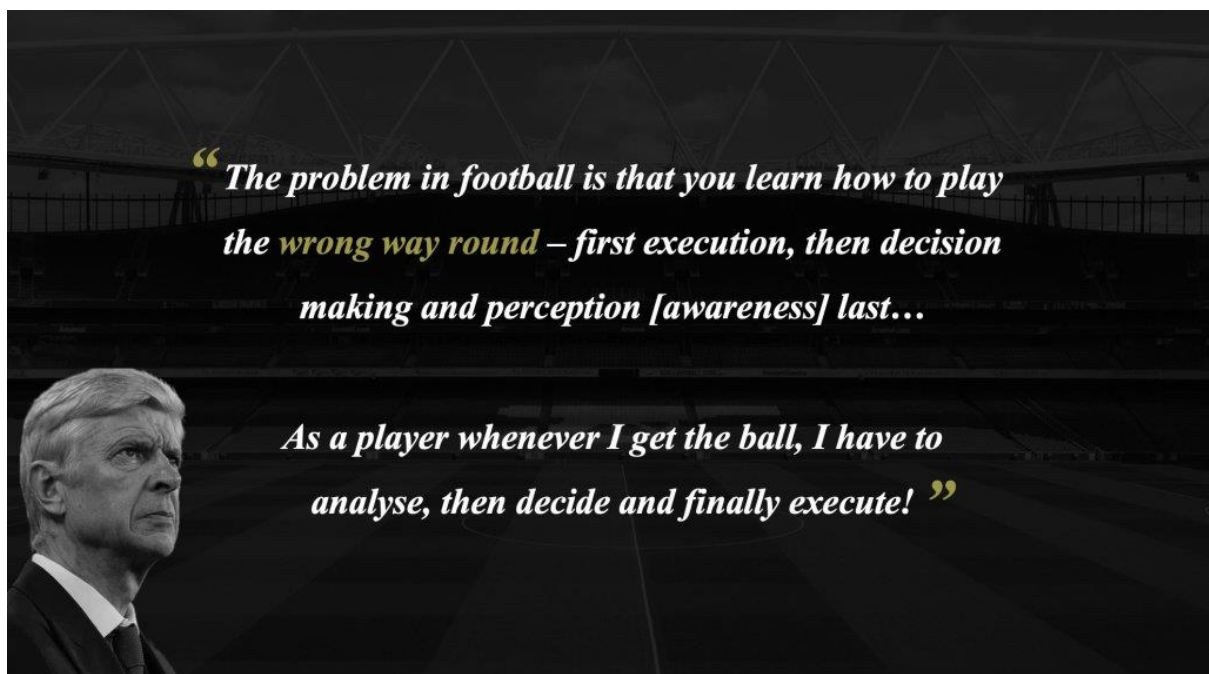




## AWARENESS



The skill to recognise individual and collective opportunities to support decision-making.



*“The problem in football is that you learn how to play the wrong way round – first execution, then decision making and perception [awareness] last...”*

*As a player whenever I get the ball, I have to analyse, then decide and finally execute! ”*

**Awareness** – *the perception of information (i.e., space, ball, opponents, team-mates) on the pitch* – is a crucial and often overlooked aspect of youth development, with skilled

perception a significant determinant of sporting expertise. **Considering actions with the ball are so significant to match success, it is clearly important to understand the processes that lead up to them.**

## WHEN IS AWARENESS BEST DEVELOPED?

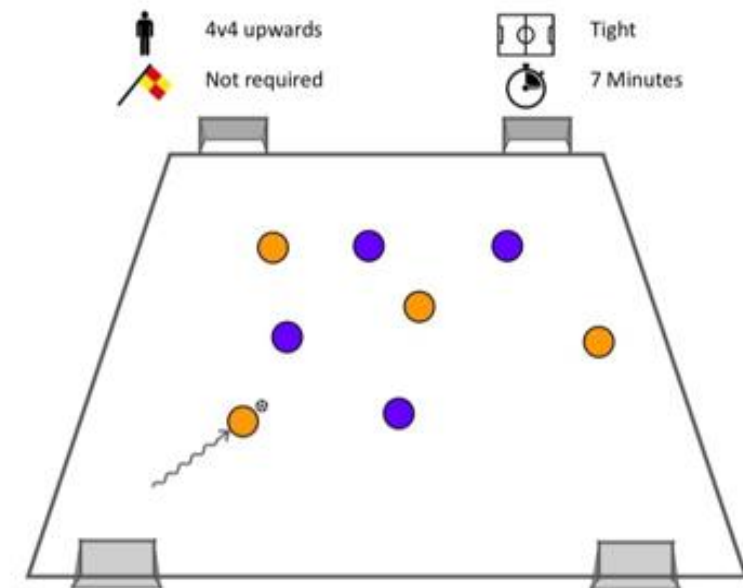
Awareness can be improved at all ages, with particular emphasis needing to be placed on its development with young players. Strong exploratory skills at these ages will often complement development in other performance areas, such as technical, tactical and physical aspects. **At C.A.R.D.S, our focus on awareness begins from the earliest ages and extends through all stages of our program.**

## HOW DOES C.A.R.D.S LOOK TO DEVELOP AWARENESS?

We believe that **representative and realistic game-based scenarios** are the most effective way to develop awareness. As such, we look to utilise activities promoting the location of many sources of information under time constraints, representative of the real game. Information-rich training contexts are particularly appropriate with older and highly skilled players, though **task simplification** (i.e., 2v2 or 3v3 games, as opposed to 5v5 or 7v7) can still ensure representative learning design is achieved with younger players and beginners.

Some manipulations of **constraints** that could help develop awareness are playing in a smaller area (pitch size), the position of the goals or the means of identifying team-mates (i.e., not using bibs). Below is one example of a simple small-sided game that can help the development of awareness, with the use of two corner goals at either end of the pitch encouraging player perception of which goal to attack at any given moment. This activity also allows the coach to manipulate different constraints to emphasise different outcomes, based on player ages and ability levels (Dan Wright 2017, '50 Small-Sided Games).

# FOUR GOAL GAME



**ORGANISATION** A 4 goal pitch, often this game works better if target goals are used to make scoring more challenging.

**OBJECTIVE** Each team defends 2 goals and scores in 2 goals. Great set up to encourage; dispersal and switching play. Out of possession a good one for defending as a team, which goal to cut off?

**OBSERVATION** In possession

- Disperse and use the full width of the pitch
- Have the ability to switch play through a 'pivot' player in the centre
- Recognise when to switch from a highly concentrated area to a low area

Out of possession

- Dictating the area the attackers can play into
- Defending in 1v1 / 2v2 around the goal
- Emergency defending to block and stop shots

**PROGRESSIONS** Can add scoring zones or 1 touch finish, to add more challenge

Use gates and play with 1 target player for each team, he then has to anticipate and receive a pass in the correct gate for the goal to stand.



## Implicit Feedback and Questioning

Coaching commands such as 'scan!' and 'check your shoulder' are commonly used to encourage awareness, yet research has shown that such explicit instructions are often detrimental to players' perception and decision-making processes. We prefer more **implicit instructional techniques**, a form of learning proven to be more durable to stress and uncertainty than prescriptive and command-style coaching.

An example of implicit instruction could be directing learner attention to 'information-rich' areas - potentially through **questioning** - whilst practical examples could be activities like

**silent** or **one-touch** soccer. These constraints encourage player perception of the movement of players off-the-ball, developing awareness and decision-making proficiency.

## Opportunities for Play

Research has highlighted how soccer-specific play activity can aid the development of perceptual-cognitive skills, leading to enhanced game intelligence. The positive emotions engendered from play, fun and enjoyment can also expand learners' peripheral vision, enabling access to enhanced visual information. Providing meaningful **opportunities for play** is a key part of the C.A.R.D.S program, with the below an example of a play-based starter activity that can promote awareness without explicit coaching (Dan Wright 2017, '50 Small-Sided Games').

# MESSY FOOTBALL



8 upwards

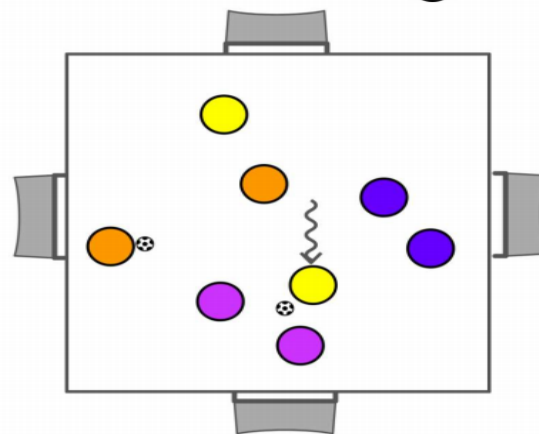
Not required



Square / Tight



8 Minutes



**ORGANISATION** A small tight square pitch, with 4 target goals or coned goals. I tend to play without goalkeepers for this one. This works well as an arrival activity.

**OBJECTIVE** This is a basic 2v2, with 2 games going on simultaneously on the same pitch. The interference and chaos from the other game allows players to dribble and pass under no, some and full pressure.

**OBSERVATION** Observations for this one;

- When to play as an individual when to combine?
- Playing with your head up (awareness)
- 1v1 / 2v2 / 2v1 playing with a underload and overload

**PROGRESSIONS** You can play each game with a time limit or "first to...".

You can keep score of games won, draw and lost...or just play for fun!

