

# Striking the Ball

Kicking is a fundamental and versatile technique used for passing, shooting and clearing. True soccer players refer to it as striking the ball because it sounds more controlled.

## How to strike the ball

There are two general types of kicks based on the position of the ball, ground kicks and volleys.

### Ground kicks

On ground strikes, the placement of the supporting leg is just as important as the kicking leg. In order to produce a quality kick you'll need balance. The right way to keep your balance is to plant your supporting foot in line with the ball. By stepping slightly behind, you will produce a rising ball. Most young players who are not taught properly, are not aware of keeping the supporting foot in line with the ball. They always loft the ball when trying to kicking harder.

In order to get the maximum power from a strike, the knee of your kicking leg has to be above or in line with the ball at the exact moment you make contact.

The follow-through is the sweeping motion of your kicking leg after you've contacted the ball. Usually, you must follow-through in the direction of your aim. If you have trouble understanding this concept, try landing on your kicking foot after you have struck the ball.



### Volleys

When striking the ball in the air, proper balance is essential. Therefore, you have to adjust to the flight of the ball by quick changes in your footing. You are ready to swing, only after you have positioned yourself in right spot. You should not attempt a volley, if you feel that you are reaching too far or when the ball is too close and that impairs your swing.

Some situations may require jumping and volleying. You must time your leap, just as if you were taking a header.



## How to practice kicking

The best way to practice your technique is against a keeper (or a friend) who consistently serves the ball back. If that is rarely an option for you, a smooth wall that is at least 2 meters high and 5 meters wide is a nice replacement. Beginners should work with still balls (meaning they must trap the ball as it comes back) while advanced players can strike it while in motion. At first, you must concentrate on your technique, and progressively move towards accuracy of placement. Adding power should be the final step of your kicking workout. Various challenges are also applicable, such as aiming at a target on the wall or dribbling (in random directions) before you kick. Such exercises must be repeated consistently because they improve all aspects of your game which include kicking - passing, finishing, clearing and so on.

Practicing volleys is slightly more of a hassle if you don't have a workout buddy, but it can be done. Simply toss the ball (or kick it) upward and strike it using a composed technique as it comes down. A friend can be very useful when you're working on air kicks. He can throw the ball at your feet while you try to kick it back in his hands.

# Different methods of striking the ball

## *Inside of the foot*

Put your supporting foot about 10 cm to the side of the ball with your toes pointing in direction of the target. With your ankle locked at about 90 degrees, bring your kicking leg back and swing through the equator of the ball. Your kicking ankle must be perpendicular to your supporting foot. Contact the ball with the arch of your foot and follow-through in the direction of your target. When well executed, the ball will roll smoothly rather than bounce along the ground.



## *Outside of the foot*

When planting your supporting foot next to the ball, your toes have to be directed about 15-30 degrees outward from your target. This will let you drive straight at your target, hitting the ball with the outside of your laces.



## *Instep drive*

Place your supporting foot in line with the ball with toes aimed at your target. Bring your kicking foot as far back as you can, in order to get the longest possible swing. When you swing, accelerate your foot forward as if you're kicking through the ball. The toes and ankle of your kicking foot should be stretched and locked (similarly to a ballet dancer.) To keep the shot low, meet the ball at the equator or above it. Strike the ball with the inside of your shoelaces and follow through in the direction of your target.



## *Inside curve*

Position your supporting foot to the side of the ball with toes aimed at your target or slightly to the side of it, depending on the direction of your desired curve. To gain power, retrieve your kicking leg back, but not too much or you'll lose accuracy. Swing forward with your kicking foot and meet the ball with the upper part of your big toe. "Slice" the ball not in the center but low on the outside, so that a spin will be produced. Follow through in the direction of your swing (not directly towards the target.)



## *Outside curve*

If you're kicking the ball with your right foot put your supporting foot on the left side of the ball or vice versa. The toes of your supporting foot should be aimed at your target or slightly turned to the direction of the curve. Bring your kicking foot as far back as possible and swing forward aiming for the inward side of the ball. Again, if you're kicking with your left foot, then aim for the right side of the ball (the one closer to the supporting foot.) Use the area of your foot around the outside of the shoelaces down to the pinky-toe. Remember to follow-through in the direction of the swing.

## *Chip*

Your supporting foot should be planted next to the ball with toes pointed at the target. Quickly swing your kicking foot back and then forward without moving the thigh. Sharply cut the ball from the bottom with the tip of your toes. This will produce a lofted ball that is spinning vertically.



## *Volley*

The volley is a kick used when the ball is above ground. In terms of technique, it follows the same principles as the instep drive. Producing a good volley is largely determined by your timing. Concentrate on when to swing rather than where to contact the ball or trying to strike it really hard. If you hit the ball at the right time, it will have enough power and you'll get more control over its direction. Do not lean backward when you use this technique because that will loft the ball. Make small adjustments in your footing so that you have good balance before you actually swing.

