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BELWEST FOXES SOCCER CLUB INC.

“SET PIECES U11 +” CORNERS, FREE KICKS AND PENALTIES

A successful and well-rehearsed set piece is a sight to behold for a soccer coach. It benefits not only the team on the pitch but also the coach himself, whose reputation is enhanced because of his apparent ability to organise and communicate ideas on the training ground. However, when working with junior players, coaches must forget any thoughts of such glory, focussing instead upon basic techniques and rules rather than any complicated routines.

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AGE-GROUP GUIDELINES

MAIN FOCUS	AGE GROUP & COMPETITION FORMAT	TEAM GUIDELINES	TIC EMPHASIS
Learning to master the ball	U/8-U/7 4v4	No formation / tactics consist of only very general instructions	Setting a 'TIC' for football
Learning to act with the ball purposefully	U/8-U/8 7v7	1-3-3 formation/basic tactical instructions/everyone plays all positions	TIC
Learning to play together purposefully	U/10-U/11 9v9	1-3-3-3 formation/limited tactical instructions/talent for specific positions more clear (but still flexible)	TI
Learning the positions and basic tasks in 11 v 11	U/12-U/13 11v11	1-4-3-3 formation: Extending tactical instruction, explaining the positions and basic tasks	TIC
Learning how the basic tasks link together	U/14-U/15 11v11	1-4-3-3 formation: Choloy/ specialising for a positions + corresponding tactical instruction	TIC
Learning how to play as a team	U/16-U/17 11v11	1-4-3-3 formation: Extending development on one position related to the team's output	TIC Football conditioning
Performing/winning as a team	U/18-U/19 11v11	1-4-3-3 formation: Perfection per position and as a team; result-oriented teamwork	TIC Football conditioning
T : Technique I : Insight C : Communication			

ENJOYMENT IS THE THING, NOT WINNING!

When children are training or playing games against other teams they need a fun environment where they can play without pressure. The game result, for younger players, should be irrelevant.

If the emphasis is on winning matches or the competition, the development process is doomed to failure and the fun of junior play is replaced by the pressures and frustrations of adult football.

A study of youth sport values showed that the most important values were:

- enjoyment
- personal achievement

The least important value was:

- winning

The junior coach must value, above all else, the individual development and welfare of every single player. Research has shown that the emphasis should be on the child experiencing fun and excitement. Children at this age are still sampling many sports and activities; football coaches can have an impact on which sport the child will choose.

PASSING THE BALL ↓

Even at junior level, most defending teams anticipate that the ball will be delivered high into the penalty area from a corner. So, by passing it short into the feet of a teammate, you can benefit from an element of surprise. To be successful, this tactic relies upon the players in the penalty area moving around to create confusion as well as the opportunity for one of them to slip unnoticed towards the kicker. Presuming the pass is successful, the player in possession of the ball should move towards the touchline and pull the ball back from it, as by doing so the defending team cannot push out and catch anybody offside.



1 A white-shirted attacker breaks out of the penalty area towards the corner-taker.

2 The corner-taker feeds the ball into his team-mate with a measured pass along the ground.

3 The ball is returned to the corner-taker, who can now whip the ball into the penalty box from a different angle.

There are two unique problems that junior coaches must contend with when working on corners. Firstly, not many children are keen on heading the ball, and, secondly, juniors often struggle to kick the ball in the air across the penalty area. To overcome these shortcomings, coaches should work on both heading and striking in separate sessions, but they must be realistic about what their team can achieve from corners. A carefully delivered pass is often the best option for a junior side.

CORNERS

HITTING THE DANGER ZONE ↓

If you are fortunate enough to have both a corner-taker who can strike the ball powerfully and players who can head it effectively, the option of playing the ball high and long becomes realistic. The taker should be encouraged to hit an area midway between the penalty spot and the six-yard line, as this area offers attackers a good chance of hitting the target and puts goalkeepers in a dilemma about whether to stay on the line or come for the cross.



1 A corner-taker who can deliver a ball with both power and control is an asset to any team.

2 The ball arrives in an area that puts the goalkeeper in a dilemma ... should he stay on his line or come for the cross? He decides to stay on his line.

3 A white-shirted attacker is first to the ball and meets the cross with a firm header.

4 The header has too much power for the goalkeeper to keep it out, and the ball nestles in the back of the net.

A VARIED DELIVERY ↓

To be effective from corners, teams must vary their deliveries; playing some balls short into feet while hitting others long to the far post and some to the near post. It is advisable to work out a simple system of hand signals that the corner-taker can use to let team-mates know what he or she plans to do.



A corner played short to a team-mate on the edge of the 18-yard box can often take opposing defenders by surprise.

THROW-INS

The key rules concerning throw-ins have already been explained (see page 27), and all players should be aware of them.

THE DEFENSIVE AND MIDDLE THIRDS

Throw-ins taken in these areas of the field should be directed down the touchline towards the goal you are attacking. Players should not throw the ball in towards the middle of the pitch, as this can result in conceding possession in a potentially dangerous area. The priority is to retain possession, so players must be encouraged to move around to give the thrower targets to aim at.

THE ATTACKING THIRD

In this area of the field, players have the choice of either working the ball down the touchline or throwing it in towards the opposition goal. A long throw directed into the penalty area can cause mayhem, but it should still be directed at a team-mate. Strikers should be reminded that they cannot be offside from a throw-in, so they can surge forward at will. By doing so, they will either offer an option for the thrower or drag a defender out of position and create space for a team-mate.

FREE KICKS

When practising free kicks, many coaches succumb to temptation and overcomplicate matters in search of a clever routine. However, at junior level, free kicks do not need to be decorated with fancy step-overs or dummies, nor do they need to involve four or five players. Quite simply, a free kick should be either a pass or a shot. Speed and accuracy of delivery are all that matter.

THE SHOT →

The bending free kick is both an effective and popular way to get the ball around a defensive wall. The ball is struck with the inside of the foot (as explained on page 61) and for a right-footer moves from right to left. The theory is simple; the player aims the ball wide of the wall and bends it back around and into the corner of the goal.

Some youngsters, however, will struggle to bend the ball with sufficient power and accuracy to beat the 'keeper. As an alternative, such players may prefer to get a team-mate to push the ball to the side of the wall, thus making an angle for them to drive a shot at the unguarded portion of the net.



1 The goalkeeper sets his wall to guard the near post, while he takes care of the other side of the goal.

2 The red team, however, do not attempt to bend the ball around the goal and, instead, the ball is shifted to the side of the wall with a short pass.

KEY RULES

- The ball must be stationary when a free kick is taken – the kick must be taken again if the ball is moving.
- The ball must travel its own circumference before it is considered to be in play. This means that placing a foot on top of the ball does not constitute a free kick being taken.
- Defenders must be 10yds (9.1m) from the ball when a kick is taken.
- Players can be offside from free-kicks.
- Free-kicks awarded to a defending team within its own penalty area can be taken from any other point in the penalty area.

THE PASS →

Junior players should be discouraged from launching the ball aimlessly forward from free kicks. It may be effective for some senior teams to send high free kicks into opposition territory from deep positions, but it is not recommended that youngsters employ this tactic. Instead, they should aim to put the ball down, look up and pass it to the feet of a team-mate. Ideally the pass should be made quickly and decisively, and if possible the ball should go forwards rather than backwards.

ASSESSING THE SITUATION

When the referee awards a free kick, players must immediately check two things. Firstly, they need to check if the kick has been awarded as a direct or indirect kick (see page 24-5), and, secondly, they must assess whether they are close enough to goal to take a shot. Players must be encouraged to be realistic when assessing whether they can shoot for goal or not, as there is little point in a 10-year-old hitting a free kick from 30m (32yds) and watching it dribble towards the goalkeeper's feet. If the kick is not close enough to goal to warrant a shot, the ball should be put down and quickly passed to the feet of a team-mate.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

Players will only improve their free-kick technique if they are willing to put in extra time on the practice ground. Organized group sessions offer the chance for players to practise their kicks against a goalkeeper and a defensive wall, but by practising on their own, players can work more intensely on their kicks.



3 Number 9 runs onto the ball and, before any defenders can react, cradles a shot at goal.

4 By moving the ball to the side of the wall, the attacking team gives number 9 a greater area of the goal to aim at.

5 The keeper scurries across his line, but there is nothing he can do to keep the ball from finishing in the back of the net.



1 The player on the left does the sensible thing here. With the goal out of range, he picks up the ball and puts it down ready for the free kick.

2 He plays a simple, short pass to his nearby team-mate, who can now carry the ball forward.

3 No risks were taken and, while no glory was achieved, the blue team retains possession and begins to move forward again.

PENALTIES

Everybody likes practising penalties, but when it comes to the real thing, volunteers are not always as forthcoming. Coaches should remember that the best players do not necessarily make the best penalty-takers. The basic skill of beating a goalkeeper from 12yds (10.9m) is not difficult, but in the context of a highly competitive football match it can be daunting. And, with the introduction of penalty shoot-outs to settle many competitions nowadays, there are more and more of these nerve-wracking scenarios, even at junior level.



PRACTISING PENALTIES

Traditionalists believe there is no point practising penalties because you cannot replicate the tension of a match on a training ground. However, while this is true, it is important for players to hone their technique in practice sessions so that they are confident in their ability to hit the target should they be called upon to take a spot-kick during a match.

By placing cones in the corners of the goal, players can practise their penalty technique without the need for a goalkeeper.

POWER OR PLACEMENT

Junior players should be encouraged to aim their penalties rather than blast them. A shot placed in the corner is impossible for a keeper to reach, but one blasted straight down the middle of the goal relies on the goalie getting out of the way. There is also a greater risk of missing the target altogether when going for power over placement. As with any shooting practice, it may be helpful to place cones in the corners of the goal so that players can focus their efforts.

GOOD PENALTY ↓



A carefully struck penalty directed hard and low towards the corner of the goal is destined for the net.

BAD PENALTY ↓



This time, however, the player leans back and strikes a hopeful shot over the centre of the crossbar.

PENALTY TIPS

1. Never change your mind on the run up. Decide what you are going to do and stick to the plan.
2. Look at the goal before you take the kick, but look at the ball when striking.
3. Keep your head down to avoid skying the ball.

Belwest Foxes Soccer Club Inc.

NOTES