

LIGHTEN UP

by Jack Kynaston



The key to the future of Soccer is standing right in front of us waiting to be discovered and developed.

COPY THAT

Not everybody can coach but everybody can learn.

Lighten Up is an original Australian Freestyle Soccer drill that was created in 1985, and developed over a period of six months, to improve the balance and coordination of flat footed, stiff legged and one footed Soccer kids. It's a multi purpose close repetition ball drill that enables individual Soccer players to get 200 ball touches in five minutes using their head, shoulders, thighs and alternating both feet.

As Freestyle Soccer ideas gradually flow into the mainstream game, more kids are using 200 ball touches to develop their intuitive control and more coaches are copying Lighten Up to improve their teams. Any system is only as good as the coaches who copy it. Anyone is welcome to copy Freestyle Soccer as long as they get the copy right. It's easy to get the copy wrong when we all follow each other without discovering what to do, learning how to do it or understanding why. Each copy can vary until players lose sight of the original purpose.

Freestyle Soccer is not a coaching system. It's a learning program designed to identify the strengths, weaknesses, skills, talents, fears, needs and limits of Soccer kids so they can reach their full potential. All they need is a willingness to look, listen, ask questions and learn.



Lighten Up puts the fun back into the fundamentals

LEARNING PROGRAM

A Learning Program doesn't adapt kids to suit a system. It adapts a system to suit the needs of each kid.



Close repetition drills teach kids to focus on the ball

A team coach teaches techniques and tactics so that teams can win games. They follow the bouncing ball in a game and they don't have time to learn how kids move their feet or what they look at when they kick a ball. They don't know where kids move or what they call when they want the ball. All kids have talent. We can't teach talent with a coaching system and we can't discover it without a learning program.

A learning program enables kids to believe in themselves, think for themselves and express themselves. All kids have talent, character and intelligence. They don't need to stand around waiting to be told what to do. Lighten Up teaches kids to coordinate mind, body and ball while getting hundreds of ball touches and developing confidence.

CLOSE REPETITION DRILLS

Close repetition drills are designed to integrate natural physical and mental skills with Soccer skills.

In the leading Football nations of the world, millions of streetwise kids spend hundreds of hours getting thousands of ball touches. That puts most of them 1 million steps ahead of Australian Soccer kids.

Australian Soccer kids don't lack talent. They lack footwork and vision, power and precision, movement and decision, belief and repetition, challenge and intuition. Close repetition drills activate the natural skills that kids need to enhance their Soccer skills. Lighten Up is the foundation of all Freestyle Soccer close repetition drills.

Kids who stand in a line for two minutes, between shots, forget what their last kick was like. Lighten Up enables players to learn and adapt quickly. The results are clear, immediate, measurable and permanent.



FIRST FIVE

A Freestyle kid can take 100 steps, make 100 decisions and get 100 ball touches in 1 minute just by juggling.

Freestyle kids keep a record of their juggling figures so they know what they're up to and where they're up to when they get to the oval. Over a long period, kids have discovered the significance of the First Five. The First Five minutes of anything we do is full of mistakes. That's human nature and that's how we learn. Too many kids give up in the First Five because they don't think they're very good. After five minutes, Freestyle kids begin to coordinate mind, body and ball.

When a kid juggles a ball 30 times, the first ten numbers are very poor because kids feel stiff and awkward. The last ten numbers add up to a lot more. It takes at least 200 ball touches to reach that intuitive level. The average Soccer kid only gets 20 ball touches before a game and spends the next 20 minutes making unforced errors. For the last 30 years, Freestyle Soccer kids have practised 200 kicks before kickoff so their control was second nature when the whistle blew. Lighten Up is the most effective way to improve any Soccer kid in five minutes.



FOOTSTEPS

Any kid or coaching organisation can look, listen, ask questions, think, discover, improve and grow.

Ball control is a basic motor skill like walking or running. By putting one foot forward, it enables the other foot to swing naturally through a ball not stab at it. We all develop basic motor skills in three stages.

Lighten Up is conducted in three sets. The first set is the cognitive level where kids stop to think and take it slow. The second set is the associative level, where kids become more comfortable with the drill and slow becomes smooth. The third set is the intuitive level, where kids become more confident when they realise that they've improved. Soccer kids don't know how good they really are until we show them.

Freestyle kids begin with short, simple, slow and smooth steps and gradually increase the speed, range, power and degree of difficulty.



SLOW MOTION

The first set helps Soccer kids find their feet.

The thrower stands two metres in front of the ball player and throws the ball continuously to their head, then the shoulders alternating from left to right, then the thighs, the inside of the feet and the laces. The number of throws depends on the improvement of each ball player. The throwers understand what to look at and what to look for. They look at the natural skills and they look for the 10 Freestyle elements.

All kids are different. Some kids stab at the ball because they stand flat footed. Some kids kick too high because their legs are stiff and straight. Some kids are scared to head the ball so they close their eyes. Some kids lack balance because they're one footed. Some kids rush and become too tense. Some kids try too hard to kick the ball too hard. Some kids don't know their own strength. Some kids just need a good kick. Some kids only make mistakes because they worry about making mistakes. The key to confidence is to tell these kids to make more mistakes and then watch how the mistakes begin to disappear.



Look, think, move, control, mind, body, ball.

SMOOTH MOTION

On the second set, kids relax because they know the drill. They begin to jog on the spot with steady rhythm.



The teenage mentor is the natural coach of the future.

The most important subject any kid can learn about is themselves. Before they learn to control a Soccer ball, Freestyle kids learn how to control their body, power and temperament. Any kid can boot a long ball. Some kids can blast the ball over the bar from inside the 6 yard box. Lighten Up and ball juggling teach kids to keep the ball close.

Repetition creates habits, good, bad and permanent. Kids learn to play the way they train. If we're going to coach kids to stand around in a circle sharing one ball before kickoff, we can expect them to stand around flat footed in a game waiting for someone to pass to them.

On the other hand, if kids use Lighten Up to get 200 touches of the ball before every game, they're going to have better, faster, smoother, smarter control when it counts in the game. Kids who use close repetition drills develop sharp instincts and can dictate the play.

LOCOMOTION

Coaches don't need to feed the ball in every training drill. Kids are old enough to feed themselves.

By the third set, kids discover that they don't have a weak foot after all because Lighten Up activates both feet and coordinates the upper body. Some kids just stick their neck out to head the ball or they stick a foot out to stab at the ball. Freestyle kids learn to move their whole body when they control the ball. They put their body behind the flight of the high ball. They use their arms for balance and power when they run and they use their upper body to change the elevation of the pass.



Freestyle kids tackle what the other kids avoid.

When Lighten Up was created for two players in 1985, the original drill incorporated two touch control and control on the move to better simulate match pressure. Some kids try to stop every ball with their foot even if it's head high. Lighten Up encourages kids to practise chest/volley, thigh/volley, head/volley and football. Once they become intuitive, Freestyle kids duplicate these skills at speed while running onto a high ball in attack or back pedalling in defence.

HEAD

Safety is the key factor in heading any Soccer ball.

Fear is real in Soccer. Concussion is real. We can bury our heads in the sand and ignore the problem or we can face the challenge and do something about it. Some kids are scared to contest a high ball and deliberately arrive late for the goal kick. Some kids are scared to head a ball because they believe it will hurt. So they stand their ground, brace themselves, close their eyes and the ball hurts. Heading hurts because kids let the ball strike them instead of them striking the ball.

Lighten Up enables kids to practise heading a ball that only travels 2 metres. They learn to move their whole body in support of the head. Too many kids take their eyes off the ball on contact. Freestyle kids can keep their eyes on the ball because they discover that it doesn't hurt. Lighten Up teaches kids the importance of footwork and vision.

Eyes on the ball, knees bent and arms out for balance



Kids look up to teenage mentors and relate to them

STAND AND DELIVER

Freestyle kids use their whole body to control the ball.

Pele would often pass the high ball first time with his shoulder instead of bringing it down to the ground. Nowadays, referees often blow for handball because they haven't seen a shoulder pass before. Freestyle kids use shoulders at training but not in games except as a last resort. If a low hard ball flies across the goal it only takes one touch to score.



The thighs provide a large control surface. When a high ball drops in a game, players can use their thigh to take the pace off the ball and the ball drops nicely at their feet for the second touch. An interesting observation about thigh control is that 30% of kids put their weight on the striking leg and the other 70% keep their weight on the standing leg. Lighten Up enables kids to develop coordination and balance because they constantly transfer weight from left foot to right foot.



FEETBALL

When strikers keep blasting the ball too high, Lighten Up helps them to get over it.

Some kids straighten their foot too early so that they kick the ball with a stiff leg and produce backspin that puts it over the bar. Lighten Up teaches kids to keep their knee over the ball as they volley so they can create top spin to keep the ball down or make it dip. Freestyle kids use 200 touches to exercise ankle, knee and hip joints for greater control.



Juggling teaches kids to use different parts of each foot to vary the power, direction, range and elevation of their passes and shots. Any kid can kick a ball. Lighten Up teaches players how to control a ball.

Freestyle kids learn that a correct kick looks good, feels good and sounds good. When their timing is off, the kick will make a higher slapping sound. When their timing is perfect, the ball will make a deep sound. Lighten Up enables kids to use sound judgement when they warm up so they know when they're ready to play the game.

CONFIDENCE

Ordinary kids have a fear of being different and different kids have a fear of being ordinary.

Kids don't lack talent. A lot of them just lack belief in themselves. Confidence is the most important goal for every kid and teenager.

Kids are fast learners. If we correct them every time they miss a shot, they soon stop missing their shots because they stop shooting. All kids make mistakes. In a coaching system, we stop every mistake to correct the kid. In a learning program, we can observe the mistakes to identify their underlying cause. Lighten Up enables us to correct the mistakes without constantly reminding kids what's wrong with them.

Fear of failure is the greatest obstacle in sport. Most kids who lack confidence avoid heading, juggling, shooting and their weak foot. They're scared of getting hurt when they head a ball. They're scared of dropping the ball when they juggle so they never use their weak foot and they're scared of missing when they shoot in case the coach shouts at them or their mates laugh at them. Lighten Up shows kids how good they are at heading, juggling, shooting and using both feet.



CHALLENGE

Freestyle Kids learn at the cognitive level, practise at the associative level and can play at the intuitive level.

Every Soccer oval has one isolated corner where a single goal can be set up so that kids can practise shooting and close repetition drills without being directed in their every move, corrected for their every mistake, protected from every failure or rejected for being different.



Every Soccer club can establish a skills park or a shooting gallery where kids can get together, create new drills, improvise old skills and develop respect, responsibility, resourcefulness and resilience.



Sport should be a challenge from the grassroots level to the top level. Every kid can learn to compete with themselves, establish their personal best effort and try to beat it. Every national sport should be able to compete with other codes for the thousands of talented kids. Junior Soccer should be fun, exciting, inspirational and challenging. The most important requirement in Soccer is a growth mindset. It comes with an open mind, positive attitude and an optimistic outlook.

THE POWER OF ONE ON ONE

We need to look at what we do and wonder why and then look at what we don't do and wonder why not.

A Personal Soccer Skills Trainer (Psst!) is essential to the future of the game. The parent is the original individual coach and they can do a lot to give their kids confidence and motor skills. In every club, there are senior players, skills specialists and retired coaches who can develop individual coaching skills to help every junior player.

Some kids practise Lighten Up on the move. Some use two feeders. Some teams use the goalkeeper to throw the ball so he can get 200 throws in five minutes. Freestyle kids improvise their own versions. **Speed Up** is a rapid fire variation where the ball is thrown high or low at random and the ball player learns to react instinctively. Some kids use **Tune Up** to get their timing back after a long layoff. Some kids develop **Loosen Up** so they can learn to relax in the goalmouth. Some kids use Lighten Up to help them concentrate before a match.



Freestyle kids drive, strive, thrive and come alive

MATCHWARMUP

A keeper can get 200 throws before the whistle blows.



In the 30 minutes before each game, the average Australian Soccer kid gets 20 touches of the ball. Some teams stand around in a circle sharing one ball before kickoff. Some kids stand in a line for two minutes waiting to have a shot at goal. Some teams copy other teams. Lighten Up enables every kid to get at least 200 touches of the ball



Nobody can pick up a ball and have perfect control immediately. The initial touches are too hard or too soft, too fast or too slow, too early or too late, too high or too low, too left or too right, too loose or too tight. Lighten Up is the quickest way to develop consistent control. Some kids distract their team before a game. Lighten Up ensures that kids only disrupt one player at a time. The keeper can work with the strikers, the defenders can pair off to practise one touch passing and the midfielders can learn to give and go, pass and move, hit and run.

TRY ANGLES

If we look at how Soccer was coached 20 years ago, we get an idea of what kids of today will think in 2040.

Soccer is a very straightforward game. A lot of kids just run straight forward and kick straight forward. The attackers run in a straight line where defenders lie in wait for them. The strikers fail to catch the straight through ball. Shooting practice is conducted straight in front of goal assuming that the best kids run straight down the middle of the field. Freestyle kids approach the game from a different angle. They can change the flight of the ball and stamp their own control on it.



AFL players look, think and move 360 degrees because of the shape of their field. They use their vision to choose a wider range of options. Soccer players are limited to thinking up and down in straight lines. Lighten Up encourages kids to use their agility to head or volley to the side. Most attacks are simple geometry. If the feeder can put a good pass in front of the winger, the winger can sprint to the line, cut the ball back, away from the keeper, and in the path of the strikers.

Players understand space and they look for space. Freestyle kids have the freedom and intelligence to run their own drills so they understand the connection of angles and space. They use the energy in the ball to redirect the flight and point of attack where the keeper least expects it. Lighten Up enables kids to rotate as they kick and put spin on the ball.

SAFETY NET

Some kids want to play Soccer really badly. The Safety Net ensures that no Soccer kid ever gets left behind.

A coaching system looks at the kick and overlooks the kid. In the 10 years it takes to teach the average Soccer kid, nobody will spend 15 minutes with that player to learn about them. Intelligent, athletic 17 year old College kids are repeating the same mistakes they learned when they were seven because nobody had time to look at them, listen to them, ask them for feedback or recognise their basic weaknesses.

When kids struggle to strike the ball because they stand flat footed, or they struggle to strike the target because they take their eyes off the ball, they haven't just picked up the problem. They've been doing the same for 10 years and nobody noticed because they look at technique.

In a learning program, the Safety Net is a mandatory assessment of every 10 year old Soccer kid to identify fears, needs and weaknesses before any bad habits can become permanent. If we can't see talent in kids, we need to look closer. Lighten Up enables us to identify hidden and untapped talent and encourage kids to challenge their own limits.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Any kid plays well if we tell them what to do. Freestyle kids can play well when we don't tell them what to do.

A good coach tells kids **what** to do so they follow orders. A better coach shows them **how** so they can practise on their own. The best coach explains **why** so kids can make their own decisions. The most effective way to stimulate intelligence is to ask questions. Ask kids what they look at when they kick a ball, how many kicks they need before each game and how long they spend at shooting practise.

Australian kids have just as much intelligence, talent and character as the kids in the leading Football nations but they develop differently. Streetwise Soccer kids in Europe get thousands of repetitive ball touches every day and take control of their own development. Lighten Up gives Freestyle Soccer kids the chance to catch up. A coaching system teaches Soccer skills. A learning program encourages kids to look, listen, ask, think, discover, practise, improve and improvise.



Freestyle kids are responsible for their development

EXPORT QUALITY

Lighten Up is being redesigned for a growth mindset and a growth market so the product can be improved.

The only obstacles to achievement in any endeavour at any level are ignorance, laziness, selfishness and fear and they come from within us not without us. Put them all together and we have a fixed mindset.

Freestyle Soccer needs to be challenged or it will stagnate and always stay the same. Any country that plans to establish 70, 000 academies has the growth mindset needed to develop its own learning program.

The Peoples Republic of China provides an exciting market for close repetition drills. Lighten Up is the ideal drill for hundreds of kids to practise in pairs because it can be developed in a confined space. It reflects the fusion philosophy of martial arts. Mind, body and control.



There are a number of different sports that can improvise Lighten Up to improve key elements of footwork and vision, power and precision, movement and decision, belief and repetition, challenge and intuition.