

Practical Considerations For Developing Soccer Footwork

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Soccer Specific Speed

Soccer speed is the ability to start quickly from all different positions, accelerate to top speed in the shortest time possible, change direction, and stop rapidly under control to make the play. Footwork is an essential element of this

Why Train Footwork

The feet are in contact with the ground in movement and all movement is initiated off the ground. It is the feet that must absorb shock on ground contact and then use those forces to propel the body in the desired direction.

Get Hip to The Feet

Quick feet are actually quick and supple hips. Control and positioning the center of gravity is the major objective of proper footwork.

Foot Position / Weight Distribution

It is not necessary to be up on the toes because the foot must come back down to the ground to initiate movement. The weight should be distributed approximately 75% to the forefoot and 25% to the rear foot in order to allow multi-directional movement.

Arm and Hand Position

The arms and hands should be positioned to aid in the first movement.

First Step Position & Length

The First Step Should be of appropriate length to create a positive shin angle. The foot should hit slightly behind the center of gravity to allow the large powerful hip extensors to work. A long first step forces the player to try to pull themselves over the foot. This is not a good position for force production.

First Step Direction

The first step must be in the intended direction to gain a step. The most common error is the false step or miss-step away from the intended direction.

Foot Movement

Contact point - Preferably toward the ball of the foot.

Weight distribution - The weight should be distributed over the whole.

Height of step - A low heel recovery is necessary to put the foot in proper position to push against the ground. Movement upward is a wasted motion.

Sound - Quiet is the key. No slapping or loud noise on foot contact.

Rhythm/Tempo - The foot contact should be rhythmic.

Type of Step

This is determined by the distance of the required movement.

Crossover Power Step -the leg opposite of the intended direction is driven across the body and past the opposite foot.

Open Step - the foot nearest the intended direction is turned (opened) towards the intended direction and used as the plant foot for the next step.

Jab Step - the foot nearest the intended direction is jabbed towards the intended direction; this is the first step to a player shuffling sideways, but could be used as the power step for a goalkeeper's dive in that direction.

Drop Step - is similar to the open step, but more of a step backward, which turns the hips towards the intended direction.

Warm-up

Fence or post swing - standing sideways, grab a fence or a post and swing the leg closest to the fence/post. Start small and work to a long, high swing. Then face the fence/post and swing the leg.

Bands - with the band around the ankles: do side steps, 20 to each direction; walk forward and backwards; do cariokas (see quick foot ladder below); monster walk (squat and big strides); short quick side steps;

Skipping - the coach listens and watches for heavy steps or other tendencies. Other skips include: the cross-over skip with the arms swing across the body as each foot crosses in front of and across the other; duck foot skip with one foot turned out; pigeon toed skip with one foot turned in.

Multi-Directional Movement- Wheel Principle ®

Soccer requires multi-directional movement. To be effective, the athlete should train to move in all spokes of the wheel. Think of a large compass (10 foot diameter) with spokes that go out to eight directions (N,NE,E,SE,S,SW,W, NW). From the center facing north, a player should be able to quickly react to any of these directions. The setup can be developed with the player running in from the South position and moving to a specified position; or side-stepping in from East or West. The player can be told which direction to move as the coach watches for inappropriate steps. Later, the player can follow a directional pointer from the coach. A ball could be introduced as stationary in the center or on the ends or could be dribbled from a position; the ball could also be turned or received in a specified direction.

Specific Footwork Drills

Jump Rope - Fake the rope if one is not handy.

Drop & Go - The sprinter's body weight falls into partners outstretched hands; at some point, the hold is released and the player sprints forward.

Push & Go - The partner pushes against the sprinter leaning forward; at some point, the hold is released and the player sprints forward.

Quick Foot Ladder - the footwork drills are only limited to one's imagination. The ladder is made up of 8 or more 18 inch connected segments.

- run straight through with specific steps required, such as: every square; every other square; 2 squares, skip one; both feet in every square; carioka (right crosses in front of left into square, left crosses behind into the next square, followed by the right going behind the left and so on; etc.
- from the side, either back and forth through the same square or zig-zag through the ladder: shuffle both feet into the square (double in); right jab steps in, left power steps overtop, right steps out; right steps in and pivots, left steps overtop, right steps out; carioka back and forth; do the Ali shuffle inside a square
- sprint to the ladder, quick step through, sprint out

Dot Drill - Think of the 5 dots on a die. The dots are numbered 1 (bottom right), 2 (center), 3 (bottom left), 4 (top left), 5 (top right). Right foot starts on 1, the left foot is on 3. Using R as a notation for right foot and L as the left foot, the sequence is R-2, L-3, R-4, L-2, R-1, L-3. This sequence is executed as many times as possible in a 15-30 second time period. The next sequence is the same only with the left foot starting. The movement should imitate a forward movement of steps, followed by a backward run of two steps. Hop scotch with turns can also be used with the dots. The dots could be spray painted or just imagined.

Low Hurdles - Start the hurdles (6-8 inches high) about 2-3 feet apart. As the players improve, move them closer together. Note, always RUNOUT after the last hurdle.

- one step run through
- two steps between each hurdle; lead with opposite foot
- go sideways
- incorporate more speed with a run up to the hurdles

Low Box Quick Step - use a low box (4-6 inches high) to step on and off.

Ball Drop - the server holds up two balls to the side and drops one, the player must get to the ball as soon as possible with a cushion touch, wedge trap or dribble touch to the side.

Goalkeepers can dive catch the ball. Vary the distance from the server. Vary the starting foot position of the player.

Hoops - 24 inch hoops in various spots. Players are to sprint to them and step inside with a specific step. For instance, 1 foot step in; double foot step in; multiple mini-steps; step in and pivot; step in backwards; include a passed ball between the hoops. They can also be used with many of the side to side activities in the speed ladder.

Over the Line - use a painted line to do quick hops, both feet to ground as soon as possible. Add ball--for instance one touch a ball between line hops.

Designing A Program

- Three to five drills daily.
- Specific objective for each drill relative to the players strengths and weaknesses.
- Improving footwork is speed work so it should be done when the player is fresh.
- The total time should be about fifteen minutes per day.
- Allow enough rest between drills so that quality is maintained. Learn the correct action then - add speed.
- Design soccer specific drills that are derivatives of the generic footwork drills to ensure that the improved footwork will transfer to the game.

Evaluative Criteria For Drills Or Exercises

- Is it functional?
- How does it relate to the actual movement being trained for?
- Does the athlete relate it?
- Is it adaptable?

Miscellaneous Points and Summary of the Session

The first step is the key to quickness. A long first step is not rewarded in soccer. A long first step means a player is in the air for a long time and can't change direction during this time. The foot movement should be as low to the ground and back onto the ground as soon as possible. If a player takes a long first step, he must push back in the opposite direction before he can go forward. Players need to work on the length and direction of their first step. Some other comments and suggestions.

"Rhythm is maximum control with speed."

"Drill as fast as you CAN, not as fast as you CAN'T."

Use player lines as rest between action. To train speed, there must be adequate rest between.

When doing footwork exercises, the goalkeeper should juggle soccer ball(s).

Put these some of these exercises between other activities; e.g., after a shot, the player hops side to side over a line through a speed ladder.

Use the band to running the ladder.

Use a sequence in a hurdle and speed ladder drills; e.g., forward 2, back 1.

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