

General Points To Consider For Ball Control by Willie Conlon (Shamrock Rovers FC)

Players must understand that ball control is not a means in itself, but a means to an end. At the end of each control a player will have four options to act on:

- Most often the player will control to pass the ball.
- In the attacking third players will control to set up shots.
- The player may control the ball to dribble.
- The player may control to run with the ball.

With this in mind, the player should decide as the ball is in flight what he intends to do after controlling the ball, is he going to pass, shoot, dribble or run with the ball. The quality of the player's first touch on the ball will often determine the quality of the action that follows.

Many coaches instruct players to "trap the ball" before passing it. The word "trap" suggests stopping the ball. Young players get into a bad habit of trapping the ball using the sole of the foot every time the ball comes to them. Coaching players to trap or stop the ball with the sole of the foot can cause many bad habits for the player and limit the techniques he can use immediately after his first touch on the ball.



'Mr Woo', who is widely acknowledged as the world's greatest football entertainer, can juggle the ball with his head, shoulders, chest, knees and, of course, feet. He is also a Guinness World Records holder after bouncing the ball on his head for five hours, six minutes and 30 seconds

The following are bad habits as a result of "trapping the ball" with the sole of the foot:

As the ball travels towards the foot, the head will drop and eyes will be fixed on the ball. The player at this point cannot see his passing options. In the attacking third, the player will not be able to see the position of the goalkeeper if his head is down, thus limiting his shooting options.

If the ball is controlled with the sole of the foot on the first touch, the position of the ball will be too close to the player's body for the player to pass over a long distance. There needs to be a distance between the player and the ball for the player to strike the ball over a long distance. In the attacking third, the player cannot afford to stop the ball with the sole of the foot. The player needs to set up shooting opportunities as soon as possible. If the ball is controlled with the sole of the foot, it will limit the player's ability to shoot over a long distance. Trapping the ball with the sole of the foot will also effect the time in which a player makes decisions. The player will take one second to trap the ball, another second to push the ball out from the body and yet a third second before the player considers the option of whether to pass, dribble, shoot or run with the ball. During this period the nearest opponent will be closing down the ball and looking to dispossess the player.

Coaches should encourage players to use their first touch on the ball economically and effectively. As opposed to trapping the ball with the sole of the foot, players should look to play their first touch out of their body and into a position that will allow them to perform a variety of techniques on their second touch. In general, right footed players should look to play their first touch approximately one and a half yards in front and to the right side at a 45 degree angle (left footed players to the left side). By playing the ball out and in front of the body on the first touch, the player will improve in the following:

Better all round vision as eye's follow ball out and up and not focused down at the feet.

- Can immediately evaluate passing and shooting options.
- Can pass the ball over a long range.
- Can shoot the ball over a long range.
- Less chance of being caught in possession of the ball due to improved vision.

During the course of a game it is not always possible to play the ball in the perfect position. However, it is surprising to note that on numerous occasions when players control the ball, they neglect to consider what they are controlling for, to pass, to shoot, to dribble or to run with the ball.

Players should play their first touch out and in front at a 45 degree angle.

There are four main controlling surfaces of the body, these are:

- 1.The head
- 2.The chest
- 3.The thighs
- 4.The feet

There are two types of ball control. These are the cushion control and the wedge control. Both of these can be performed on the head, chest, thighs or feet. The main differences between the cushion and the wedge control are:

The Cushion Control:

A player will normally select to use the cushion control when time and space are available. On making contact with the ball, the player will immediately withdraw the controlling surface of the head, chest, thigh or feet. This will take away from the power of the ball and act as a cushioning effect. The muscles in the body should be relaxed, thus making them soft for better surface to cushion the ball.

The Wedge Control:

A player should select the wedge control when time and space is limited. On making contact with the ball, the player will immediately push out and redirect the ball using the head, chest, thighs or feet. The muscles in the controlling surface should be tense and hard, thus making a better surface for the ball to redirect from.

Note: When teaching ball control to very young players it is advisable to make sure that the footballs are not too hard. It is recommended that a little air be taken out of the ball, to make the ball softer and easier to control. Young players will be less reluctant to control a soft ball than a hard ball. Try to use hand stitched ball and not plastic molded balls. Plastic balls are very difficult to control, especially on the chest, head and thigh.