



Dear Coach Fantastic,

I am currently training my under 16 club team and my question is with regards to free taking. Do you think a team of this age should have a dedicated free taker and if so what type of coaching should they be receiving? The best player we have technically does not have much confidence when kicking frees yet the less proficient players are always looking to get their chance. What would you advise?

(Patrick, St Mary's)

Hi Patrick

This is a very topical question as we have received a number of enquiries with regards to specialisation of players at the various age groups. Of course at the younger age levels you would be encouraging the coach to give all players an opportunity to kick their own frees as they all need to develop the required skills.

You are currently coaching at under 16 level however but it is still important that all players are given the chance to practice taking frees. I would encourage you to allow all players to take kicks during your training sessions and this will also assist you to identify who your designated free takers will be. It is also important to remember that frees are not always from in front of the goal posts so there will be a number of players that will have to kick frees throughout your matches. Most teams will have an assigned player to kick close in frees, another for further out and perhaps an additional player to kick from the opposite side if you have left and right sided players. It is also important that you practice penalty kicks to identify a player to have the confidence to take these.

It is interesting that you pointed out that your 'most proficient' player is not confident with taking the frees and if you can identify other free takers from your squad it may ease the pressure that she feels as being identified as the top player and allow her to concentrate on her other skills.

With regards to types of practice, as the players progress through the ranks they will probably spend more time on their own taking frees but at that age they will be looking for your guidance with regards to how they should be kicking these. It is a good idea to spend some additional time with these players before or after training to work on kicking from various distances and angles. You should always allow them to start on 13m line and directly in front of goals and then work their way out as they are successful with the frees. This will also assist them to clarify their range and you will be able to identify who your free takers should be from the various positions on the pitch.

I hope this assists with your query

Coach Fantastic