

RUNNING IN SOCCER - MERELY LOCOMOTION OR SOMETHING MORE?



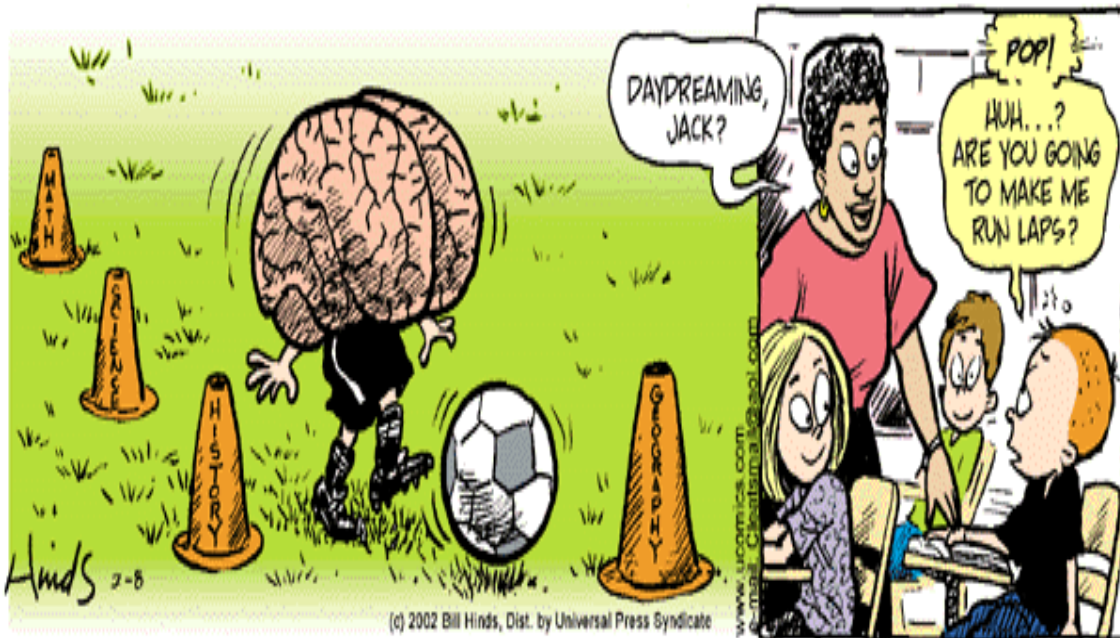
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Why do coaches have players run? There are generally three reasons most coaches have players do running exercises. They are for punishment, warm-up and fitness. Examining each of these three reasons punishment is the most erroneous.

Frequently coaches use running as a punishment for misbehavior during a training session. Some coaches have even used running as a punishment for an entire team at the end of a match if the team did not meet the coach's expectations of performance. For the individual and the team using running as a punishment hurts team morale more than it solves any behavior problem. First of all soccer is a game that requires a lot of running. You have to *like* running to play the game. Why give something so integral to the sport a negative connotation both mentally and emotionally for the players? This is just the opposite of what the coach should be trying to achieve in developing a team. If punishment is needed for misbehavior then there are many other options the coach could use other than running as punishment. Soccer coaches should never use running as a punishment!

Far too many coaches use running laps as a way to warm-up players for a training session or match. Coaches who have earned the "Y" License or have attended a Youth Module course know running laps is one of the three Ls to be avoided. The three Ls are laps, lines and lectures. Please avoid the three Ls during your training sessions. There are many activities that a coach can do with the ball to warm-up players for a training session or match. These activities will get the blood flowing and the muscles, tendons and ligaments warmed-up for a good stretch. The boon of this approach to warm-up is increased contact time with the ball, which has a positive impact on the players' ball skills. It also is more effective in getting the players mentally warmed-up to play soccer. Running laps has nothing to do with playing soccer. Soccer players don't run in straight lines at the same pace for 100 or more yards during a match. So what in the world does running laps around the field have to do with the game? The physical aspect of the warm-up should simulate the physical demands of the game.

Running exercises of course are necessary to improve players' physical fitness to meet the demands of the game. With children in the U6 to U14 age groups fitness improvement can be accomplished in activities with the ball. Check out the book The Baffled Parent's Guide To Coaching Youth Soccer by Bobby Clark for some great activities you can use to this end. Adolescent (15- to 23-years-old) and adult players will need some exercises without the ball for the overload principle to come into affect to maximize their match fitness. Coaches working with the players 15 or older should attend the "C" License coaching course to learn more about fitness training for older soccer players.



There are two words in soccer that I dislike. They are drill and hustle. To find out why drills destroy skills and should not be used in youth soccer please attend the “Y” License coaching course. As for hustle it is so often misused that it has come to mean run around the field like a chicken with your head cut off. In other words the coach saw a soccer game once and everyone was running so if you are not “hustling” then you are not playing soccer. Hustle has come to mean mindless running, merely for the sake of running. Do soccer players need to have a high work rate? YES! But it means tactical running, on and off the ball movement with a purpose.

Soccer players need to learn when to run and when to **not** run. There are times when it is tactically correct to not run. They also need to learn at what angle to run. Far too many American players run constantly in straight lines on the field. They look more like a track team doing the 100-yard dash than a soccer team. Coaches must teach players when to make straight runs and when to make diagonal, square and bent runs. Of course these runs could be forward or backward on offense or defense.

Players must also learn about the timing of runs, when to start and when to stop. Most off-the-ball runs start too early so the player is marked up once he or she arrives in the space where he or she hopes to meet the ball. Directly incorporated to the timing of runs is the pace of the run. Recovery runs on defense are probably going to be all out. Tracking runs on defense will have to match the pace of the opponent being marked. Many, but not all, attacking runs without the ball will start off slow or at a moderate pace and then accelerate at the last moment darting past an opponent to meet the pass.

Well this leads us back to the title of the article; there **is** something more to running in soccer than mere locomotion. Hustle, run Forrest run, doesn’t quite make it for the game of soccer. Put some brains as well as brawn in your players’ running.

“Don’t run so much,” Johan Cruyff once said, meaning that players often cover lots of ground but to no effect. “You have to be in the right place at the right moment, not too early, not too late.”