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FORMATION AND ASSESSMENT CRITERIA OF RAPID TACTICAL THINKING IN YOUNG FOOTBALL PLAYERS

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ABOUT ARTICLE

Keywords: rapid thinking, attention regulation, motor-logical integration, neurodynamic factors, effectiveness of football training, cognitive development.

Kalit so'zlar: tezkor fikrlash, diqqatning boshqarilishi, motor-mantiqiy integratsiya, neyrodinamik omillar, futbol mashg'ulotlari samaradorligi, kognitiv faoliyat rivoji

Ключевые слова: быстрое мышление, управление вниманием, моторно-логическая интеграция, нейродинамические факторы, эффективность футбольных тренировок, развитие когнитивной деятельности.

Abstract. This study focuses on examining the development characteristics of cognitive processes in young football players—specifically, processing speed, attention control, and the integration of motor and intellectual activity. Special diagnostic tests, including a missing-letter word formation task and the “Digital Square” test, were administered to both the experimental and control groups. The findings demonstrated that football training significantly enhances young athletes’ thinking speed and motor control abilities. The combination of team-based and individual training sessions contributes to improving players’ intellectual potential, attention stability, and decision-making speed. Moreover, the test results highlighted the role of neurodynamic and genetic factors in cognitive functioning, as well as the impact of regular training on these indicators.

Annotatsiya: Ushbu tadqiqot yosh futbolchilarda kognitiv jarayonlarning — xususan, tafakkur tezkorligi, diqqatni boshqarish hamda motorika bilan bog‘liq aqliy faoliyat integratsiyasining rivojlanish xususiyatlarini o‘rganishga qaratildi. Tadqiqot davomida tajriba va nazorat guruhlariga bir qator maxsus diagnostik testlar, jumladan, tushirib qoldirilgan harflardan so‘z yaratish topshirig‘i hamda «Raqamli kvadrat» testi qo‘llanildi. Olingan natijalar shuni ko‘rsatdiki, futbol mashg‘ulotlari yosh sportchilarning fikrlash tezligi va motorik faoliyatni boshqarish qobiliyatini sezilarli darajada yaxshilaydi. Jamoaviy va individual mashg‘ulotlarning uzviy uyg‘unligi sportchilarda intellektual salohiyatni kuchaytirib, diqqatning barqarorligi hamda qaror qabul qilish tezkorligining oshishiga xizmat qildi. Shuningdek, test natijalari yosh futbolchilarning tafakkur jarayonlarida namoyon bo‘ladigan neyrodinamik va genetik omillarning ahamiyatini, shuningdek, muntazam mashg‘ulotlar mazkur ko‘rsatkichlarga ko‘rsatadigan ta‘sirini yaqqol ifodaladi.

Аннотация: Данное исследование посвящено изучению особенностей развития когнитивных процессов у юных футболистов — в частности, скорости мышления, управления вниманием и интеграции моторной и интеллектуальной деятельности. В ходе исследования в экспериментальной и контрольной группах были применены специальные диагностические тесты, включая задания на составление слов из пропущенных букв и тест «Цифровой квадрат». Полученные результаты показали, что футбольные тренировки существенно улучшают скорость мыслительных процессов и способность к моторному управлению у юных спортсменов. Сочетание групповых и индивидуальных тренировок

способствует повышению интеллектуального потенциала, устойчивости внимания и оперативности принятия решений. Кроме того, результаты тестирования отразили значимость нейродинамических и генетических факторов в развитии мыслительной деятельности, а также влияние регулярных тренировочных нагрузок на данные показатели.

INTRODUCTION

Today, football holds a unique and central place in Uzbekistan's sports system as the most popular and widely followed sport. Its significance goes beyond merely providing physical activity for youth; it plays a crucial role in their intellectual, psychological, and social development. Recognizing the multifaceted impact of football, Uzbekistan has undertaken comprehensive reforms to elevate the sport to a higher level, train highly skilled athletes, identify talented young players, and create a modern, scientifically grounded training system. A key legal framework guiding these reforms is Decree No. PF-5887, dated December 4, 2019. This decree marked a pivotal moment in the development of football in Uzbekistan. It prioritized modernizing infrastructure, improving the qualifications of coaches, implementing training programs aligned with international standards, supporting women's football, and expanding competitive opportunities for youth teams. Its practical implementation required a critical review of the organization of sports schools, football academies, and professional clubs to ensure they meet contemporary standards and effectively prepare players for domestic and international competitions.

The modern football landscape places complex demands on young athletes. Success in football requires not only physical strength, speed, and technical skills but also advanced tactical thinking, rapid decision-making, the ability to analyze opponents' actions, and the capacity to anticipate and respond to dynamic game situations. Therefore, relying solely on traditional physical training is insufficient. An integrative approach is required—one that ensures the holistic development of the player, encompassing physical, cognitive, tactical, and psychological dimensions. Scientific research indicates that many youth sports schools in Uzbekistan face organizational and methodological challenges. Inadequate planning and insufficiently individualized training programs can negatively affect the preparation of young players, which in turn impacts the performance of national and youth teams in international competitions. Consequently, expected results at major tournaments are often not achieved. This highlights the urgent need to analyze the internal resources, identify weaknesses in current methodologies, and implement systematic improvements.

During the preparation of young footballers, several factors must be carefully considered. Psychophysiological capacities, movement coordination, motor integration, technical-tactical skills, and, particularly, cognitive development play a central role. Football is a rapidly changing, high-intensity sport that demands fast and accurate decision-making. A player must evaluate the game situation within seconds, weigh multiple options, and choose the optimal

course of action. Thus, rapid thinking, attention distribution, visual-motor reactions, and the stability of neurodynamic processes are directly associated with performance. Sports psychologists, including renowned expert A. Waiters, have emphasized that up to 70% of a footballer's success depends on cognitive abilities. Based on this understanding, a significant portion of training should focus on developing decision-making skills, problem-solving strategies, and the ability to anticipate opponents' actions. For example, football academies in England dedicate approximately 80% of training time to cognitive exercises, scenario-based simulations, and tasks designed to improve decision-making speed. This approach has proven effective, significantly enhancing the quality of young players' performance on the field.

Motor integration—the harmonious coordination of movement, timing, and reaction speed—is also critical in modern football. The synchronization of motor and cognitive processes contributes directly to a player's overall effectiveness. Consequently, training programs should include complex coordination exercises, responses to visual and auditory stimuli, rhythmic movement drills, rapid changes of direction, and technical exercises that are combined with decision-making tasks. Such methods allow athletes to simultaneously develop physical, cognitive, and tactical skills in a realistic and integrated manner. Modern football pedagogy increasingly emphasizes analytical and scientifically based approaches. Tools such as video analysis, neurodynamic testing, GPS monitoring, accelerometers, and detailed performance tracking provide objective data on individual player actions, high-intensity segments of play, and overall workload. These tools enable coaches to evaluate players' strengths and weaknesses, design targeted interventions, and optimize the individual and collective training process.

Furthermore, the development of rapid tactical thinking and decision-making skills in young players is essential for achieving high performance in competitive environments. Rapid thinking allows athletes to anticipate the actions of opponents, identify open spaces, make accurate passes, and execute pressing effectively. When combined with strong technical skills and tactical understanding, this cognitive capacity enhances both individual and team performance. Attention allocation—the ability to focus on multiple stimuli simultaneously and shift focus quickly—is another crucial aspect of training. Exercises such as decision-making drills, interactive mini-games, and scenario-based tasks improve attention distribution, reduce errors under pressure, and strengthen players' ability to perform in unpredictable situations.

In conclusion, developing football in Uzbekistan and preparing young athletes professionally requires a systematic, integrative approach. Physical, technical, tactical, and cognitive components of training must be harmonized to achieve optimal results. Scientifically grounded exercises aimed at enhancing rapid thinking, attention control, and motor integration form the foundation for cultivating future professional footballers. In the current context of ongoing reforms, modernizing youth training systems, implementing evidence-based methodologies, and improving coach qualifications are critical steps toward ensuring that Uzbekistan produces footballers capable of competing at the highest international levels. Only through such a comprehensive and scientifically informed approach can the country ensure sustainable success in both youth development and professional football.

Materials and methods

Purpose of the Study. The purpose of the study is to determine the effectiveness of tactical thinking in young football players during the evaluation of game situations in competitive conditions and to scientifically investigate the factors that contribute to its development.

Objectives

1.
o study the theoretical foundations of tactical thinking in young football players based on the analysis of existing scientific and methodological literature, instructional manuals, and advanced practical experience;
2.
o identify indicators of young football players' thinking abilities, attention control, decision-making speed, and perception of tactical situations;
3.
o develop effective practical recommendations, training tools, and methodological approaches aimed at forming and enhancing tactical thinking in young football players.

Result and discussion

Research Methodology. Psychological and pedagogical testing methods are essential diagnostic tools widely used to assess an individual's thinking processes, attention control, cognitive functions, and their effectiveness. These methods allow research to be conducted both individually and in groups and help determine a person's intellectual activity, information processing speed, ability to allocate attention, and shift it from one task to another. The first method is aimed at measuring the speed of performing the components of thinking, including goal-setting, analysis, and operational tasks. During the test, participants are provided

with specially designed sheets containing a series of words, with certain letters replaced by lines. The words must consist solely of singular nouns. After the signal is given, participants have three minutes to identify the missing letters and restore the correct words. Each line represents one missing letter, and the number of correctly restored words serves as the main indicator of thinking speed, attention distribution across multiple activities, and neural process mobility.

Evaluation is based on the number of correctly restored words. If a participant correctly restores fewer than 20 out of 40 words, it indicates low levels of thinking and neural activity. Between 21–30 correct answers indicates an average level, while 31 or more reflects high intellectual activity. This method allows for precise assessment of participants' thinking speed, mental flexibility, and ability to divide attention across multiple tasks.

The second method, the “Digital Square,” is designed to evaluate cognitive indicators such as attention distribution, rapid switching between activities, information processing speed, and accuracy. The test is conducted on a square grid consisting of 25 cells, containing numbers from 1 to 40 arranged randomly, with 15 numbers intentionally omitted. Participants are required to identify the missing numbers and record them in a numerical sequence. The standard completion time is typically 1.5 minutes, although some manuals allow up to 15 minutes. During evaluation, correctly identified numbers, mistakes, and corrections are recorded separately. This method assesses attention stability, visual observation skills, error detection, and correction speed. Additionally, it serves to integrate cognitive and motor abilities, evaluate decision-making speed, and determine overall cognitive potential.

The combined use of these two methods allows for a comprehensive assessment of an individual's cognitive abilities. The first test measures operational and goal-setting components of thinking, while the second evaluates attention distribution and shifting. Together, they enable educators and psychologists to deeply analyze participants' thought processes, identify individual characteristics, and provide targeted recommendations for development. Thus, psychological and pedagogical testing methods serve as an essential tool in assessing and developing cognitive readiness in young athletes, particularly football players. They evaluate thinking speed, attention control, multitasking ability, information processing speed, and error correction. Based on these results, coaches and psychologists can tailor training programs according to individual characteristics and cognitive abilities. Consequently, these methods help enhance young football players' intellectual and cognitive potential, ensure

effective decision-making under competitive conditions, and improve overall performance in game situations.

Analysis of the Obtained Results. In sports practice, assessing and determining the speed of cognitive processes in young football players is of great importance. In team sports like football, rapid decision-making, analyzing on-field situations, and selecting the correct actions directly affect a player's overall performance. Therefore, systematically evaluating cognitive activity, thinking speed, and neural process mobility in young footballers is essential. Although several specialized tests have been developed for this purpose, psychological and pedagogical tests can also be widely applied in practice. Such tests allow indirect assessment of cognitive processes not only in footballers but also in children of specific age groups. General psychological tests are effective tools for evaluating various aspects of cognitive activity, including attention allocation, rapid information processing, decision-making speed, and operational components of thinking. During the study, young footballers were given a special test task to be completed within three minutes. Participants received sheets containing 40 words with missing letters. Each line represented a missing letter, and the words were required to be singular nouns. This method allows precise assessment of thinking speed and neural process mobility.

The results were analyzed for the experimental and control groups. According to Figure 1, before the study, 12 players (60%) in the experimental group fully completed the test, correctly restoring between 31 and 35 letters in the words. This indicates a high level of cognitive activity and neural process mobility. Additionally, before the study, 8 players (35%) and after the study 7 players (35%) showed average levels, correctly restoring 21–26 letters. This provides important information about their decision-making speed and information processing ability on the field.

Furthermore, before the study, 25 players (35%) and after the study 1 player (5%) demonstrated low levels, correctly restoring 15–19 letters. These results indicate individual differences in cognitive and neural activity and are important for determining developmental levels. Overall, the test results show that in the experimental group, thinking speed and neural mobility increased significantly through sports training. This demonstrates that both team and individual exercises effectively develop cognitive and psychomotor skills in young footballers.

Moreover, this test methodology allows identification of individual psychological characteristics, analysis of thinking processes, and adjustment of training programs. The results confirm that the test is an effective tool for

evaluating attention distribution, rapid thinking, and neural process mobility. Such assessments are essential for improving young players' cognitive and psychomotor readiness, enhancing rapid decision-making in games, and developing adaptability to dynamic on-field situations.

When psychological tests and specialized methods are applied together, they enable systematic evaluation of cognitive processes, identification of individual characteristics, and tailoring of training to personal needs. Based on these results, coaches can select exercises to improve cognitive, psychomotor, and tactical readiness. This ensures faster and more accurate decision-making during competitions, improving overall game skills and sports performance. Thus, the test results demonstrate their effectiveness as a tool for assessing thinking speed, neural mobility, and cognitive potential in young football players. They allow training to be planned and optimized according to individual characteristics, significantly enhancing performance during games.

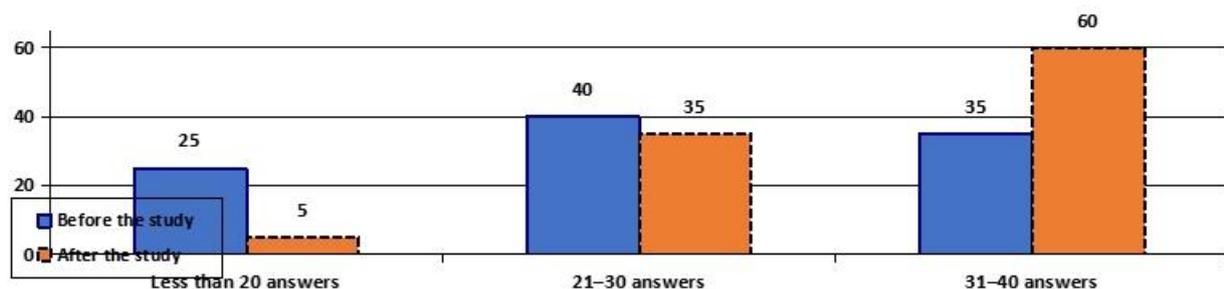


Figure A. Experimental group

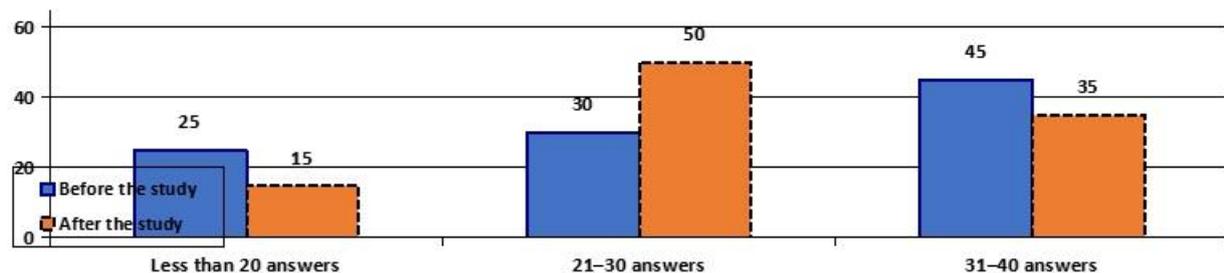


Figure B. Control group

Figure 1. Results of the 3-minute test for the experimental and control groups: A – Experimental group; B – Control group.

Determining and developing the speed of thinking in young football players is a highly relevant issue in sports practice. In team sports such as football, rapid decision-making, analyzing situations on the field, and selecting the correct

actions directly affect a player's overall performance. Therefore, assessing the cognitive and psychomotor potential of young footballers should be carried out systematically. Although a number of specialized test methods have been developed for this purpose, psychological and pedagogical tests are widely used in practice and are considered effective. Such tests allow for indirect assessment of the speed of thinking not only in young football players but also in children of certain age groups. General psychological tests are effective tools for evaluating various aspects of cognitive activity, including attention allocation, rapid information processing, decision-making speed, and the operational components of thinking.

In the study, young football players were given a special 3-minute test. Participants were presented with sheets containing 40 words with missing letters. Each line represented one missing letter, and the words were required to be nouns in singular form. This method allows for an accurate assessment of players' thinking speed and the activity of nervous system processes.

Analysis of the control group results (Figure B) showed that before the study, 7 footballers (35%) successfully completed the test, while after the study, this number increased to 9 footballers (45%). They correctly identified 31 to 35 letters in the words. At the same time, before the study, 10 footballers (50%) and after the study, 6 footballers (30%) showed average levels of thinking and nervous system activity, correctly completing 21 to 26 letters. Additionally, before the study, 3 footballers (15%) and after the study, 5 footballers (25%) demonstrated low performance, correctly placing 15 to 19 letters.

Comparing the results of the experimental and control groups shows that the experimental group achieved positive improvements, while the control group showed no significant changes. This indicates that the training process effectively enhances the thinking and nervous system activity of young footballers. Moreover, test results are valuable for identifying individual psychological characteristics and tailoring training programs to the specific needs of each athlete.

It is known that thinking develops throughout life and across various activities. At each age stage, thinking has its unique characteristics. In early childhood, thinking manifests in actions aimed at solving specific tasks. For example, children develop practical thinking through activities such as correctly placing objects, fitting rings onto a toy pyramid, opening or closing boxes, searching for hidden items, and similar exercises. Collaboration with others through speech fosters visual-practical thinking.

At later stages, thinking manifests in the complex relationships between actions, symbols, and words. Although thinking is connected to speech, it is not merely verbal expression. It involves the ability to convey the same meaning through different words, accurately explain one's own thoughts, and select appropriate vocabulary. From this perspective, exercises aimed at developing thinking should encompass not only physical but also intellectual components. To assess attention and its distribution, the "Digital Square" test was applied. Participants were given 1.5 minutes to identify missing numbers in a square grid and record them in a special numerical sequence. Twenty football players were evaluated on a 9-point scale. In Figure A, the experimental group showed low results before the study but demonstrated positive changes afterward. In contrast, the results in Figure B for the control group remained largely unchanged. This analysis indicated that the athletes initially had low levels of attention distribution, the ability to switch from one state to another, and rapid information processing.

Thus, test results related to thinking and attention distribution confirm that these methods are effective tools for assessing the cognitive and psychomotor development of young football players. Using these tests, coaches and psychologists can plan training sessions while considering the individual characteristics of participants. Moreover, the results allow athletes to make faster decisions in competitive conditions, participate more effectively in the game, and improve overall football skills.

The test outcomes demonstrate that specialized psychological methodologies and pedagogical tests, when used together, effectively assess the speed of thinking, the activity of attention and nervous system processes, and overall cognitive potential in young football players. They make it possible to tailor training programs to individual abilities and enhance performance during competitions. In this way, these methods play a crucial role in developing both the intellectual and psychomotor skills of young footballers, as well as significantly improving their decision-making abilities during gameplay.

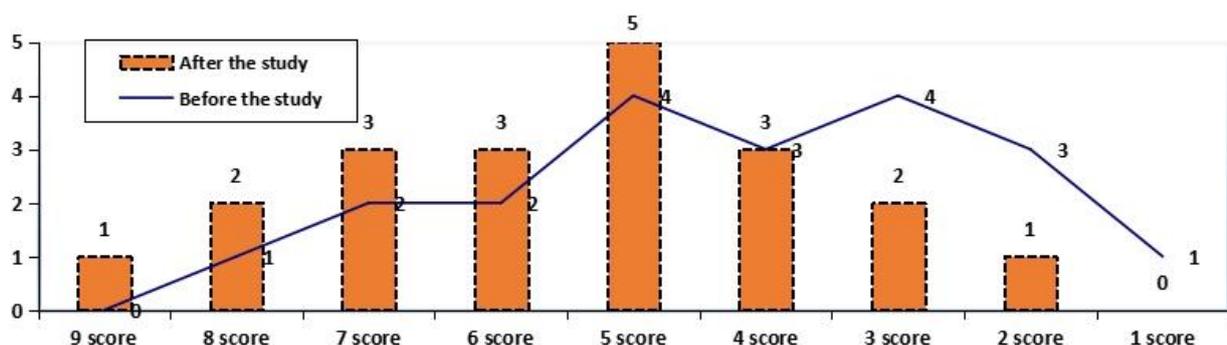


Figure A. Experimental group

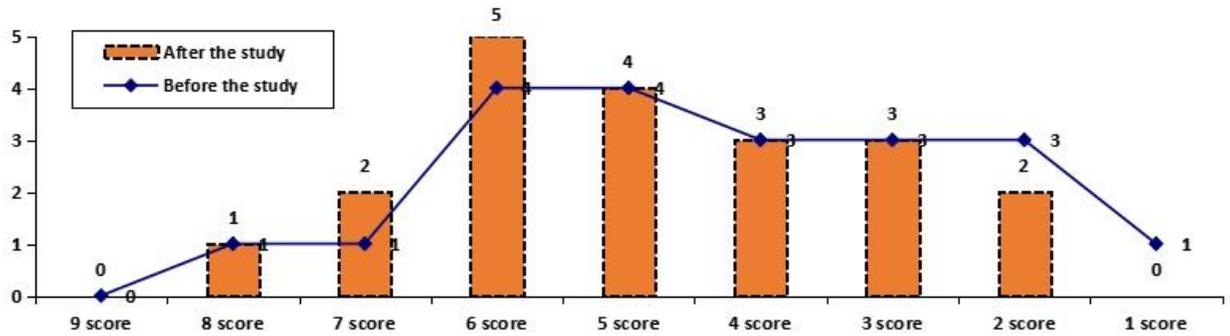


Figure B. Control group

Figure 2. Results of the experimental and control groups during the 1.5-minute test: A – experimental group; B – control group

Significant individual differences in logical thinking were observed within the studied group. This indicates that, even when each player is assigned clear tasks and responsibilities during team training, the intellectual potential of young footballers—specifically their thinking skills—has not yet been fully developed in a targeted manner. Such differences are, on one hand, related to the individual psychological profiles and cognitive potential of the players, and on the other hand, depend on the methodological approach and level of coach supervision during training. At the same time, regular engagement in football ensures that young athletes develop the ability to shift attention quickly from one situation to another, which is a form of advanced thinking. This process enhances the integration of psychomotor and cognitive components, enabling players to respond quickly and correctly to any situation on the field. Rapid shifts in attention and thinking speed are closely linked with motor skills, improving movement accuracy and speed, coordination, and balance. Thus, the integration of motor skills and cognitive abilities emerges as a key factor determining the overall athletic potential of young footballers.

An increase in the intensity of this process leads to accelerated development of motor skills, giving players an advantage over their peers. This, in turn, enhances decision-making speed in competitive situations and allows for high efficiency in implementing strategic and tactical decisions during the game. Additionally, motor skills are influenced simultaneously by age-related physiological characteristics and the specifics of sports training, meaning both factors contribute to the harmonious development of cognitive and physical abilities.

Individual analysis of players in the studied groups also revealed significant differences in thinking speed. Thinking speed depends, on one hand, on genetic

factors and the neurodynamic properties of the central nervous system, and on the other hand, on the intensity and structure of football training. Football practice plays an important role in developing mental functions, as it shapes not only physical readiness but also quick thinking, decision-making ability, and the integration of movement skills. However, this positive effect is most noticeable in later childhood, particularly between the ages of 12 and 16. Therefore, coaches should plan training by considering each player's individual characteristics and assign tasks of appropriate complexity. This approach develops not only thinking speed but also attention distribution, stress resilience, and rapid decision-making skills.

In conclusion, football training is an effective tool for developing attention distribution and rapid decision-making in young athletes. It fosters the integration of cognitive and motor skills, enabling high performance during gameplay. Consequently, it provides a crucial foundation for the comprehensive development of cognitive and physical potential in young football players.

Practical Recommendations. To develop rapid thinking and effective attention distribution in young football players, the training system should include several key directions. First, assigning clear tasks and responsibilities to each player during team training stimulates their intellectual activity. For example, in small groups, decision-making tasks related to offensive and defensive positions effectively enhance the integration of attention and thinking. This approach strengthens players' abilities to make quick decisions, think strategically, and adapt to changing situations. At the same time, clearly defining each player's individual contribution and responsibility to the team increases game intelligence and allows coaches to analyze each athlete's strengths and weaknesses.

Second, conducting training in a real competitive environment under time constraints is important. Such conditions force players to think quickly and coordinate movement with decision-making. Mini-games, evaluating the opponent's strategy in real time, making collaborative decisions, and completing tasks under pressure effectively develop attention distribution and rapid thinking. Interactive exercises, including performing tasks within limited time, selecting and executing various combinations quickly, are important tools for enhancing players' cognitive abilities.

Third, individual training is also crucial. Exercises should be adapted to each player's neurodynamic characteristics, motor skills, and cognitive potential. For example, specialized exercises based on the "Digital Square" test and thinking tasks can improve attention and cognitive integration. These methods enhance

rapid decision-making, the ability to divide attention across multiple tasks, and quick error correction. Additionally, individual exercises increase motivation, fostering a desire for self-improvement through measurable personal results.

Research and observations indicate that rapid thinking and motor integration are key factors in improving the cognitive and physical potential of young footballers. Coaches should balance training according to each athlete's individual characteristics. This approach not only improves team performance but also supports individual development. Therefore, training programs should combine team and individual exercises, tasks performed under real-game conditions, and specialized drills aimed at developing neurodynamic potential.

Continuous monitoring and assessment should also be implemented in training. Regular testing of players' thinking speed, attention distribution, and decision-making allows coaches to adjust exercises individually. This approach creates an effective system for the harmonious development of cognitive, psychomotor, and physical abilities in young footballers.

Conclusion.

The study results indicate that rapid thinking and attention distribution in young footballers are closely linked to individual characteristics and neurodynamic potential. Positive changes observed in the experimental group confirm that football training has a beneficial effect on the integration of thinking and motor skills. Assigning clear tasks and responsibilities during team exercises, as well as interactive tasks requiring decisions under time constraints, significantly develops players' attention and thinking speed. Motor skills also play a critical role by ensuring the integration of movement and cognitive processes. Furthermore, individual training allows adjustment of each player's cognitive abilities and attention span. Thus, football training proves to be an effective tool for fostering intellectual and physical development in young athletes.

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