

Foot Skills



Multiple Touches on the Ball

Probably the single most important thing a child can learn in soccer is to be comfortable with the ball at their feet. And the most effective way to establish and enhance that comfort is to give them multiple touches on the ball, i.e. increase their foot skills.

Foot skills should be the foundation of every practice session no matter how young or old the child is, because...

- Working on foot skills at the beginning of a practice session is a great way to warm up.
- Foot skills are easily adjusted to match the complexity of the skill and age you are coaching.
- There is always progression.
- You get multiple touches on the ball right away.
- Done at speed it can be a good aerobic training tool and is much more effective, overall, than running laps, or the like.
- As time passes, and mastery is achieved, the skill becomes instinctive and is used without thought in game situations.

It is like hitting a baseball, which a difficult overall skill to obtain. There are a lot of different muscular movements, which require coordination, involved in hitting a baseball. Bat position, stance, head (and therefore eye) position, bat movement, feet movement, hip movement, etc. etc. If a player had to think about all of them before the skill was performed, the child wouldn't be able to hit a beach ball. After sufficient repetition in practice, hitting a ball becomes so instinctive that a large percentage of the population under the age of 15 can actually do it.

The same can become true for our soccer players. Multiple touches on the ball builds confidence, muscle memory and coordination, which makes a first touch on the ball and appropriate reaction for confrontation with a defender instinctive.

Below are several ideas for multiple touches on the ball that can be part of your warm-up. Remember any skill can be broken down to an age appropriate level. However this list attempts to go from basic foot skills to more advanced. Most of the below skills can/should be performed with both feet (first strong, then weak foot).

1. Foundation (tick tocks – like a pendulum of a clock) – Fast movement of ball inside right to inside left and back again. Player is in a semi-sitting position and has to develop a rhythm with the ball. *Can begin with soft, slow touches for younger ages, progressing to the above.*
2. Inside-Out Roll (ankle rolls) – Place the outside of the right foot just off the top of the ball. Roll the foot over the ball keeping it in contact. The movement is left to right. The foot rotates so at the end of the stroke the inside of the foot is on the outside of the ball. Reverse the movement so that the outside of foot rolls over the ball right to left. The inside of the foot ends the stroke.
3. Pull Back to Instep – With sole of the right foot on top of ball roll ball back and trap with the instep of the right foot.
4. Pull Back to Inside of Foot – With sole of right foot on top of the ball, pull back to the LEFT instep. Alternate left sole to right instep. It is important that the non-receiving foot is not planted. Set up a rhythm.
5. Triangle (pull to instep, tick-tock, push back to start) - Pick a spot about 2 to 3 feet in front of your body. This is the point of a triangle. Your left and right feet are the other two corners. Start with the right foot. Put the sole of the right foot on top of the ball. Pull the ball back to the right inside foot and then immediately play the ball to the left inside. Serve the ball back with the left inside to the sole of the right foot at the point of the triangle. The idea is to keep the ball moving throughout this exercise.
6. Block Ball Inside-Inside and Change Direction – Ball in front of player. Player covers the ball with the inside of the right foot. Swiveling hips he plays the ball to the inside left and changes direction. Tap the ball out in front again and repeat.
7. Block Ball Outside-Inside Same Foot – This is slightly more advanced than number 6 (above). Push the ball out in front of the player. Player blocks ball with the outside of the right foot and plays it AWAY from pressure to the inside of the SAME foot
8. Brushes (rolling the ball) - Starting with the right foot player brushes the top of the ball across his body (i.e. right to left). The right foot ends up crossed over the left. The left foot moves behind the right to the opening position and the next brush takes place. Once a player gets the rhythm right he/she should be able to put 5 consecutive brushes together without the ball running away.
9. Brush Tap – The same basic movement as the brush but instead of making a second brush the player taps the ball to a halt with the inside of the other foot. i.e. if you are Brush-Tapping right, the right foot brushes and the left foot taps.
10. Tap- Tap – Brush – Start with the ball on the inside of either foot. Tap the ball to the inside of the opposite foot and then back again to the starting foot. The starting foot then brushes the ball to the opposite foot. The sequence is then re-started with the next tap. It is important to develop a rhythm and be on your toes for this skill.
11. Tap-Tap-Tap- Step Over Push Outside – Three (3) taps in this drill. After the third tap the opposite foot steps over the ball and pushes it to the outside with the outside portion of the foot. The skill is then repeated.

12. Step Across – Play Outside Away from Pressure – Push the ball out ahead. Stop it with the sole of the right foot, then immediately step past the ball with the same foot. Ball is now near the back (in this case, the left) foot and the right foot/leg is shielding the ball. Then lift the left leg over the ball and play it back with the outside of the foot.
13. Pull Back – Play Behind – Change Direction – Push the ball out front. Stop it with the sole of the right foot. Pull it back past the left ankle. Play it behind the left ankle with the inside of the right foot. Left outside receives the ball and moves off in a different direction. Tap the ball with the instep twice and then repeat using the left sole to stop the ball, pull it back, etc.
14. Inside-Outside – Dribble the ball with one foot alternating the inside of the foot with the outside. Use dominant foot first and then the less dominant foot. When single foot mastery is achieved use both feet going inside-outside-outside-inside.
15. Pull Across – Outside – Start with the right foot on top of the ball. Pull it across your body and then push it outside with the left. Stop the ball with the sole of the left foot and pull it back across your body then push it outside with your right foot.

Conventional wisdom indicates that a child has to perform a skill a minimum of 75 times before they actually begin to learn it. Mastery comes much later. That is why it is so important for the children to get multiple touches on the ball.

The above skills can be the Warm Up and FUNDAMENTALS portion of your dribbling foot skills practice session, or use parts as a warm-up for any practice session.

Games to Bolster Footskills

Other dribbling skills that can be incorporated into the match related phase of your practice session.

Red Light – Green Light

- For the very young, Under 6 the game of Red Light – Green Light is an easy game to learn and teaches the children to keep the ball close and under control. As in the game we played in our youth, one player is "IT". He stands at one end of the field with his/her back to the others and calls out red light, green light one, two, three and then turns around. The players meanwhile have been dribbling toward him/her and must stop, with their foot on top of the ball, when the player turns around. Anyone moving must go back to the beginning to try again.

North – South – East and West

- Players dribble where the coach tells them to, i.e. a direction as suggested in the title or you can make it a color or an animal, whatever. This again teaches the children to keep the ball close and, hopefully, shows them how to change a direction.

Draw

- This is a very popular game with the younger crowd. Place players in 2 lines facing each other. Place one soccer ball in the middle of the each two players. The object of the game is to **draw** the ball back using the sole of the foot. The command to "Draw" is given by the coach. The fun part is that the coach has to tell a story in which he uses the word "draw" to signal the players.
- For example: Willy and his sister were working on cleaning their rooms. Willy said "where should I put these socks? And his sister replied, "In your **Drawer**." Make up really silly stories.
- You can add progression to this drill by having the players jog in place, have the players only use the non-dominant foot, have the players move up a ladder if they win and down if they lose the round and see who can get to the top first

Bulldog

- For Under 8 teams, and even up to the Under 10 age groups, the game of **Bulldog** and **Shark** are long time favorites.
- Set up a rectangular grid with cones. It is helpful if you have sidelines. One player is in the center and is the bulldog. Everyone else is along an end line with a ball. The object is to get to the other end, in control of the ball. Don't let them just kick it and run after it. The bull dog has to knock the ball out of bounds. Whoever's ball goes out becomes a bull dog puppy and assists the bulldog in getting the remainder of the players. The last player in becomes the next bull dog.

Shark

- Shark is played in a rectangular grid. In version one everyone has a ball and is a shark. In version two one particular person is a shark and doesn't have a ball while everyone else does.
- The object in both games is to dribble in a confined area, keep the head up, be aware of other players, and shield the ball from pressure. Of course you don't have to tell them all that, they'll just think it is fun.

- The object in version one is to knock everyone else's ball out of the grid. (Players who are knocked out should do a particular skill on the sideline, such as "foundation" or tap-tap-brush instead of just sitting and watching). Last player in wins.
- In version two, one player is the shark and goes after every other player until only one person with a ball remains.

Freeze Tag

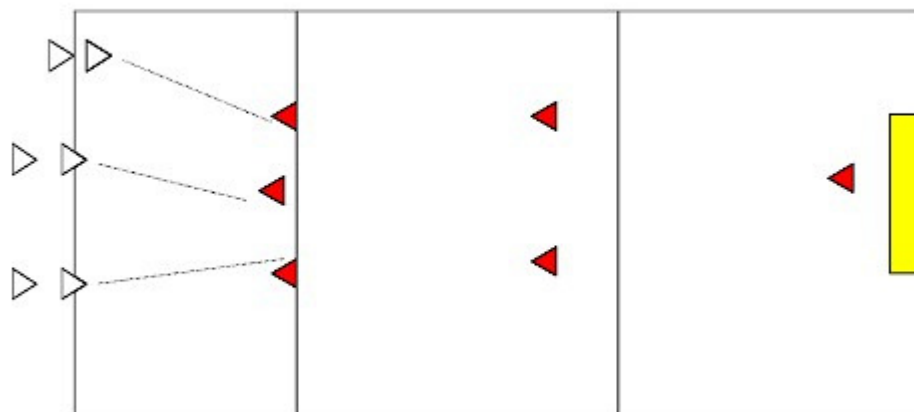
- Freeze tag is played in a rectangular grid. One person (or two if you like) is (are) IT. All players must dribble and stay in control of their ball. If they lose it out of bounds they must freeze in place. If the IT player tags them with their ball they are also frozen.
- Teammates of the freezees can unfreeze them by passing their ball between legs and picking it up on the other side.
- Change the IT often.

Four Corners

- Set up a grid field with a square in each corner. This square is the goal.
- Have players aligned along the sideline with a ball at their feet.
- Call out two names and throw a ball into the field. Players have to dribble the ball into any one of the four goals, under control, and stop the ball within the square with the sole of their foot. Let the players play for 60 seconds at a time.
- If the ball goes out of bounds call a player quickly to put their ball into play. Encourage quick changes of direction and make them aware that there are goals at both ends of the field. This should encourage them to pull the ball back out of trouble and head in a different direction rather than just hammering the ball one way.
- As the players get better you can move on to War.

War

WAR



The Game

1. Dribblers' (light triangles) try to dribble through the three zones occupied by the dark triangle defenders.

2 Defenders must stay in their zones, and try to kick any ball that is dribbled through out of bounds.

3. Dribblers' go three at a time. If the dribbler ahead of you in your line gets their ball knocked out, the next dribbler in line may go right away.

4. As soon as the 'dribbler' in front of you leaves the zone, the next 'dribbler' can also go.

5. After beating the last defender, the 'dribbler' must shoot the ball into the goal to get a point for their team.

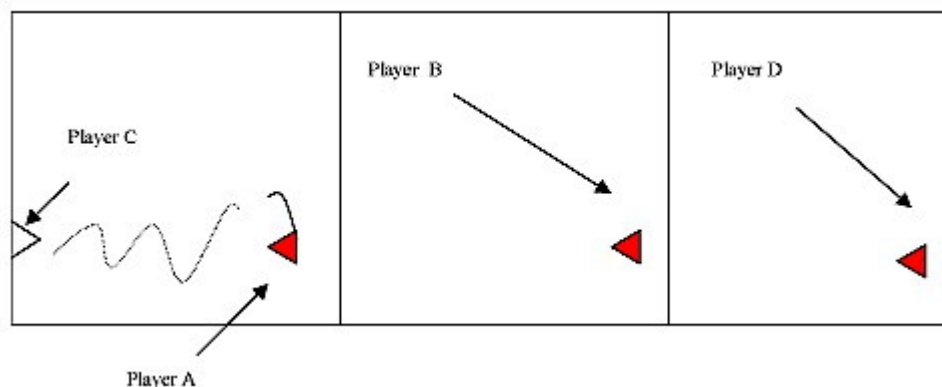
Coaching Points

- Good dribbling technique.
- Look for an opening... perhaps sending a teammate in early to act as a decoy, then when the defense opens up take that clue to penetrate.

Variations on the Game

- Put a 'FREE ZONE' between each zone shown. The free zone can be 5 yds. wide.
- Once the dribbler gets in the free zone, they can rest before they take on the next defender.
- You can also have people that make it into the free zone, leave their ball and assist the next person to try to get past the defender by passing.

1 v. 1 v. 1



The Game

- Player "C" starts on the endline and dribbles into Zone 1, trying to get past Defender "A".
- If "A" steals the ball, "A" tries to dribble past "C" and over the end line.
- If "C" manages to get past "A", "C" continues through Zone 2 and tries to beat "B" over the end line.

- If "B" steals the ball, he takes on Player "A" who has been waiting in Zone 1.
- If Player C beats player B he then takes on Player D. If player D wins he reverses field, takes on, player C. If he beats Player C he then takes on B, etc. etc.

Coaching Points of 1 v 1 v 1

- Individual Attack and Defense
- Attack: Try to unbalance defender, attack at pace, try to face the defender as much as possible, change pace and direction.
- Defense: Try to channel the attacker towards the sideline, use sideline as a second defender.

Variations of 1 v 1 v 1

- Allow defender "A" to chase "C" into Zone 2 if beaten. "C" must then hold "A" off while at the same time moving towards player "B". This also makes "C" not give up on the ball after being beaten.
- Start off with the defender as a **passive player**, then let the defender become semi-active, then fully active.

"GET EM"

- Here is a game which involves both passing and dribbling that is fun and engages players quickly. Also, although primarily an individual exercise that allows for differences in ability level, if the players are ready, it can quickly become a cooperative game where players work together to solve a challenge.

The Game

- Each player will need a ball. Player 'A' is "It" and is the only player to start with a ball. All the other players around the outside of the grided space.
- Player 'A' dribbles and tries to hit the other players below the waist with the ball. When hit, that player gets a ball and joins player 'A'.
- The game is over when all of the players have been caught.
- The last player caught is "It" and starts with the ball for the next game.
- If you think the task will be too difficult for the one player to get another at the start of the game, start with 2 players being "It".

Coaching Points of Get-Em

- Encourage quick movements and sudden changes of direction to catch players off guard.
- Players not caught should run, jump, and use zig-zag movements.
- A variation can be added by having all players play with a ball.

RUNNING BASES

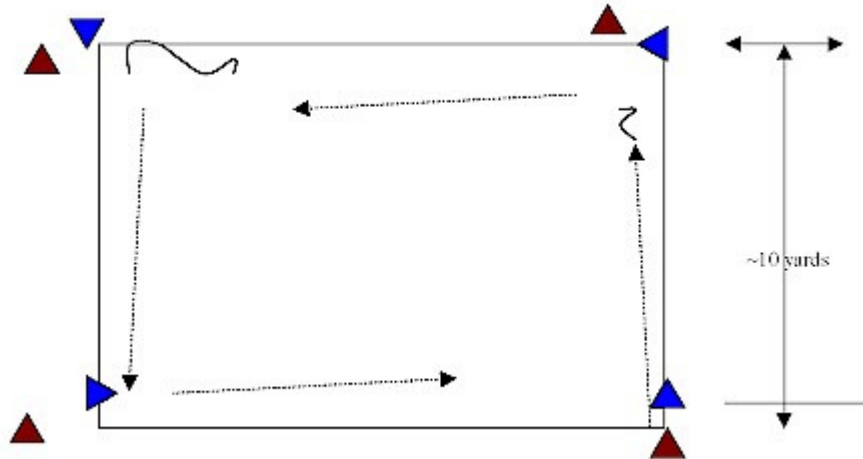
- Here is another game that emphasizes dribbling that is fun and challenging for players. Again, primarily it is an individual game that could lend itself to small group cooperation if the players are ready.

The Game

- Each player will need a ball, except those that have been designated as "It".
- Players that are "It" need to carry a colored pennie or flag in their hand.
- Players with a ball try to dribble without being tagged. If they are, they exchange places with the "tagger" (The "tagger" hands the pennie to the dribbler and takes their ball).
- Dribblers are safe in one of the designated bases. Only one player is allowed in a base at a time. if a new player enters a base, the old player must leave the base.
- Add "taggers" when the players find the game to be easy.
- It seems about right to have one base for every 3 players, but, this number can be adjusted either way to make the game constantly interesting.
- This game can also be played by only allowing the "tagger" to "get" someone by kicking their ball away, not just "tagging" the person. (a variation on Shark)
- Experiment with different combinations of "taggers" and bases to keep the players engaged.

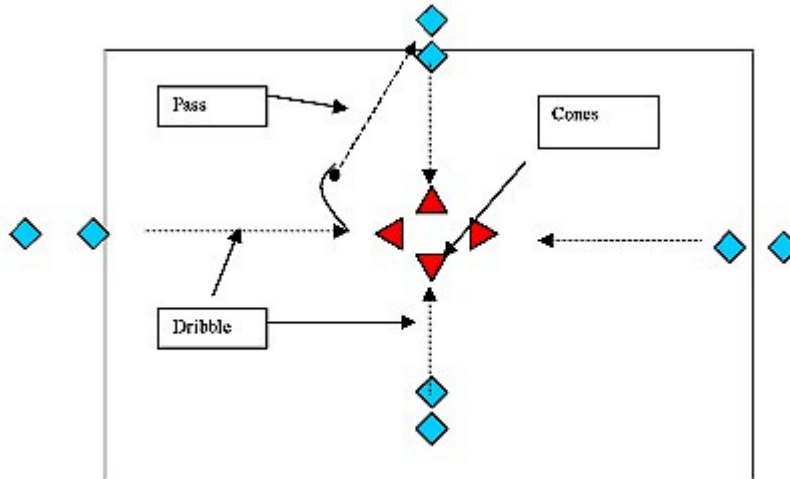
More Advanced Foot Skill Activities

- An example of a more advanced foot skill drill is shown below. This type of drill is good for the second phase of any practice warm up.
- Place your players in groups of four. Drill number 1 has four players on the inside of a grid of cones about ten yards apart and a second group on the outside of the grid.



- Players on the inside of the grid have a ball. Players on the outside are doing static stretching. This is a high intensity drill for the players on the inside. It is important to have the correct work-rest intervals, hence the players on the outside, spelling the players on the inside.
- Each inside player dribbles towards a cone ahead of them and at the cone executes a move pre-determined by the coach. Start it off simple, make the first round a move such as brush (left or right).
- Have the player then accelerate to the next cone and execute the same move. When the inside player gets to their starting position have the outside player take his/her place and do the same series of moves.
- This type of warm-up can use a progression just like any other aspect of practice:
- An example progression could be:
 - Brush
 - Brush Tap
 - Tap-Tap-Brush
 - Pull a vee and accelerate at right angles
 - Pull the ball back – sweep behind and accelerate to the next cone by pushing the ball ahead with the outside of the plant (non-sweeping) foot.

Another easy warm up drill is Pinwheel. Have four lines facing a set of cones located in the center.



Players all dribble towards the center cones. As they reach the cones they pull a move towards the left. (Important that all players move in the same direction or collisions will occur.). After the move has been performed the player passes the ball to the next player *in the line to their left*.

This is also a drill where you can use progression of moves from easier to more difficult. One of the types of moves that can really be worked here are ones that use the outside of the foot. A simple one is to stop the ball with the sole and then pull it back out of danger by turning the foot over the ball, swiveling the hips and using the outside of the foot to move to the left (or right) and *AWAY* from pressure, in this case a set of cones.

Still More Advanced Foot Skills

Here are some more advanced skills the kids can work on. When demonstrating these moves break them down into component steps. It is a good idea with the younger ages if you could have several older travel players at your practice to help demonstrate the first time.

Scissors

For illustration purposes we'll call the right foot the scissor foot and the left foot the plant foot. The move can of course also be done in the opposite direction. Using the left foot, lift foot toward the left (plant) foot. The motion of the moving the right foot is behind the ball. Continue a circular motion with the right foot over the top of the ball and out to the side. The whole body is leaning to the right "*selling*" the move to the defender. Shift weight from left to the right. Bring the originally planted foot (left) towards the now planted foot (right) it. Explode away with outside of left foot with an outside of foot push.

The move "sells" the move to the ball carrier's right and then moves quickly in the opposite direction.

Double Scissors

After shifting weight to the right on first scissors, the left foot executes a 2nd scissors shifting weight back to the left foot. The right foot then follows the left and the explosive move, with the outside of the right foot is now to the right.

This move is intended to get the defender moving first one way, and then after he/she sees the original fake, to move in a second direction, which is also a fake.

Scissors Brush (or Scissors – Drag)

This is a combination move which utilizes the previously learned brush move in conjunction with a scissors. After shifting weight on scissors, drag ball with inside of standing foot across the body.

This move can be used when the defender does not "*buy*" the first scissor fake. If the opening is to the ball carriers right, (defender's left), then the move is continued to the right by brushing the top of the ball and then accelerating to space.

Scissors Drag Turn

After **scissors brush**, bring foot which is dragging the ball around the back of the ball and explode in opposite direction with outside of this same foot

Scissors Roll Drag Turn

After shifting weight on scissors, drag ball with sole of standing foot making the ball roll and with outside of this same foot change directions and explode away with outside of the same foot.

Cruyff

The Cruyff terminology is slightly different than the Scissor. In the Cruyff we have a faking foot and a plant foot.

The Cruyff begins with a fake cross pass. After the fake touch behind the plant leg with the inside of the faking foot. The weight is now shifted from the plant leg to the faking foot. Turn toward the plant foot and then explode with instep of plant foot in any direction depending upon the placement of the defender.

The first time the children try this they should play the ball back and away from pressure. This is a great cover move. It is also a great simple move on the wing and when dribbling laterally across the field.

Stepover Turn (Step Over Right – Turn Right)

Fake an instep kick or inside of the foot kick. Then continue moving the foot around the front of the ball to the other side and back several inches. Flex knee (step down) and shift weight to this foot. Turn body back toward the ball and explode with other originally plant foot using inside of foot or instep (shoe laces area); great move on the wings or when pinned into a tight space.

Rivolino

This move is similar to a scissor and is sometimes confused with it. In this move the faking foot moves across in front of the ball, *brushing the grass*. It then crosses over the pant leg so, if stopped at this point, you have made an "X" with your legs. The faking foot is then planted.

At this point you have several options. You can cover the ball with the inside of the original plant foot and play the ball back away from pressure. You can bring it back across in front of the new plant foot and do a brush in the opposite direction. You can combine a move by playing the ball back and then instep driving in the opposite direction. There are a lot of other possibilities.

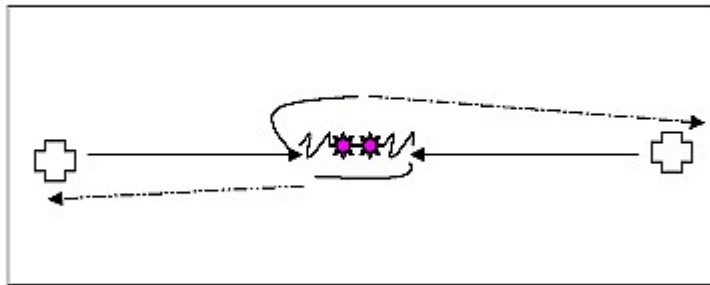
One of the easiest ways to get the players working on these drills is to do the following:

Two players face each other, each with a ball.

Coach calls out the move he wants the players to perform

Players drive, under control, towards the center cones as shown.

Pull move at center cone **AND MAKE SURE** both players move past cone in the same direction. (either both to *their* right, or to *their* left)



Match Related Work

After working against a static defender, again in this case cones, it is time to move on to more pressure, i.e. a living, breathing and moving defender.

Select a set of players to act as defenders and give them pennies to distinguish them from the ball handlers. The defenders are very passive to start. Have them just get in the players vision but not try to steal the ball. After a while turn up the pressure a little by letting the defenders tap away balls that come out of the ball handlers control. Don't let them steal it yet. The third level of progression is to let the defenders go full out and attempt to tackle.

Make sure you praise good moves by the offense. It is challenging to attempt to do some of these moves at full speed and you must build success and confidence in order to get them to make these attempts in a game situation.

Match Condition Games

After completing your match related phase it is time to move on to a match condition. A match condition normally allows for even sides, 3 on 3 etc. However if you want to make a coaching point, say let the dribblers experience success, you might want to slant the sides to 3 on 2 or even 3 on 1.

The key is that the match condition must emphasize the skill that you have been teaching, in this case dribbling and foot skills.

For example you could make a condition of scoring the fact that the player has to dribble through the goal.

You could make a condition where the player has to perform a move that you yell out every time a 1 v 1 situation occurs.

There are infinite varieties of match type games. Use 2 balls and four goals located at the corners of the field. Use your imagination.