakes but they have the freedom to think for themselves and create their own moves so they keep searching for the reasons behind the mistakes. Freestyle kids develop their natural ability and take control of their mistakes. They know how to score goals because they learn how to miss. Team players make mistakes because they worry about making mistakes. If we tell them to make as many mistakes as they like, they will stop worrying. As soon as they stop worrying, they stop making mistakes.



ALL KIDS CAN PRACTICE

There's a key to every kid and a drill for every skill.

Controlling a ball is a simple motor skill just like walking and running. We develop motor skills at three levels. At the cognitive (conscious) level, we have to stop and think before we do anything. At the associative (familiar) level, we get to put the skill into practice. At the autonomous (intuitive) level, we can create successful moves without thinking because we synchronise our minds with our bodies. Most Soccer kids never get enough ball touches to become intuitive. The average junior player gets 100 touches of the ball in a training session. A Freestyle juggler can achieve that in one minute.

Too many kids separate and isolate their Soccer skills from their natural skills and look like mechanical robots. They run without a ball or stab at a ball while standing still. The key to practice is to integrate and coordinate Soccer skills with natural skills. Kids need their Soccer skills for the 5% of the game when they have the ball. They need their natural talent for the other 95% of the game. They need to look, listen, call, think, learn, understand, make decisions and move.



ALL KIDS CAN IMPROVE

We can improve any kid in 5 minutes by discovering their talent.

Kids are easy to improve because they're willing to listen and learn. Adults may take a bit longer. Too many 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. They haven't reached disillusion yet.

Soccer kids need to develop their minds and bodies so they can achieve their full potential. The key to improving kids is discovering what each kid needs to improve. There are ten key elements we can use to evaluate footwork and vision, power and precision, movement and decision, belief and repetition, challenge and intuition.

The most important subject any kid can learn about is themselves. The priority for every kid and teenager is to develop their confidence. The easiest way to do that is to keep a record of ball skills and fitness drills so they can measure their own performance and improvement. Every club should provide a skills park where kids can practice close repetition ball skills without any direction or correction from adults.



ALL KIDS NEED IS A BALL

Some kids are kept under control, some are in control and some kids are out of it. Freestyle kids learn how to take control.

Some players look really good when they follow instructions but they become lost when they have to make their own decisions. If we put 8 elite kids in a circle, and give them a ball to juggle, they can't put ten passes together without dropping the ball. They stand dead still, keep dead quiet and wait to see what the ball does before they react to it. The way kids behave in the circle indicates how they play in a game.

Freestyle kids train with a ball on their own every chance they get. A Soccer ball doesn't tell kids what to do or criticise them if they make mistakes. It keeps kids on their toes and forces them to use both feet. A ball helps kids to relax and gives them hundreds of touches so they can reach an intuitive level of skill. Kids aren't impressed by best practice. They want better practice with more balls. They don't just want to improve. They want to measure their improvement. Ballwork gives results that are immediate, visible, permanent and measurable.

