

ONE FOR THE TEAM



Australia can become a Top 20 Football nation, if we integrate a coaching system with a learning program.

FREESTYLE SOCCER

It takes 40 years to improve any Soccer kid in 5 minutes.

It takes 40 years to discover what we don't know about Soccer kids and their talent. Once we understand what to look at, and what to look for, it becomes easy to improve any Soccer kid in 5 minutes and that means we can improve any team and Australian Soccer. Anyone can do it if they're willing to learn about players and listen to new ideas. There's a key to every team and a drill for every Soccer skill.

We just need to observe teams at training and in games, ask the right questions, analyse team performance and identify specific team needs. All kids are different. It's easier if we teach them all to be the same but it's far more rewarding to discover their unique talents. An Army of soldiers may look like mechanical robots when they all march in step but, when they stop, we discover that they all have unique skills and each individual is a specialist in a different area of expertise.



SEVEN PRINCIPLES

We can adapt the principles of Freestyle Soccer to any team.

Freestyle Soccer is based on seven principles. All kids are different. All kids have talent. All kids make mistakes. All kids can practice. All kids can improve. All kids provide a challenge. All kids need is a ball. Freestyle Soccer is where kids can come to their senses. They learn to look, listen, call, think for themselves and get a feel for the ball.

We're teaching the same skills and drills to all players, regardless of their positions on the field or their levels of experience, intelligence, motivation and talent. We're trying to improve kids without knowing what each kid needs to improve. We can adapt an individual learning program to suit the needs of a team. There's a lot more to Soccer than teaching kids. We can develop their character, discover their natural talent, stimulate their intelligence, motivate their effort, maximise their energy, inspire their confidence and encourage their creativity. There isn't a Soccer team we can't improve in one training session.



10 KEY ELEMENTS

A coaching system teaches techniques and tactics so that teams can win games. A learning program looks at the natural skills that all kids have. There are 10 key elements that help kids develop natural skills. These elements make it easy to improve any junior Soccer team.

All team players need footwork and vision to strike the ball, power and precision to shoot and score goals, movement and decision to support the ball player, belief and repetition to develop close control and challenge and intuition to achieve their full potential.

Freestyle Soccer can coordinate a learning program with a coaching system, can integrate natural skills with Soccer skills and can activate the natural energy and intelligence that all kids have. The key is to believe that kids can achieve. We can't see talent if we don't search for it and we won't search for it if we believe that kids lack talent.



QUICK ASSESSMENT

A quick assessment identifies what each team needs to improve.

It takes five minutes to give every team player a card, pen and ball and get them to juggle the ball and write down their juggling figures. Their range of numbers identifies the juggling level of each kid. The personal best number gives each kid a new target to aim for. The information enables us to discover the kids who can't juggle and the Freestyle kids who practice every day without being told to practice.

It takes five minutes to get a whole squad to race once around the Soccer field. Each kid records a time that they can try to beat later in the season. A simple race identifies the three kids at the front who drive themselves and the three at the back who drag their feet. Some kids always challenge their limits and other kids like to cut corners.



DNA PROFILE

The most important issue in Soccer is the player. The most important subject any Soccer kid can learn about is themselves. They need to understand their strengths, weaknesses, fears, needs and limits so they can overcome any obstacles and recognise their own unique talents.

The DNA Profile lists 10 skills and enables kids to self assess the three peak skills that define them and the three weak skills that challenge them. A team coach can then group kids together to practice specific skills such as juggling or shooting. In the 10 years it takes to train each Soccer kid, nobody will spend 15 minutes with that player to identify their needs or give them any critical feedback.



FOOTWORK

All Australian Soccer kids are flat footed and this makes them stab awkwardly at the ball instead of striking through it smoothly. If we teach kids to stand still when they control a ball, they will become stiff and awkward. If we get kids to stand dead still in a line, and kick a dead ball to the coach once every two minutes, they will learn to stand around in a game and wait for someone to pass them the ball.

We spend so much time looking at Soccer skills that we overlook the natural skills that all kids have. It takes five minutes to show kids the key to footwork, vision, motional intelligence and communication.



VISION

The quality of coaching is not measured by what we teach but by what kids learn. They're not always the same.

In a game, the team coach follows the bouncing ball so they can monitor control and possession. They don't have the time to see what players are doing without the ball for the other 95% of the game. Every coach needs a second pair of eyes. An assistant coach or a teenage mentor can take the pressure off a coach and observe players.

Any coach can stand behind the net and discover that some players look at the ball when they shoot, some players look at the goal and some players don't look at the target until after they shoot. Any coach can place target cones inside the goals and discover that kids don't aim small and miss small. They aim for the whole goal and miss big. The more we can learn about players, the more we can teach a team.



MATCH UP AND CATCH UP

Soccer kids need thousands of ball touches to become intuitive.

In the leading Football nations of the world, kids are playing with a ball every day and they average a thousand touches each day. These kids are already one million steps ahead of Australian Soccer kids.

There's absolutely no reason why Australia can't be a Top 20 Soccer nation. We have the talent, intelligence, resources and environment. We just need to integrate a coaching system with a learning program.

Close repetition drills in pairs are the most effective way to match up kids and catch up with the rest of the world. Kids don't need to wait in a line or stand around in a circle sharing one ball. Ballwork in pairs enables kids to either control the ball or support the ball player. Kids learn to give and go, pass and move, instead of just standing there.



PASSING AND RECEIVING

The most effective way to stimulate intelligence is to ask questions.

Any communication network has the ability to pass and receive critical information on the development of players. If we can talk, we can listen. If we can teach, we can learn. If we can tell kids what to do, we can observe how they do it and analyse why. If we can pass details of their training, we can receive information of their progress. Ask kids why they go to school. The usual answer is 'to learn'. Some kids just learn to do what they're told. Freestyle kids learn to think for themselves. That's the same reason that kids go to Soccer training.

Ask kids how many ball touches they need before they're ready to play a game. They don't know and nobody has ever told them. Ask them whether they look at the ball or the goal when they shoot. Ask them why so many shots go straight to the goalkeeper. Ask them how many balls they can fit between the two posts and how many from the ground to the crossbar. Ask them what they're scared of in Soccer. We can't improve kids till we discover what they need to improve.

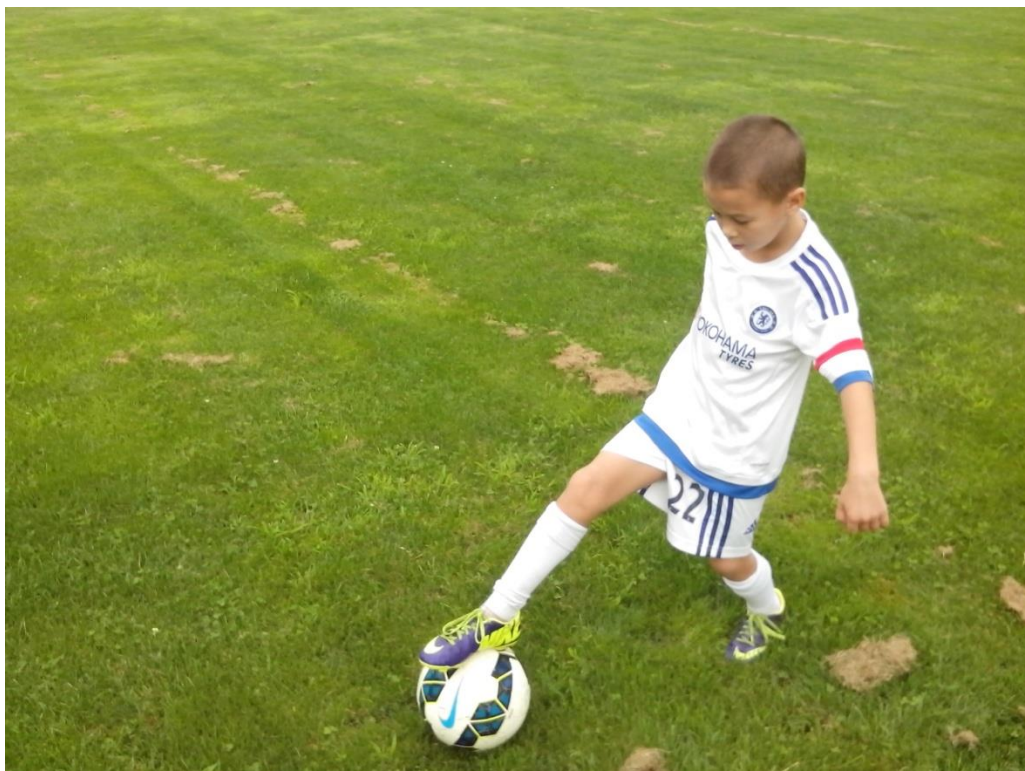


IMPROVING

Freestyle kids learn the rules of kicking balls so they can bend them.

Seventeen year old Soccer kids are repeating the same mistakes they learned when they were seven. A lot of kids learn the basic skills and are happy just to kick a ball. Freestyle kids master the basic skills and then take them to a higher level. They keep practising until they can drive, chip, stab, volley, bend or slice the ball whenever they want to.

Kicking a ball is a basic motor skill just like running. We can develop motor skills at three different levels. At the cognitive level, we stop and think before we do anything. At the associative level, we begin to get a feel for the ball. At the autonomous level, we can do the right thing consistently without thinking. Kids who stand in line, and kick a ball once every two minutes, never get past the cognitive level. They never get enough ball touches to become intuitive. If we keep doing the same, we will get the same results and stay at the same level. If we really want to improve, we need to look for more ways, better ways, faster ways, smarter ways and different ways to challenge our limits.



OPEN LEARNING

We all have eyes, ears, mouths and minds. We just need to open them. We need to look, listen, ask questions and think.

Any kid can improve in five minutes because they're willing to listen and learn. Kids achieve because they don't know what they can't do. Adults give up too easily because they know what they can't do. What's significant for the future of Australian Soccer is not how easy it is to improve any Soccer kid but how difficult it is to get any adult to look at any ideas that are new or different.

Kids have minds and bodies of their own and they need to exercise them to reach their full potential. If we direct everything they do, correct everything they do wrong and protect them from every failure, we limit their joy of discovery and their ability to develop respect, responsibility, resourcefulness and resilience. Any Top 20 Football nation has to believe in the talent and national character of their kids.

The biggest challenge for any junior Soccer team in Australia is how to turn eleven individuals into a cohesive and effective team. Any team can increase ball possession when the ball players look and listen and the support players run and call. There are at least 20 calls that teams can use to improve possession. There are close repetition drills that teach kids how to develop communication and teamwork.

