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BELWEST FOXES SOCCER CLUB INC.

“SPEED AND AGILITY”

Children usually have a good standard of general fitness, so at junior level coaches should not have to spend time working on stamina and endurance exercises. However, it is still important to tailor players' fitness to meet the game's requirements. A few simple exercises can do wonders for physical conditioning for soccer, and the key areas of speed and agility should be the primary focus of any training drill.

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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 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.

FAST FEET

STATIC PRACTICE ↓

Placing each foot on top of a static ball looks simple, but it is not quite as easy as it first appears.

The objective is to keep the ball still while touching it gently with the sole of each foot. This exercise will help improve a player's coordination and control as well as his or her speed of foot.



1 Two cones define the line upon which the ball is set. The player must aim to keep the ball in the centre of the line.

2 The player extends both arms to aid balance as he removes his right foot and prepares to place the sole of his left shoe on top of the ball.

3 The ball has moved slightly and the player has to adjust his position as he prepares to put his left foot down.

SIDE TO SIDE ↓

This exercise is essentially a variation of the static practice illustrated above.

The player must try to move the ball, in a controlled fashion, between the inside of each foot.



1 Boundary cones are used once more to define the player's position. He stands lightly with his weight on the balls of his feet, and prepares to make contact.

2 The ball is struck sharply with the inside of the left foot and, as before, the arms are extended to aid balance.

3 The player takes his second touch, clipping the ball back with his right foot.

TOE TAPS

A player with fast feet can manipulate the ball quickly within confined areas and, as a result, has a distinct advantage over more ponderous opponents. Fast feet will enable him to nick the ball away from defenders and move it sharply out of trouble. Opponents can also be sucked in by a swift change of direction or a subtle drag back. Toe taps offer an excellent and enjoyable way for players to improve the speed of their footwork.

POINT TO POINT ↓

Once players are confident moving their feet quickly around a static ball, they can progress onto exercises that involve lateral or linear movement. The drill illustrated here shows a player moving the ball along a line while all the time facing forwards. It is an exercise that will improve not only footwork, but also balance and control.



- 1 Cones are used to define the line along which the player must move. He must remain adjacent to the ball and at right angles to the direction of travel.
- 2 The player rolls his right foot over the ball to move it in a controlled fashion along the line.
- 3 The player has successfully rolled the ball from left to right, and he takes a final touch to complete the movement from cone to cone.

BACK AND FORTH ↓

Moving the ball forward and back using only the soles of the feet is a difficult skill that requires both coordination and fast feet. Players should be encouraged to use both feet and should move back and forth to a mark no more than 20m (22yds) ahead of them.



- 1 Starting between two cones, the player puts his right foot on top of the ball and pushes it forwards.
- 2 With his arms used for balance and his body positioned upright, the player picks his knees up high and rolls his foot over the ball.
- 3 The player reaches the end of his forward run, but instead of turning, he begins to roll the ball backwards to his starting point.

MOVEMENT AND CONTROL

FAST-FOOT LADDERS

The drills illustrated here are intended to promote the importance of maintaining balance and control while moving at speed over short distances. Ordinary garden canes can be used instead of the fast-foot ladders shown in the photographs, but care must be taken to space them properly. Intervals of 45cm (18ins) are recommended.

LOOK STRAIGHT AHEAD ↓

This exercise is an extension of the cane drill illustrated on page 19. Players must move through the ladder or canes as normal, but to encourage them to look up, the coach stands at the end of the line and throws a ball for them to head or catch. There are many variations of this exercise, and coaches should experiment to meet the aims of a particular session. Double steps, in which both feet are placed one at a time in each space on the ladder, are particularly useful for developing quick feet.



- 1 The player moves through the ladder with a good running style, bringing her knees up high as she moves forward.
- 2 To encourage the player to look up rather than at her feet, the coach stands at the end of the line and throws a ball to her.
- 3 The player heads the ball back towards the coach and moves back to the start of the exercise.

SIDESTEPPING LADDER WORK ↓

Footballers are often required to sidestep their way forwards during matches, and this exercise will help them practise the movement while working on their balance, coordination and speed of foot. Players must place each foot – one at a time – inside each gap on the ladder.



1 The player stands lightly on the balls of his feet and springs between the gaps in the ladder. The right foot leads.

2 The left foot is brought down beside the right, in the same gap on the ladder.

3 With his arms out to maximize his balance, the player continues his run with his right foot leading the way.

BALL WATCHING ON THE LADDER ↓

Players instinctively look at their feet when making their way down the fast-foot ladder, but during a match they will need to direct their eyes at the ball and their opponents rather than their footwear. To break this habit, the following drill, in which players sidestep down the ladder while exchanging chest passes with the coach, should be employed.



1 The player moves down the ladder, while the coach travels alongside.

2 The coach throws the ball toward the player, who is forced to look up as he prepares to catch the ball.

3 Without breaking stride or looking down, the player catches the ball, returns it to the coach and continues his run down the ladder.

EXPLOSIVE POWER

HURDLES

Exercises that are intended to improve a player's reactions and acceleration are often called plyometrics. This type of training should be done regularly, though only for short periods, usually between five and ten minutes. An extended plyometric session can lead to injury and fatigue.

SPRING OVER THE HURDLES ↓

All players, from goalkeepers to centre forwards, will benefit from this simple exercise that is intended to improve both reactions and jumping ability. By springing over closely spaced, small hurdles, players move rapidly through the obstacles. Players should be encouraged to surge up quickly after each landing, rather than sinking to a low squat before ascending again. Each player should do no more than five repetitions of this exercise in one session.



- 1 The player bounds over a short hurdle, lifting both knees high above the obstacle.
- 2 Both feet make contact with the ground on landing, but the player does not sink to a low squat but, instead, bounds sharply up again.
- 3 She 'explodes' into another jump over the next hurdle. The movement through the hurdles is continuous, rather than a series of distinct jumps.

ONE FOOT AT A TIME ↓

A conventional hurdling style, in which one foot leads and one follows, can be used to work on both reactions and coordination. With the hurdles still spaced closely, the player must explode over the obstacles, but greater control is needed than with the technique used to spring over them.



1 There is not sufficient room for the player to take each hurdle in his stride, so instead he must bound over them from virtually a standing start each time.

2 The left leg leads and the right leg follows as the player prepares to land between two hurdles.

3 As soon as the player clears one hurdle, he prepares to bound over the next. As with the spring technique, players should be encouraged to surge up quickly after each landing.

SIDESTEPPING THROUGH HURDLES ↓

By springing over closely spaced hurdles using a side-on motion, players can improve both their coordination and their plyometric fitness. As with the other hurdling exercises, players should be encouraged to spring up quickly between hurdles. Repetitions should also be limited to a maximum of five per session.



1 The right leg leads as the player drives over each hurdle.

2 Both arms are extended to improve balance as the player strides this hurdle.

3 The left leg is brought over sharply to join the right, before the next hurdle is crossed.

REACTION AND COORDINATION

HOPSCOTCH

Players of all ages and abilities can benefit from a game of hopscotch. The pattern of jumping and hopping is perfect for older players to work on their plyometric fitness, while for younger footballers, simply placing their feet in the hoops helps them improve their coordination. If striving to improve plyometric fitness, players must be encouraged to exaggerate the spring between each hoop.



1 Players form an orderly queue behind the two small cones, as the player in white hops into the first red hoop and bounds forward.

2 With one foot in each of the second row of red hoops, the player prepares to hop onto her right foot and into the first yellow hoop.



3+4 The player repeats the pattern of hops and jumps as she moves through to the end of the course. The coach, meanwhile, looks on and encourages the players to progress through the obstacles at a swift pace.

HOOPS

The old-fashioned hoop is an extremely useful tool for the soccer coach. By simply bounding between them, players can work on their explosive fitness, and by moving in and out of them in a predetermined pattern, reactions and coordination are also improved.

DOUBLE-STEPPING THROUGH THE HOOPS

This exercise uses a similar pattern of hoops as hopscotch, but, instead of working on plyometric fitness, it promotes both fast feet and coordination. Players have to put each foot, one at a time, in each of the hoops and are forced to switch direction sharply as they move through the course.



1 The right foot leads as the player moves from the first hoop onto the next.

2 With both feet in the right-hand red hoop, the player must now switch direction and move towards the single yellow hoop.



3 By shifting his weight onto his left side, the player swings sharply into the first yellow hoop. This time it is his left foot that leads.

4 The right foot is brought alongside the left in the first yellow hoop. The circuit is completed by repeating the sequence of movements that was used to get through the red hoops. Young players need to be reminded to concentrate and go slowly so that they don't tread on any of the hoops – as is the case here.

GLOSSARY

Blades

A type of soccer boot that has cleats on the sole, rather like a baseball boot. A relatively new innovation in soccer.

Calf

Area of the leg, found at the back of the shin. A term usually used to refer to the muscle found in this position.

Closing down

Defensive technique used to deny opponents time and space.

Conditioned game

Small-sided game in which players' movements are restricted by boundaries to limit their exertions.

Cruyff turn

An attacking move first used by Holland's legendary forward Johan Cruyff.

Diuretic

Substances which cause increased output of urine. Diuretics should never be consumed at half-time. Coffee, tea and alcohol are all diuretics.

Dynamic flex

An approach to warming up that requires players to move around while they stretch rather than work from a static position.

Groin

Muscles on the inside of the thigh, which are frequently strained by soccer players in the act of stretching or kicking.

Hamstring

A muscle group located at the back of the leg, and which stretches from the lower buttock to the back of the knee.

Isotonic drinks

Easily absorbed into the blood stream, an isotonic solution provides quick rehydration. A simple isotonic drink can be made by mixing fruit juice and water in equal measures.

Ligaments

Tough, fibrous tissues which link to the bone and reinforce the joint. Ligaments keep the joints in place while allowing great flexibility. Ligament injuries are common in football. It can take a great deal of time and rest for a ligament to regain its strength and flexibility once damaged.

Overlap

An overlap is a run made off the ball, usually down the wing. The runner makes his run from behind the ball, getting ahead of the ball, which is held by a team-mate; the latter then releases the ball in front of the runner.

Plyometric training

Training which develops explosive power within the muscles. Examples of plyometric training include jumping over hurdles and running across benches.

Scoops

The term used to describe the technique used by goalkeepers to catch crosses and shots played at below chest height. The hands are closed round the ball in a scooping motion as it hits the keeper's chest.

Sweeper

Defensive position which refers to the last player in a central defensive trio. A sweeper usually plays alongside two markers and is responsible for patrolling the area behind his two colleagues. He is also expected to carry the ball out from the back.

Tendons

Tendons are linking agents which join muscles to bone.

The trap

The basic method of controlling a football using the foot.

'Ws'

The 'Ws' are used to deal with shots and crosses played at or above chest height. The hands are placed in front of the body, with fingers spread wide and thumbs touching each other.



Warm-down

A short period of gentle exercise (similar to a warm-up), which should follow every match. This will help to break down any lactate that has built up in the muscles during exercise.

Warm-up

A warm-up should be carried out prior to any exercise. It is intended to raise the heart rate prior to competitive exertion and warm the muscles to make them more supple.

Wing-back

Variation on the full-back position. Wing-backs are usually used in a 3-5-2 or 5-3-2 system. They are responsible for patrolling the flanks and are expected to spend a great deal of the game attacking. However, they must also defend their wing when required, as a result, this is a stamina-sapping position.

NOTES