

A Basic Understanding of Soccer

Soccer is a good game for kids to play because it is fun, it requires very little in the way of equipment, it is a good way to build stamina, no player is too big or too small to play, and boys and girls can play together and have a good time. Soccer is really a rather simple game but is confusing to many people in the U.S. because we have not been exposed to the game enough to be familiar with the basic rules and some of the basic strategies of the game.

Once parents see their children play the game, they begin to enjoy the game for the reasons mentioned above and because the game very seldom produces any significant injuries. Parents can improve their own enjoyment of the game as well as help their kids become better team members by working with their kids and learning together the rules, strategies, and terms used in playing soccer. This learning process helps both the players and the parents to understand the game better.



The Makeup of the Team - Teams are composed of 11 players, one of whom is the goalkeeper. The other 10 players are divided into 3 groups. The groups are:

1. Forwards or Strikers (Offense)
2. Halfbacks or Midfielders (Offense and Defense)
3. Fullbacks or Defenders (Defense)

Forwards - The forwards are the attackers for the offense who are primarily responsible for moving the ball toward the goal and kicking the ball into the goal for the team's scores. There are usually either 4 or 5 forwards in a team's formation. The forwards are identified as to whether they start on the right or left side of the field or whether they are the center forward. Forwards may be inside or outside forwards on one side of the field depending on whether they are nearer or further from the center.

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Halfbacks - The halfbacks or midfielders are the 2 or 3 players who play between the forwards and the fullbacks. These players are responsible for preventing the opposing team's players from getting past them and getting close to their own goal. If the halfbacks can take the ball away, they have the option of passing the ball to one of the forwards on their own team or moving the ball up the field a little ways themselves before passing the ball to one of their forwards.

Fullbacks - The fullbacks play close to their own goal and are responsible for helping the goalkeeper protect the goal. There is no way one goalkeeper can protect the goal without the help of the fullbacks. There may be 3 or 4 fullbacks depending on the team's formation. When the ball comes to one side of the field, the fullback(s) on that side of the field must move out toward the ball and the other fullbacks shift over nearer the front of the goal to provide the best defense. Whenever the fullbacks get the chance to kick the ball, they should always kick the ball toward the side of the field. Kicking the ball toward the side of the field and away from the center of the field is called "clearing" the ball. Clearing the ball is a very important defensive principle.

The Soccer Field or "Pitch" - The soccer field is rectangular and the end line is called the "goal line". The side lines on the field are called "touchlines". The goal lines and the touchlines are part of the playing field. The ball is only out of play when it completely crosses the boundaries of the playing field. Players should continue to play all balls until the referee indicates the ball is out of play. Play should stop when the referee blows the whistle, but the players should keep playing the ball near the sidelines, the goal line, or the goal until the whistle blows.

Playing the ball - Except at throw-ins, the goalkeeper is the only player allowed to play the ball with his/her hands or arms, and may only do so within his/her own penalty area. The penalty area is a large rectangular area directly in front of the goal. A player may, however, use any other part of the body (feet, head, thigh, chest) in order to stop, control, pass, move with the ball, or score.

Throw-ins - A throw-in is taken along the touchline at the point where the ball went out of play. It is awarded against the team that last touched the ball before it went out of play. The ball must be thrown into play with both hands, from behind and over the head. The thrower must keep part of each foot on the ground either behind or on the touchline. No goal can be scored directly from a throw-in, and the thrower may not play the ball again until it has been touched by another player.

Scoring a Goal - A goal is scored when the ball completely crosses the goal line under the crossbar and between the goal posts. Even if the goalkeeper catches or stops the ball and the ball is past the goal line, a goal is scored by the attacking team. When the attackers (forwards) are moving the ball toward the goal, it is important for the players to stay spread out and play their proper positions. The player with the ball should always be looking for another player who might be in a better position to play the ball or take a shot. When one forward sees another forward who is open, the ball should be

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passed to the open forward as all the forwards move together down the field. All the forwards should be moving up and down the field at the level where the ball is being played. The forward should always run at a moderate pace so they do not become fatigued. There is a tendency among the younger players to run too fast. This makes it more difficult to control the ball and leads to the players becoming very tired. The best way to attack the goal is for the outside forwards to play the ball down the sides of the field. As the ball gets closer to the end of the field (the goal line and the goal), the forwards should pass the ball towards the center of the field in front of the goal. This is called "centering" the ball and is a very important offensive principle of the game. When the ball is centered, all the forwards should attempt to kick or head the ball into the goal as quickly as possible. Whenever the ball is kicked toward the goal, the players should follow the ball toward the goal until the ball is definitely in the net or until the goalkeeper has control of the ball. Remember that the ball is always in play until the goalkeeper has complete control of the ball.

The Goal Kick - A goal kick is awarded to the defending team when the ball crosses their goal line (outside the goal itself) after having been touched by an opponent. The kick may be taken by any player of the defending side, including the goalkeeper. The ball is placed within the half of the goal area nearer the point where it crossed the goal line.

1. The kick must send the ball completely out of the penalty area before either team is able to play the ball.
2. The kicker may not touch the ball again until it has been played by another player.
3. All opponents must retreat outside the penalty area until the kick is taken.
4. No goal can be scored directly from a goal kick.

The Corner Kick - A corner kick is awarded to the attacking team if the ball crosses the goal line (outside the goal itself) after having been last played by a player from the defending team. It is taken from the quarter circle at the corner flag on the side of the field where the ball went out of play.

1. The corner flag may not be moved to help the kicker.
2. Opponent's must remain at least 10 yards away from the kicker until the kick is taken.
3. A goal can be scored directly from a goal kick.
4. The kicker may not play the ball again until it has been touched by another player.

Free Kicks - A free kick is either direct or indirect and is taken from the point where the offense (foul) occurred.

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The Direct Free Kick - A direct free kick is one from which the player taking the kick can score a goal directly without the ball having to be played by a second player. Direct free kicks are awarded for the following fouls:

1. Tripping
2. Holding an opponent with a hand or arm
3. Playing a ball with a hand or arm
4. Kicking or attempting to kick an opponent
5. Jumping at an opponent
6. Charging an opponent
7. Striking or attempting to strike an opponent
8. Pushing an opponent with the hand or any part of the arm

The Indirect Free Kick - An indirect free kick is one from which a goal cannot be scored until the ball has been touched by another player. An indirect free kick is awarded for these fouls:

1. Dangerous play
2. For charging fairly, as with the shoulder, but when the ball is not within playing distance.
3. Charging the goalkeeper, unless he/she is holding the ball
4. Goalkeeper for stalling
5. When a player taking a kick off, throw-in, goal kick, corner kick, free kick, or penalty kick plays the ball a second time before another player has touched it.

At all free kicks, the opponent must line up at least 10 yards from the ball. The ball must be stationary at a free kick and the kicker may not replay the ball until another player touches it.

Penalty Kick - Any offense that incurs a direct free kick is punished by the award of a penalty kick to the opposing team when the offense is committed by a defending player in his/her own penalty area. A penalty kick is taken from the penalty spot. All players except the goalkeeper and the player taking the penalty kick must stand outside the penalty area, at least 10 yards from the penalty spot. The player taking the kick must propel the ball forward and he may not play it a second time until it has been touched by another player. The goalkeeper must stand on the goal line, without moving his/her feet until the ball is kicked.

The most common foul to result in a penalty kick is the playing of the ball with the hands or arms in the penalty area. It is extremely important for all the players to remember that the hands and arms are not used in soccer except by the goalkeeper.

Playing Your Position - The most difficult concept to teach young players is the concept of playing one's position. It is most important for the players on the right side of the field to stay on the right side of the field even if the ball is on the left side of the field.

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If the player is in proper position, he/she will be ready to play the ball when the ball is kicked into his part of the field. Also players conserve their energy when they play their positions and do not run all over the field trying to play the ball everywhere. The best way for a player to remain in position is to watch the ball most of the time but occasionally to glance around the field to see if he/she is still in the portion of the field which he/she is supposed to be covering.

Receiving a Pass - When the ball is passed to a player, the player should do the following four things in order:

1. Control the ball
2. Look to pass the ball to a teammate
3. IF he cannot make a pass, he should control the ball and dribble up field.
4. As the player dribbles the ball, he should always be looking to pass the ball to any teammate who is in a better position to play the ball.

Dribbling the Ball - Dribbling a soccer ball means controlling the ball and moving it around the field with the feet. It is important in dribbling the ball that the player run under control so the ball is not easily taken away by the other team. Also, by running at a moderate rate of speed, the players do not become fatigued so easily.

Practice at Home - The primary school soccer program is for fun and for the introducing young players to the game. The practices with the team are adequate preparation unless the young player specifically wants to spend some extra time at home playing soccer. These are two things a player could do at home to become a better soccer player