

## The Value of Juggling

I still juggle all the time. I never pass one of my son's soccer balls without flicking it up and tapping it into the air. I'll balance it on my foot and tell Jack, my son, to get it. When he gets close, I'll flick it over his head and keep juggling. He just starts cracking up like it's the funniest thing in the world. My dad used to do that to me.

He'd juggle really close to his foot. I'd try to kick it away and miss. He played the ball so well with either foot that I remember not being sure whether he was right-footed or left-footed. Seeing him juggle so well made me want to do it. It was a challenge.

### **One reason juggling is so much fun is that you improve so quickly.**

First, you try to keep the ball up a couple times. When you can do it 10 times, you try for 20, then 50 and so on. Do it enough until you can juggle the ball 100 or 1,000 times. If you can juggle 20 times with your right foot, try 10 with your left foot. Alternating feet when you juggle is excellent practice.

### **Juggling is the greatest thing players can do to work on their skills.**

Sometimes kids ask, "Why should I juggle? You never do it in a game."

**Juggling trains you to become comfortable with the ball.** To tap the ball in the air over and over means you're hitting the sweet spot. How can a player volley a ball that comes flying across the field if he can't connect well on a ball he's knocking a few feet or inches in the air? Just as juggling off the instep helps a player acquire the skills for trapping and striking the ball, juggling off the thigh helps him become comfortable with bringing down the ball at that height. Remember—a player can't dictate how a ball is going to arrive during a game.

Besides training foot-eye coordination, **juggling is a great way to work on balance.** Standing on one foot, and hitting the ball with the other. That's just what a player does when he shoots, passes, or traps the ball.

And **good overall balance is a key ingredient to being a superb athlete.**

To this day, I love watching a videotape of Diego Maradona juggling the ball with every part of his body except his arms and hands. It's as if he has a spell over the ball. Being a good juggler doesn't necessarily make you a great player, but I've never seen a great player who's not a good juggler. I think that tells you something.

*Excerpts from "More Than Goals" by Claudio Reyna with Mike Woitalla were provided by Human Kinetics.*