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“SKILL SET WARMING UP”

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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.

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AGE-GROUP GUIDELINES

MAIN FOCUS	AGE GROUP & COMPETITION FORMAT	TEAM GUIDELINES	TIC EMPHASIS
Learning to master the ball	U/6-U/7 4v4	No formation / tactics consist of only very general instructions	Getting a 'TIC' for football
Learning to act with the ball purposefully	U/8-U/9 7v7	1-3-3 formation/basic tactical instructions/everyone plays all positions	TIC
Learning to play together purposefully	U/10-U/11 9v9	1-3-2-3 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: Choice/ 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			

WARM-UP

It is true that children's muscles are typically more supple than an adult's, but they are not immune from strains and pulls. If players overstretch or twist awkwardly when their muscles are cold, they can sustain a painful and debilitating injury.

Whether warming up before a game or a training session, children should take the time to stretch properly and ensure they are supple enough to perform

at their peak. It is also essential that they warm down after exercise.

Throughout the professional game warming up is taken very seriously, but even at junior level, there is no reason why players should not go through a short but thorough warm-up and stretching routine.

If players prepare properly, they will give themselves a better chance of performing to the best of their ability for the duration of a game. Warming up for a training session or match should involve stretching and jogging for 10–15 minutes, depending on the age of the children. Older children will have more patience. Running will get the body temperature and the heart rate up, while stretching will warm the muscles.





← JOG FIRST

Before players begin any stretching, it is advisable to jog gently around the pitch or training field for a few minutes to raise the body temperature and heart rate.

DYNAMIC FLEX VERSUS STATIC STRETCH

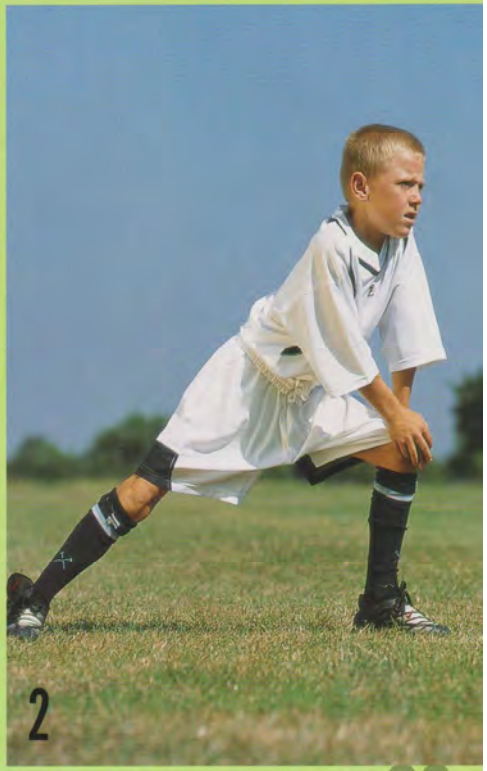
There are two ways to stretch. The conventional way is the static stretch, where you stand still and ease into each movement. The second method, called dynamic flex, is where the player moves around as he or she stretches. The experts are currently divided on the relative merits of each approach. Whichever one you choose, the important thing is to ensure that players always stretch in a controlled and unhurried fashion.



GROIN STRETCH ↑

Soccer players are more susceptible to groin strains than most sportsmen. The groin muscles, which are located on the inside of the thigh, can be damaged when a player overstretches, or stretches awkwardly, for a ball or tackle.

- 1 This is an exaggerated version of a sprinter's starting position. The following muscles are stretched by this exercise: frontal groin area, thigh, calf and Achilles tendon.
- 2 The player adopts the position shown, applying pressure to his knee to maximize the stretch.



HAMSTRING →

The hamstring (or the rear leg biceps to be more accurate) is located at the back of the leg. It is a muscle group that travels all the way from the lower buttock to the back of the knee. As anyone who has suffered a hamstring tear will tell you (sprinters and speedy wingers are particularly susceptible), this injury is extremely painful. Hamstring injuries always occur suddenly and, while there can be no guaranteed protection, good stretching is the soundest precaution you can take. Stretching hamstrings will also make players more flexible.



1 There are many variations of hamstring stretch, but junior players should not need to get into the elaborate contortions that some professionals indulge in.



2 The leg being stretched is locked straight, while the rear leg supports the body. Both hands are placed upon the leg to apply pressure while the stretch is held for 10–30 seconds.

THIGH STRETCH →

The frontal quad is a very large muscle in the thigh. It is one of the easiest to pull and one of the most difficult to heal. Muscle strains are common, particularly when players are pushing off from a standing start. Good all-round flexibility lessens the chance of strains, and the best way to achieve this is to stretch properly.



1 This popular exercise can be performed assisted, i.e. with a partner, or solo. The key is to move into the stretch gradually.



2 Players should be encouraged to maintain their balance while slowly bringing pressure to bear on the thigh.

THE LOWER LEG: CALF AND ACHILLES STRETCH ↓

The most likely muscle to be affected by cramp is the calf muscle. Most soccer players know the pain of cramp in the calf only too well. The causes of cramp are the subject of much debate. Obstruction of blood/oxygen supply, salt deficiency or deficiency of other body minerals have all been blamed. All no doubt play their part, but muscle fatigue due to prolonged work is clearly a major culprit. Development and preparation of the calf muscle will limit the chances of cramp.

The calf and Achilles tendon are closely linked and often a pain in the Achilles is the result of a blow to the calf muscle. The lower leg is a very sensitive area and, therefore, requires special attention. The Achilles tendon, for example, should not be stretched too quickly or too strenuously.



1 This exercise stretches the calf and Achilles. It may look awkward, but it is worth practising and getting right. Players' position their weight on the bent, rear leg while the front leg provides extra support. Body weight is positioned centrally.

2 Make sure players avoid the temptation to lean too far forward. This position should be held for 20 seconds before it is repeated using the other leg.

TIPS

- Players must be encouraged to take their time. Explain to them that they must ease into each stretch.
- A stable, balanced body position is essential. Uneven weight distribution will make exercises more difficult and less effective.
- Players must avoid sharp, sudden movements. Stretching should be smooth and controlled.
- Make sure that players are breathing steadily throughout each exercise. Breath should be taken in through the nose and exhaled from the mouth.



END

WARMING UP

According to popular wisdom, junior players do not need to warm up because they are 'naturally supple' already. Thankfully, this archaic and potentially dangerous view has been challenged by a new breed of progressive coaches, and today most youngsters expect to go through a warm-up routine before a training session or game.

NOTES