



Soccer Players: Visualize Your Goals

See why visual skills play a key role in the game.

Soccer is one of the most popular sports in the world. And it's also one of the most demanding of its players' visual skills.

Sussex University's Tag Lamche has extensively researched the role of visual awareness in soccer. "Visual skills are central to soccer, with specific challenges for goalkeepers and for the various outfield positions," says Lamche.

Lamche believes that too many soccer coaches and players think of sports vision training as a one-day activity that's interesting but not a normal part of their game preparation. He is trying to get the word out about the potential benefits of vision training.

"Visual skills training represents the final frontier in elite sports training, with huge potential to elevate skill level, creativity and play-making ability," he says.

Key concepts

Coaches can train players to make the following vision strategies second nature:

- Scan the playing field.
- Track open spaces.
- Anticipate plays.
- Keep your body position open to maximize field of vision.

On defense, Lamche says, "Coaches should stress fundamentals such as maintaining a 'defensive triangle' to ensure you position yourself to see the ball and the attack you're making."

Do you have the six most important visual skills for soccer?

The six most important visual skills for soccer

1. Gaze control

Gaze control refers to where you position your eyes when executing a kick. If a player executes the kick with his or her head down, he or she is more likely to score because the goalkeeper won't be able to pick up cues from the kicker's eyes.

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2. Peripheral awareness

This is the player's ability to perceive what's going on around him or her, without turning his or her head. Karen Muncey, president of Dynamic Edge Sports Vision Training Centers, notes, "Peripheral awareness is not only essential for superior performance, but it also helps prevent collision and injury."

3. Visual search strategies

Skilled soccer players know where to look for the most important visual cues and information.

Strategies include:

- Anticipation. Experienced players hold their eyes on an area of interest for at least 100 milliseconds.
- One-on-one defense. Expert players concentrate on opponents' knees and hips.
- Passing and kicking accuracy. The most accurate kickers display longer eye fixation on the target prior to kicking.

4. Visualization

"Your performance is determined by the thoughts programmed into your mind," explains Craig Townsend, director of It's Mind Over Matter. With mental visualization comes shot execution. Highly skilled players are better able to visualize their shots than their less-skilled counterparts.

5. Visual coordination

Top players have top visual coordination skills. Muncey explains, "Most soccer players depend more on eye-foot and eye-body coordination than on eye-hand coordination. Exact eye-foot coordination is essential to making solid shots that go in the right direction, perfectly on target."

6. Visual memory

Skilled players can recall and recognize patterns of play more effectively than their less-skilled opponents, and they have a better idea of what is likely to happen under different sets of circumstances.

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