

Fundamentals of Receiving

As with passing, there are many different ways to Receive the ball in soccer. Some of them are basic and some more advanced. Receiving, **and then preparing the ball for the next action, is possibly the single most important skill in soccer.** So important that it has been given its own terminology, **the first touch.**

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

The coaching points for basic *foot receiving* , **From the Nose to the Toes** are:

1. Head up – make eye contact with the passer and “request” the ball
2. Knees flexed – be ready to move in any direction
3. Heel down – toe up
4. Play the ball outside of your “footprints”.
5. Soft touch – give a little as the ball hits the foot

Sounds simple right? Well lets break them down one by one and then suggest ways and means of teaching this technique.

First, head up...the opposite of what you do just before you pass. Requesting a pass, non-verbally, is an important and overlooked aspect of receiving the ball. Players at the young ages will probably shout for a pass to be sent to them. And that is all right when they are young, but as they progress the non verbal cues, eye contact, starting a run to space, etc. etc., become more important.

Second.. knees flexed...if the player stands rigidly, with the knees locked, in order to move after an errant pass he/she must first flex the knees and then move. This wastes valuable time and often results in the player not being in a good position to receive the ball. Remember, not every pass is going to be right on the money.

Third... heel down, toe up. This is a common mistake. Many young players will leave the foot flat on the ground. The result is that many balls will just run over the toes and keep going. Balls that take a slightly bad bounce will do the same. The pass in this case is received on the inside surface of the foot.

On very young players you can have them receive a pass with the heel down toe up on the **sole** of the foot. A common mistake here is that the player tries to step on the ball, timing exactly when the pass will move underneath their foot.

Obviously this requires a degree of eye – foot coordination that is not necessary if the child would simply plant the heel on the ground and raise the toe.

Fourth...Play the ball outside of your footprints. Have the players visualize where their footprints are as they prepare to Receive the ball. If you are working in a gym you can outline the footprints with athletic tape to illustrate the point. The training technique is to set the ball outside of where they are standing, i.e. outside of their footprints. A common mistake that young players make is to stop the ball dead at their feet. They then have to take a step or two backwards to get set to play the ball to the next player.

Last.. soft touch. Many young players are too rigid when the ball is played to them. Many even “attack” the ball. The result is that the ball bounces away and is lost. The foot has to give a little, moving back away from the direction the ball is coming, ball so that it can be set up for the next action, either another pass, a shot or some dribbling move.

With more advanced players you will see them actually lifting the foot and then bringing it down in a slight “slicing” motion to bring the ball to a standstill.

Teaching the Fundamental Skill of Receiving

Have the players form two lines facing each other, pairing up with a partner across from them. Assuming that basic passing has been taught, have each pair pass the ball back and forth.

Start out simple by using a sole of the foot Receive. Make sure that the non-dominant foot is used as well as the dominant one.

Progress to an inside of the foot Receive using first the dominant foot and then the non-dominant one.

Allow multiple touches on the ball to start, then progress to two touches and finally to one touch.

Basic Receiving Progression #1 –The Triangle

The basic shape on the soccer field, as was discussed in passing, is the triangle. Now we use the same passing progression to work the receiving skill. Here instead of the player at the apex being the distributor of the balls have the players pass around the triangle.

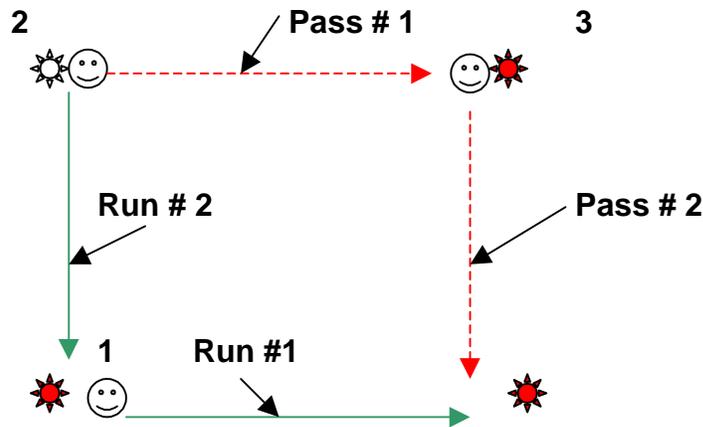
Initially all balls come from, lets say, the left. The receiving player Receives the ball on the inside of the right foot, i.e. plays the ball across their body and opens up to the field prepared to pass to the next player.

The direction is then reversed and the ball comes from the right. The receiving player then Receives the ball with the left foot and opens up to the field prepared to pass to the next player.

Remember to emphasize the points discussed previously, heel down – toe up, play the ball outside of your “footprints”, soft touch – give a little as the ball hits the foot.

Basic Receiving Progression # 2 – The Triangle with Movement

Set up a square grid with cone and place players at three of these cones. **Player # 2** starts with the ball. He initially has support to his right and left from **Players # 1 and # 3**. He now passes to **Player 3**. **Player 3** now only has support from **Player # 2**. **Player #1** therefore must recognize this and run to the unoccupied cone and re-establish support in two directions for the ball handler



So the basic idea is to pass and have the player *off the ball* react to the pass and provide support by running to the open space, in this case, the unoccupied cone.

Coaching Points

1. Since there is no pressure stress technical excellence
2. The *off the ball* player should be alert to make his run.
3. The passer should make eye contact with the player to whom he is passing. That not only alerts the receiver, but it cues the off the ball player to make his supporting run.
4. Passes should be received open to the field. For example, in the diagram above, if **Player # 3** received the ball from **Player #2** with his right foot, he would have to either play the ball across his body to **Player # 1**, (the *off the ball* player making his run), or two-touch it to his left foot, or play it back to **Player # 2**.

Effectively by playing the ball with the wrong foot he has limited his passing options. When there is no pressure, he will have time to adjust. However under pressure the extra second that it takes to adjust may mean the difference between a completed pass and a loss of possession.