

# Two kids and a football



*Two kids and a football create a chemical reaction.*

**Connect**

*We need Soccer kids who can drive, strive, thrive and come alive.*

The central attacking midfielder has possession of the ball and is looking for a run and listening for a call. Three forwards stand with

their markers and wait for the ball player to pass the ball before they move. Anybody can learn to strike and receive a ball. We need drills that connect the ball player with the support players. We need players to relate to each other in a game. The ball player needs to pass and move. The support players need to call and move.

Kids need hundreds of ball touches to reach the intuitive level where control and decisions become second nature. They will never achieve this level by standing in line and waiting two minutes between each kick. Ballwork in pairs is the most effective way to develop ball control and the most efficient way to use training time.



## Trust

### *Two kids and a ball will open up a whole new world of Soccer*

Echidna football can develop skill and confidence. Two kids and a football can develop talent and trust. Confidence is belief in yourself. Trust is belief in others. Trust connects talented kids with their team.

Two kids and a football ball change the whole dynamic structure of Soccer development. Suddenly, kids have to look, listen, anticipate, communicate, think, make decisions, make mistakes, understand, improvise, learn, move and depend on someone else. At the same time, these kids are getting hundreds of repetitive ball touches.





## Support Play

***Australian Soccer is full of support players who stand with their markers and wait for the ball to be passed before they make a run.***

When two kids juggle a ball in pairs, they can't stand still or take time out. They learn to hit and run. It's perpetual motion and intelligence on the move. They're either controlling the ball and deciding the pass or they're moving and improving their position to receive the ball. One Bounce juggling teaches kids to give and go, pass and move. One Bounce One Touch juggling teaches them to position themselves and the ball. Kids learn to relax on the ball but stay sharp off the ball.

Freestyle kids stand out because they don't stop talking and they don't stop moving. You can hear where they're coming from and see how far they're going. Kids who do nothing, create nothing. Freestyle kids who move make the opposition move. Two kids and a ball can master possession by learning everything about control and support. They constantly challenge and push each other so that they both improve.

The first 5 minutes of any drill is full of errors. That's human nature. Too many kids give up in the first 5 and too many coaches stop them to correct them. After 5 minutes the mistakes will disappear anyway.



## Heading

*If you're heading the wrong way, try it from a different angle.*

Whether heading for goal, heading out of defence or competing for a goal kick, there's a fear of the high ball. It naturally comes from too many kids getting hit in the head. It's time to start heading back.

Echidna football can develop heading skill. A kid just throws the ball into the air and heads it back into his or her hands. It doesn't hurt so they keep doing it until it becomes second nature and comfortable. They can increase the height of the throw and start to move around.

We don't need to create players who head the ball because they **have** to. We need to create players who head the ball because they **want** to. Concussion can be a serious issue if we let kids get hit by a high ball. Heading in pairs is a safe way for kids to discover how well they can dominate a high ball once they develop confidence at their own pace.



## Shooting Practice

*Two kids can run shooting drills with a net and a few balls.*

Shooting practice is another great way for kids to connect and relate to each other. There's no point in every kid practising shooting in isolation. Shooting practice is also a good time for keepers to get a challenging workout. Freestyle kids are great at shooting because they practice for two hours at a time until the skill becomes second nature.

Networking makes ball control more interesting, challenging and measurable. Kids get inspired when they strike the back of the net or hit the target cones at training. Two players can practice with one as striker and the other as goalkeeper. Another essential pairs drill is to have one kid crossing the ball with the second player as target man. There's not much point in having dynamic strikers if most players fail to get the ball into the box. Crossing is an advanced drill that needs work. Kids need to be able to change the direction of the ball at speed.





## Hit the Cones

*Two kids can measure their performance and improvement.*

In Soccer, the most important subject that any kid can learn about is themselves. They need to understand their strengths, weaknesses, fears, needs and limits so they know what to practice and improve.

Every kid has a range of accuracy and a range of power. They need to understand what their range is so that they don't get pushed by team mates to attempt passes that are too far. Kids don't know how good they are because nobody measures their performance or improvement.

There are no small targets in Soccer. When kids pass, they pass in the general direction of players. When they shoot, they aim for the whole goal. In fact, most kids are very accurate. When they learn to hit target cones, they discover that they can hit a cone 30 metres away.



## One Metre

*Too many kids try too hard to kick the ball too hard.*

For some reason, boys always think that they have to kick the ball with 100% power. Some little kids are so talented that they can blast the ball over the crossbar from inside the 6 yard box. When kids kick the ball too hard, the easiest solution is to put them up against a wall. They soon learn that a wall can return the ball a lot harder and faster.

Close passing in pairs teaches kids to control their power as well as the ball. One metre reduces their time and space so they learn to keep on their toes and react instinctively. It's a great way to improve kids who are flat footed and stab at a ball. They learn to strike through the ball smoothly. They practice one touch, two touch and three touch. Any kid can kick a ball. Intelligent players develop a feel for the ball.





## Juggling

***Once kids have mastered control on the ground, they take to the air.***

There are plenty of coaches who tell their players to keep the ball on the ground at training to make control a lot easier. The reality is that the ball will often be bouncing in a game. Freestyle kids are always up for a challenge. They prefer to practice with a difficult bouncing and spinning ball so they never get caught unprepared in a game.

Whenever they have the choice, Freestyle kids will always take the hard way out. They don't need to be directed what to do, corrected for doing it wrong or protected from loss, failure or mistakes. These kids push themselves harder than any coach can. They're the first to know when they make a mistake and they learn from everything they do.

***The most effective way to learn to juggle is to let the ball bounce.***



## Match Preparation

***Better to be serious before the game and have fun after the game than trying it the other way around.***

All across Australia, teams copy each other by standing around in a circle and sharing one ball before kickoff. Each kid is standing around talking for 90% of the time and controlling the ball for the other 10%. The average kid will get 10 kicks of the ball before the whistle blows. Match preparation is critical to match performance and match results.

Two kids and a football can get 200 kicks in five minutes. They can start with close ballwork and then gradually move further apart. They can practice close heading or juggling in pairs. They can concentrate without being distracted by the rest of the group's conversation. A striker can work with a keeper. Defenders can practice one touch passing in pairs. Midfielders can practice distribution on the move.





## Respect

***The most important part of the pass is the receiver. If you give your team mates a ball they can use, they will give you the same respect.***

Any kid can kick a ball. Freestyle kids learn how to pass the ball. They trust their team mates to understand what they want. A winger needs a firm ball on the ground that they can cross first time. Strikers need a ball they can take in their stride. Defenders won't give a corner away if they can put the ball out for a throw-in and won't give a throw away if they can turn a clearance into distribution for his forwards.

The Neymar Effect shows that the top players can play competitively using only 10% of their brain activity. Close repetition drills enable any player to reach the intuitive level where control is automatic.

The more kids have to think for themselves, and make their own decisions, the more they stimulate their intelligence. The more they create their own moves, the more they can develop their motor skills and activate their natural energy. Kids need to play their own game.



## **.In the Line of Fire**

***Kids are never going to stretch their minds and bodies by standing in a line waiting to be told what to do and where to move.***

We can learn a lot about a team when they all stand in the firing line, waiting to practice the wall pass with their coach. We can quickly identify those kids who give and stop, pass and stand still. It's very easy to overlook talented kids when they wait, hesitate and stagnate.

It's a common occurrence that support players wait to see where the ball player passes the ball before they make a run. It comes from building the game around the ball and the ball player. Everybody learns to ballwatch. Coaches follow the bouncing ball so they never see what kids do for 95% of the game when they don't have the ball.

There's a different key to every kid and a different drill for every skill. By learning about kids, and identifying their strengths and weaknesses, we can discover what each kid needs to improve. There are simple drills where two kids can learn how to call and move.





## Help Needed

***30 minutes extra time is what happens when training has finished and the serious kids get serious. Anybody can do it.***

When the Socceroos are ranked number 50 in the football world, Australia is ranked number 50. That's the position we're all in. We can all do something to raise the level of Soccer in this country. When the national youth teams struggle to score goals, we can help by going to the source and teaching kids how to shoot. We are all connected.

Pick the weakest kid in your team and help them. Both of you will feel better. If you're the weakest kid, ask someone to help you. That's what teams are about. A team is only as good as its weakest link. If we keep helping out the weakest link, the whole team will get better.

How many kids ask a coach or senior player for help? How many coaches offer to help kids who struggle with their game? If we start at the bottom and work up we can increase the talent base in Australia.



## Get it Out

*The greatest pressure is either in the 6 yard box or in your head.*

When in doubt they kick it out, or put it in if there's too much doubt. So many kids give away an own goal instead of a corner or they give away a corner when they could give away a throw or they give away a throw when they could get the ball up the field and out of trouble.

So many defenders give the ball away by trying to trap it in the 6 yard box. A relaxed defender has the control to turn any clearance into a through ball for his forward line. Two kids and a ball can practice one touch passing in pairs. Their aim is to get 100 continuous passes without losing control. They start at one metre which is really too hard because that's how they kick. Then they try 5 metres, 10 metres and finally 20 metres. Any defenders who can keep the ball down for 100 kicks over 20 metres are ready to turn any clearance into a pass.





## Lighten Up

*A lot of teenage Soccer players are uniquely uncoordinated.*

It's amazing what kids can get away with when they're really young. It's accepted that kids are one footed. Smart coaches don't ask if kids are two footed. They ask them if they're left footed or right footed. A one footed kid can play quite well but gradually the gap between the good foot and the weak foot becomes a lot wider. Opponents learn to manoeuvre that kid onto their weak side. At the same time, some of these kids get a growth spurt and everything becomes uncoordinated.

Two kids and a football can regain natural balance and coordination in 5 minutes using the Lighten Up close control drill. They stand two metres apart and one kid throws the ball and the other kid kicks back. Lighten Up is an essential way for kids to focus before a game and get 200 touches of the ball which eliminates a lot of unforced errors.

When the game starts, kids need to know that they're ready to go.



## The Bouncer

*No kid should ever be forced to juggle a Soccer ball.*

Juggling is just one example of how kids can use close repetition drills to improve their ball control and confidence. Wall practice can give kids 1000 kicks in 10 minutes alternating between both feet. Close passing in pairs or Lighten Up can give kids 200 ball touches in 5 minutes. There are plenty of ways for kids to develop self esteem.

The most important goal for any kid is confidence. A lot of top kids lose confidence because our way of helping them is to constantly remind them what they're doing wrong. They never get to discover how good they are or how easy it is to improve their natural skills.

Any two kids and a football can learn to juggle a ball in 5 minutes by letting it bounce. The hardest part of juggling is controlling a ball on its way down. The easiest part is controlling the ball on its way up. One Bounce helps kids to judge the bounce of the ball in a game. A kid should only juggle in a game to get out of trouble, not show off.





## Buddy system

### *No Soccer kid should ever be left behind*

Every Soccer team should use a buddy system where players are naturally paired off with team mates so they can help each other with basic skills, push each other on fitness drills and encourage each other in games. Every kid in the team needs to know that at least one player has their back. Any team that neglects a player is creating a weak link.

When players practice together, at training or in their own time, they develop respect, responsibility, resourcefulness and resilience. All kids want to learn. It's easy to develop players who learn to do what they're told. It's much more rewarding to develop players who learn to think for themselves, make their own decisions, make their own mistakes, find their own solutions and move on to the next challenge.



## Challenge

*The worst thing is to be satisfied. The best thing is to be challenged.*

Australians are naturally competitive. They're never satisfied to sit back and rest on their laurels. Freestyle kids, who train on their own or with their mates, train because they want to not because they have to. They compete with themselves and each other to keep improving.

There are plenty of skilful kids who only practice what they can do. Freestyle kids practice what they can't do. They go as far as they can and from there they can see a lot further.





## Range Practice

*Learn about yourself so you can discover and extend your limits.*

Every kid in the world has a range of ranges. As a minimum, they have a kicking range, a throwing range, a power range and accuracy range. Every range can be measured, recorded and extended.

A 5 year old kid can hit a cone from 5 metres away and score a goal from 10 metres away. Some 5 year olds have a longer range than that. In the search for confidence, every kid can discover what their range is and then they can set the next target to show their improvement. Confidence is based on facts not sports psychology. There are simple ways to measure the performance and improvement of every kid and prove that they're getting better and a lot better than they expected.

Two kids with a football can compete against each other to hit target cones. They soon discover that they can hit small if they aim small. Every time a kid achieves something it motivates them to try harder.



## Next Generation

*Any creative person will reach a level where they want to improvise*

There are Soccer skills that haven't even been invented yet. Any innovation in Soccer will come from the next generation not the old generation. The next generation don't know what they can't do yet.

Two kids can communicate by using a football. Freestyle juggling is a way for kids to develop an intuitive feel for the ball where they have the confidence to create moves without any preconceived intentions or instructions from adults.

Every kid needs the freedom to play with a ball, think for themselves and make their own decisions. It's great to have skilful players who only train when they're told to train and can follow every instruction but it's more exciting to learn about talented players who only want to play because they have a hunger and a passion for the game..

