Soccer Heading Checklist

General Points on Heading
1. Keep the eyes on the ball during the entire skill, both before and after impact. Using less than ideal biomechanics can result in too much trunk or neck flexion, making it impossible for the athlete to keep their eye on the ball. This decreases accuracy and stability of the athlete’s body in the air.

2. Impact the ball with the middle zone of the forehead, although more skilled players may use other parts of the head. The middle zone of the forehead includes the frontal bone, which provides a smooth, flat and strong surface for the impact with the ball.

3. The neck should remain relatively fixed with both neck flexors and extensors contracted. This allows adequate transmission of momentum to the ball and decreases the chance of injury. “Flicking” the neck should be avoided, as this causes angular acceleration of the head, which puts the head and neck at greater injury risk. If the neck muscles are not firmly contracted, the ball may produce some backward movement of the head which decreases the athlete’s control over the ball.

4. The faster the run up to head the ball, the more force can be imparted to the ball, increasing its speed.

5. Use the largest number of joints possible (including the legs, trunk, arms and shoulders) to impart force to the ball for maximum speed.

6. If the athlete is jumping to head the ball and it is contacted at the height of the jump, there is zero vertical velocity of the body, so the trunk muscles will have to produce velocity. If the ball is contacted at the instant the athlete leaves the ground, he will get maximum velocity from his head transferred to the ball which together with trunk muscle contraction will produce a greater velocity on the ball. When heading in a crowd, the player who jumps highest who will make contact first. Generally it is suggested to head the ball on the way up in the jump, just before the apex of the jump.

7. Deceleration of the head after impact is very important to avoid injury. Deceleration is aided by keeping the eyes on the ball after impact. Deceleration
is also aided by keeping the neck muscles rigid and contracted. If the neck is allowed to snap forward after contact, there is an increased chance of injury.

8. Following impact, the head plays an important role in maintaining balance of the body during flight. A change in direction of the trunk is usually preceded by a change in direction of the head. So after impact, the neck muscles should stay contracted to decelerate the head and allow the eyes to stay focused on the ball. If the neck is allowed to flex, the trunk will go with it, putting the athlete off balance in the air and potentially on the ground when they land.

**Offensive Header on Goal From a Cross Pass**

**Two-foot take-off moving header**

**Takeoff Phase**

Two foot take-off increases the height of the jump over a one foot take-off. A run up is used to increase the knee flexion range of motion at takeoff. Arms should be well behind the trunk on landing for the takeoff- a greater range of arm motion will increase the ground reaction forces and increase the height of the jump.

Knees and hips flexed to 90 degrees prior to takeoff.
Trunk flexed well forward prior to takeoff.
The athlete should initiate the jump by swinging the arms up, elbows extended then extend the legs and trunk.
At takeoff the trunk, knees and hips should be fully extended and the arms should be pointing upward to ensure a full range of motion of these joints.

**Airborne Phase**
The initial movement of the trunk and hips on leaving the ground is extension to produce more range of motion through which to move and produce velocity that can be imparted to the ball. Trunk extension should be 10-15 degrees, and hip extension should be approximately 30 degrees.

The knees should be flexed.
The athlete may use some trunk rotation and/or sideflexion away from the desired direction of the ball to prepare to re-direct the ball towards the net from the cross pass.
As the athlete approaches the peak of the jump and impact, he should begin to flex the hips and trunk and extend the knees.
The arms should still be above the head.

**Impact**
At impact, the player is just shy of the peak height of the jump so he still has some vertical velocity and can reach the ball before other players on the field.
The hips and trunk should forcefully flex and the knees should extend.
The trunk should forcefully sideflex or rotate toward the ball if this was part of the airborne phase.
The arms should drive forcefully into horizontal extension to impart force and to help keep the body stable in the air.
The neck remains stationary and the trunk flexes approximately 30 degrees in the direction of the header. When used as a shot on goal the player must aim the ball away from the goalkeeper and preferably in a downwards direction.

**Landing**
The player must try to land on both feet at the same time, to decrease the force of impact.