

Echidna football



The future of Australian Soccer is a kid and a football

Try It

Echidna football can work anytime and anywhere

We can all learn a lot from a kid and a football. Everything that kids do is innovative because it's all new to them. They're open to ideas so they try things. They're versatile so they change their minds a lot and work on different variations. They don't follow a timetable. They practice what they need to practice. They make as many mistakes as they like and they learn from everything they do, good and bad.

Kids are the first to know when they make mistakes so they don't need someone to constantly remind them. They can work it out for themselves and they can keep going until they solve the problem.

Ballwork for a kid needs to be exciting and ballistic. They need to be moving and they need to be moved. They don't need to stand still either in a group listening to theory, in a line waiting to kick a ball or in a circle waiting for the game to begin. They need to be challenged.



A kid and a football never stand still or wait for instructions

Roll It

You don't have to play Soccer to play with a Soccer ball.

Any kid can have fun playing with a round ball. They throw it, trap it, roll it, kick it, bounce it, spin it, stab it, chip it, lift it, lob it, balance it, bend it, catch it, drive it, volley it, head it, juggle it, count it, move it, slice it, cut it, place it, smash it, flick it, control it and JUST STOP IT!

They can get a lot out of a ball. There are social, technical, personal, physical and health benefits for any kid who plays with a round ball. They can develop agility, flexibility, balance, coordination, accuracy, timing, rhythm, strength, power, feel, reflexes, creativity, awareness, both feet, concentration, natural talent and confidence.

The earlier kids practice with a ball, the sooner they can coordinate their basic motor skills and integrate them with their Soccer skills.



Enjoy It

If anyone ever tells you that you lack the talent to reach the top, that's probably the greatest motivation that any player can have.

Soccer is just a game. It was developed to suit the needs of people of all shapes, sizes, genders, ages and levels of intelligence and talent. Even if kids didn't play the game competitively, the benefits for a kid with a ball are enormous.

Playing with a round ball challenges kids, gets them fit and healthy, helps them to socialise with other kids and improves their confidence. There are so many different skills in Soccer that any kid can discover what particular talents make them different to other kids. There are no limits to what players can achieve if they take it one step at a time.



Throw It

You really need to move if you really want to improve.

Get a ball in your hands and throw it up in the air just above your head. Using your forehead, head the ball back into your hands. Keep doing it. What are your feet doing? Don't just stand there, do something. Move your feet. Walk and throw the ball up to your head.

The first thing you learn about Soccer skills is that you need to use your natural skills. You need to use your whole body when you control the ball. You need arms for balance and feet for coordination.

The second thing you learn is to pace yourself. Don't try too much too soon or you'll rush and tense up. Relax and don't worry about making mistakes. Once you feel comfortable, head the ball twice into your hands and then three times and gradually increase your challenge. Try the shoulders, the thighs and the instep. Keep moving all the time. The more you develop ball control, the more you build body control.



Head It

Use your hands to start with and then you won't need them anymore

Ball control is all about setting yourself short term targets that are clear, achievable, permanent and measurable. Every time you reach a target, you increase your confidence. As you become more confident, you can raise the level of your targets.

Try walking while heading a ball and count how many touches you get before you drop it. Maradona controlled a ball on the move by using his shoulders. See how many times you can juggle a ball on your thighs. The next stage is to juggle using feet only. Challenge yourself to juggle as you walk forwards and then backwards. There are no limits to how much you can achieve if you keep setting short term goals. There are 100 different Soccer skills you can develop. There are so many different talents in Soccer that it's impossible for any kid to be untalented. If we can't see talent, we need to look closer.



Catch It

The joy of discovery puts the fun back in the fundamentals

Echidna football can cover every aspect of player and ball behaviour. Don't be scared to use your hands when you work with a ball. Throw the ball into the air and trap it on your head, neck, shoulders, thighs and instep. Throw it higher and let it bounce before you catch it. The more you practice with a difficult high bouncing ball, the more confident you will become in a game while other players hold back.

Catching a ball is all about timing. The key to catching a high ball with perfect timing is to keep your eyes on the ball as long as you can.



Spin It

Innovative kids have the talent to put their own spin on the game

Echidna football can be the first taste of freedom where kids get to identify their natural abilities and see how good they are. They can take responsibility and make decisions without being questioned.

Kids can discover a lot about a ball and a lot more about themselves. Most Soccer balls have distinctive markings on them that make it easy to anticipate the flight by reading the spin and the bounce. When they constantly practice with a ball, kids get to read the flight intuitively and without realising. The key is to keep their footwork moving.

There are plenty of kids who can kick a ball without knowing where it's going. The challenge for freestyle kids is to put the ball where they want it to go. Control isn't luck. It's the result of time and effort.



Bounce It

The most important subject you can learn about in Soccer is YOU.

A round ball is a great companion for kids because you can kick it in the air or up against a wall and it will come back to you. As you get used to it, you begin to understand how it behaves. Experience on the ball helps you to judge the ball while other kids hesitate and wait.

Stand 2 metres from a wall and start to kick the ball against the wall alternating your feet. You need to keep on your toes so you can react quickly to the bounce. Wall practice teaches you to weight the pass. Weight transfer improves your natural balance and coordination.

Too many kids try too hard to kick the ball too hard. Force is the default for skill and a simple indication that kids lack confidence. Shy kids will always kick the ball too high to compensate for control. Your brain is the most sophisticated computer and can retain a wide database on the aerodynamic forces of a round ball so you need to practice as much as you can until your control becomes autonomous.



Balance It

The best players in the world manage to relax under pressure.

The most important goal for any kid is confidence. Confidence needs to be based on facts not sports psychology. We can tell kids how great they are, which is what their parents do but it has a greater effect if we can measure and record their performance and improvement.

Most kids have a natural tendency to challenge themselves. Whenever we can tell them what their juggling P.B. is or a fitness result, they have a target they can aim for. Every parent, coach and teacher tells kids to try their hardest. The key to Freestyle Soccer is to tell kids to relax and make as many mistakes as they like. As soon as they relax, kids start to improve their ball control. The most effective way to relax is to balance a ball on the head, neck, thighs or instep. They can only learn to balance a ball when they finally stop trying so hard.



Move It

Ballwork develops balance, coordination, timing and rhythm.

Any kid can kick a ball. That usually means that they kick **at** a ball. Little kids will always stab **at** a ball to get more force. The key to control is to strike **through** the ball and make twice as much contact.

Echidna football can develop technical skills. A moving kid and a moving ball can integrate Soccer skills with the natural skills that all kids have. Soccer movement means fluid motion. It doesn't mean hopping over a dead ball for two minutes because everyone else does.

Ordinary kids think 'ball and goal'. They chase the ball till they catch it and then they rush towards goal till they lose it again. Freestyle kids think 'space and possession'. They look and think 360 degrees and they aren't restricted by convention. They look for the best options. Freestyle kids are never scared to make square or diagonal moves.



Turn It

The key to skill is a kid and a ball. The key to talent is a moving kid and a moving ball. If you can move it you can improve it.

The secret to controlling a ball on the move is weight transfer. By constantly switching the ball from one foot to the other you can develop natural balance in both feet and the confidence to make decisions. One footed players are so limited in their options and so restricted in their movements. As they reach their mid teens, they become more predictable and opponents force them onto their poor side. The gap between their good foot and bad foot becomes wider.

There's no such thing as a weak foot in Soccer. When kids run, each foot is as strong as the other. Both feet need thousands of ball touches.

The more joints you exercise, the more control you have. When you move with a ball, bend your knees and swivel your ankles to change the direction of the ball. Use the inside and outside of both your feet.



Soccer is just like a chess game. You have to out think and out manoeuvre your opponents. Never become predictable or boring in your play. Always put pressure on the other team with or without the ball. A Soccer player has the agility and flexibility to change the pace and direction of the play. Every time you switch play in an attack, you force the opposition to disrupt their defence and lose their stability. The other team can only play as well as you let them. Don't let them.

Juggle It

The secret to juggling is to alternate your feet with every step.

Don't take walking and running for granted. It's a very economical way of moving and a lot more effective than hopping like a kangaroo.

Try hopping on one foot for 5 minutes and then try controlling a ball at the same time. There's a limit to juggling with one preferred foot. It's human nature to always look for the easy way out but if you start developing your neglected foot, there's no limit to how far you can go. When you walk and run, you discover that you don't have a weak foot. Every time you put your foot down, you regain your balance.



Count It

Your self esteem needs to be based on facts not nice compliments.

Anybody can tell you that you're playing well but you need to know how well. It's important to know that you're actually improving. You should get out of the game what you put into it so keep investing.

Juggling a Soccer ball gives you the freedom to take control of your own development. You can practice on your own, or with your mates, every day without someone else trying to help you by pointing out all your mistakes. If you use a training diary, and write down your juggling figures, you'll discover some surprising facts about yourself.

If you juggle the ball 30 times, you will soon realise that the last 10 numbers are so much better than the first 10. You will notice that your control reaches a higher level after about 200 touches of the ball. This is important to understand when you prepare for games on match day.



Stab It

All creative people master the basic skills and then they improvise.

Any kid can learn the basic rules of kicking balls. Talented kids learn how to bend them. Ordinary training creates ordinary players. Extra training creates extraordinary players who soon get bored. The worst thing kids can be is satisfied. The best they can be is challenged.

Once talented kids develop an understanding of ball aerodynamics, they begin to put their own spin on things. They can vary their kicks to provide top spin, back spin and side spin. They know how to stab at a ball that moves towards them, away from them or across them.

Kids need thousands of ball touches to reach the intuitive level where they automatically make the right decision without stopping to think about it. They will never reach that level by standing in line and kicking a dead ball once every two minutes.

An ordinary player will try to blast the ball through two defenders and the keeper. An extraordinary player will chip the ball over the top.



Control It

Controlling a ball is a simple motor skill like walking and running.

Imagine if we all learned to walk the correct way by taking a perfect step every two minutes. We would look like stiff, mechanical robots. We learn to walk by walking at about 100 steps a minute. Using close repetition drills we can learn to control a ball with 100 kicks a minute.



Let gravity help your ball control. Throw the ball up high. Let the ball hit your head and it will drop to your thigh. Let it hit your thigh and it will fall to your instep. The key to gravity is not to hit the ball but let the ball hit you so that it doesn't bounce too far. The real challenge is anti-gravity. Throw the ball into the air and then use your instep to push the ball up to your thigh and then up to your head.

Go as far as you can and you can see a lot further. Never be satisfied with basic skills. Always expand your skills by adding combinations and mobility. Practice gravity on the run but also invent your own combinations using head, shoulders, chest, thighs and feet. Ball skills are nothing to do with showing off. They increase your confidence.

Slice It

Kids love to kick the ball one way and make it go a different way.

Most kids are happy just to kick a ball. After a few years of basic training, it's nearly impossible for these kids to hit across a ball. They automatically strike through the centre of the ball. Freestyle kids get bored with straightforward shots. They like to put their own slant on the game. They take every skill and see how far they can stretch it.

Freestyle kids learn how to make mistakes. They practice miskicks. They know how to score because they learn how to miss. It doesn't matter what you do with a ball as long as you can read it and understand it. If a striker can hit the equivalent of a knuckle ball or put a wicked swerve on a shot, he will learn how to use that in a game. The most effective time to shoot is when the keeper doesn't expect it. Innovative strikers learn how to disguise their snapshots.

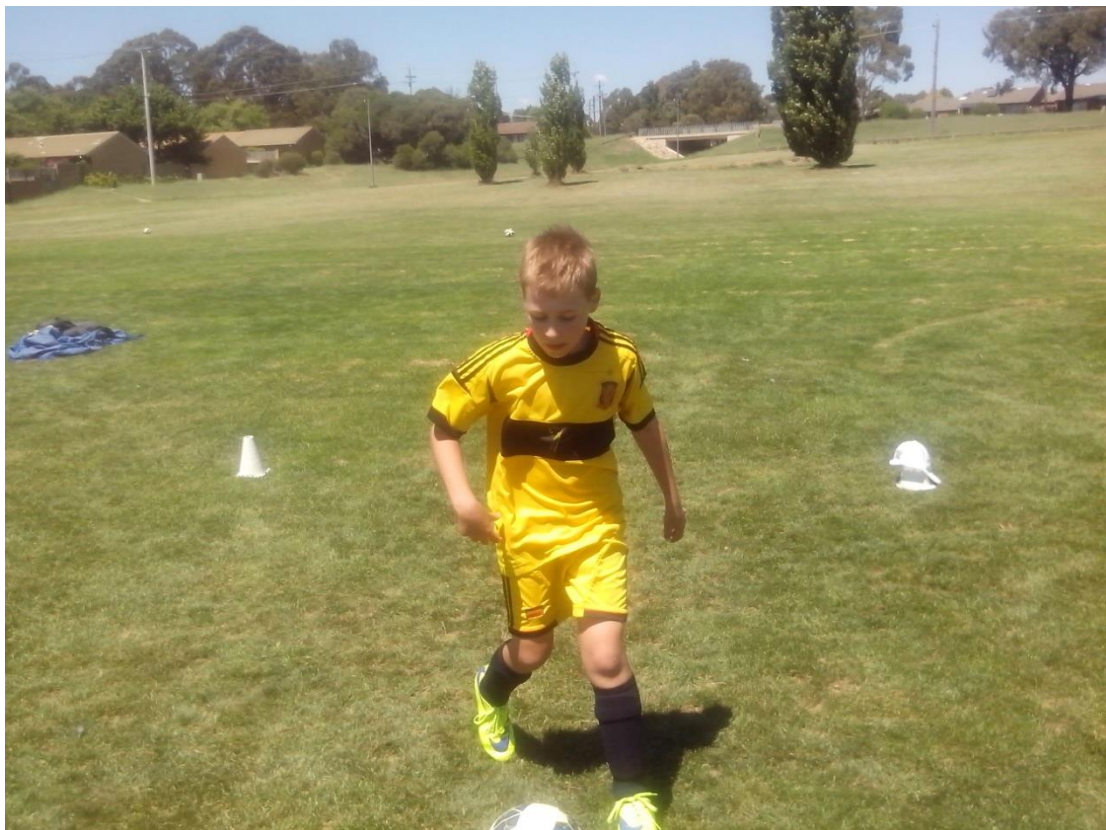


Place It

The most difficult skill in Soccer is making the right decision.

In a junior size goal, we can fit 23 balls between the two posts and 8 balls from the ground to the crossbar. That's 184 places to shoot. That's like giving kids a bowl of jelly beans and asking them to choose one. Kids don't even see one big goal. They see 184 targets and they aim for the lot so that the ball goes straight to the keeper. An experienced striker can just pick one simple target and place the ball.

Australian Soccer kids don't know how accurate they are because they've never aimed for small targets. Freestyle kids practice with small target cones. Any kid can practice hitting the cones. No matter how inexperienced they are, it takes them 5 minutes to discover that they can hit a small cone from 20 metres away. The inspirational effect this has on kids motivates them to extend their range. Most kids can hit a small target 30 metres away with practice and once they appreciate their accuracy range, they can increase their power range.



Smash It

Little kids can put the ball over the bar from inside the 6 yard box.

There's nothing wrong with smashing a ball at the goal. It depends on how kids get to that level. Some kids just expect too much too soon.

Some kids like the instant gratification of getting straight to the point. As soon as they arrive at the oval, they put the ball on the ground 25 metres out from goal and proceed to blast the dead ball over the crossbar. Their second attempt is even more interesting. They increase the force. These kids have got nowhere else to go but up. Straight up.

Experienced strikers always start with a strong foundation and build on their skills. They begin in the 6 yard box with slow, short, simple, two touch control on the ground and gradually increase the power, distance and degree of difficulty. Traditionally, the last shooting set for Freestyle kids should be creative, challenging and powerful.



Lob It

Jugglers can lob the ball by changing the angle of the ankle.

When kids juggle a ball they put backspin on it by curling their toes. A right footed kick puts the ball to the left and a left footed kick puts the ball to the right. These kids soon learn to make subtle changes.

Ordinary kids tend to panic under pressure. Even talented strikers can panic in front of an open goal because they never get enough practice to become familiar with the situation. Freestyle kids get thousands of ball touches so they learn to relax under pressure in the penalty area.

A natural feel for the ball gives them more time to look up and choose the right option not just the first option. The first option is always to go through players and the second option is to go past them. Freestyle kids always have the option and the ability to go over the top.



Drive It

A football takes the worry out of a kid

Give a kid a Soccer ball and they can't stand still. Both of them start moving. Freestyle Soccer is all about a moving kid and a moving ball. The more a kid works on ball control the more they develop body control. A ball is the most effective way for kids to activate their motor skills. It's the simplest way to combat laziness and obesity.

When they practice with a round ball, kids don't have to worry about making mistakes. They learn from trial and error, hit and miss. When they make mistakes, they make adjustments without making a fuss.

They don't have to worry about trying to impress or show off with a Soccer ball. There's no peer pressure with Echidna football. Notice how kids can maintain eye contact and concentration with a ball.



Flick It

Once you control yourself and your power, you can control the ball.

Some kids believe they can go through solid objects. Other kids are more cautious and try to go around. Confident kids go over the top. All kids have the power to blast a ball but they learn to control it.

The greatest pressure in Soccer is in the penalty box. That's when strikers and defenders think their sharpest and try their hardest. They tense up, try too hard to kick the ball too hard and rush their moves. The secret is to relax. Echidna football can overcome the pressure.

The greatest players in the world look relaxed in the penalty area. The key to relaxation under pressure is familiarity. There are talented strikers who panic in front of an open goal because they only practice shooting for 15 minutes a week. Freestyle kids practice until they get bored. Then they can stop thinking so much and enter the zone where control becomes intuitive and their moves become second nature.

You don't need to juggle a Soccer ball to become a top player but it really helps you to make sharp and accurate decisions when you're limited with time and space. When the crunch comes, and you can win the game with one touch, the Soccer ball can be your best friend.



Switch It

If you do nothing, you create nothing. Move and create something.

Ordinary kids run up and down the field in straight lines and pass the ball straight forward. Whatever you become, don't become ordinary.

Any kid can trap, pass, dribble, shoot, screen the ball and head it. The most challenging skill in Soccer is choosing the right skill at the right time. If you have to think about it, you're not ready yet. You need thousands of repetitive ball touches to reach the intuitive level where you can do the right thing without stopping to think about it.

In a competitive game, Neymar uses 10% of the brain activity of ordinary players. In other words, his control is so intuitive that he has more time to think about other aspects of the game. He has the time to think two steps ahead. Play with your heart. If you see a move, try it. If it's wrong you'll learn from it and if it's right you'll learn from it.



Believe It

A kid and a football can develop skill. Two kids and a football can develop talent. They learn to look, listen, call, think and move.

Any kid can develop a high level of technical skill getting thousands of repetitive ball touches with as many variations as possible. Once they have the skill, they're ready to convert that into creative talent. Talent is the natural ability that all kids have. They develop it by exercising their brain and their body. They take a skill and improvise.

Close repetition drills in pairs are the most effective way that kids can integrate their natural skills with their Soccer skills. Kids spend too much time standing in line waiting to kick a dead ball. Most kids are naturally competitive and want to challenge themselves to show what they can do at speed and under pressure. Kids can have fun while they learn and can learn while they have fun. Two kids can have a ball.

