

Composure

“Many fail because they are inhibited when under pressure.” – Arsene Wenger

One of the key football deficiencies in Australia, as noted recently in the FFA National Curriculum, is the ability of our players to maintain composure on the ball in tight areas under pressure, particularly at speed.

What this means is that when a player in possession of the ball is under pressure – for instance, faced with a situation where an opponent is closing down the surrounding space – the player will have a tendency to panic and make a poor decision. Quite often players will resort to one of the following responses:

- Clearing the ball away, usually lumped up the park.
- Putting the head down, which ultimately limits vision and the ability to find a positive solution.
- As a last resort the player will attempt to dribble through players, using strength instead of skill and deception.
- Losing balance, which leads to poor close control of the ball and poor passing technique.

PLAYERS' GUIDE

HOW TO STAY COMPOSED UNDER PRESSURE

- Don't be afraid of failure. Be brave and try to find a solution. Making mistakes is a vital part of learning. See them as opportunities to improve your game.
- Stay balanced at all times and keep the ball central (close to your feet), which enables you to dribble or pass in any direction at any time.
- Add lots of deception to your movements. It's vital to keep the opponents guessing; for instance, you could use lots of feints, scissors, step-overs, pretend chips and passes, and fake looks etc.
- A simple trick is to face your opponent. This will keep them at a distance. Be aware, though, that as soon as you turn your back to them, they will move in and close your remaining space.
- Stay alert, keep your head up so you'll notice a solution and be prepared to accelerate out of a tight space or play a safe pass – or even a delicate pass – when the opportunity arises.

COACHES GUIDE

HOW TO CREATE COMPOSED PLAYERS

- Develop each individual player's technique, skills and tactical awareness (based on age-specific requirements).
- Facilitate the development of each individual player's creativity, innovation and flair.
- Players should be encouraged to take risks and play with no fear.
- Develop a team culture whereby mistakes are an accepted part of learning and players are encouraged to learn from their mistakes.
- Play lots of small-sided games, thereby giving young players plenty of opportunities to learn how to get out of tight areas.

ADVICE FOR YOUTH COACHES

- Get knowledge and guidance. Start by reading the new FFA National Curriculum, then become brave, strong and committed in your endeavour to focus on developing the players in your squad, rather than making winning your priority.
- Develop a thick skin along with a good sense of humour, as you will be a pioneer (and maybe not initially win most of your games) when you adopt this new developmental approach. As others jump on board, you will then be a leader and a mentor to others who will also attempt to put development ahead of winning.
- Share your thoughts and experiences of adopting the new philosophies with parents, players, other coaches and club officials.