

## First Touch

Two words heard so often when discussing players, especially at the advanced levels. How is his/her first touch on the ball?

It's such an important part of the game. Isn't the essence of this wonderful game the relationship of the player to the ball? It is the simplest form, and truly the "magic" of the game.

In a 90-minute match, a player will only touch the ball about three minutes. Those three minutes must be productive. Coaches should explain to players just how important it is to have "soft feet," to bring the ball under control as quickly as possible and to put where they need it in order to make the next play.

And teach them that "space equals time." A clean first touch -- touching the ball into an open space -- will indeed provide the player with more time. Coaches should provide their players with concrete examples of why "time" is critical. Show them how play is more deliberate, precise and productive when a player has space and the time to deliver the ball accurately. Technically, there are six areas to teach:

1. Move into the path of the ball as quickly as possible. Learn how to receive the ball in a way that opens up the field of play.
2. Identify the places around you where opponents will pressure you and open spaces where you will have time to play the ball. Take an early look.
3. Decide what part of the body with which you will play the ball.
4. Relax and use a soft touch, with good balance and rhythm.
5. Create space for yourself or someone else by using just one touch.
6. Field awareness. Keep your head up, and look to penetrate with a pass or a dribble.

Spend a lot of time on this. It is crucial to player development. Training the first touch shouldn't be complicated. Use small-sided games (4 vs. 4 for example), and make sure you continue to coach the first touch throughout the session. Stay focused on it. Constantly remind the players of the technical and tactical demands. Play games where many touches on the ball are required. Continue to work on this throughout the season. Remember that repetition is key. Your continued focus on first touch shows your players how important this concept is to them.