The value and practical application of visual exploratory head movement as a measure of spatial awareness in football.

#### Thomas McGuckian, Daniel Chalkley & Gert-Jan Pepping

#### Australian Catholic University, Brisbane, Australia

According to an ecological approach to visual perception, exploratory action - such as eye, head and body movement - enables an athlete to perceive what is afforded by their environment. Therefore, in dynamic and enveloping environments such as football, consistent head movement is necessary for players to maintain an awareness of the changing opportunities to act as play emerges around them. The value of this scanning behaviour is widely accepted by coaches, however, research has only recently taken a systematic approach to better understand it in representative environments. These studies have shown that a greater spatial awareness – as measured by a higher head turn frequency or head turn excursion – enabled athletes to complete passes more quickly, play a successful pass, play a pass behind them, play a forward pass, or turn with the ball more often. The current study investigated the exploratory head movement of football players during training and match-play, with the aim of understanding how closely common training drills elicited the scanning behaviours used by players during 11v11 games. The findings should be considered in conjunction with recommendations given by national football associations, as many common training designs may not be developing the scanning behaviours needed by players during competitive match-play.