

# Life Kinetik: What can it bring to Liverpool next season?

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**Liverpool's Daniel Sturridge likes wearing headphones.** He's often photographed wearing them, he sparked a Twitter row over whether they were wireless or not, and he even has a promotional deal with Beats by Dre.

According to Southampton manager, Ronald Koeman, spending hours wearing headphones and scrolling through social media is bad for footballers. Players' communication skills suffer, Koeman believes, when they spend too much time in their own little worlds. It interferes with their ability to interpret situations and make decisions on the field.

Earlier in the season, Koeman announced that his Southampton squad were getting regular sessions in communication and social interaction after the club's coaches had been trained by German company Life Kinetik. Now, Sturridge's manager, Jürgen Klopp, has arranged for Life Kinetik to come to Liverpool, albeit, in the first instance, to work with the youth coaches.

When the Liverpool first team squad were in Basel preparing for the Europa League final against Sevilla, Life Kinetik were at the club's Melwood training complex showing ten academy coaches how to improve the communication skills of their young players, who are perhaps most at risk of becoming glued to their smartphones.

"Jürgen got hold of me not long after he took charge at Anfield and said we need to do something with Liverpool," says Life Kinetik founder and head trainer, Horst Lutz.

Klopp previously worked with Life Kinetik at Borussia Dortmund. He calls the training one of the most exciting developments he has discovered in football in recent years. Klopp employed Life Kinetik's methods once a week with his Dortmund squad, and believes that changing small details around communication can have a big impact on a team's performances.

The Liverpool Academy coaches learnt an exercise program designed to enhance the players' motor skills. The general idea is to enable players to react more quickly to movement, making the brain sharper. Exercises test physical, cognitive and perceptual skills in a number of different ways.

It's simple stuff. In one activity, pairs of participants throw a ball to each other. At the same time, they shout out to their partner which hand they want the ball to be caught in. Their partner must respond by stepping 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."

Life Kinetik have worked with many football clubs in Germany over the past few years. "The training combines coordinative exercises with training of visual perception," says Bayern Munich and Germany goalkeeper, Manuel Neuer. "When the eyes do not work perfectly, especially in difficult situations, it is incredibly difficult to respond properly."

"(The training aids) rapid detection and decision in narrow, cluttered game situations," adds Bernhard Peters, SV Hamburg's sporting director.

According to Lutz, Klopp believes it's vital for footballers to notice more of what is happening around them on the pitch – to have a bigger, more detailed picture in their heads.

"It is Klopp's opinion that the player who has the ball has more possibilities because the others are moving in a way that they can receive the ball," Lutz says. "When there are more possibilities, the player with the ball is able to do mostly the right thing in a shorter time."

The reason too much personal technology is bad for us, Lutz explains, is that it can affect our working memories. "Because we can search for everything in seconds, nobody has to remember things," he continues. "This affects our fluid intelligence."

Fluid intelligence is the capacity to think logically and solve problems in novel situations, independent of acquired knowledge. It involves the ability to identify patterns and relationships posed by new challenges, and to extrapolate these findings using logic.

"So if people use this technology too much, they are not as good at solving problems," Lutz says. It is easy to understand how that can impact on a footballer's performance.

Most people can store between five and nine items in their short-term memory, with those at the higher end of the scale possessing a significant advantage. "When you can store nine you have 80% more possibilities than someone who has only five," says Lutz. "You can

realise more things that are happening around you and it's easier to make a solution for the problems that might evolve out of these nine things that you have recognised.”

While the Life Kinetik training helps players create more brain connections, is it essential to everyone? In the case of Sturridge, a recent example might suggest it isn't.

In the 35th minute in Basel, the striker received the ball just outside the left corner of Sevilla's penalty area. He immediately noticed that the goalkeeper, David Soria, was covering the near post, but as a result there was a gap at the other side of the goal. Sevilla right-back, Mariano, was also covering the near post, the most likely danger area for any shot given that Sturridge favours his left foot.

Adil Rami stood a few metres away, towards the centre of the box. But with Liverpool runners on their way towards the penalty area, the centre-back stayed slightly ahead of his right-back, just in case Sturridge opted to cut the ball back. Rami's positioning enabled the Liverpool striker to perfectly line up his shot with the far corner of the goal. The angle didn't suit a conventional left-foot strike, but Sturridge didn't want to use his weaker right foot.

By now the Liverpool runners, Philippe Coutinho, Adam Lallana and James Milner, were marked around the edge of the penalty area. Alberto Moreno, sprinting down the left flank, had too much ground to make up for Sturridge to use the overlap.

Assuming Sturridge didn't want to play the ball back to Roberto Firmino behind him, he had only one option left. A spectacular curling shot into the far corner with the outside of his left boot, which gave Liverpool a 1-0 lead.

Despite being a fan of his headphones – and presumably his phone too, like most people his age – during those few seconds Sturridge was aware of his own position, the two defenders' positions and the goalkeeper's. He also had in mind his preferred striking option, and that three of his supporting teammates were all marked. He was aware of the one small part of the goal that remained unprotected, and exactly how to exploit that opportunity.

That's nine pieces of information at once stored in Sturridge's short-term memory, which would suggest his cognitive skills are working just fine. There will no doubt be room for improvement with some among the Liverpool squad, however, as Moreno arguably proved when he missed Mariano's run which led to Sevilla's equaliser.

Given his faith in the Life Kinetik programme at Dortmund, it may only be a matter of time before Klopp introduces the methods to the first team at Melwood.

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