

Soccer



Soccer is different from all other SO sports as it combines equally physical abilities, technical skills and team tactics. Other sports such as basketball have high basic skill requirements while track events require endurance and fewer skills. Soccer requires endurance, speed and agility as much as ball skills and team strategies. Coaching soccer is a mixture of skill development, fitness training and game strategies that must be executed together in order to be successful.

A top generic soccer player can run ten km per game. This is necessary for players to be a part of every aspect of the game as balls move from one end of the field to the other. SO players run far less than generic players as they compete on a much smaller field (approximately 1/3 size), but the ability to be part of every facet of the game is an important success factor for them too. When taking active part in a game, SO players will run and walk one to three km. It is easy to observe that many SO players make limited contributions in a game, stay behind on defense (or offense), and can't run the required distance to be part of the action. Other SO players have more speed and endurance and dominate the play, they are covering a lot of distance per game and are the "stars" of their teams. Basic SO soccer expectations must include the ability to run a minimum of two km to take active part in games.

SO soccer requires the same basic skills as generic soccer players:

- Dribbling (looking up at the play)
- Running with the ball
- Passing and Receiving (both legs with control)
- Striking (both legs including crosses)
- Goaltending (blocks, catch, passing and kicks)

SO soccer skill level varies a lot. Some teams have a relatively strong ability to move the ball and strike while others have a low skill level. Soccer can be enjoyed even with low skill levels as the game can be unpredictable and players can somewhat participate when the ball is in their general area. Time with the ball is an important element. It is often tracked in generic teams and is an

Changing Expectations in Special Olympics

indication of skills such as passing and control and team tactics. Teams with over 65% ball possession are often dominating games. Ball possession in SO soccer almost does not exist unless a better team plays a lower skilled one. When two comparable teams play, time with the ball is very low as teams lose possession quickly. In many occurrences, players look down at the ball and can't find the proper course of action quickly enough before an opposing player is there to challenge for the ball. Skill development is necessary to increase time of possession, create scoring opportunities, and develop better team strategies.

With only six players on the field (excluding the goaltender), all successful SO soccer programs have relatively good team skills and work on offensive and defensive strategies during training and games. We have observed that team strategies made the difference between winning and losing in many SO tournaments. Most SO coaches spend their practices working on skill development, running agility, speed and endurance drills and play game scrimmages for the rest of practice. This seems like a logical thing to do, however because almost all SO programs have the same approach, the successful SO programs are the ones that spend time understanding what strengths and weaknesses their team and their opponents have. They include offensive and defensive strategies in their training. In general, successful SO soccer teams are not the ones with the best skills, but the one with fastest and fittest players in a good team strategy environment.

SO soccer development must address all three aspects of the game, physical, individual skills and team play. The 20-hour program is aimed at soccer basic skill acquisition, Club Fit and soccer practices addresses physical abilities such as agility, speed, strength and flexibility. Team play must be part of every practice.

Basic soccer skills are listed in the basic skill section (next page). These sheets can be used as a guide, and when all skills are marked "yes", players are ready for more advanced team and individual skills.

Guidelines for using the skill sheet for soccer

1. Playing soccer require good endurance. The first basic skill is to be able to run 2.5 km.
2. When this is done (it can take more than 20 hours and can be done at home) start on dribbling skills.
3. Follow each step of the skill sheet (one at a time) until all basic skills are acquired. Progress will be directly related to the amount of focused practice time.

Soccer Basic Skills

Basic Skill: Part of the Game **YES** **NO** **Comments**
 Sub Skills

Running 2 km

Basic Skill: Dribbling (Looking up) **YES** **NO** **Comments**
 Sub Skills

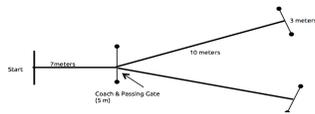
5-cone slalom (2m apart)
 back and forth in 30 sec.
 No cone turned over
 Looking forward at the cones (not at the ball)

Basic Skills: Passing and receiving **YES** **NO** **Comments**
 Sub Skills

Passing (left leg) 10m 10/10

Passing (right leg) 10m 10/10

Control and Pass 6/10

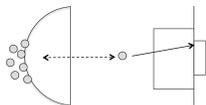


Header 5m target from coach
 Throws 5/10

Basic Skill: Striking **YES** **NO** **Comments**
 Sub Skills

From outside penalty area
 Striking low 9/10

Striking raised 5/10



**When athletes achieve all “YES”, they have acquired basic skills.
 Expectations are critical to skill acquisition.**

20-hour acquisition

Skill Breakdown: Examples of priority elements to focus on during practice

Spend time on each one until acquired

1. Passing and Receiving: Inside foot – 90 ° to direction – Both legs – Eye on the ball – Body in pass direction – Follow through – Receiving – First touch concept – Eye on the ball – Keep ball moving – Next move anticipation
2. Striking (50% accuracy): Ball distance to body – Shot direction – Non-kicking foot placement – Arms – Back leg swing – Body angle and position – Ball placement on the foot – Follow through



3. Ball skills:

Throw in: Grip – Arm – Body action

Dribbling: Small steps – Eyes up - Foot contact – Both leg

Body control: Chest – Thigh - Head

4. Team Skills: Offense – Defense – Set plays – Give and go

The key is to practice one skill at a time, don't worry about perfect passing/receiving or strikes, practice as much as possible with focus on one skill at a time.



Home soccer training

Passing and receiving, dribbling, throw-ins and striking are possible to practice at home. Start with passing and receiving with a parent or using a wall just like in the picture above.

Running three times per week (two km) is an important part of basic soccer playing to be part of plays and must be done at home.

Home passing/receiving Practice example (20 minutes)

20 pass on right (aim for a mark on the wall)

20 pass on left

Repeat 3 times on both feet

5 minutes break

20 pass on the wall and receive back on same foot (stop between each try and change leg)

20 pass on the wall and receive back on the other foot (stop in between each try and kick back with the foot that just received the ball)

Repeat this practice as often as you can. The goal is to pass and receive with both legs.

Similar type of practice can be done for striking, dribbling and throw in.

SO Soccer practice example: (1 hour and 30 minutes)

Focus SO skill training (Passing/Receiving) and Team Play

Warm Up 10 minutes (run, stretching)

Teaching Skills 30 minutes

(SO athletes are visual learners, always use a demonstration and generic players if possible, slow down demonstrations when introducing a new skill, use hands to guide movements when necessary)

Pass/Receive: (left and right) (repeat 3 - 5 times)

1. Pass and receive with 2 players (non-moving)
2. Pass and receive with 2 players moving

3. Triangle pass
4. 4 corners pass drill
5. Relays pass and receive

Soccer training 15 minutes

Speed: reaction sprints (5 x 8")

Agility: Touch cones and back (coach say which one)

Team Play 20 minutes

Offense: Set plays, long passes

Defense: Shutting down top players, offense support to defense

Game scrimmage 10 minutes (practice all skills)

Cool down 5 minutes

Conclusion:

Although skill acquisition is important in SO soccer, it must be balanced with physical training (to be part of the game) and with team tactics. Generic soccer elements such as time of possession are dependent on players' skills, and these skills belong more in advanced expert levels than in current basic SO programs. There is a definite advantage in SO soccer to be fast and strong and play team strategies. When a program is successful, strong team tactics matches players' physical skills.

It is important to keep in mind that SO soccer is different than generic soccer. Using the soccer skill sheet is an excellent way to learn basic soccer skills and encourage athletes to practice often. Many skills can be practiced at home, and the more time spent on focused training, the better each SO athlete will become.

Club Fit sessions are of assistance to develop strength, flexibility and speed. This can free up more time on the field for skill acquisition and team play. Home practices and training of individual skills should also be considered and repetitions are key to skill acquisition. Running two km is a basic soccer requirement to remain part of play, and running at home two km, three times per week is the best way to develop this ability.

Using practices to demonstrate correct skills and work on team play will always be required to develop SO players. We would even suggest adding generic players to practices (and exhibition games) to provide better technical, physical and strategy examples.

Lesson Plan
Basic Skill Acquisition Program
(weekly or monthly)

Sport _____ Athlete Name: _____

Program Expectations

1- Weekly Practice (attend all practices)

Day (S) _____ Time _____

Location _____

“What the group is working on”:

2- Club Fit 100% attendance (Including Functional Testing exercises)

Day _____ Time _____

Location _____

“What you need to concentrate on”:

3- Basic Skill Development Homework (4 times per week - 1 hour per day)

Skill _____

“Individual Home Practice Objectives”