



FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT MODEL

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PLAYER PROGRESSION GUIDE

5+ PLAY & DEVELOP

Overview
Developmental Checklist
Skills

5+

**PLAY &
DEVELOP**



WHAT IS PLAY AND DEVELOP?

This stage is designed for athletes 5+. Young athletes need the opportunity to develop basic movement skills such as running, jumping, kicking, throwing, and catching, while being introduced to the sport's fundamentals through fun practices and games that provide significant amounts of positive reinforcement.

At this stage of development, helping players acquire skills, find joy in the game and develop confidence through participation, is far more important than the final score of any game.

Practices need to be fun and free-flowing with more emphasis on opportunities than outcomes. Keep your players moving and shrink the games down to their size.

Athletes at this age need appropriate-sized balls and equipment to perform skills and activities effectively. If you are working with especially young kids, don't hesitate to use equipment like foam balls that make it easier to grasp, throw and catch.

The skills developed at this stage will underpin everything your young players learn later as they progress athletically in the years to come. Longtime NFL strength coach Buddy Morris once said, "At this stage, everything is cross training." You will primarily use footballs and football terminology in your drills and games, but what kids learn should be transferable to other sports and activities.

Some athletes at this age will lack the prerequisite physical qualities to perform certain drills, and that's okay. Find success in what they can do and adapt appropriately. As they get older, they will learn sport-specific skills that transfer across the game, whether they play non-contact, limited contact or contact football.

Done in the right environment, these drills, exercises and games provide the introduction young athletes need to develop the physical qualities that lead to better technical skills as they progress through the Football Development Model.

> **Reminder: Using this guide**

Throughout this Player Progression Guide, you'll find drills. You can find descriptions of these drills in the glossary on page 73.

STAGE DEVELOPMENT CHECKLIST

Checkpoints are based on the **CORE** technical skill areas of the Football Development Model. These are checkpoints for mastery.

Athlete will be able to...

Passing (Using a developmentally appropriate-sized football)



- Throw a ball with an overarm motion while stepping forward with the opposite foot
- Throw a ball overhand with proper hip and shoulder rotation
- Throw for distance with accuracy to a stationary target (5+ yards)

Running and Receiving (Using a developmentally appropriate-sized football)



- Run with a football while maintaining body and ball control
- Catch a ball while stationary using the hands only (not trapping it or cradling against the body)
- Adjust hand position to match the level of the thrown ball

Kicking and Punting (Using a developmentally appropriate-sized ball or football)



- Kick a stationary ball from a stationary position
- Approach a stationary ball and kick it forward
- Accurately drop a held ball so the foot can contact the ball in a punting motion

Athletic Foundations



- Gallop and shuffle in various directions without feet touching
- Skip and march with contralateral arm movement
- Perform jumping and landing actions with balance
- Maintain balance while running, skipping, and hopping
- Run in general space with others while maintaining personal space
- Avoid obstacles while carrying a football
- Demonstrate understanding of change of speed (i.e., walk, jog, sprint)
- Maintain body control when changing direction and speed

Thinking, Feeling and Behavior



- Demonstrate the ability to take turns
- Demonstrate the ability to share
- Follow simple directions
- Use words or actions to demonstrate awareness and understanding





PASSING

SKILL ELEMENTS AND KPIS

Below are skills that build the Passing progression. Each step of the progression has Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and drills that help coaches train and improve passing. Drill descriptions can be found in this guide's glossary.

1 PRE-PASS POSITION

- ✓ The body, grip and arm position prior to the throwing motion beginning. Creating a solid base from which to throw by having feet shoulder width apart, ball centered at chest, with a firm grip on the ball.

KPI(s):

Grip

- Fingers on laces
- One finger of space between palm and ball

Base

- Feet shoulder-width apart
- Weight on the instep
- Hips inside the heels



Drills to Support

- Meet in the Middle Grip Drill
- Opposite Foot Throws (overhand)
- Partner Step and Throw

2 POSTURE

- ✓ A comfortable neutral posture as the throwing motion begins. Gained by dropping the hips, having a gentle bend in the knees and a very slight lean forward at the waist.

KPI(s):

Neutral Posture

- Slight bend in the knees
- Slight forward lean
- Weight on the instep
- Lead shoulder pointed at the target



Drills to Support

- Mirror Drill

3 THROWING MECHANICS

- ✓ The movements that make up a successful throw and the ability to coordinate those movements throughout the throwing motion.

KPI(s):

Fluidity

- Throw the ball in a single, fluid motion
- Use proper arm path

**Drills to Support**

- Partner Step and Throw
- Throw and Catch Relay
- Opposite Foot Throws (overhand)
- Palms Up Small Arm Circles to Large Arm Circles (Clockwise and Counterclockwise)
- Arm Flaps (Internal/External Rotation)
- Arm Slaps/Hugs

4

FINISH

The body position and follow through after the ball is released.

**KPI(s):****Balance**

- Front foot flat on the stride
- Back foot finishes even with or slightly behind the front foot
- Look for stability in the finish

**Drills to Support**

- Don't Cross the Line

> TIPS FOR COACHES**Coaches should keep the following things in mind...**

- Feel free to play any fun games that involve throwing and catching a ball (any ball).
- Take time and stress the importance of properly warming up the arm before throwing.
- Use a developmentally sized ball.
- Don't focus too strongly on detailed mechanics of the throw. Just encourage the throwing motion to be fluid.
- At this stage we are introducing skills like grip, base and balance, not mastering them.

“You don't do drills to do drills – you do drills to help the player become a better technician.”

Herm Edwards*Head Football Coach, Arizona State*



RUNNING AND RECEIVING

SKILL ELEMENTS AND KPIS

Below are skills that build the Running and Receiving progression. Each step of the progression has Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and drills that help coaches train and improve running and receiving skills. Drill descriptions can be found in this guide's glossary.

1 FEET/FOOTWORK

- ✓ Preparing the body from the ground up by making sure feet are positioned appropriately in preparation for, during and after the catch or handoff.

KPI(s):

Stance

- Two-point stance
- Equal weight distribution
- No false (extra) steps
- Inside foot forward

Start

- No false steps
- Push off the front leg
- Hip drive from the back leg
- Proper foot strike
- Contralateral arm motion aligns with lower body movement



Drills to Support

- Zig-zag Pathway
- Stance and Start
- Stop-and-Go Flow
- Curved Pathway
- Red Light/Green Light
- Tag Games
- Sharks and Minnows
- Stepovers (Half Rounds)

2 ARMS/HANDS

- ✓ Preparing and positioning the fingers, hands and arms to complete a successful catch or handoff.

KPI(s):

Arm/Hand Position

- Hands up, fingers spread (Receiving)
- Make a diamond shape with the hands (Receiving)
- Arms against the body to create a pocket for the handoff (Running)
- Near arm up during handoff (Running)



Drills to Support

- Self-catch
- Catch and Step with Partner
- Hot Potato
- Clockwork Hands

3 VISION

- ✓ Tracking the football through the air and into the hands, keeping eyes up in the direction of the play, and learning to focus through distraction with the body in various orientations.

KPI(s):

Locate

- Get the head around (Receiving)
- Find the ball (Receiving)
- Eyes up, looking ahead (Running)



Drills to Support

- Progressive Turn and Catch
- Mesh
- Mesh with Steptover
- Colored Ball Drill

4 FINISH

- Movement through and following the catch or handoff, transferring the football from catch or handoff to tuck and assuming correct ball-carrying position.

KPI(s):

Ball Security

- 5 points of pressure
- Ball in the outside arm



Drills to Support

- Catch, Wrap and Step
- Coaches Knockout
- Mesh
- Hand-off Relay

➤ TIPS FOR COACHES

Coaches should keep the following things in mind...

- Feel free to play any fun games that involve throwing and catching any sized ball.
- Free play involving running at various tempos. Add a ball when convenient.
- Don't focus too strongly on detailed running mechanics.
- Encourage movement and activity running, skipping, jogging, shuffling, etc.



KICKING AND PUNTING

SKILL ELEMENTS AND KPIS

Below are skills that build the Kicking and Punting progression. Each step of the progression has Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and drills that help coaches train and improve kicking and punting skills.

1 PREPARE

✓ The stance and approach prior to making contact between the ball and the foot.

KPI(s):

Body Position

- Proper lean and balance
- Stable base



Drills to Support

- Balance Kicks

2 CONTACT MECHANICS

✓ The movements that make up a successful kick/punt up to and at the point of contact. The ability to coordinate these movements throughout the kicking/punting motion.

KPI(s):

Eye-foot Coordination

- Maintain vision on contact point through connection

Drop

- Drop the ball, don't toss it



Drills to Support

- Stationary Kicks
- Partner Kicks
- Partner Punts

3 POWER

✓ Using multiple muscles and leg speed to generate strength behind the kick in order to achieve longer distance and/or height.

KPI(s):

Leg Swing

- Generate force at point of contact
- Swing the leg through contact



Drills to Support

- Super Kickball

4 FINISH

The drive and follow-through that completes the kicking motion.

KPI(s):

Follow Through

- Maintain balance through contact
- Follows up and through towards the target



Drills to Support

- Balance Kicks

> TIPS FOR NEW COACHES

New coaches should keep the following things in mind...

- Feel free to play any fun games that involve kicking a ball (any ball)
- Don't focus too strongly on mechanics of the kick. Just encourage the kicking motion to be fluid and on balance.
- Be outcome-based not performance-based.
- Use of a developmentally sized ball is vital.
- At this stage we are introducing skills like contact and leg-swing, not mastering them.

“ I wholeheartedly believe in the Football Development Model. The way that you should be approaching -- especially youth -- is with development in mind. You need to have an end goal for that player, that child, to understand that everything they're learning now has to be for their development. Forget the game, forget the fact that we're playing football, this is for their development, for their benefit and that football model helps that whole process.”

Manuel Fraga

*Full-Field 11-Player Tackle Coach,
Miami Xtreme (FL)*



ATHLETIC FOUNDATIONS

SKILL ELEMENTS AND KPIS

These Skill Elements, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and drills will help lay the foundation for athleticism and building better athletes.

FUNDAMENTAL MOVEMENTS

General physical movements that are foundational to developing athleticism while serving as a base to support sport specific skills.

RUNNING

Locomotive movement at a faster pace than walking; both feet are in the air at the same time with feet alternating moving forward

KPI(s):

Arms, Body, Tempo

- Skip and march with contralateral arm movement and linear arm movement
- Skip and march with proper hip drive
- Skip and march with thigh parallel to the ground
- Stop and go with body control
- Skip and march while changing tempos
- Run in various orientations and pathways



Drills to Support

- | | |
|---------|-------------------------|
| • March | • Zig-zag Pathway |
| • Skip | • Forward/Backward Runs |
| • Bound | • Stop-and-Go Flow |

SHUFFLING

Sliding laterally with the lead shoulder pointing in the direction of the movement; feet sliding along the ground in direction of movement without touching or crossing each other

KPI(s):

Control, Tempo

- Gallop and shuffle without feet touching
- Shuffle laterally to right and left
- Stop and go with body control
- Perform all actions with varying tempos

**Drills to Support**

- Gallop
- Lateral Shuffle
- Lateral Cone Step Over

JUMPING AND HOPPING

Jumping: Pushing off the ground with both feet, using the leg muscles to achieve takeoff and landing balanced on two feet with knees slightly bent to absorb the impact

Hopping: Pushing off the ground with one foot, using the leg muscles to achieve takeoff, and landing balanced on one foot with a slight bend in the hopping leg to absorb the impact and opposite leg bent at the knee, not touching the ground

**KPI(s):****Movement, Balance, Tempo**

- Jump with both feet leaving the ground at the same time
- Land with both feet touching the ground at the same time
- Coordinated arm swing, raising and lowering the center of mass
- Leave ground and land on one foot while maintaining balance and body control
- Perform all actions at varying tempos

**Drills to Support**

- Dot Jump/Hop
- Bunny Hops Forward/Backwards
- Jumping Beans
- Lilly Pad Jump/Hop

FALLING AND ROLLING

Falling: Moving fluidly from an upright position to a position on the ground without bracing with the limbs

Rolling: Using twisting or circular movement of the whole body to travel in a given direction while on the ground in a non-upright position

**KPI(s):****Head, Arms, Knees, Landing**

- Roll in straight line
- Transition from a standing position to a roll
- Protect the head while falling to the ground
- Perform forward and backward rolls
- Safe landing mechanics

**Drills to Support**

- Learning to Fall Forward
- Learning to Fall Backward
- Forward Roll
- Backward Roll
- Log Roll Bonanza
- Overhead Toes Touch Ground
- Seat Rolls to Bear Crawl

SENSORY AWARENESS

The ability to receive and differentiate various types of sensory stimuli in the environment and respond appropriately.

KPI(s):

Vocabulary, Space, Vision

- Movement skill vocabulary
- Move in space
- Directional awareness
- Identify different rhythms and tempos
- Visually track an object
- Maintain balance in different body orientations

Drills to Support

- Heel/Toe Walk
- 60 Ways to Play Resource
- Bumper Cars
- Bats and Bugs

ATHLETIC PERFORMANCE

Foundational movement skills and skill descriptors that are inherent to all levels and game types within football.

AGILITY

- Ability of an athlete to move quickly and easily
- Ability of an athlete to move and change direction and position of the body quickly and effectively while under control

Drills to Support

- Building Agility 1
- Building Agility 2
- Building Agility 3
- Building Agility 4
- Follow the Snake

STRENGTH AND POWER

Strength: The amount of weight that can be moved and not the speed in which it is moved

Power: Moving an object between two points as quickly as possible with force

Drills to Support

- Wall Push
- Squat Under
- Squat Walkout
- No Hands, Get Up
- Crab Crawl
- Bear Crawl

STAMINA

- Ability of an athlete to sustain prolonged physical or mental effort



Drills to Support

- Multi-directional Get Up and Go
- Clean and Dirty
- Sharks and Minnows

SPEED

- The rate at which an athlete is able to move or operate
- The ability of an athlete to move quickly across the ground or move limbs rapidly to grab or throw



Drills to Support

- Gear Runs
- Gear Runs Random Order
- Sprints

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT MODEL

Visit usafootball.com/fdm to get the latest resources and information.