

Fundamentals of Passing

There are many different ways to pass the ball in soccer. Some of them are basic and some more advanced. You can pass with the inside of the foot, the outside, the toe and even the heel (back pass). You can lay the ball out flat, make it curve in or out, chip it, loft it etc.

What we'll be concerned with here initially are the fundamentals of basic passing, what you would teach to a 7 year old (and up) to build a foundation for more advanced techniques.

The basic coaching points for basic *inside of the foot passing* , ***From the Nose to the Toes*** are:

1. Head down – eye on the ball
2. Plant non-kicking foot along side the ball
3. Pick a spot near the center of the ball, strike ball at, or slightly above, this spot. Properly struck (in this manner) the ball should turn away from the passer and towards the receiver
4. Follow through

Sounds simple right? Well lets break them down one by one and then suggest methods for teaching this technique.

First, head down...you always hear coaches tell the players to play with their head up right? And of course that is right in most situations. The “head up” component of passing precedes the actual execution of the skill.

In other words the player must already have his target picked out before he executes the pass. Why head down? Because your eyes cannot affect the flight of the ball. It is more important that you strike the ball correctly and that is done by eye-foot coordination. In the best case, and with a lot of practice, the head is down for only a split second. As the players get older, peripheral vision comes into play and only the eyes move.

Second.. the plant foot. Important because if you plant your foot behind the ball your kicking foot is coming up as you strike leading to undercutting the ball. Now in advanced passing that is *sometimes* what you want to do but when we're teaching the younger ages we just want the ball to travel in a straight line with some “weight” on it.

Third.. picking a spot on the ball. Again if you kick too low you'll undercut the ball, pick too high and you'll “top” it. With a lot of practice a child will automatically pick the sweet spot on the ball.

Last.. follow through. A common mistake made at the younger ages is the lack of a follow through...kick through the ball. They tend to jerk back as they strike the ball and consequently do not get a lot of power on the pass.

Teaching the Fundamental Skill of Passing

Have the players form two lines facing each other. One line goes down to their knees and holds the ball with both hands on the ground. The hands are safely together and **BEHIND** the ball. It is best if you demonstrate this technique before someone's fingers are accidentally kicked.

The kicking players are to strike the ball moderately hard, without trying to kick the ball out of their teammates hands.

Coaching Points

1. Break the skill into simple steps.
 - **Show where to strike the ball**
 - Show where to plant the non-kicking foot
 - Show the head down position (eyes-on-the-ball)

2. Make sure that the players take their time in “resetting” after each kick. It is more important that technique is perfected than they get done with the drill. A lot of the younger players view everything as a race or a contest.

3. *Listen* for the sound of a ball being struck correctly. This is a very overlooked cue in sports. A well struck ball in any sport has a distinct sound to it. It is a very good way to get feedback on how a player is doing and once they recognize it, it is a powerful motivational tool that does not require “outside” (i.e. you the coach) intervention.

4. Make sure that both the dominant foot and the **non-dominant foot** are used. As the skill is acquired, try spending twice as much time on the non-dominant foot in order to build it up.

Once the fundamental technique is acquired it is time to move on to actual passing. At this point coaches tend to amplify the lesson into both passing *and* receiving. As the players get older this is more and more appropriate since they have been exposed to both. In addition you really need to be able to do both to effectively work the passing skill but at the real young ages if you introduce a second skill you will dilute what you are trying to get across. In general, teaching one skill at a time is the better course of action **at the younger ages**.

In addition, and I cannot stress this enough, use of the non-dominant foot has to be stressed during each and every exercise.

Progression of the Passing Skill

Basic Passing Progression #1

Have the players form two lines about 10 yards apart facing each other. Each player in one line starts with the ball. Make sure there is adequate room between the players for errant passes. If you find that the distance between the lines is too great stop the drill and bring them closer together. The drill must be geared for success to build confidence.

Have the players begin passing to their partner. As with the static drill mentioned above watch for proper striking technique, proper foot placement, eye-foot coordination (head down) and follow through.

But now in addition to these coaching points you must look for:

- 1) Proper “*weight*” on the ball. Weight is the speed, spin and/or pace of the ball. Too little weight and the ball doesn’t reach the target....too much and it is difficult to Receive.
- 2) Accuracy. The plant foot is a big determiner of where the pass will go. Generally the pass will go where the plant foot toes point. You’ll see a lot of toes turning outward at the beginning. This should be corrected.
- 3) Stress that the player should not step back to kick the ball. A common error at the young ages is for the player to stop the ball, take one or two steps back and then pass it.

Again work both the dominant and non-dominant foot. Build success first with the dominant foot and then begin to work the non-dominant foot at a rate equal to twice that for the dominant one.

Basic Passing Progression #2 –The Triangle

The basic “shape” on the soccer field is the triangle. And the first basic tactical concept, which we will not go into in depth here, is the concept of *support*. In its simplest form the concept of support should find the ball carrier with players to his/her right and left giving him passing options. One coach I know used the approach of having the players “*draw his six-shooters*”, holding their hands out at approximately 45° from their bodies. The fingers of the *six-shooters* then point at the two support players.

The easiest way to start the support triangle is to set up cones as markers where the players should stand. Start with the ball at the apex (center) of the triangle. Have this player pass to the left and then receive the ball back. Then pass to the right and receive the ball back. After 10 repetitions change the center player and repeat.

Coaching Points

- 1) Watch for body position on the pass. The plant foot is still the biggest determiner of where the ball will go.
- 2) The receiving player should take the ball on the foot **opposite** the direction from which the pass is coming. (i.e. if the pass is coming from the left, the right foot receives, and vice versa.) This is called opening up to the field of play, another concept that we will go into in more depth later.

Basic Passing Progression #3 –One Touch Passing

Have the players form two lines about 10 yards apart facing each other. Each player in one line starts with the ball. Make sure there is adequate room between the players for errant passes. If you find that the distance between the lines is too great stop the drill and bring them closer together. The drill must be geared for success to build confidence.

Have the players begin passing to their partner. At the youngest age you may want to have the ball served by hand, i.e. have the ball rolled to the kicking partner who now has to one touch (or one time) the ball back to their partner who picks it and rolls it back.

Once everyone is comfortable with one-touch you can progress to having both partners kick the ball one touch to each other. Make a game of it. Have them count how many times they can keep the ball going without either missing. Progress to a game where on each successive kick the players take one step closer to each other until the ball is ricocheting back and forth at a rapid pace.

Below are some basic passing games you can have a lot of fun with your younger players while teaching the fundamental skill.