

How to Develop Faster Reactions

For soccer players, speed is always a fundamental skill to develop. Having speed can cure many ills of a team or player. Speed can give a team/player a tremendous advantage on the field. Speed allows teams to score more goals, defend better and to win more 50-50 balls allowing for more possession.

Performance based speed and agility training helps players learn the skills necessary for speed improvement. But what about reaction speed? Can reaction speed be increased through training as well? The answer is YES!

Reaction time can be defined as the measurement of stimulus and response affected by 4 distinct measurements.

1. Perception of the stimulus: What has changed on the field?
2. Recognition of the stimulus: What does that change mean to me as a player?
3. Analysis: What should I do about this change?
 - a. Learned responses allow a player to deal with the change.
4. Motor action: Beginning of muscle activation.

Performance based training shortens this reaction time.

By exposing a soccer player to many different on the field scenarios, the player will shorten the recognition period. Mental recall beats mental construction every time!

The concept is that if a player has experienced a similar stimulus in the past to the one the player now faces, there is a developed pathway in the player's brain which allows the player to choose one of several possible solutions. Once the possible solutions are narrowed, choosing the best one is now accelerated due to this scenario based training.

With regards to the motor action phase of reaction, the speed (time) range for a muscle to contract falls between $\frac{1}{4}$ second to $\frac{3}{4}$ second. While some of this (motor action speed) is genetic based, a lot of this is influenced by performance based training too.

Since scoring and defending can be measured in inches and milliseconds, giving your players scenarios that allow them to process them faster, may result in your team scoring more goals and giving up less goals too.

Some examples could be:

- Mishandled goalie collections
- Body language of the shooter on a PK

- A ball in the box that cannot be cleared
- Slick/wet playing conditions
- A dummied ball between the legs

What examples can you add that could help your team react to situations?

By putting your players in game simulated situations, and coaching them on how to handle these situations should they occur, will help develop quicker reaction times for your players to react to these situations.

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