



Let's train the eye muscles!

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Association

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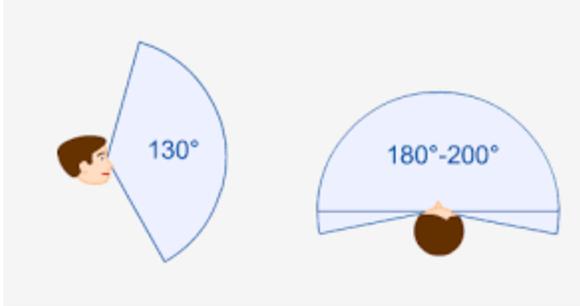
Age group: 8-12

Perception, decision, execution such as passing, dribbling, shooting are important factors to a player's success when playing the game. Therefore, the practice sessions should help the development of these factors. Playing is the best teacher for youth.

Every player is subject to considerable amounts of sensory stimuli they must digest and react to in real-time. The player must perceive, conceive, and decide a plan of responsive play within a split second.

- *Perception: is the ability to scan one's environment and filter to the most relevant data.*
- *Conception: is the envisioning of possibilities within that environment. A player would make a decision in real time.*
- *Execution: is to pass, to shoot, and to dribble with technical precision.*

A player's options are determined by what he sees. This is why perception, conception in conjunction with decision making are essential success factors within a soccer game. Furthermore, the interaction between the pressure of time, space, and opponent create an infinite number of potential situations in every game. This always creates a new situation and makes soccer unpredictable. If a player can perceive, conceive, decide and execute with technical precision, he will be prepared for all situations in a soccer and will make a quick decision. The decision-making is based on experience and knowledge which the player experienced through practice sessions and games. Therefore, we should challenge the kids with many visual stimuli in practice sessions, so they are learning to make decisions on the field. This article will demonstrate how to develop and train the player's peripheral vision. Peripheral vision allows you to see objects all around you without turning your head or moving your eyes. It is what you use to see something out of the corner of your eye. It helps the player scan the field and to make a quick decision prior to even receiving the ball.



left picture: vertical field of vision
right picture: horizontal field of vision

In the picture above you can see the horizontal field of vision range of an average person which covers 180° - 200° . The horizontal field of vision can be extended up 270° through practice of the eye muscles. We can assume that a game like practice session can help develop the vision and composure that is needed to make a decision under time pressure. More important, the kids learn how to find a solution and to decide autonomously to succeed on the field. These practice sessions will help to develop their vision, and the kids will have fun, because they are playing soccer!



Warm up

Set up:

- 35x25yd octagon field.
- 4 mini goals at the longer side.
- 3 teams of 5 players > each team has a different color.
- Each team has 2 balls.
- The players pass the ball within their team.

Coaching points:

- Let them pass and move for 1-2 minutes without any instructions.
- The receiving player needs to change the direction after getting the ball > before receiving scan the field to find space.
- After passing the ball > the player changes the direction as well to make himself available to receive the ball from the next player.
- Head up, scan field, find space.
- Purpose of the pass is to penetrate forward to the opponent's goal and to play the opponents out of the game > look for the long vertical pass.
- As a receiver don't be too close to the passer.

Variation 1:

- Every player has a ball now > the players are changing their balls passing to each other
- But this time the players must change the ball with a player of a different color.

Variation 2:

- One team leaves the field and 4 players position on the slope side of the field > the 5th player is a neutral player on the field.
- Every player of blue and green has a ball > the player play a give and go ball with the outside players or with the neutral player in the field > when they get the ball back > they score on the mini goal with the second touch (goal is to win space quickly).



Main part 1 (5 vs 5+5)

Set up:

- keep the field set up from warm up.
- Blue and green team are in the field.
- 4 red player position on the outside and one red player in the field as a neutral player.
- Blue vs. green > the goal is to get the ball from one side to other (1 point) together with the neutral player.
- If the team makes it to other side, they get the ball back from the outside player and change the direction to make it to the other side (the scoring team keeps the ball).
- Switch the teams after 4-5min.

Coaching points:

- Quick ball control and quick passing.
- Scan the field before receiving > where is the next open player, where are the defenders, where is space?
- Long vertical passes to gain space > no high ball!
- Pass with power and precision (to keep the defenders away).
- The team can use the outside and neutral players.

Main Part 2

Set up: same as above.

- Blue vs. green.
- Each team defends 2 mini goals and scores on the other 2 mini goals.
- A team must play with the neutral before they can score (at least one pass) > the teams must unlock the goals.
- After a turnover they must start over again.
- If a team scores > change the game direction > the scoring team keeps the ball.

Main Part 3

- Same set up.
- This time if the team in ball possession plays with an outside player, the outside player can now enter the field and support the team > if the team loses the ball > the outside players must go back to the original position.



Final Part

Set up:

- Same field set up.
- Use 2 youth goals with goalies.
- Green vs. blue > the team in ball possession can play with the outside players.
- If the team scores without using the neutral or outside player = 1 point.
- If the team scores by using the neutral player = 2 points.
- If they use the offense outside player, the outside players can dribble with the first touch in to the endzone and can pass in front of the goal and assists the goal = 3 points
- Change teams and tasks after 3-4 min.
- No change of game direction after scoring this time!

Coaching Points:

- Same as above!

Highlights of the coaching points:

1. Touch

Find free space with the first touch and change the direction of play.

Pass to gain space

Use long vertical passes preferably to gain space and to play out opponents of game quickly. Depth before width!

Sharp passing

Pass with power and precision to make it as difficult as possible for the defender to intercept the ball.

Getting open and supporting

Don't stop after passing the ball, keep moving. "Can I be an option to receive a ball again?".

Eye contact

Pass only if the receiver is ready to receive; look for eye contact and speak to the receiver.

Find the gap

Try to get open between 3 defenders, even if you don't get the ball often, but it will draw the defenders

Scan the field

Scan the field for options and the next step or move before receiving the ball.

Keep the ball moving

When receiving the ball, don't stop the ball completely. Keep the ball moving with the first touch!

Leading pass

Pass the ball into the leading foot. So that the receiver can move forward with the ball with the first touch!

To sum up, it is important that kids can make decisions autonomously and not to overcoach the kids. That requires a coach to be patient, to tolerate mistakes, and to let the kids find their way to solve a problem on the field. Too many instructions from the coach can create an information overload for a player which results in diminishing returns. This will take some time and you won't see results within a week or two. It is important to keep the long-term development of every player in your mind.

Let them play!

I also recommend having the kids use earplugs, so that kids can't hear, and they must use their eyes. You could also have all kids play in the same color. Now they must recognize the faces of their teammates.

As always please let me know if you have any questions, if you need more information or if you have any feedback. Please feel free to contact me: dgroth@nyswysa.org.