

Building An Effective Walking Football Team

There are numerous examples of teams that do not necessarily have the most talented players, but are very organized both offensively and defensively, are always one step ahead of the game, are very assertive and effective collectively, and therefore achieve success.

So what is required to ensure teams to be more effective? Effective teamwork, a characteristic of all the great football teams, involves far more than simply being a part of a group and trying hard individually in a game. When a walking football team gets it right, teammates connect in highly skilled, clever (often subtle), and complimentary ways.

In essence the “sum of the whole far exceeds the sum of the individual parts.”



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Effective teamwork required all players to adopt and execute strategic positional formations. All players in forward, midfield, and defence positions performed offensive and defensive responsibilities for the team (e.g., full pitch man-to-man close marking, zonal defensive strategy in the first third of the

pitch). Players respected and valued each team member’s contributions and improvements.

“Okay, let’s try and keep a diamond and triangle shape formations to maintain depth and breadth in both offence and defence...who’s best to stay back, who’s best to go midfield, and who’s best to spearhead the front?”

Players’ positional roles need to complement one another to produce a cohesive offensive and defensive unit. For example, forwards played an important role as the first line of team defence. Similarly, the goalkeeper and defenders played important roles as the first line of offence. These combined positional strategies reinforced the added value of effective teamwork to enhance performance.

Effective teamwork requires all players to be fully focused and to constantly “read” and respond to the dynamics of the game such as rebound anticipation following defensive and offensive shooting attempts. There is a need for all players to be totally switched on.

“Let’s try and move the ball quickly between us and with lots of movement off the ball since the opposition aren’t tracking our players...watch for their player who shoots every time he gets the ball.”

Specifically, during team offence, players need to identify, predict, and act upon game patterns, such as the strengths and weaknesses of the opposition’s defence, as well as their team’s offence. Similarly, during team defence, players need to identify, predict, and act upon game patterns, such as the strengths and weaknesses of the opposition’s offence, as well as their team’s defence.

Set pieces (e.g., center kicks, goal kicks, free kicks, corners, throw-ins) need to be responsive to specific game situations and executed in order to gain a decisive offensive and/or defensive advantage for the team.

Assert your Team's Influence on the "Tone" of the Game

Effective teamwork requires all players to assert their influence (defensively and offensively) on the "tone" of the game. For example, when defending, nearby team mates need to challenge for the ball in a determined and tenacious manner. Furthermore, the team needs to work as an efficient unit to delay the opposition's advance to goal, as well as denying space and options for the opposition's attacking players.

"Make a challenge early as the opposition player receives the ball so he doesn't have time to assess his passing options."

Similarly, attacking players need to work as an efficient unit to execute "smart" and walking-quick advances toward the opposition's goal area (i.e., give-go-and-call moves, rapid ball passing with a trajectory in close proximity to team mate), as well as created space and options for the ball carrier.

Leadership and Communication throughout the Game

In addition to the captain's role, effective teamwork required all players to demonstrate leadership and communication throughout a competitive game.

"Let's hear lots of calling for the ball – it gives our ball carrier options as well as unsettles the opposition...keep talking to each to other to maintain our team shape when defending."



This has a positive impact on the team, as well as being "off-putting" for the opposition. For example, when defending, players should send game-related signals to mark opposition players, to cover vital space in front of their team's goal area, and therefore prevent offensive opportunities for the opposition. Similarly, when attacking, players need to send game-related signals to call for the ball, move into good positions, and therefore create problems for the opposition's defence. Equally important, communication needs to be positive, constructive, encouraging, and praising of teammates' contributions and improvements.

Play with Impact (Make it Happen)!

Finally, effective teamwork requires all players to play with impact. This requires players, individually and collectively, to be determined to do their best, to be committed and confident to succeed, and, when required, be able to raise their game to a higher level in order to gain a decisive offensive and/or defensive advantage for the team. For example, during team offence, all players need to be determined to attack and penetrate the opposition's goal. Similarly, during team defence, players need to be determined to protect and prevent offensive strikes on their goal.

Improvements will always be enhanced by:

- 1) brisk walking gait by all players,
- 2) walking-specific football skills,
- 3) walking football team offence and defence strategies,
- 4) basic positional team roles; team game-plan strategies to maximize team strengths and guard against team weaknesses; assertive team calling throughout game; full pitch man-to-man close marking; constant off-the-ball mobility during team offence; rapid ball passing with a trajectory in close proximity to team mate; and rebound anticipations following defensive and offensive shooting attempts.

Improving effective Team Strategies

Effective teamwork in walking football can happen organically when players spend time playing together in competitions but players can better develop effective team strategies through deliberate and guided practice conditions that closely simulate competitive matches.

Developing effective team strategies is not a panacea for winning competitive walking football games since many factors (e.g., the talent pool of players, the quality of team and player development programs, team confidence and chemistry, the competition, good fortune) influence performance results.

But melding a team together that understands more deeply what each other are doing certainly helps. Teams become more effective when players are able to provide input regarding *initial game planning* (e.g., communicate specific roles, teamwork, offence and defence strategies), *periodic performance analysis* (e.g., identify strengths and weaknesses of general and specific team play/skills), and have input into *suggestions about specific goals for further improvements* (e.g., more calling for the ball and off-the-ball movement into space, practice first-touch ball control skills, attend to penetration in offence).

During interval break and at the end of game debrief it is important to identify areas for further improvement: "What sorts of successful and less successful team plays are being made?" (patterns), "Why are these happening?" (cause and effect), "What are the strengths and weaknesses of the opposition team?" (judgments), "What could our team do better?" (judgments), "How could we practice to improve this aspect of team play?" (developmental).

Summary of a paper by Harry Hubball (University of British Columbia) and Peter Reddy "Effective Team Strategies for High Performance Veneran Players (Journal of Sports Pedagogy and Physical Education).

We would love to hear about your experience(s), your thoughts, your comments. Send your response to: info@walkingfootballbrisbane.com.au