

## Focus

### What is Focus?

Focus is the ability to keep all of your attention and concentration on just one thing. For example, if you are focused on juggling then you are only thinking about juggling and you are concentrating on the ball and using the proper technique. You push all other thoughts out of your mind.

### Understanding Focus:

In order to be able to do the type of practice that is proven to accelerate the development of skills (deliberate practice) you need to develop the ability to focus and concentrate on learning and practicing that skill. This type of focus takes tremendous willpower because it's not easy to do. You must give every ounce of mental effort you have to stay on task and not let your mind wander.

### Connection to Soccer:

Focus is very important in a game like soccer because the game is very complex. Complete focus and concentration must be given to what's happening on the pitch because there are so many decisions to be made *before* taking a touch or playing the ball.

- Great soccer players develop the ability to block out distractions.
- Great soccer players are conditioned to practice with total focus and concentration.
- Great soccer players practice on the "edge" of their current ability, always reaching to master new skills.
- Great soccer players stay completely in the moment... the *now*.
- Great soccer players focus on **WIN** which stands for **What's Important Now**.
- Great soccer players practice *big picture thinking* and constantly remind themselves of what's important to reaching their big goals.

### How to Develop your Focus:

Countless thoughts are competing for your attention. Learning to focus your attention on just one thing and then keep that focus for long periods of time is a skill that takes time to develop, just like juggling is a skill.

### Here are some practical tips to help you develop focus:

1. Before you begin a training session or match create a routine to mentally prepare for what's getting ready to take place. A word or thought such as WIN can be a "cue" to alert you to mentally get ready. Ask yourself: "What's important right now?" Mentally

prepare to concentrate and give 100% mental and physical energy to what you are going to be doing.

2. If you find that during workouts your mind starts to wander, learn to bring your focus back to the activity you're doing. Create a cue or trigger such as **WIN** that can help you refocus your attention back to the activity at hand.
3. Learn to mentally be the boss of your own world. You control the thoughts in your head and what you're focused on. Think about what you're thinking about.

### **Did You Know?**

Both the Men's National Team and Women's National Team have a sports psychologist or "mental coach." Here's what Colleen M. Hacker Ph.D. who has served as the Women's National Team's sport psychology consultant since 1996, has to say about focus: "There are only three points in time for an athlete: past, present and future. Wherever you focus, that's where your energy goes. Does it do any good to focus in the past or in the future? No. The focus should be on this play, this moment. Its right-now thinking and awareness. That's where maximum control is for athletes: Right now!"