

Fundamentals of Shooting

There are many different ways to shoot the ball in soccer. Like passing, some of them are basic and some more advanced. You can shoot with the instep, with the inside of the foot, the outside, and yes, even the toe. You can drive 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 shooting 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 *instep drive shooting* , ***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.
4. Knee of kicking leg is over the ball
5. Instep is “locked” Toe down and ankle flexed up in direction of calf
6. Approach is slightly from the side.. not dead on
7. Follow through

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

First, head down, just like in passing The “head up” component of shooting precedes the actual execution of the skill.

In other words the player must already have his target picked out before he executes the shot. 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 shooting 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.

Fourth.. the knee of the kicking leg is over the ball. This technique determines the correct body position. If the knee is forward of the ball (which rarely happens) the weight is too far forward and the ball is mis-kicked. If the knee is behind the ball, a far more common occurrence, the player tends to arch their back away from the ball. This results in too little power.

Fifth.. instep is locked. A wobbly foot leads to inaccurate and low power shots. Locking the instep (sometimes referred to as locking the ankle) is not a natural thing for the kids to do. You have to break this down into steps and be vigilant when they shoot. It is very easy to back slide after this technique is taught.

Sixth... approach from the side. The biggest fault in the instep drive is coming straight at the ball. This leads to toe kicking. At the younger ages toe kicking is quite common and natural. They will enjoy more success kicking with their toes than with their instep. They will seem to get more power on the ball. This is illusionary. It is a simple matter of physics. The more surface area applied to the ball (instep) all other things being equal, the more accurate and the more powerful will be the shot.

But the biggest reason not to let them toe kick is that it is a bad habit that is extremely difficult to break in later years. Teach them the right way now and there will be far less problems in the future.

By moving in slightly from the side you naturally tend to want to kick with the instep instead of the toe

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 Shooting

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 knee over the ball position
 - Show the ankle locked position
 - Show the approach from the side
 - 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.

Now its time to actually take some shots. The best place for you to view shooting technique is from the side. In that way you can see the knee placement over the ball , the ankle lock and the follow through.

In my opinion it is best if a player can take a multiple number of shots at one time, so this is a time when you want every spare ball that you have on the field. Break the players up into groups of shooters (1 per group) and retrievers (2 or more per group). Move from group to group and watch technique. Stress technique over power. Power comes with practice. Also with the younger set don't worry about hitting the corners. Get the shots on goal, corners will come later. Give them too many things to think about and nothing will happen.

Now of course very few goals are going to be scored when the ball is still, especially at the younger ages where penalty kicks and direct free kicks are uncommon so we need to move into drills where the player has to set the ball up, again outside their footprints, in order to make space for themselves to shoot.

At the real young ages you will find the kids setting up a shot by stopping the ball and then taking two steps back in order to run at it. That's the kind of stuff that we as coaches have to point out each and every time it happens so that this bad habit never gets a chance to form.

The second biggest "bad habit" that you'll see the younger ages have is not kicking with the non-dominant foot. They'll instead run around the ball to get in position to use their dominant foot. And of course they'll rarely have that kind of time in a game situation. Practice, practice, practice with the non-dominant foot, but most of all look for coaching opportunities to praise the use of the non-dominant foot even if the shot is flubbed.