

WINNING

SOCCER

FOR GIRLS

THIRD EDITION

Deborah W. Crisfield

Foreword by

Bill Hawkey and Patrick Murphy,

Coaches, Varsity Girls' Soccer,

The Pennington School,

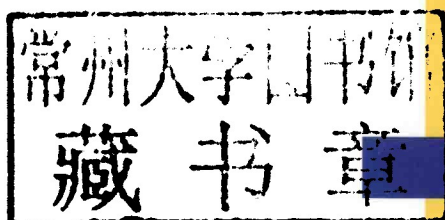
Pennington, New Jersey



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WINNING

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FOREWORD

The appeal of soccer is no mystery. It resonates with the very essence of an athlete's physical abilities. Athletes who like to run find that the game rewards them for both their speed and their endurance. Young players who like to be part of a group and to accomplish a goal with teammates need look no further than a soccer field. It takes more than one player to move the ball down the field and score goals, and teamwork builds confidence and trust, traits that an athlete can use in everyday living.

The game is also easy to understand. Get the ball into the net. Accomplish this by using any part of your body except your hands. Soccer tactics can be straightforward and basic or quite complicated. Offense-defense mismatches such as three-on-two, two-on-one or speed versus size on a breakaway can decide the outcome of a game.

In soccer there is no huddling or timeouts to call set plays, only continuous action where players are required to think and make decisions literally "on the run." The action is mentally challenging. Players go from defending one minute to attacking the next. You cannot play soccer without being totally engaged—physically, mentally, and emotionally. What's not to love about an activity that so totally challenges you and keeps you alert and active on so many levels?

Soccer is a game in which an individual can improve her skills working by herself. She needs only a ball and dedication. Many an Olympic soccer champion has launched her rise to the top using a wall or a backyard. You don't need expensive equipment—only a ball, some imagination, and a desire to improve.

Long popular in the world, soccer has made great strides over the past 25 years in the United States. Today, girls' soccer is completely enmeshed in our sports culture, especially at the youth league, scholastic, collegiate, and Olympic levels of play. More and more young girls are noticing and stepping up to be part of the fun. It's exhilarating to be part of this growth and gratifying for us to have the opportunity to coach these aspiring athletes.

At the Pennington School we've produced championship teams and all-star players, including academic all-America selections as well as selections on the *Parade* magazine all-America teams. We've won the New Jersey state prep championships for girls soccer teams 10 times since our program began in 1982, and along the way have been consistently ranked number one among New Jersey private schools. Since 2002, our team has broken through with top-20 national rankings among all high schools in the United States of America.

We know that our athletes love competition and want to test themselves against the very best. They understand that preparation breeds confidence and confidence yields success. The first step in preparing is to learn how to play the game correctly, and to master the fundamentals. Our girls practice the skills needed to succeed on the soccer field each and every day of our season. We work on the basics and try to get a little bit better each day.

That's why we're pleased to assist in presenting the skills and drills on the pages of *Winning Soccer for Girls*, which is an excellent guide for learning the principal aspects of the game. Like long journeys, great athletic performances begin with a single step. You can take your first step by studying and applying what's in this book, such as the correct way to handle the ball, to defend, to shoot and to play as a team. It's all here on these pages. Start reading and becoming the best you can be.

—Bill Hawkey and Patrick Murphy
Coaches, Varsity Girls Soccer
The Pennington School
Pennington, New Jersey



INTRODUCTION

THE GROWTH OF GIRLS' SOCCER

Women's soccer has finally arrived. When I began playing the sport in the seventies, it was still "the other sport" to play in the fall. Most athletic girls, at least in the preppy suburb in which I was growing up, hit junior high and headed straight for field hockey, with its short sticks and short kilts. Many high schools didn't even have girls' soccer programs. Fortunately, mine did, and my devotion to the sport was off and running.

Right around this time, towns discovered that youth soccer leagues were a popular and inexpensive way to provide recreation for the area's children. A ball, a field, and some cones for goals were all that were needed, and at the youngest ages, boys and girls could play together. My sister, ten years younger, was at the right age to benefit from these programs, and by the time she reached junior high, her youth team had not only traveled all over the state for tournaments, but had covered most of the northeastern United States as well.

The opportunities were incredible, and before long these youth leagues had created hordes of young soccer players who grew into older players crazy about the game. These players have since invaded the high school, college, and Olympic levels.

The experience that girls gain from this early exposure to the sport is invaluable. When I played soccer in high school, interest was so slight that we only had a varsity team, and there were no cuts. Now many high schools have a varsity, a junior varsity, and even a freshman team, and the level of play rivals that of my former college team. Girls from age six on up have found a sport they love.

This shouldn't come as a big surprise. Soccer has, for a long time, been the most popular sport in the world. The United States is the only major country where soccer fails the popularity test. However, American women have embraced the game and won three gold medals in the past four Summer Olympics. Youth soccer leagues are going strong and the natural



appeal of the sport is working its charms. It's cheaper, safer, and (in many people's minds) more fun than the competition. Unquestionably, the best way for soccer to become number one in this country is for young people to keep playing it. Fortunately, they are doing just that.

Given that girls are spearheading this American soccer movement, it seems only natural that they should have a book written especially for them. And *Winning Soccer for Girls* is that book.

A LOOK INSIDE

This book covers all aspects of soccer, from the rules of the game to strategies for winning, and it can be used by both the player and the coach. The chapters on skills detail the mechanics of passing, ball handling, shooting on goal, and heading, and describe the most opportune time to use the

variations of each. Each of these chapters goes over the hows and whys of a specific skill and includes drills and games that you can use to improve your technique.

In addition to learning skill development, however, soccer players have to be in good shape. The book begins with a detailed chapter on training, covering warm-ups, stretching, and endurance programs. Drills and exercises that improve overall and soccer fitness are also included.

Following the chapters on skills is a separate chapter on strategy. In order to play competitively, you need to learn offensive and defensive tactics and how the skills can be combined in the larger picture of the game. When you put these mental skills together with the physical skills you have learned, you will have everything you need in order to play soccer to win.

PRACTICE TIME

Despite the comprehensive nature of this book, you are going to have to do more than just read. Like any other skill, soccer ability takes practice, practice, and more practice. Knowing the mechanics behind a specific skill won't do you much good if your body can't execute it. Just like a one-year-old learning to walk, you have to train your body to move in a new way.

Keep in mind that practice can come in many forms. It certainly can't hurt to take a hundred shots on goal every day, but if that's too boring for you, try turning your practice into a game. At the end of each chapter there are descriptions of games that make practicing more fun. And you don't have to stick to just these games; you can also make up some of your own.

PLAY THE GAME

This practice should also include game situations. It's one thing to learn each skill; it's another to execute your skills in a game situation. The pressures that exist in a game add a whole new dimension to passing, shooting, and ball handling. That's why it's so important for you to get out and play the game. It's only when you're on the field that you can really get to know how to play soccer.

To develop, you have to play every day, one on one or three on three. If you don't have an organized practice, play on your own. Don't worry too much about having a field with fancy goals; you can create your own in your neighborhood, your backyard, even your driveway. This is where you experiment to see what works, and this is where you develop a real love for



the game. Even though games are the fun part of the sport, keep in mind that games should always be combined with skill development. You won't be able to learn anything from playing if you start off with incorrect skills. In fact, a skilled player can learn tactics much faster than a tactically smart player can master the skills.



THE MENTAL COMMITMENT

No matter what, though, get your head in the game. When you practice or play soccer, you should think soccer. Every time you're around a ball, your mind should be focused on the game. The minute you let your mind wander to the movie you saw the night before, the weekend's homecoming dance, or the total unfairness of your history teacher assigning a huge paper for Monday morning, you've lost the edge. Soccer should be your focus from the minute you start playing to the minute you stop.

This philosophy should not be reserved just for games. You should always practice the way you play. If you're focused during practice, then chances are you won't even have to think about focusing during a game. It will be second nature.

All this doesn't mean that you shouldn't have fun playing soccer. Actually that's the most important part. This is a game, after all, and you

should be playing it because you enjoy it. But believe it or not, the more committed you are to improving yourself, the better you will play, and the more fun you'll have. Nothing does more to turn a player into a superstar than a commitment to improvement, a love of the game, and a desire to be the best player she can be, every time out.



CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xii
FOREWORD	xiii
INTRODUCTION	xv
The Growth of Girls' Soccer	xv
A Look Inside	xvi
Practice Time	xvii
Play the Game	xvii
The Mental Commitment	xix
 1 IN THE BEGINNING	 1
A Short History	1
What's in a Name?	2
Soccer in the United States	2
 2 RULES AND EQUIPMENT	 5
The Playing Field	5
The Equipment	7
The Rules	7
Out of Bounds	7
Offsides	9
Fouls	10
A Few Unwritten Rules Too	11
 3 TRAINING TO PLAY	 13
Stretching	13
Ankles	14



Calves and Achilles Tendon	14
Quadriceps	15
Hamstrings	15
Hip Flexor	16
Inner Thigh	17
Hips	17
Groin	18
Waist and Sides	18
Shoulders	19
Triceps	19
Neck	20
Endurance Training	20
Circuits	21
Strength	22
Crunches	22
The Rocker	23
Hill Sprints	23
Brain Training	23
Drills	24
Forward Roll	24
Push Up	25
Leap and Roll	25
Back to Back, Chest to Chest, Head to Head	25
Jump and Stretch	26
Lift and Roll over Back	26
Swing	26
Fall, Catch, and Push	26
Indian Wrestling	27
Full Body Lift	27
Game Time	28
Stomach Toss	28
Over Under Relay Race	28
Leapfrog and Snakecrawl	29

4 PASSING 30

Control	30
Beyond Control—The Rest of the Basics	31
The Inside of the Foot	32



The Instep Pass	33
The Lofted Pass	34
The Chip	35
The Volley	36
The Drop Kick	37
The Outside of the Foot	37
One-Touch Passing	38
Drills	38
Wall Kicking	39
The Weave	39
“Yes” Drill	40
Windshield Wiper	41
Drills that Develop Ball Control	43
Side Flick	43
Heel Flick	43
Heel-Flick Fake and Go	44
Game Time	44
Six-in-a-Row	44
Soccer Golf	44
Hot Potato	45
Ten and Again	45

5 RECEIVING THE BALL 46

Create Options	46
Plays Without the Ball	47
Square	48
Wing	48
Wall	49
Overlap	49
Back	50
Communication	50
Trapping the Ball	50
Trapping with the Body	52
One-Touch Passing	53
Drills	53
Receive and Continue in Same Direction as Pass	53
Middle Player	54
Running Backward	54
Air Attack	56