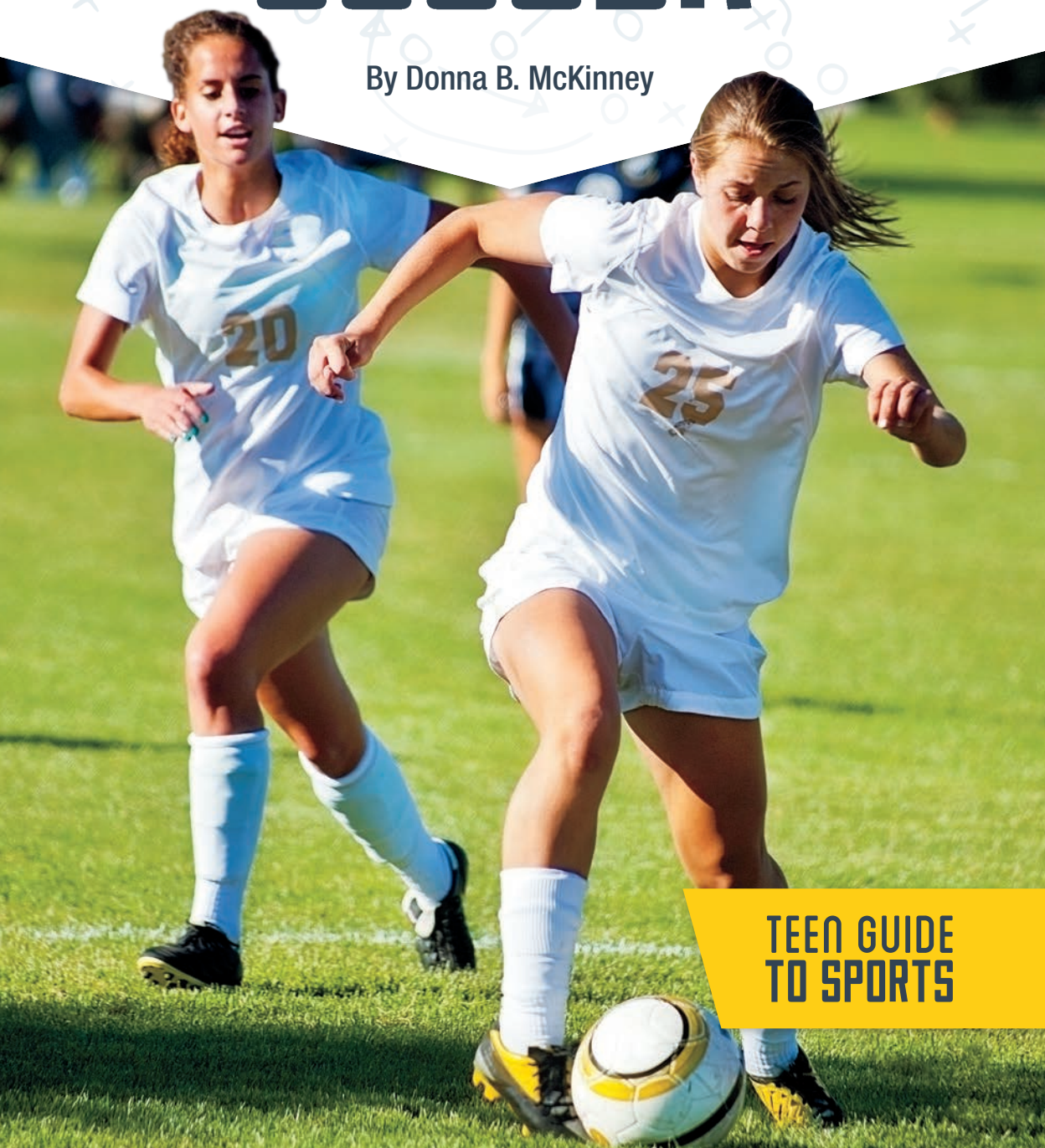


# EXCELLING IN SOCCER

By Donna B. McKinney



TEEN GUIDE  
TO SPORTS



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## CHAPTER ONE

# HOW DO I MAKE THE SOCCER TEAM?

If players strive to play on any kind of organized soccer team, whether it be a community league, a travel or club team, or their high school team, preparation is key. Athletes should make sure that they are ready when the opportunity comes. Pelé, who was on

three World Cup teams, said, “Success is no accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice and most of all, love of what you are doing or learning to do.”<sup>6</sup>

**“Success is no accident.”<sup>6</sup>**

*– Pelé, Brazilian soccer player*

Landon Donovan would probably suggest that anyone interested in competing on a soccer team start by focusing hard on the basics. Donovan is an American soccer player who spent much of his career with the LA Galaxy. He is considered by some to be the best American player ever. He holds the MLS regular-season record and the US men’s national team (USMNT) record for goals and assists. Donovan says, “I think we get too caught up in tactics and formation, and perhaps we’re still trying to perfect fundamentals and haven’t mastered the basics yet. When you’re Argentina, Brazil, and Spain, every young kid knows how to trap the ball, pass the ball, cross the



*Players should make sure to have fun while learning to play soccer. If they don't enjoy the sport, it will be hard to improve.*

ball, do everything perfectly. We're still getting those things, and I think we're putting the cart before the horse a little bit in [the United States]. I didn't learn much of that until I was in my twenties. So if we just take a step back and work on the basics, the rest will come.”<sup>7</sup>

Playing soccer is more than just skilled footwork, although that is important. The top soccer players combine physical skills, mental strength, fitness, and knowledge of the game to make themselves

**“I think we get too caught up in tactics and formation, and perhaps we're still trying to perfect fundamentals and haven't mastered the basics yet.”<sup>7</sup>**

*– Landon Donovan, American soccer player*



the best on the pitch. In soccer, there are six basic skills: dribbling, receiving, passing, shooting, tackling, and heading. To prepare to play on any level team, players will want to practice and develop these fundamental skills.

## **DRIBBLING**

Dribbling is the skill a player uses to move and control the ball with his or her feet. The best way to get better at dribbling is through repetition—endless touches on the ball. Work at using all of the foot—outside, inside, bottom of foot, and heel. Practicing dribbling using one foot and then the other allows either foot to be used as needed in a game situation. A player should work to increase his or her speed while dribbling too. Then practice changing speed and changing direction, all while maintaining constant control of the ball.

A player can practice dribbling alone, but it is also important to practice with another person who is working to take the ball away from the player. Dribbling involves not only footwork, but also concentrating on the way a player moves his or her body. Body movement while dribbling can help the player balance or help fool an opponent with moves such as fakes.

## **RECEIVING**

When a player is receiving a ball, it will come either in the air or on the ground. When the ball comes on the ground, the player should watch the ball and receive it with his or her foot. The heel should be down and the toe pointed up on the receiving foot. When the ball hits the foot, the player should absorb some of the pass. This is called a soft touch. Once a player receives the ball, he or she should be thinking ahead to the next move—either passing, shooting, or dribbling.

## GEAR UP

Compared with some other sports, the gear a soccer player needs is fairly simple. Besides the basic gear, players who play the goalkeeper position also need goalkeeper gloves. Many players also use a bag or backpack to carry their gear. Soccer balls range in size from one to five. Youth players usually use a ball ranging from size three to five. The league decides what size ball will be used, depending on the age-group of the players. For soccer shoes, players can choose between turf shoes and cleats. Be sure to get shoes made for soccer, not just baseball or football cleats. Sometimes the league has requirements about the footwear, so players should be sure to check that before shopping.

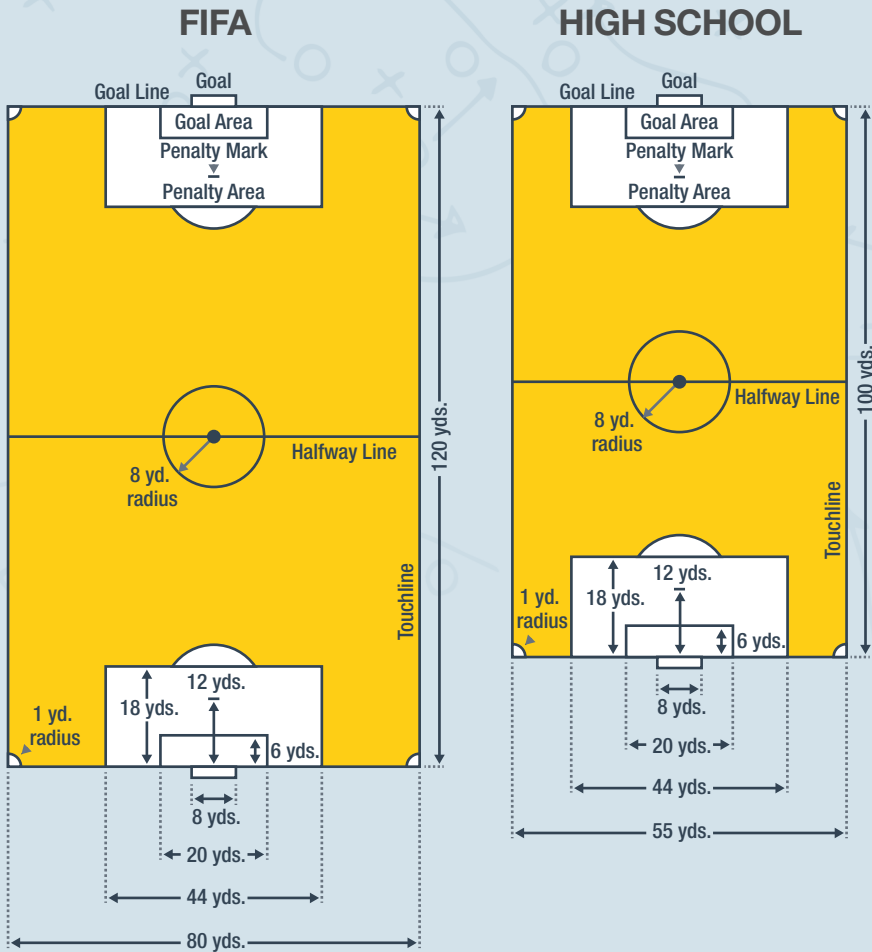
Receiving the ball in the air requires a player to focus on the ball in flight, noticing the speed and direction of the ball. At this moment, the player must also be thinking about which part of the body to use in receiving the ball—head, chest, thigh, or foot. Players should remember to use their body like a cushion. They should move with the ball or give with the ball a little to receive it with a soft touch. This keeps the ball from bouncing hard off the body and to the other team.

To practice receiving, two players can start simply, taking turns passing and receiving the ball. Players can practice receiving it in the air by tossing the ball to each other. Then, to improve players' skills, add a defender to the drill. The defender will pressure the player to receive the ball quickly and cleanly.

## PASSING

Most players like to pass using the inside of the foot. But a player should work on passing using all the parts of the foot. Beyond the

## DIAGRAM OF A FIELD



Soccer fields are different sizes. In high school most fields are the same size. With faster professional players, the field needs to be bigger. In FIFA games, the field is longer and wider. No matter the competition level, penalty boxes should remain the same size. Larger goals would make scoring too easy.



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