



## **BELWEST FOXES SOCCER CLUB INC.**

### **“DRILLS FOR PASSING AND CONTROL” Juggling and Heading**

The simple skills of sidefoot passing and cushioned control are all too often neglected on the training ground, as many junior coaches frequently ignore these fundamental techniques in favour of the more glamorous aspects of the game. However, time spent on shooting drills or step-overs rarely brings forth the kind of increase confidence and improved performance that can be achieved by regularly practising the vital arts of passing and control

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## VARIETY AND PROGRESSION

When putting on a passing and control session, the most difficult thing for a coach is to retain children's interest. Sidefoot passing does not sound terribly exciting to a junior player, who will invariably have both eyes fixed on the goals and fingers crossed that today is the day for shooting practice.

To gain children's attention, you must make sure that training exercises are varied – even if this means changing a few superficial details while maintaining the central theme of the drill. Concentration will, however, only survive if the session offers achievable challenges and regular progression. For example, a group of six-year-olds will probably struggle to sustain an opposed, one-touch keep-ball session that requires them to use only their weaker foot. However, it may be an ideal practice drill for an older group of children who have already been working on keep-ball sessions for several weeks and who have shown that they can cope with one-touch keep-ball with their stronger foot.

Finally, to ensure successful practice sessions, the coach should work on passing and control often, but never prolonging a single drill for more than about ten minutes.

# DRILLS FOR PASSING AND CONTROL

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## HITTING THE WALL



Passing and control can also be practised by players working at home on their own, all it takes is a wall, a ball and a few minutes. Kicking a ball against a wall at different heights, angles and speeds, and then controlling it as it bounces off, can do wonders for a player's control. It is an old technique, but it is nonetheless effective.



## ← KEEP-BALL SESSIONS

Five players in a circle, passing a football between themselves, in no particular order, constitutes keep-ball in its most basic form. It is, however, an exercise that can be progressed in many ways to test particular strengths and weaknesses. Firstly, the coach can decide upon the number of touches each player can have – three (control, set and pass) is the maximum. Secondly, the coach can decide which foot to use and, finally, he or she can set the session as 'opposed' (i.e. with defenders) or 'unopposed'. An opposed session recreates some of the pressure of controlling the ball in a match situation. The player must get behind the ball early and decide where to pass it before it has arrived.

### DRILL DETAIL

1. Space a group of players equidistantly around a circle that is about 20m (22yds) in diameter.
2. Set a boundary of cones around the outside of the circle to prevent the players from extending the circle to make the exercise easier.
3. Get the children to pass between themselves, allowing them three touches each to start with.
4. Work through the progression.
5. This exercise should be practised regularly, though its duration should never exceed ten minutes.

### PROGRESSION

1. Unopposed, three touch.
2. Unopposed, two touch.
3. Unopposed, one touch.
4. Opposed, two touch.
5. Opposed, one touch.

## SIMPLE PASSING DRILLS

To start with, some young players may struggle to contend with the pressure of a keep-ball session. To help them hone their passing technique and first touch, it may be better to begin with a smaller-scale exercise. A two-player drill is ideal for this purpose, and with subtle variations it can also be used to help more experienced players develop their skills.



### ← STATIC DRILL

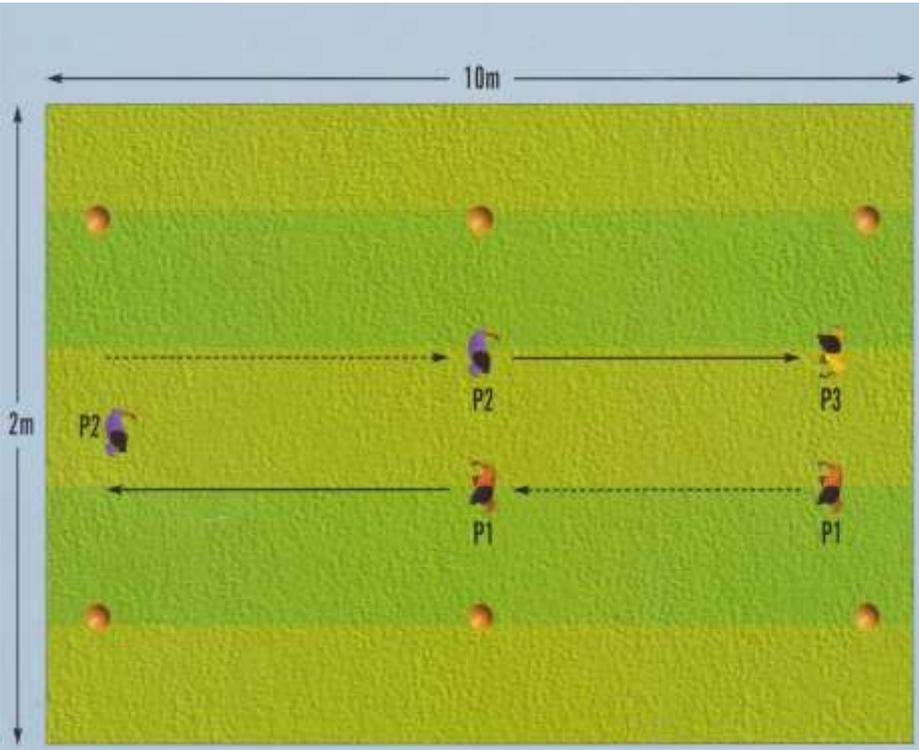
This exercise is basically a controlled version of two players passing a ball between themselves. All the coach needs to do is mark out an area with cones and define the aims of the session. The cones will help prevent the exercise declining into chaos as the two players would otherwise get further and further apart. To start with, the players can have as many touches as they like, but a gradual progression should be employed until they are confidently stroking the ball, first time, with either foot. The coach can also direct the players to control with one foot and pass with the other, or to play passes left-footed from left to right or right-footed in the opposite direction.

### DRILL DETAIL

1. Mark out a rectangular section of pitch 6m x 1m (6.5yds x 1.1yds) using cones or similar markers.
2. Position players at opposite ends of the marked area.
3. Get players to pass between themselves, allowing them three touches each to start with.
4. Work through the progression.
5. This exercise should be practised regularly, though its duration should never exceed ten minutes.

### PROGRESSION

1. Three touch, either foot.
2. Two touch, either foot.
3. One touch, either foot.
4. Two touch, stronger foot.
5. One touch, stronger foot.
6. Two touch, weaker foot.
7. One touch, weaker foot.



The diagram shows a rectangular area representing a soccer pitch section, measuring 10m in length and 2m in width. The area is marked with orange cones at the corners and midpoints of the long sides. Three players are positioned in the center: P2 on the left, P1 in the middle, and P3 on the right. A dashed arrow points from P2 to P1, and a solid arrow points from P1 to P3. Another solid arrow points from P3 back to P1, and a dashed arrow points from P1 back to P2. A legend in the bottom left corner indicates that dashed arrows represent 'run' and solid arrows represent 'pass'.

**↑ PASSING ON THE MOVE**

Once players have mastered the static drill, they can move onto a more 'game-realistic' drill, which incorporates movement. This time a larger pitch is used – 10m x 2m (11yds x 2.2yds) – and a minimum of three players is required. Players run with the ball to a cone positioned at the centre of the pitch, they then pass the ball to a colleague who is commencing a run in the opposite direction from the baseline. The second player then runs with the ball back to the middle and, in turn, passes the ball to a third player.

**DRILL DETAIL**

1. Mark out a rectangular section of pitch 10m x 2m (11yds x 2.2yds) using cones or similar markers.
2. Position cones halfway down the length of each side of the pitch.
3. Explain to players how many touches they are allowed and which foot should be used to control and which to pass.

## GETTING STARTED ↓

The only problem with ball juggling is that many young players find it very difficult to get started and often become frustrated that they cannot make instant progress. The best way to avoid this is if they start by letting the ball bounce before attempting to kick it up toward their own hands.



**1** The ball should be spun as it is dropped, with the player flicking his or her hands up and away from the body to put backspin on the ball to bring it back toward the body.

**2** The next step is to try to kick the ball before it has touched the ground. Encourage players to use both feet, even at this early stage.

**3** The aim is to get the player juggling in the following sequence: spin from hands, bounce, right foot, bounce, left foot, catch. Once this sequence is being regularly achieved the 'bounces' can be removed and the ball moved from right foot to left foot.

Not so long ago, many coaches frowned upon their players spending time juggling a ball around the training ground. Thankfully, nowadays attitudes have changed, and the benefits of good juggling skills are widely appreciated. The great thing about ball juggling is that young players cannot get enough of it. Children are always desperate to hone their skills, copying tricks from older friends and working on the flick-ups that they have seen on TV. It is also a skill that players can practise on their own, and by doing so they will improve their close control, balance and confidence when dealing with balls that arrive at an awkward height. And did we mention that it is fun too?

# JUGGLING



Juggling the ball with both feet is not as easy as looks. Players must stand lightly on the balls of their feet, keeping their eyes focussed on the football throughout.

2 Players must control their strike, making a firm but not heavy contact. As the ball rises into the air, the player should adjust his or her body position so that the opposite foot is directly underneath the point at which the ball will come down.

### ↑ JUGGLING WITH LEFT AND RIGHT FOOT

## CHECKLIST

### JUGGLING

Players must remember to:

- Stay relaxed.
- Avoid planting their weight heavily on their standing foot (otherwise they will not be able to adjust their body position).
- Keep their eyes on the ball.
- Strike the ball firmly with the top of the boot.
- Practise using both feet.

This player is standing too heavily, with his feet flat on the ground. He will not be able to react and reposition his body to meet the ball as it descends.





## INDIVIDUAL SKILLS

As a player's skills develop, he or she should try to control the ball in as many different ways as possible. This will help that player improvise during games when the ball arrives awkwardly. The back of the heel is a good surface to control the ball as is the outside of the foot, but as with all ball skills, control and accuracy only come with practice.

## THIGH JUGGLE ↑

Juggling is all about innovation; so when a player is happy keeping the ball up with his or her foot, the next step is to employ other parts of the body. The thigh is an obvious choice, as it has a perfect surface for juggling as it is wide and reasonably flat.

The juggle should begin in the normal way, with a spin and then the feet, but once the ball is airborne it should be pushed up to chest height. The thigh is then positioned at right angles to the body and is brought up to meet the ball as it arrives at waist height.

## FLICK-UPS

Flicking the ball in the air is something that all young players love to attempt. It provides a golden opportunity to show off, and even many professionals use a fancy flick to pick up the ball before taking a throw-in or corner kick rather than use their hands. These skills have no real application or value to competitive football and should be restricted to use on the training ground. Nevertheless, they look good, are great fun and help maintain children's interest.

## THE TOE FLICK ↓



1 The player leans forwards slightly and drags the ball back towards his left foot, using the side of his right foot.

2 The ball rolls up the left foot, which is flicked up sharply as contact is made.

3 The action of flicking up the left foot sends the ball flying into the air.

## THE ARDILES FLICK ↓



1 The player leans forwards to his left and drags the ball up the back of his standing leg (in this case the left) using the sole of the other foot.

2 As the ball reaches the calf, the player takes his right foot away from the ball.

3 He brings up his left foot, striking the ball with his heel.

4 The ball flies up and over his head.

# HEADING

Most junior players do not like heading the ball, but it remains an essential area of the game and one that they should strive to master. The best way to overcome the fear of heading is through gentle encouragement and regular practice. However, practice sessions should always be kept brief, as it is not recommended that junior players repeatedly head a hard ball for prolonged periods. There are three main types of header, and each is outlined below.

## DEFENSIVE HEADER →

Power and height are the aims for a defensive header.



- 1 To achieve the necessary elevation and power, players must get beneath the flight of the ball as early as possible.
- 2 Players should aim to head through the bottom half of the ball.
- 3 A full follow-through will ensure that sufficient force is applied to send the ball safely away from danger.

## ATTACKING HEADER →

In direct contrast to the defensive header, attacking players should aim to direct their headers down.



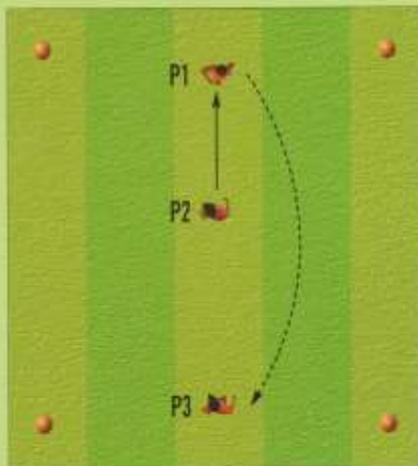
- 1 An early jump will help achieve the extra height necessary to direct an attacking header.
- 2 Forwards should strive to get above the ball's flight so that they can head through the top half of the ball.
- 3 Power and direction are vital, and, if possible, players should aim to send the ball down and towards the corners of the goal.



- 1 Players must aim to get beneath the ball as early as possible, manoeuvring into position so that the ball drops on to the head.
- 2 At the moment of impact, the player pulls his head back slightly to cushion the ball.
- 3 The ball drops gently to the ground at the player's feet.

### ← CUSHIONED HEADER

Controlling the ball with the head is a difficult skill that requires both coordination and a subtle touch. The technique used to cushion the ball down to the floor or into the path of a team-mate is similar to that employed when controlling the ball with the chest.



### ← PRACTICE DRILL

The following practice drill will help build confidence and improve the heading technique of all players.

Player 1 throws the ball to Player 2, who in turn heads the ball back over the server and to Player 3. After each header, the players rotate.

#### DRILL DETAIL

1. Mark a boundary 10m x 10m (11yds x 11yds) using cones or other markers.
2. Start by serving the ball yourself to ensure an accurate delivery.
3. Remind players of the need for accuracy.
4. This exercise should be practised regularly, though its duration should never exceed ten minutes.

#### PROGRESSION

1. Heading to a player 10m (11yds) away.
2. Expand the length of the playing area.
3. Add in an extra player just in front of Player 2 to act as a defender.
4. Replace Player 3 with two differently coloured markers in the left- and right-hand corners. As the ball is delivered, the coach calls out the colour of one of the markers (e.g. 'red') and the player must head toward the appropriate corner.

## CHECKLIST

### HEADING

Remind players that they should:

- Avoid closing their eyes when heading the ball.
- Use their arms for balance – though avoid jumping with elbows high.
- Concentrate on meeting the ball at the highest point possible
- Get into position early and before their opponents.

**NOTES**