

Can brain training make better footballers?

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On me headphones, son ... Liverpool's Daniel Sturridge. Photograph: BPI/Rex/Shutterstock

It sounds like a game designed for toddlers – throwing and catching a ball to encourage talking – but, according to coaches at Southampton FC, brain-training technique Life Kinetik is the latest weapon in the war to stop modern life ruining the beautiful game.

Sick of his players spending their time glued to social media or with **Beats headphones clamped over their ears** like grumpy teenagers, Saints manager Ronald Koeman has **introduced Life Kinetik to encourage them to talk to each other**. Koeman says that young players don't chat or play cards on the team bus any more, and this lack of chat is affecting their game. "Communication on the pitch is so important, even if it is just to help your team-mates and say 'time' or 'turn!' ... For young players it is all about themselves and less about communication with the rest of the players," Koeman told a conference in London.

Horst Lutz, the German founder of Life Kinetik, says the technique is about more than forcing friendliness. It aims to make the brain sharper through exercises that test physical, cognitive and perceptual skills. In one exercise, participants must throw their partner a ball and, at the same time, shout out which hand they want it to be caught in. Meanwhile, their partner must step forward with their opposite leg to catch it.

"The idea is to make the most of our brains, making new connections between our neurons by doing things we haven't done before," Lutz explains. "For footballers, the main focus is reaction speed and [making] fewer errors."

In Germany, the technique is used by football teams including Hamburg, the national volleyball and hockey teams and by skiers – as well as in schools and old people's homes. Lutz says we will soon be hearing more about Life Kinetik in the UK: he says Jürgen Klopp (who used the method with Borussia Dortmund) is planning to bring it to Liverpool.