

October 24, 2005

TECHNICAL NO 5. "HEADING"



Coaches:

As part of our continuing series for your coaching notebooks, the following represents the 5th of our technical topics: "**Heading**" (No. 7 Notebook).

ALL NOTEBOOKS ARE ONLINE!

Dribbling is our individual style. **Passing** makes us team players. **Receiving/Controlling** the ball with comfort is the essential skill of the game. **Shooting** is putting the ball in the net—the game's objective. **Heading** in soccer is unique among all sports.

CONTROVERSIES OVER HEADING

Since the late 1990s, numerous studies from here and abroad have addressed the issue of heading and possible brain injury. None of these studies has proven conclusive, and the USSF has distributed a review of the research on heading which shows heading to be safe for players if they practice proper technique (ussoccer.com).

You may also have seen ads for "Full 90" headbands. The firm initially tried scare tactics to sell their headgear. After being confronted with strong evidence to the contrary by the USSF, they pulled back and now advertise their headbands to protect against head-to-head, head-to-ground, and head-to-post injuries—all part of our game.

Heading a soccer ball is unique in team sports and an essential part of our game. Heading a soccer ball is not dangerous if coaches teach proper technique—the subject of this "Coaches' Notebook."

Essential Principles of Heading:

- Keep your eyes open (to follow the ball).

- ❑ **Keep your mouth closed (to avoid biting your tongue).**
- ❑ **Try to use your forehead—the strongest part of your head.**
- ❑ **Attack the ball. Don't let the ball play you.**
- ❑ **Establish your space. Jump before your opponent.**
- ❑ **Coaches: Don't focus a single practice on heading—intersperse it in your exercises.**

Why Head the Ball—Depends on Your Purpose

- ❑ **Heading to Pass. Glance ball off the side of your head to your teammate's feet or to space for them to run on to.**
- ❑ **Heading to Shoot on Goal. Either head down to goal or deflect (“redirect”) ball to goal. Shoot for the corners away from the keeper.**
- ❑ **Heading for Defensive Clearance. Often a strong header. Front of the head. Practice good tactical distribution to teammate.**
- ❑ **Back-Header to Teammate or to Clear a Cross/Corner. E.g., from a throw-in, back header to teammate down the wing. On a cross/corner, back header just to get the ball out of range of a charging opponent.**
- ❑ **Heading to Trap the Ball. Light touch, pull back, let ball drop at your feet.**

Coaches, I have outlined below a sample practice to work on heading for U10 players and up. Please don't focus an entire practice on heading. That's too much.

Other Tips:

- ❑ **Use soft balls. Take some air out of them.**
- ❑ **Practice heading with “nerf balls” to start if your players are at all apprehensive.**
- ❑ **Hang a ball over the goal post or tree limb so players can practice heading.**

Call with any questions.

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HEADING PRACTICE

Simple to Complex: U10 and Above Only!

Warmup

1. In 2s:

- **Soccer Volley Ball**: Use the side line. Players play soccer volley ball with heads.
- **Across field**: Server (jogging backward) throws ball to player's head. Player heads ball to server. Server collects ball with body, picks it up, and keeps serving headers to side line. Then switch.
- **Juggle with Head** (5 players). Keep count of consecutive headers.

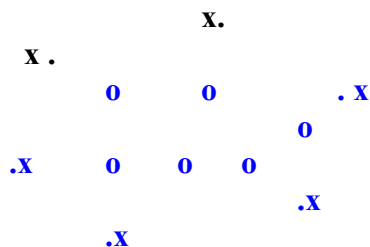
Technical

1. In 2s: Both players on their knees. Server throws ball to other player, who heads back to server. Use all principles of heading outlined above. Point of exercise: remove all concerns except pure heading.

2. In 3s—standing.

- Server throws ball to player who heads to clear, pass, or backheader. Keep switching. 3rd player receives passes or retrieves ball.
- Server throws ball to player who heads on goal (or between flags). 3rd player plays goalie or retrieves ball.
- Server throws ball over attacker's head to defender who makes contact and heads over the attacker (who does not go for ball).

3. "Windows"--

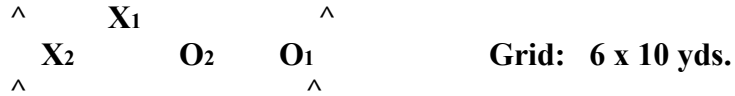


Os move around in large circle. Xs throw balls to Os for headers. Xs

call type of header (“back” for pass, clearance, head down for goal, back passes, and trap. Switch after 5-10 headers.

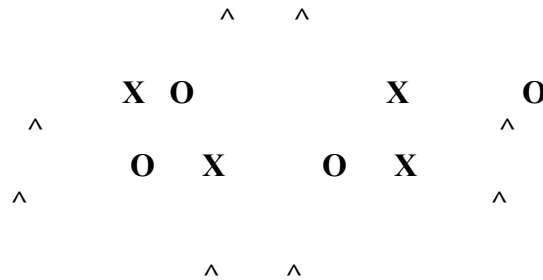
Small-Sided Games

1. 2 v 2



X₁ throws ball to teammate X₂—they proceed to head back and forth to the small goal. O₁ plays goal and O₂ challenges for ball. Switch after each try on goal. Keep score.

2. 4 v 4



Objective: Score in small goals. Also, 3 straight headers equals a goal.

Scrimmage

Move in Goals—35-40 yards apart.

1. Use “free (neutral) flankers”—coaches or players. Balls played to flanks cannot be challenged.

Flankers can cross the ball, punt the ball, or throw the ball for headers.

2. Play 7 v 7 to large goals w/Keepers (or last player back can be keeper).
Players can pick up any ball on the ground, take 3 steps maximum, and throw the ball to a teammate. Goals can only be scored from headers (or volley shots).

3. “Gaelic Football” (Irish game).
Players can either dribble a ball on the ground or pick it up. If picked up, players allowed 3 steps and then must “vertical dribble” (touch ball with foot from hands) or pass it to a teammate.

Passes are done with the base of the palm only—forward or back.