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A Ball, Some Friends, and a Soccer Goal

By Nick Smith

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If Pele, Maradona, and Beckham don't sound at all familiar to you, or if you think Freddy Adou is a guy you may have gone to high school with, keep reading... please. This article covers all the equipment and skills you'll need to join the rest of the world in playing the wonderful game of soccer.

Actually, the rest of the world plays football – they call the sport that Steve Young used to play American football. The term 'soccer' came into being in the later part of the 19th century when people began abbreviating the French variation of 'association football' to soccer. Whatever name you use (I'll call it soccer for the purposes of this article), it refers to the fast-paced, exciting game that has captured the interest of more and more Americans in recent years. If you've found that you've been left behind when it comes to the sport, here's a few equipment tips and skills you'll need to have to start playing.

As the name 'football' suggests, you'll need a ball. Soccer balls come in many different sizes, materials, and styles; and league specifications vary depending on the age and level of the players. If you just want to buy a 'normal' ball, double check with the store clerks to make sure you've chosen the right one; or if you're buying online, you can check the ball size against the standards found at www.fifa.com. The best material for your ball depends on the type of surface you're going to play on. If you'll spend any time at all kicking the ball around on the street or playground, I would shy away from buying a nice leather ball – the asphalt will tear it up. Synthetic materials will usually hold up better on those surfaces, and typically cost less.

Once you've got your ball, you're going to need at least one pair of feet; however, if you want to do more than just kick the ball against your garage you're going to need at least two sets. There are a number of different techniques when it comes to kicking the soccer ball – I'll just summarize them all by saying that the goal of kicking the ball is to hit it with some part of your foot and make it go in the direction you want it to. In fact, in soccer matches you may use any part of your body to move the ball except your hands and arms. If you grew up playing catch in the back yard, the first couple of times you try to kick the ball you'll probably look even more awkward than you feel, and it's very likely your kids are going to laugh at you. Practice makes near perfect, and you'll get better over time. Kicking the ball back and forth between two or more people helps. Once you feel like you might be able to kick the

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ball and jog/run at the same time, you're ready to graduate to playing a game.

Goals (pronounced 'goooal!!!' in actual soccer matches) in soccer are scored by kicking the ball through a rectangle shape appropriately called the goal. Though the rectangle is standard, goals can be made by placing any two objects a few steps apart. I have personally played in neighborhood games where the goal posts were chairs, barrels, younger

siblings, and shoes (if you're playing barefoot, make sure no one is wearing cleats). Kicking the ball below head height and more or less between the makeshift goal posts constitutes a goal, though you will find each goal will be heavily debated.

Competitive leagues almost always require shin guards, and you can usually pick up a decent pair for pretty cheap. Even in a friendly park setting, players can get pretty passionate, and it wouldn't be a bad idea to wear them during the game.

The rules are simple and easy to learn. The basics you need to know are that you should try to avoid kicking people, you can't tackle people like in American football, and you can't use your hands. In that sense, except for the hands restriction, soccer is a lot like life. Other rules apply more in competition, but it wouldn't hurt to read up on them at www.fifa.com.

As with any sport, the most important thing is to look good, so go out and buy yourself some silky soccer shorts and jerseys. Long hair and an Italian accent certainly won't hurt your chances of going pro – but if neither of those is an option for you, just remember to have fun and play fair.

Nick Smith is a soccer fan and client account specialist with

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Improving Soccer Skills With Soccer Training Gear

By Dana Bradley

The main objective when playing the game of soccer is to score a goal in the opposing teams' net and bypassing the goalie. This skill requires a great deal of practice, and a certain portion of muscle training and memory that needs to be acquired over time. With the proper soccer training gear, this goal can be accomplished, while improving other aspects of a player's soccer skills as well.

New technology in the field of sports training is constantly improving and expanding, but growing as a

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player ultimately comes down to the fundamentals and repetition. One soccer training device eliminates much of the time spent on retrieving out-of-play balls, allowing practice to become easier as a solo activity, rather than having a constant need to either chase balls yourself, or have a partner do it for you. This simple training device allows more time to be spent on practicing the basics of kicking, and goal placement.

Strength and endurance is another key aspect for all players to possess in order to be optimal soccer players, since a great majority of the 45 minute halves is spent running up and down the soccer field. The ability to outrun an opponent is crucial, and another soccer training device can aide players in doing just that. A rubber band-like cord that ties around the athletes waste, and is secured into the ground, offers resistance training and explosiveness when it comes to racing an opponent on the soccer field.

For some of the skills necessary to become an improved soccer player, training gear may not even be necessary. Going back to the skills learned as a child when first taught how to play the game of soccer, may be some of the best training equipment one can have. Practicing juggling and controlling the ball, quick feet to ball movements, and even just dribbling the ball while running can be some of the best training gear an athlete can have. The saying goes "Practice makes perfect", but essentially, it's more along the lines that "Practice make permanent". Repetition and control over the soccer ball without even having to think about it is what will make anyone a better soccer player.

Dana Bradley writes about

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