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## Scanning the field

Soccer-expert.com

Look at these comments about Maren Meinert, the German midfielder who performed so well in the recent women's world cup.

"She sees those runs that other players don't see," said Kristine Lilly, who was her teammate in Boston for three years.

April Heinrichs compares this almost sixth-sense to a professional billiards player who is able to see one or two shots ahead and prepares accordingly. "She has an idea of what she wants to do with the ball well before she gets it," said Heinrichs.

"Her head is always on a swivel. So often, players receive the ball and then think about how they're going to deal with it. She's moving well in advance."

Theune-Meyer (Head Coach of Germany) marvels at this type of expertise, as well. "She's very quick with her decisions, and she never looks down at the ball," said the German coach. "She always has a wide view of the field. And she never does what you expect."

Think of the best players in the world: Zidane? Ronaldo? Figo? Or Beckham? Are these players just naturally gifted technicians or do they have something else that helps make them great. These players seem to have more time than others when they receive the ball. Why do you think this is? They seem to be able to 'drift' into areas, which means they have more time on the ball. Do you think this is just a natural instinct or is it a taught awareness? I would suggest that it is a self-taught or coach taught awareness that becomes 'natural'. However, whatever the origins this awareness can be definitely be taught.

You sometimes hear coaches saying words and phrases like, "Anticipate", "Be aware" and "Look around". These terms actually highlight one very important aspect of youth development - the ability to 'scan the field'.

Players need to be aware of teams mates and opponents' positions and movements. This awareness will determine the position they will take up and what their decision will be if they receive the ball or even if they don't receive the ball.

For players in attack to create space for themselves or others they need to make the right decisions on the position they should take up on the field. The skill of scanning the field is also extremely important in defence.

The problem many coaches have is that they don't realise the importance of this aspect of youth development. The best 'readers' of the game e.g. Bobby Moore, Alan Hansen or in today's game Rio Ferdinand, scan the field constantly analysing player movement and positions.

This enables them to take up the optimum position where they are going to be most effective, either in defence or in attack.

This is not as simple as saying to a player 'get your head'. Various exercises/practices can be done to do this. Some of these can be seen on the [soccer-expert.com](http://soccer-expert.com) site. However, I would like to highlight the importance of this skill by looking at a simple scenario.

A game is building up from the back and the ball is transferred to a winger who gets in a position to cross the ball into the area. The forwards run into the box to attack the cross. The midfielder makes the decision to hang out of the area and take up a position directly in-line with the centre of the area.

In order to make that decision the midfielder must have scanned the field to identify the optimum position in order to be ready for any ball that may come out from the area after the cross. Now this is a simple example of the importance of scanning the field. You, I am sure, can think of many others.

What this example highlights is the importance of this skill. The best players are also the best 'readers of the game'. However, don't be fooled that this is just a natural skill. Yes, some may be naturally better than others, but it is a skill that can be taught and players can improve on. Coaches neglect this at their peril.

**Derek Broadley** from [soccer-expert.com](http://soccer-expert.com) adds: The most common phrase in youth soccer must be "get your head up" and yet if we think about the phrase the players are doing the natural thing in that they are looking where the ball is.

The soccer-expert team work on "scanning the field" rather than "head up".

"Scanning" is the method of getting your head up prior to coming into contact with the ball in order to know what it is you are going to do when the ball arrives.

Scanning the field is dependent on the player's body shape and is a clear indication of game awareness. Scanning is introduced in many practises that do not include a ball or by bringing the ball off the floor and into the hands.

Young players must pick up the signals of the game and it is difficult to distract them away from the ball so in order to improve the skill of scanning we must isolate the skill and take away the distractions.

The soccer-experts have developed many practises that will encourage young players to pick up the signals of the game in a fun environment using practises that all children do naturally around the world.

The advantages can be clearly seen in player awareness from the early stages, which lead to better tactical situations in all areas of the field. Scan the web for the next edition of [soccer-expert.com](http://soccer-expert.com).

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