



Report on efficacy of the Spot-on Sports Football

About Spot-on Sports

Introduction

A study was set up by spot-on sports in association with University College Cork Sports studies and physical education department to determine the efficacy of the newly designed football aimed at coaching young children in the basic skills of Gaelic football.

The spot-on sports football is the first football designed specifically for use in Gaelic football by young children. The ball itself has markings to provide a visual aid to beginners when introducing and improving kicking and hand passing technique. The study was specifically designed to determine feedback on the balls actual use within a coaching environment both from the point of view of coaches and from the children who were being coached. Children were asked to complete a questionnaire both before and after their training with the ball.

The coaching practice which forms the basis of the work under review, took place over a ten-week period in Inch Rovers ladies football club. Feedback from coaches was collected by means of a questionnaire. This report sets out the full response to the survey, setting out the details of feedback from both coaches and children. The co-operation of both coaches and children in the study is appreciated by spot-on sports.

Spot-on-Sports would also like to thank Orlagh Farmer for her support for this study and for administering all questionnaires involved in the feedback. The work conducted by UCC in this area is building an overall picture of skills development in the sport and will prove useful to experts and novice coaches alike in working with children to develop both skills and a love of the sport.

Barry Anderson

MD Spot-on-Sports

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Spot-on Sports Ball and Concept

About Spot-on Sports

Spot-on Sports is a new Irish business which aims to help in introducing beginners to the skills of Gaelic football in a fun and engaging way and also helps promote continued participation.

Founded by Barry Anderson, a passionate and experienced coach who has coached at all levels in clubs and as a club/school link coach in primary schools for over 10 years.

Ball and concept objectives

Spot-on Sports have added a design to the standard football which illustrates, through means of pictorial representations kicking and hand-passing technique to a child/beginner. This limits the need for the coach to have to explain the skill in detail and for the child to comprehend the verbal instruction and then perform the task with a plain football. The pictures assist the child in hand placement on the football, as well as providing an illustrated kick marking for children to aim for in kicking practice. Mastering the basic skills at a young age will help to raise the ceiling of achievement for all young players within the sport as a good standard of technical proficiency is a key building block for all learning at a later stage.



In addition to the football, the company provides on-line supports on their website which help the coach/teacher/parent to help the child. The online supports include a number of coaching drills using the football which demonstrate its usefulness as a coaching tool, as well as showing a number of young children using the football to learn in a fun way.

The idea of adding a coaching aid on the football is a new concept which has several benefits for clubs and schools, and will revolutionise the coaching of basic skills, becoming an integral part of the child's learning experience. The football is the essential piece of equipment required to train a child in the sport, and the addition of ball markings ensure that the maximum coaching possibilities can be utilised without additional expenditure by coaches and clubs.

Coach feedback

Profile of respondents

A total of nine coaches completed a questionnaire which was specifically designed to elicit information both on their current training methods, including kicking technique, use of visual aids and assessment of learning, as well as their view on the efficacy of the spot-on ball as a training aid. The nine coaches who responded, coached a variety of age groups. Five coached U8, seven coached U10s, two coached U12s and one coached U6s.

All coaches agreed that every child should have a ball where possible during training. One of the coaches additionally added that one between two could be sufficient while a ball each would be great to keep the children interested and enthusiastic.

Current coaching practice

Coaches were asked to describe how they currently introduce children to kicking technique. The full responses are set out below.

- By using two hands. One hand and dropping on the foot
- Break it down, two hands, one hand left or right depending on their kicking foot and drop to foot, kicking with laces.
- As much as possible I see with new girls they need extra time
- Two hands, one hand (right hand right foot) keep head down
- Look at ball with two hands, one hand either right or left, drop to foot and kick
- Showing them
- Drills from solo kicking - then kicking games
- By solo

It is worth noting from the above, the potential usefulness of the spot-on football in demonstrating kicking technique. The above descriptions very much describe the current approach of the majority of coaches. This approach involves the description and demonstration of the skills over and over to children, while the markings on the spot-on football are far more intuitive for the children and allows them to visually interpret the skill and to be able to practice it themselves using the ball markings as both a reminder of the skill and a guide to how it is properly done. The coach input using the spot-on football, while still critical, is less intensive.

Coach Feedback

Checking for learning

A range of assessment methods were employed by the respondent coaches, including observation, child-led assessment and questioning. The full range of responses are detailed below.

- Asking the girls do they understand and see can they do it themselves
- Questions, open and individual questions - helps the player to think for themselves, also assessment - practical drills
- Their movements and watching if not doing drill properly
- Watch
- Bring group into circle and if a few coaches divide group and watch
- Good listening then action
- Watching - standing next to them
- Ask child if they find it easier, point out the positives of what they do
- Visual

It is clear from the foregoing that coach involvement in assessment is critical in order to correctly develop skills. Various methods are employed by the coaches, including observation of the children's skill improvement, and questioning for learning. Having the markings on the ball is a great benefit for coaches to check for learning also.

Use of visual aids in coaching

Two coaches indicated that they did not use visual aids in coaching. The G4E video series was mentioned by two coaches. A further three coaches used video aids and diagrams (no particular series was referenced). One coach mentioned the use of cones. The full set of responses is outlined below.

- Using video aids for describing the drills
- Video aids and diagrams
- No but one of the coaches had the videos G4E programme for us.
- Video
- No girls too young but have videos from the G4E programme
- Yes, cones etc
- No
- No
- Yes, each coach looks at the skills

In all cases mentioned above, the visual aids were additional items to the game, including cones, videos, G4E programme and so on. The use of these visual aids is important in developing the children's engagement with the sport and building an understanding of their own levels of skill. A lot of the coaches used video aids for the coach, but none had used visual aids to help the participant.

Familiarity with the spot-on ball

One coach of the nine respondents, had seen the ball before. One coach indicated that they had not seen it before but that it is a good idea. The remaining seven had not seen the ball before they began to use it for this coaching experiment.

Coach Feedback

Initial thoughts on the ball

Coaches were asked to comment on their initial impressions of the ball, both on its appearance and on the concept in general. As mentioned above, only a single coach had previous knowledge of the ball, so the impressions below, are in fact very preliminary impressions.

- Very good for the younger players. It helps them, especially under - 8s.
- Very good, for younger players, but I wouldn't use it for U12 because too much concentration on the spots on the ball
- Looking on as a helper, the girls look at the shapes on the ball to do the drill
- Good idea
- What I have seen girls looking for diagram to kick if kicking or hand passing looking for ...hand
- First impressions very good. Like the visuals
- Great idea
- Visually engaging and easy to understand
- Very good

The coach feedback on the ball is very positive. The majority of coaches found the markings on the ball useful and easy for the children to interpret. One coach particularly mentioned U8s and younger players in general as finding the ball particularly helpful.

Usefulness of ball for coaching

How do you feel the spot-on football will make it easier for you as a coach to introduce the skills of the game?

- Great for coaches as they can visually see where to put hand on ball
- It was great for me as I coached the under 8s. It aided them on where to place their hands when hand passing and kicking.
- These footballs should be widespread in all clubs
- Help to focus
- These are ideal for under 7,8 and U10 show the basics
- Underage would like the colours on it. The way it shows the hands for hand passing
- Will make it easier to teach the younger kids
- 'Words' are already on the ball. These are emphasised during training.
- Ball is well used today, and kids can look at it while training

Coach feedback on the potential usefulness of the ball was detailed. The colours and images on the ball were highlighted for comment by several coaches. The usefulness of the ball in showing the basic football skills, particularly to younger players was additionally mentioned. The usefulness of the ball in focusing players and the visual nature of the children's interaction with the ball were all elements that were noticed and recorded by the coaches.

Coach Feedback

Usefulness of ball for children's understanding

Coaches were asked to indicate their impression of the ball's usefulness as an instruction tool for children. All the coaches were positive about the impact of the ball on children's understanding of instructions. The visual nature of the ball was a key useful feature, as was the fact that the ball can be easily used to progress the child on skills through hand-passing to kicking. Coaches felt that the ball is useful in showing technique, and utilised 'simple steps' to enable the child to build their skills. Full responses from the coaches are set out below.

How do you feel the spot-on football will make it easier for the child to understand instruction?

- They will know where to position hand
- The child will eventually get into the habit of placing their hand on the spot, that they will do it with every type of football
- The pictures help hugely
- Simple steps
- At u8 they need something to show besides you doing the tactics. Diagram will help
- Because its softer, hand passing would be easier as some balls are too hard.
- By visually showing them, more less hands on
- Could be used in progression through the drills from hand-pass/kicking.
- By looking at it and learning technique

Usefulness of ball for improving skills

Coaches were definitive and unanimous in their support for the spot-on ball. All of the coaches involved in the study felt that the use of the spot-on football would help children to improve their skills. Some of the specific elements mentioned by the coaches as helpful are the colour and instructions on the ball.

Do you feel that using the spot-on football will help children to improve skills?

- Definitely
- Absolutely
- For sure and big time should be sold in all sports shops to push girls/boys to help to coach them with technique
- Yes
- For definite
- Absolutely, its colour, because its soft, easy instructions on the ball.
- Yes
- 'Feel' of the ball is easier on the kids. Some of the current ones are hard when hit. Also, easier to catch.
- Yes

Children's pre-coaching feedback

Pre-coaching questionnaire for children

Profile of children

A total of 28 children completed the pre-training questionnaire. The respondents ranged in age from 8 to 13 years of age. Sixteen of the twenty-eight respondents were aged 10 or under. The majority (61%) played ladies football with a club, while fewer than half (46%) played ladies football in school.

The range of experience of children in football varied widely with some nine children having less than one year's experience of playing ladies football, with around seven children being relatively new to the game, having either just started, or indicating that they had less than two months experience of playing ladies football. Some thirteen of the children who completed the pre-questionnaire had over two years' experience of playing, in seven cases more than five years.

Confidence in a range of skills

Children were highly confident in the majority of the skills explored on the questionnaire. Over four out of five (82%) rated their hand pass at either a 4 or 5 level (5 being the highest level). Over nine out of ten rated their catch at levels 4 or 5, and 86% rated their kick at level 4 or 5. Solo was the skill where children appeared to be the least confident, with half rating their solo skill as a 4 or 5. Over four out of five (86%) rated their pick-up at a high level (either 4 or 5).

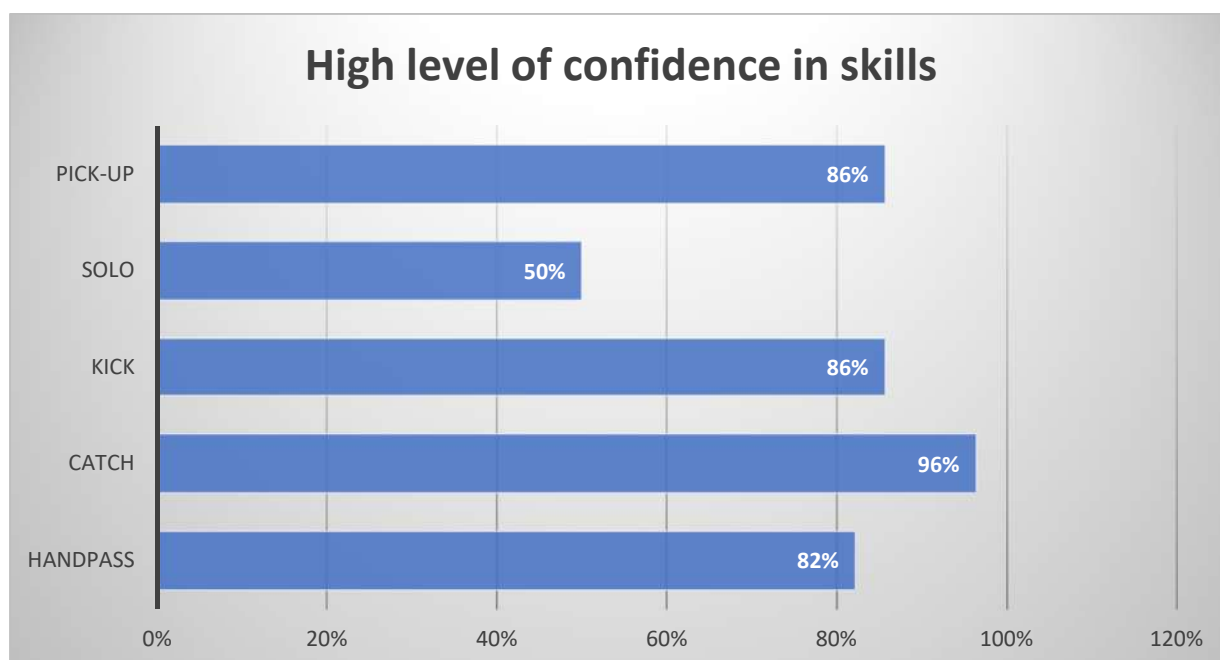


Figure 1: Confidence level of 4 or 5 in each skill

Children's pre-coaching feedback

Confidence in skill levels – U10

Looking at the skill levels by age, and separating out the U10s, a slightly different picture of skill proficiency and confidence emerges.

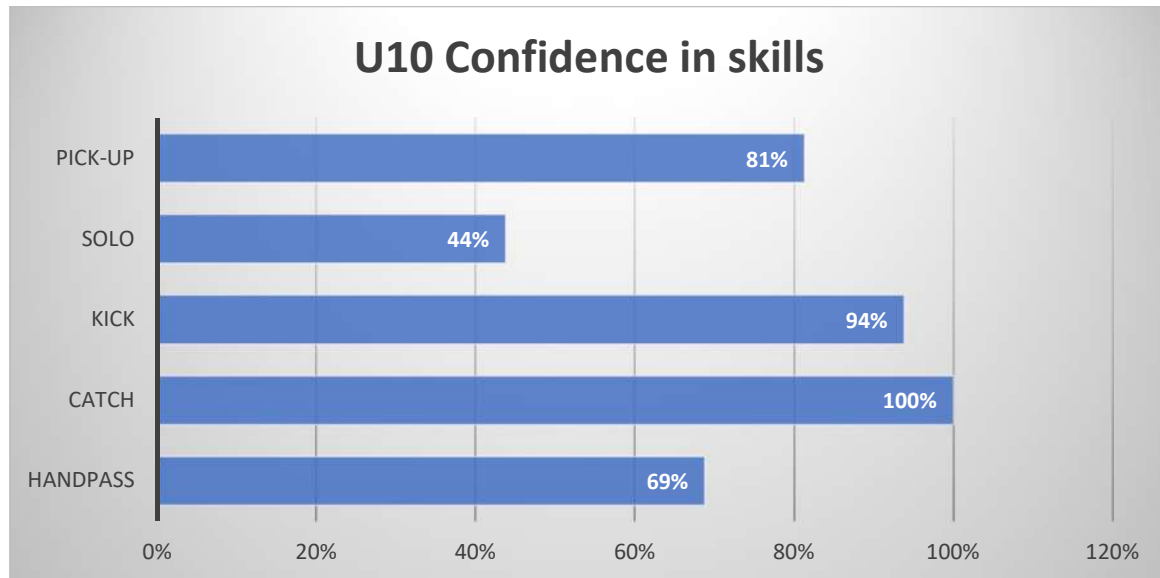


Figure 2: U10s rating confidence in skills at 4 or 5 level

Looking at the range of confidence levels in each skill by age group, it is clear that while the over 10 cohort were more confident in their hand passing, solo and pick-up skills, they were less confident than their younger counterparts in terms of their catch and kick skills. Figure 3 sets out the details.

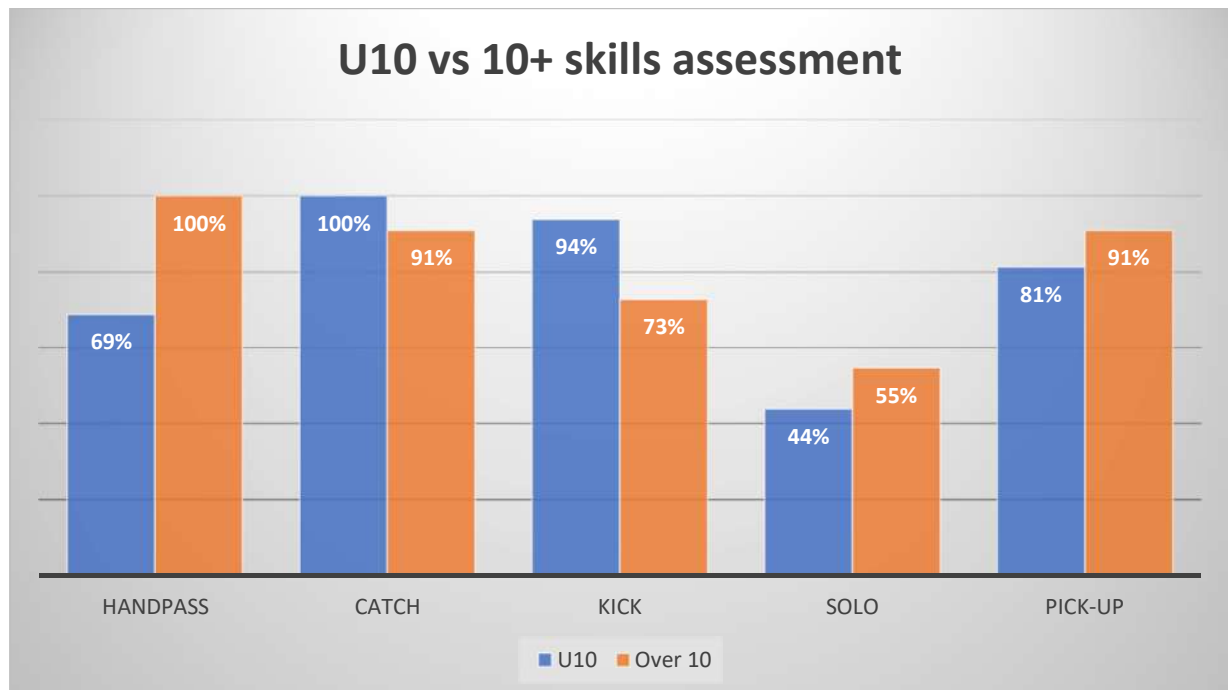


Figure 3: U10 vs Over 10s skills assessment at levels 4 and 5

Children's pre-coaching feedback

Conclusions from pre-training confidence levels

It is difficult to gauge the extent to which children were able to form a realistic analysis of their own skill levels. The majority of children in all cases rated their skills quite highly. However, this rating may also be a function of the length of time the children have been playing the game. Looking at a breakdown by length of time playing, it is clear that the skill levels of children that had been playing for longer than three years were very high, particularly compared with those who were relatively new to the game. Figure 4 below sets out the details. We can see that skills such as hand pass, catch kick and solo were more in evidence among children who had been playing the game for longer.

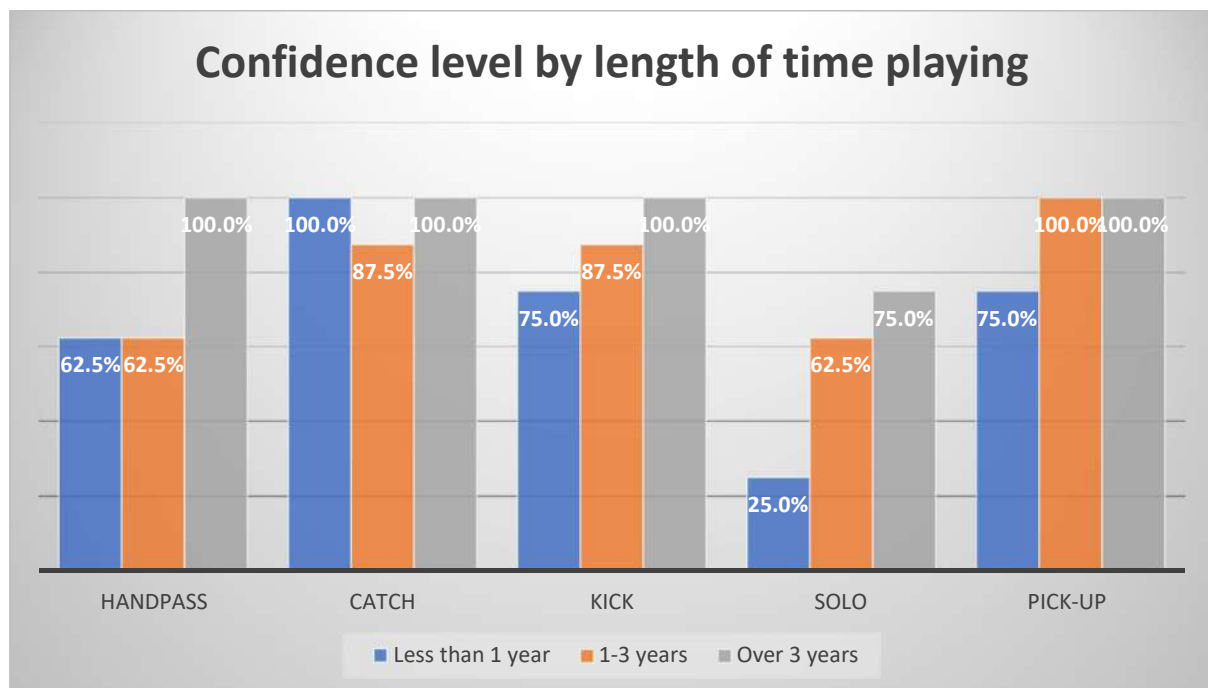


Figure 4: Confidence level by length of time playing

Use of different ball

Children were asked to indicate if using a Gaelic football with writing/pictures on it would enhance their confidence and improve their Gaelic football skills. Half of the respondents said that they were not sure, while 46% said that they felt that such a ball would improve their skills. Only one child believed that such a ball would not enhance their confidence or skills.

Post-training Questionnaire

Children's post-coaching feedback

Introduction

Following a period of training using the spot-on football, children were asked a series of questions to get their feedback on using the ball. They were asked to assess their confidence levels in the same skills as those that were explored on the pre-training questionnaire, namely, hand pass, catch, kick, solo and pickup. Children were also asked to rate their experience of using the ball itself. The following section sets out the full findings.

Profile of children

The respondents ranged in age from 8 to 13 years of age. Respondents on the post-training questionnaire were not asked the length of time they had been playing or whether or not they play with a club.

Skills assessment post -training

Over nine out of ten of those who completed a questionnaire post training rated their hand pass at a 4 or 5 level. Over four out of five rated their kick and catch skills at this level also, and just under four out of five (79%) rated their pick-up skills at a high level. Solo was the skills where fewest children rated their skills at a four or five level (43%). Figure 6 below sets out the details.



Figure 6: Skills assessment post-training (levels 4 and 5)

Post-training Questionnaire

Skills assessment post-training by age

Children under 10 were more likely to rate their catch skills post training at a four or five level compared with their older (over 10) counterparts. For all other skills, older children were more likely to rate their skills at a higher level than were the U10 cohort. Figure 7 below sets out the full details.

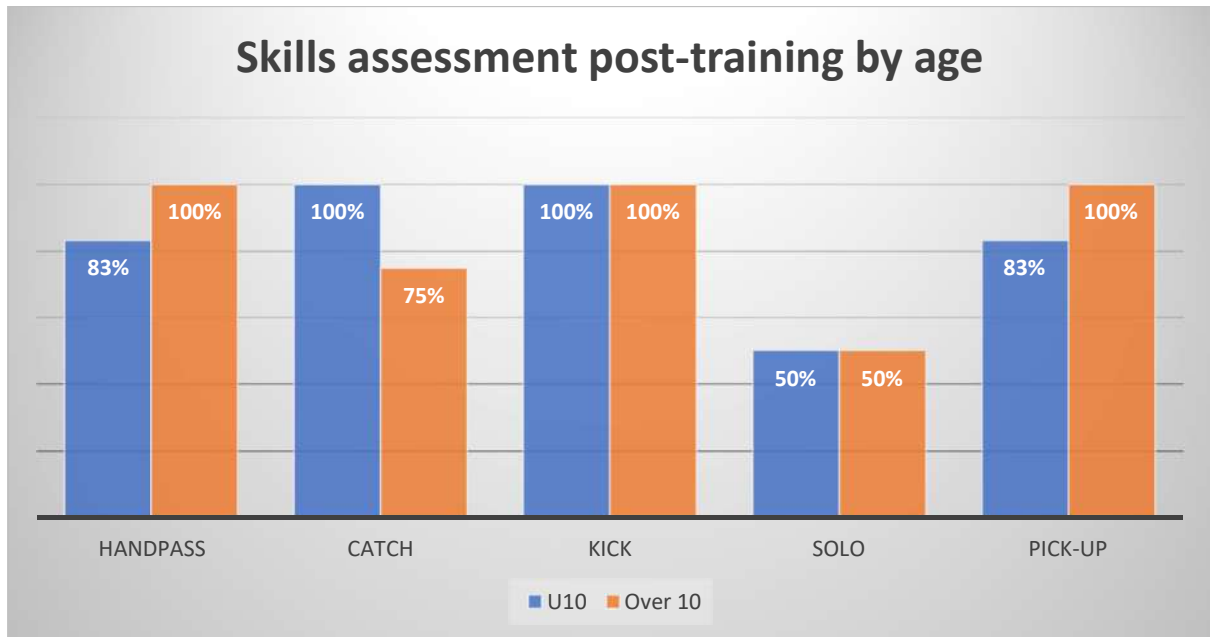


Figure 7: Skills assessment post-training by age

Pre and post training comparison

Figure 8 below shows the overall comparison of the skills ratings across the pre- and post-training questionnaires.

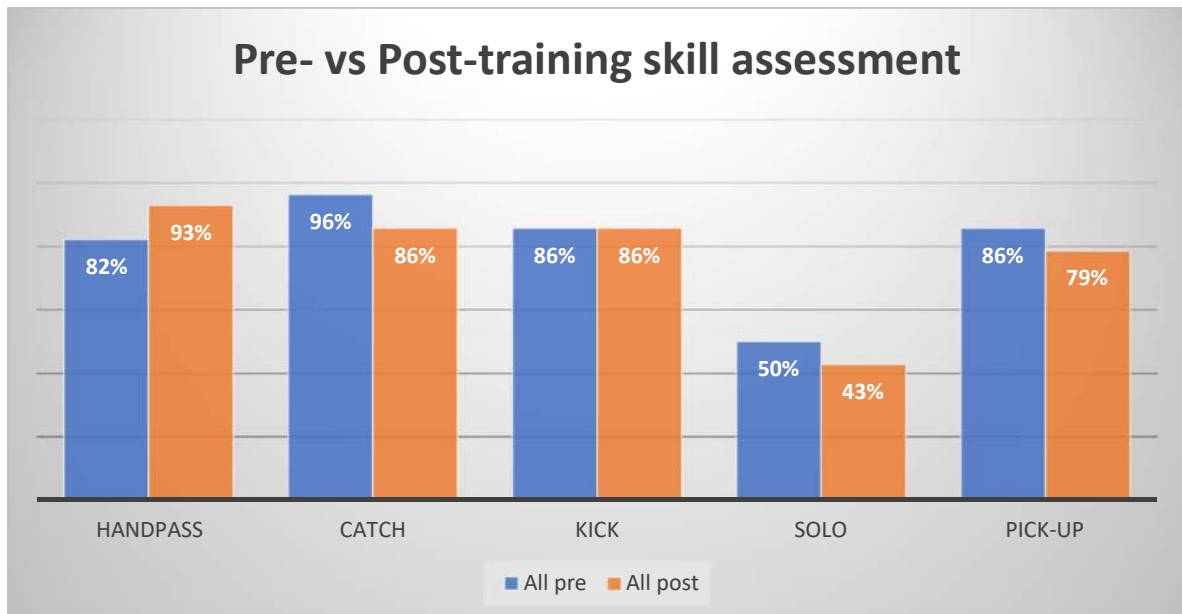


Figure 8: Pre- vs Post-training skills self-assessment – all respondents.

Post-training Questionnaire

Under 10s

With the exception of catching, which all Under 10s assessed at a level 4 or 5 in advance of the training, all other skills showed improvement based on the skills self-assessment of the under 10 players.

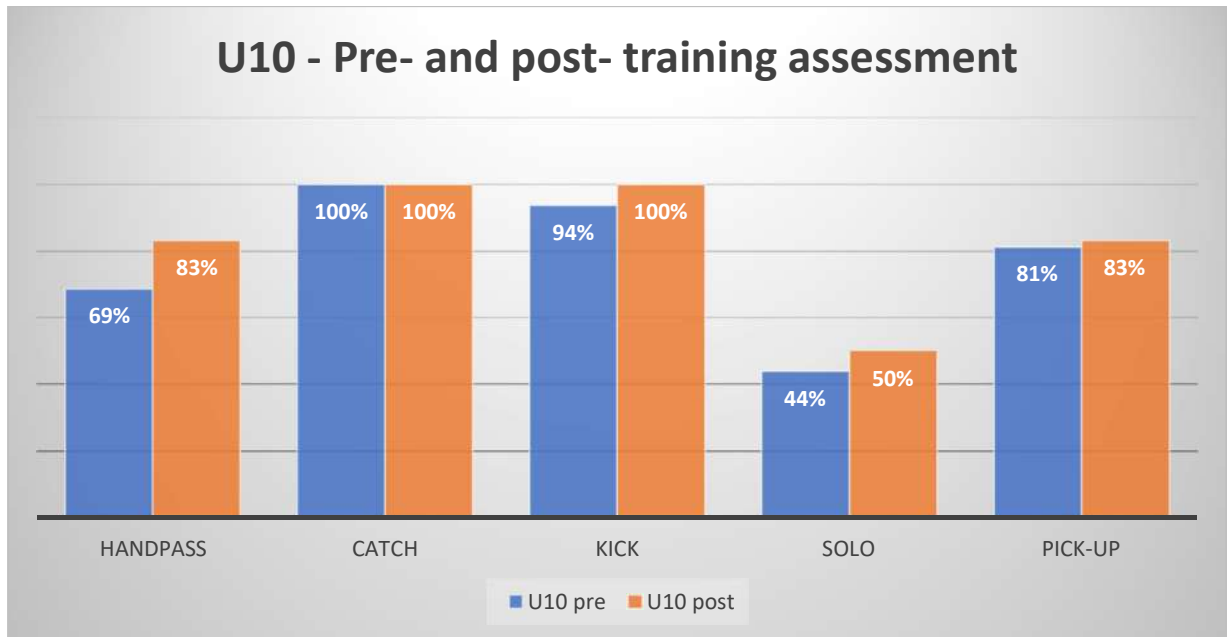


Figure 9: comparison of U10 skill assessment pre- and post-training

Similar findings were evident in the over 10s group, where a 27% improvement in kicking skills was noted. Catch and solo skills however, received a lower skill rating among the post-training group of over 10s. This may be due to the incidence of more difficult drills as training progressed leading to a revision of children's own assessment of their skills as requiring improvement.

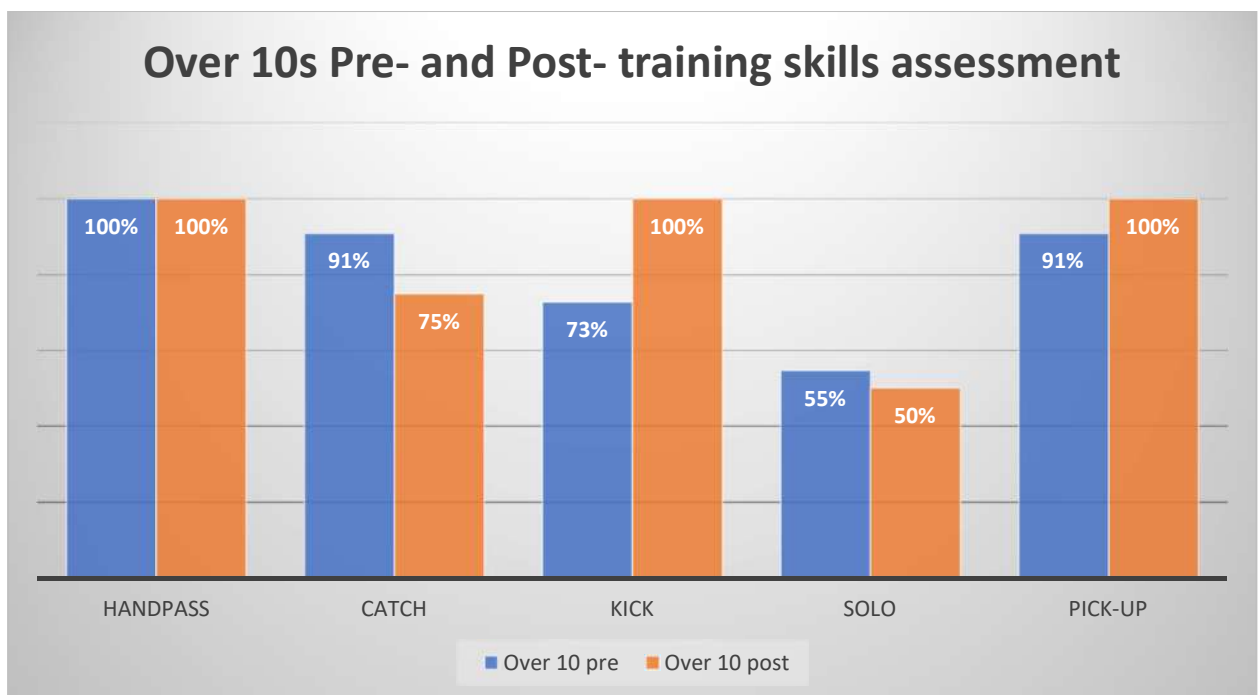


Figure 10: comparison of over 10's skill assessment pre- and post-training

Post-training Questionnaire

The football itself

Children were asked a series of questions about the football itself.

The majority, over three out of five (62%) children felt that the ball was easy to understand, the remainder (38%) were not sure.

Over seven out of ten children would ask their parents to buy the spot-on football for them or would recommend the ball to a friend. The remaining 29% were not sure.

Attitudes to the ball

86% of the children liked the ball.

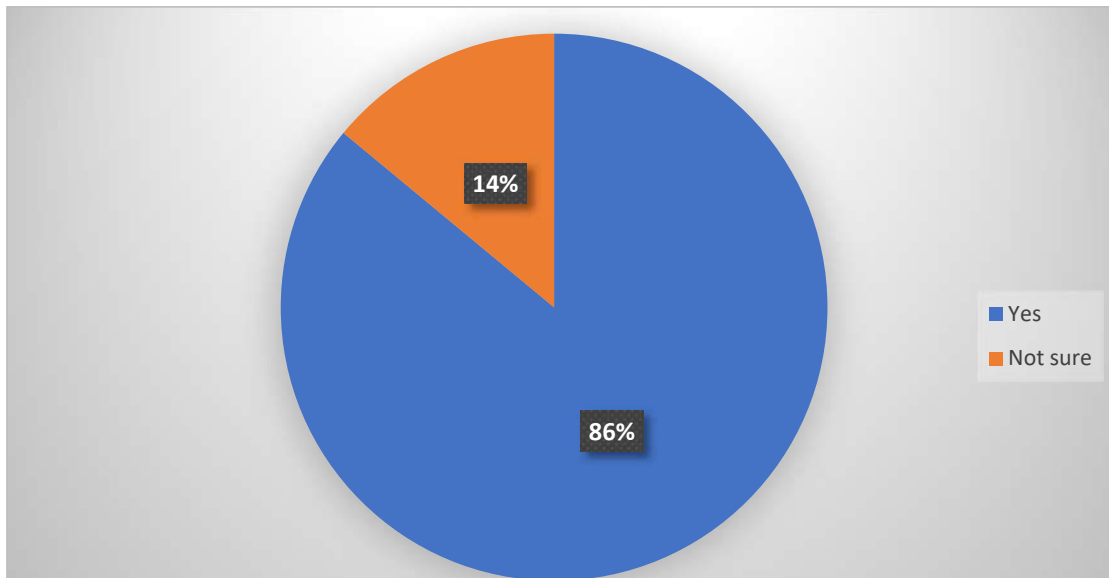


Figure 11: Do you like the ball?

Post-training Questionnaire

Future use of the ball

Over seven out of ten (71%) indicated that they would use the ball, while 29% indicated that they were not sure. Their future use may be contingent on a number of factors, including ball ownership, which are not explored as part of this exercise.

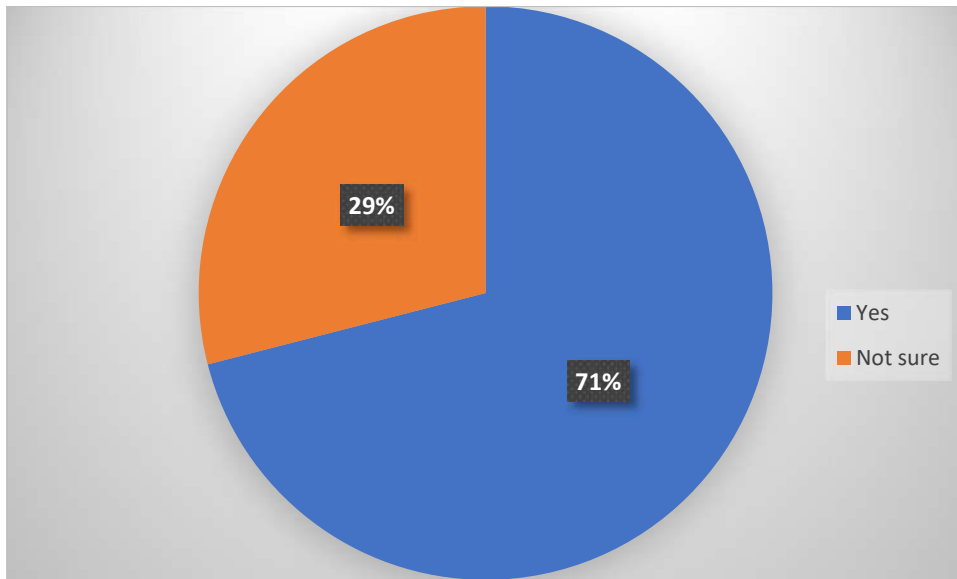


Figure 12: Do you think you will use the ball?

Preference for the spot-on football

Over a quarter of children indicated that they would prefer the spot-on football to other footballs. A further 36% indicated that they weren't sure, and 36% said that they would not prefer this ball to other balls. The reasons for children's viewpoints are provided below Figure 13.

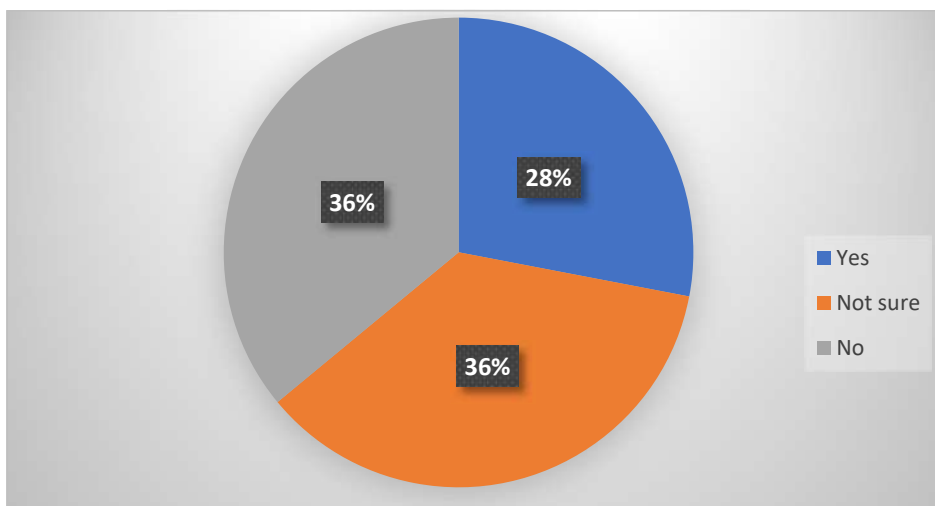


Figure 13: Do you prefer the spot-on football to other balls?

The football proved popular with the children, enhanced their skills, and the majority of children surveyed indicated that they would ask their parents to buy one, or would recommend it to a friend. One of the mitigating factors, in terms of preference for the use of the ball, is the perception that the ball is not a 'proper' ball. This preconception among children could be overcome by use of the ball as an integral part of training.

Conclusions

Conclusions

A number of conclusions arise from the study.

- The support for the ball among the respondent coaches was unanimous. Coaches overall felt that the design and visual nature of the ball markings were of assistance to children in acquiring the basic skills of the game. This view was supported by the children's own view of the ball.
- Specific characteristics of the football were mentioned by both children and coaches. The colours on the ball, the markings that enable children to correctly place hands for hand-passing as well as kick marks were all highlighted in the study by both cohorts of respondents.
- Children's own assessments of their skill levels were relatively high. However, it is clear that for the U10 group in particular, their assessments of their skills were improved under each of the skills investigated post-coaching with the Spot-on sports ball.
- Over four out of five children indicated that they liked the ball, and seven out of ten indicated that they would continue to use the ball.
- Coaches initial reactions to the ball were unanimously positive, and all felt that it would be a useful addition to their training. The children's positive reactions to the ball, and to the visuals on the ball were also stressed by coaches in their feedback.
- It is clear from this research that the spot-on sports ball and concept is one that improves the learning experience for children and also the coaching/teaching process for adults. Not only has the coaching usefulness of the ball been confirmed but additionally children respond well to the visuals and like using the ball which gives this ball a clear advantage over plain footballs currently in use with beginners.