

Seven Steps to Perfect Ball Control

Good players can bring the ball under their control in an instant – no matter how it arrives to them.

A good first touch...

- ... gives a player TIME and SPACE to assess what to do next – ie pass, dribble or shoot
- ... ensures a time-wasting second touch isn't required to get the ball out of the feet
- ... enables players to operate comfortably under pressure and in tight situations

Whereas a poor first touch...

- ... can take the momentum out of attacking play
- ... might result in LOST POSSESSION

The two types of control

1. Cushion control – taking the 'sting' out of the ball by pulling back the controlling surface on impact. This has the effect of 'cushioning' or absorbing the pace of the ball so that it drops at the feet.

2. Wedge control – by making the controlling surface, say the sole or outside of the boot, more rigid, the ball is 'wedged' between it and the ground. This is used when a player wants to force the ball downwards or into space so they can move onto it.

The basics

- Move into position to intercept the ball early.
- Select the controlling surface early and place it in the ball's path.
- Stay balanced using the arms.
- Watch the ball carefully to judge its direction and speed.
- Keep the head steady.
- Be relaxed.

REMEMBER: GOOD SERVICE IS VITAL TO PRACTISING BALL CONTROL!

What can you control it with? Anything!

- **Inside of the foot** - Plant the supporting foot 45-90 degrees to the path of the ball. Control the ball with the arch of the free foot.
- **Outside of the foot** - Used when the ball is travelling across in front of the player. Just reach forward into the ball's path.
- **Sole of the foot** - Raise the toes slightly above the heel. Used in dribbling for stopping before changing direction.
- **Instep** - For when the ball's falling from a steep angle. Stretch the ankle and cushion with the 'laces' by bending the knee and ankle on contact.
- **Thigh** - Aim for about halfway up the top of the thigh, although the inside is good for stopping balls flying past.
- **Chest** - May involve arching the back slightly, bending the knees and even jumping.
- **Head** - Use the forehead, just below the hairline.

COACHES CORNER

Six Tips for a Great Training Session

1. Set a target for each player to get an absolute minimum of 300 touches each and try to achieve this in the first 20 minutes of the session.
2. Don't run drills which involve long lines of players standing around, chatting to each other, waiting for their turn to have one or two touches. Design practices that keep everyone involved all the time.
3. Make all of your practices as realistic as possible, insist that all of your practices simulate real match conditions.
4. Restrict practices to set periods of time or target scores (you do have a stop-watch don't you?) and don't let them run on for too long - 5 minutes is usually enough.
5. You might understand the practice and what it's meant to achieve - but do your players? Plan how you are going to communicate the practice before you get there. Is it easy to understand and communicate? If not, ditch it and do something else.
6. Avoid long practice games or scrimmages. A number of players will get considerably fewer touches than others. Keep it to 10 minutes maximum.
7. Make it fun for your players, for their parents (if you coach kids) and for you