

It's not what you do, it's the way that you do it

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Footballers' success on the pitch, measured as ability to perform "complex tasks" such as tackling or passing, was not associated with their athletic ability. Credit: www.soccerscience.net

Scientists have shown that soccer players with superior ability in areas such as passing accuracy or sprint speed do not necessarily achieve better overall performance on the pitch.

Gwendolyn David, PhD researcher at the University of Queensland, says "Athletic abilities measured in the lab were not associated with any measure of performance on the pitch. In other words, it's not your ability, it's what you do with it that counts."

In the study, which will be presented at the Society for [Experimental Biology](#) Annual Conference in Glasgow on Friday the 1st of July, 27

semi-professional male soccer players were tested in the lab on their abilities in athletic tasks including dribbling speed, jump distance and volley accuracy, sprint speed and passing [accuracy](#).

Researchers then watched soccer matches and scored the subjects on their success in 'complex tasks' which brought together the abilities that had been measured in the lab with the skills needed for a soccer game. These included ball-interception, challenging another player for the ball, passing, shooting and blocking the ball.

This research provides important information for soccer team scouts, highlighting that measuring only athletic-type traits when identifying [soccer players](#) may result in missed talent. "The more skilful players, who achieve greater success on the pitch, are not necessarily the most athletic players," says Ms. David. This research may also inform coaches designing training regimes for players, suggesting that time spent actually playing might be much more valuable training than working on athletic abilities in the gym.

The results also showed that players can adopt different strategies on the [pitch](#) to maximise their success. Ms David explains: "Interestingly if a player is weaker at some aspects of the game, they can make up for this by attempting match 'tasks', such as tackling and passing, more often. This suggests that the old saying, if at first you don't succeed, try, try again can be a winning strategy."

These results may also apply to other sports, where players or participants need to combine athletic abilities with skill.

Finally this research might also shed light on animal behaviour, suggesting that the physical capabilities of an animal alone may not predict their success in complex tasks such as foraging or fighting.

Provided by Society for Experimental Biology

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