

## Heading

**Heading of the ball is a skill unique to the sport of soccer. It is an effective method of defending and a dangerous offensive weapon.**

**Fear of injury by the player and parents alike can hinder the proper striking of the ball with the head. Remember these tips when demonstrating and practicing.**

- 1. Always keep eyes on the ball. Worse case scenario the player can get out of the way.**
- 2. Strike the ball at the hairline. Whenever possible meet the ball over the players center of gravity (waist) not leaning forward.**
- 3. Step into the ball when possible. Keep a rigid neck and keep the eyes on a level plane. Chin down before and chin out as following through.**
- 4. Follow through the center of the ball. Watch for backspin on the ball as evidence of the head going downward and eyes off the ball.**
- 5. Use arms for added power. With arms outstretched in front of body, pretend to hold the sides of a picture frame. Step forward and pretend to pull head through the picture. If eyes are always forward this demonstrates good technique!**

### Introduction

Be sure to emphasize proper technique, (left). Always head the ball down when attempting to shoot on goal. On defense always head the ball up and to the sides away from the goal. Players should understand that with eyes open they can see the ball, teammates, opponents and the goal. Hit the ball, don't let the ball hit you!

### Warm-up

For today's warm-up start with the standard 20yd x 30yd field setup. Place half of your team on one side of the field and the other half directly opposite them. To begin start the players walking on their toes half way around the field. Then change to the heels and repeat twice. Next have players skip, shuffle and backpedal down the long side of the field, jogging on the ends. To finish the warm-up have one half (group A) of the team start jogging at a decent pace and the other half (group B) has to overtake them. Then group A jogs group B sprints until they catch the first group. Repeat 2-5 times depending on age.

### Skill

**(a)** Sit players in a straight line in a sit-up position. Extend the arms forward as a counter balance while leaning back. On coaches command all players pull arms back and bring the head forward keeping the eyes level. Repeat and correct if the players head goes down. Coach now serves the ball from a short distance on a straight trajectory toward the forehead. Players try to strike ball without spin back at the coach.  
**(b)** Next all players move into a tall kneeling position. Placing hands on the lower back they lean backward keeping chin down and eyes forward. On coaches command propel their bodies forward moving chin out and land on bellies and outstretched hands on the ground. Now the coach serves the ball into the head as the players fall forward.  
**(c)** Players now stand. Coach serves ball toward head and players strike ball back at coach with power. On first few attempts they can stand with feet side by side. Then players can step into the ball and notice the increased power.

### Games

**(a)** Target heading: Coach stands at one goal post with all the balls. Players form a line 10-15 yards in front of opposite post facing coach. On coaches command players run one at a time toward the coach who serves ball to players head. They aim for side netting of goal. Older children can be made to jump or dive for more difficult balls. Split into two teams and have a contest to 5 or 10.  
**(b)** Team handball with heading. Add the header for 5 points per goal and one point per head/catch combination.  
**(c)** Head-Catch. A great game for youngsters head-catch works on heading and concentration. Circle your players around you. Coach serves the ball toward each players head. A command is given on release (head or catch) and a player must try to do the opposite. When a player is eliminated they sit down and the last player standing WINS!

### Wrap-up

Repeat the essential elements of heading and use a player who has proper technique to demonstrate. Eyes always open and the ball. Lean back, step into ball and follow through for increased power. Never make head go down as players can now run into others and even the goal posts when the eyes are toward the ground.