



PILLAR II: BRAIN SKILLS



Mind and eyes in action. David Weck (above), founder of Bosu Training, demonstrates the athletic coordination skills that can give you an edge and make you a genuine contributor in your sport, not just a participant.

ATHLETIC COORDINATION

How to develop hand-eye coordination, spatial awareness, ambidexterity, balance, and lightning-fast reaction speed

by David Weck

Most aspects of athletic training are best developed in the company of others. The greatest gains are most often realized when a good coach guides you and fellow teammates are there to push and challenge you. This is true for getting bigger, faster, and stronger. It is also true for getting more agile, more flexible, and more powerful.

But there are certain athletic qualities that can only really be developed alone, on your own time, away from the rest of the pack. And it is often these athletic qualities—the ones you must gain on your own—that can give you the edge and make you a genuine contributor, not just a participant.

Intangible skills. Some of these "less tangible" athletic qualities include hand-eye coordination, reflexes, reaction time, spatial awareness, ambidexterity, and balance—call them "athletic coordination."

While you can't help but train these skills to some degree during other forms of training, they are difficult to enhance in a meaningful way within the boundaries of even the most solid strength and conditioning programs.

The truth is your coach simply doesn't have the necessary time to devote to the enhancement of your athletic coordination skills. If you want to

If you want to be the best athlete you can be, you must acquire the larger portion of your intangible skills on your own.

be the best athlete you can be, you must acquire the larger portion of these skills on your own.

Completely trainable. One of the worst mistakes an athlete can make is believing that these kinds of skills are inborn, and therefore, not trainable. Even if they don't come easily to you at first, with diligent training you can make significant improvements.

Adaptability. We've all heard the term "use it or lose it." In human physiology, these words are the absolute truth. The fact is our brain and nervous system are constantly engaged in a process of recalibration.

Scientists use the term "neuroplasticity" to describe the incredible adaptability of the human brain. Neuroplasticity describes the brain's amazing ability to remap and reorganize neural pathways based on new experiences.

A great example of this was an experiment conducted more than 50 years ago by Austrian

researcher Ivo Kohler. A group of scientists wore special glasses that flipped everything they saw upside down. They wore these glasses all day, everyday for several weeks.

At first everything was, well, upside down and very awkward. But then something really interesting happened. With enough exposure to this "new" situation, their brains began to process images so they'd appear normal—right side up—even though they still wore the glasses which flipped everything they saw upside down. Their brains and eyes literally recalibrated to this new situation.

Your athletic coordination skills work the same way. The body, brain, and nervous system will respond to what you expose them to. Just like the edge of a knife stays sharp only when you routinely sharpen it, your body stays tuned through proper use. But unlike the knife blade, there is no limit to how sharp you can make yourself. Keep working the right way and you can keep improving.

QUICK HANDS BOLA TRAINER

The ultimate training tool for keeping your mind, eyes and reflexes razor-sharp

by Jack Mindel

Perhaps you do a little juggling, play foot-bag or hacky sac, or kick around a soccer ball to loosen up before competition. If you do, you can add the Quick Hands Bola Trainer to your arsenal. Don't let the simple design or low price tag (\$30) fool you. There are more than 100 different exercises you can do with this product to sharpen and improve skills such as:

- reaction time
- eye-hand coordination
- ambidexterity
- balance
- timing
- spatial awareness
- catch reflex
- keeping your head-on-a-swivel

Basic Moves. While mastering the Bola Trainer takes a lot of practice and discipline, there are four basic moves that can help to develop your skills. They are:

- **The swing.** This consists of holding one ball and letting the other swing from the cord in various directions. Basic swings are the foundation for developing all of the skills listed above.
- **The snap.** This consists of holding one ball and snapping the other back using

the elasticity of the cord. The snap technique is what develops quick reflexes and laser-sharp vision.

- **The bounce.** Dropping one ball, almost like a yoyo, and bouncing it back up under control, adds another package of drills that can be done with the Bola Trainer.
- **The spin.** Like the bounce move, spinning the balls or the cord opens up many new drills.

Contest. Fortunately, the Internet makes it very easy to evaluate the value of the Bola Trainer for yourself. Last year, Bosu Fitness launched a Quick Hands Bola Trainer contest inviting participants to submit videos demonstrating their skills with the Bola Trainer. Just do a search on YouTube and you'll have access to many new and creative moves.

Instructional DVD. The Bola Trainer comes with a very useful and informative DVD, on which several athletes demonstrate the basic moves, along with advanced techniques. ■

Jack Mindel is a researcher and staff writer for SportsVision Magazine. He may be reached by email at: info@sportsvisionmagazine.com



US\$29.95

Each Quick Hands BOLA Trainer comes with one BOLA Trainer and a complete instructional DVD that details both basic and advanced skills.

To order, please visit the website at: www.bosufitness.com

Product Features:

- Portable and convenient
- Inexpensive
- Latex-Free
- Made of sponge rubber, nylon cord and anchors
- Comes with an instructional DVD

Product Specifications:

- Two sponge-rubber balls with a bungee cord in-between
- DVD explains how to perform progressive spin, bounce, and snap techniques

Benefits:

- Develops quick reactions and accuracy
- Helps improve motor skills
- Elicits "startle reflex"

Inner desire. Improving your athletic coordination all boils down to how much you want it and how hard you're willing to work. For those athletes with the passion and desire to be their absolute best, they can train their intangible skills to give them a unique athletic edge.

The greatest athletes—with great being defined by their performance, not just their potential—are the ones willing to go the extra mile and do what is necessary to be the best they can be; to put the time in where it is necessary, in the training room, at practice, and at home.

Training tools. One of the best tools to train athletic coordination is the Quick Hands Bola

Trainer. It's inexpensive, portable, and is ideal for home training by dedicated athletes.

The Bola Trainer itself is deceptively simple. It consists of two baseball-sized balls attached to one another by means of an elastic cord approximately three feet in length. With this simple device, you can do dozens of drills and exercises to develop lightning fast reactions and quick, accurate hands. The Bola Trainer will help integrate your primary balance components while increasing eye-hand coordination, spatial awareness, reaction timing and balance.

The fundamental movements you learn will "program" incredibly valuable muscle memory

into your hands, and with practice, the rest of your body.

Improving athletic coordination takes time and effort. Training on your own allows you to take the time you need to improve these hard to acquire skills. And it will take time, time that is difficult to spare within the group or team training environment. ■

David Weck is a visionary in the fitness world and the inventor of BOSU Training, including the BOSU Balance Trainer and the Quick Hands Bola Trainer. For further information, he may be reached through the website at: www.bosufitness.com

VISUAL SKILLS | BRAIN FITNESS | MIND SPEED | SPORT PSYCHOLOGY | SPORT IQ

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