A FREE GUIDE FROM THE FOOTBALL COACHING INSTITUTE

The 4 Biases That Shape How You See Your Players

How to notice them in training and on matchday, so you judge **what the player did**, not what you expected.

INSIDE: THE FOUR BIASES

01
Outcome
Judging the decision by the result.

02
Confirmation
Seeing what you already believed.

03
Recency
Letting the last game rewrite the season.

04
Salience
Seeing the loudest, missing what matters.

FOOTBALL COACHING INSTITUTE

Taken from Level 1 · Lesson 3.2
Foundations of Player Development

Two coaches watch the same match. They leave with two different views of the same player.

One remembers the winger losing a duel in the 70th minute. The other remembers the three runs he made to stretch the back line. Both saw real moments. Neither saw the whole player.

That is how observation works. Your experience, your expectations, the score and even your mood decide what grabs your attention and what it means to you. It happens automatically, to every coach, at every level.

WHAT IS A BIAS?

A bias is a systematic tendency that unconsciously shapes how you perceive, interpret and evaluate what you see. To keep up with the speed of a match, your brain relies on mental shortcuts called heuristics. Those shortcuts keep you fast. They also make you wrong in predictable ways.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

Feedback

A view that is too positive skips development areas and avoids the honest conversation.

Opportunity

A view that is too negative misses progress, and a label sticks long after the player has moved on.

Trust

Players feel it when you have already decided who they are. They stop listening, and stop being honest with you.

Every coach is biased. That is human. The goal is to notice when your conclusion rests on something other than what the player actually did, and to check it before you act on it.

The four you will meet every week

There are dozens of cognitive biases. These four show up most often, in training and on matchday, and each one has a sentence you will recognise.

BIAS 1 · PAGE 04

Outcome bias

Judging the decision by the result.

WHAT THE COACH SAYS

"It went in, so it was the right choice."

BIAS 2 · PAGE 05

Confirmation bias

Looking for evidence that supports what you already believe.

WHAT THE COACH SAYS

"Typical. She never tracks back."

BIAS 3 · PAGE 06

Recency bias

Giving too much weight to the most recent match or moment.

WHAT THE COACH SAYS

"He's completely out of form."

BIAS 4 · PAGE 07

Salience bias

Focusing on what is loudest and most noticeable.

WHAT THE COACH SAYS

"What a tackle. Player of the match."

They rarely work alone. Several can shape the same moment at once, which is exactly what page 08 shows.

BIAS 1 OF 4

Outcome bias

Judging the decision by the result.

You judge a decision by what happened next, instead of by what the player could see and choose in that moment. The player decided without knowing the outcome. A fair judgement does the same.

Same match · same situation · twice

Your striker is running towards the opponent's goal. A defender closes in, a teammate is free. He chooses to shoot. In the 23rd minute it flies in: "Good decision!" In the 67th minute he gets into the exact same spot and makes the exact same choice. The keeper saves: "Why didn't you pass it?"

23' · GOAL SCORED
"Good decision."

67' · CHANCE MISSED
"Bad decision."

Identical choice. Opposite verdict.

The decision did not change. Only the result did. And the result decided what the coach said.

WHY IT MATTERS

It hides the quality of the decision-making process.

Players learn to chase the result instead of the right decision. A bad choice that happens to work gets repeated.

Players stop repeating a good decision that failed once.

HOW TO MANAGE IT

Separate process from result · Review the information the player had · Ask: was the choice right at that moment?

This week: During a match, before you react to the result, ask: "If I didn't know how this ended, would I praise this decision?" Then give feedback in three parts: the decision, the execution, the outcome.

BIAS 2 OF 4

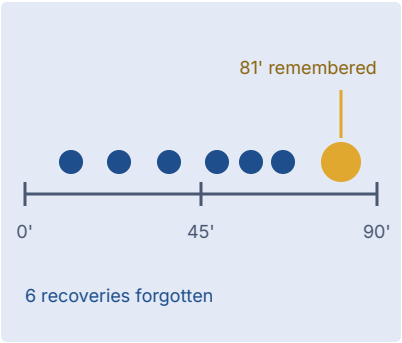
Confirmation bias

Looking for evidence that supports what you already believe.

Once you believe something about a player, you notice the moments that fit and explain away the ones that don't. You are still watching real behaviour. Your attention is just uneven.

Pre-season to week 6 · U14 squad

In pre-season you note that your central midfielder "lacks intensity". On Saturday she wins the ball back six times. In the 81st minute she jogs back after losing possession. That is the moment you bring up at Monday's session.



Seven moments. One fits the label.

One moment confirmed the label. Six moments that challenged it disappeared.

WHY IT MATTERS

Labels become harder and harder to challenge.

Behaviour that contradicts the label gets overlooked.

Real progress stays invisible and starts to shape selection.

HOW TO MANAGE IT

Search for contradictory evidence · Use another observer or video · Delay the conclusion

This week: Write your belief down, then look for the opposite in your next session and your next match: one moment that doesn't fit. Ask an assistant, or use video, to watch for exactly that. A label from week one should still be a question in week six.

BIAS 3 OF 4

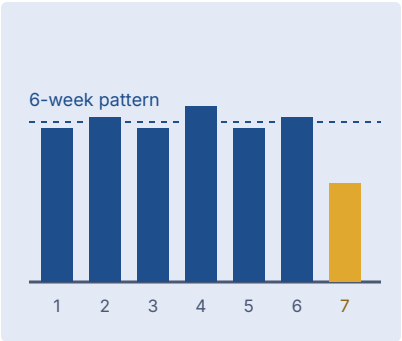
Recency bias

Giving too much weight to the most recent match or moment.

The latest match feels the most important simply because it is the freshest. One performance starts to outweigh weeks of evidence that tell you far more about the player.

Sunday evening · after a 2-1 defeat

Your left-back has had six solid weeks: well positioned, calm on the ball. Today a quick winger ran past him twice and you conceded from one of those moments. By Monday's team talk he has "a positioning problem", and on Saturday he starts on the bench.



Match ratings out of 10, last seven matches.

One afternoon against one opponent rewrote six weeks of evidence.

WHY IT MATTERS

Long-term patterns become invisible.

Selection and feedback swing from match to match.

Players get mixed messages about where they stand.

HOW TO MANAGE IT

Observe multiple sessions · Look for trends over time · Avoid decisions based on one moment

This week: Use a three-session rule: no verdict on form or selection until you have seen the player in at least three sessions or matches. Write two lines per player after every session and match, then ask: does today confirm the pattern, or is it the exception?

BIAS 4 OF 4

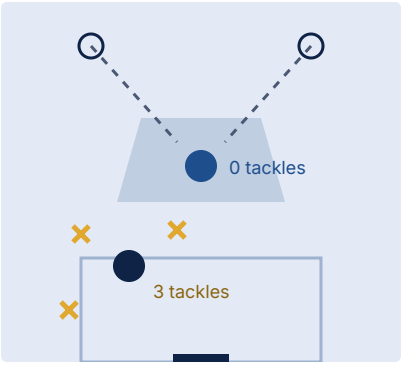
Salience bias

Focusing on what is loudest and most noticeable.

Vivid, emotional actions grab your attention. Quieter contributions, often just as valuable, slip past unnoticed: positioning, cover for a teammate, the run that drags a defender away.

Full time · player of the match

Your centre-back makes three sliding tackles and the parents applaud every one. Your holding midfielder makes none. She screened the passing lanes so well that the ball never reached her zone. Two of those tackles were only needed because the centre-back was out of position first.



The shaded lanes never needed a tackle.

The loudest player got the award. The most effective one got no mention.

WHY IT MATTERS

Spectacle gets rewarded over effectiveness.

Quiet, positional players get undervalued.

Feedback drifts towards whatever the crowd noticed.

HOW TO MANAGE IT

Observe off-ball behaviour · Define a specific focus in advance · Reduce distractions

This week: Run an off-ball five: in a small-sided game or a match, watch one player for five minutes without following the ball. Choose your focus before you start (positioning, support runs, reaction after losing it) and stick to it.

One moment, four biases

73' · 1-1 · U16 cup match

Your right winger, already called "lazy" by two of your staff, tries a nutmeg on the edge of the box. He loses it, the opponent breaks, and they score. Twenty minutes earlier, his run off the ball dragged a centre-back out of position and created the space for your only goal.

Each bias pushes you towards the same quick verdict. Each question pulls you back to the evidence.

BIAS	WHAT IT WHISPERS	THE QUESTION TO ASK
Outcome	*"It cost us the goal, so it was a bad decision."*	With what he could see, was the dribble a reasonable option?
Confirmation	*"There he goes again."*	What did I see today that does not fit "lazy"?
Recency	*"He was poor today."*	Is this his pattern, or the last twenty minutes of one match?
Salience	*"All I can see is that nutmeg."*	What did he do off the ball that led to our goal?

THE FAIRER PICTURE

A creative winger who took a risk in a dangerous area, lost it, and also created your goal. That is a coaching conversation about risk and timing. It is not proof that he is lazy.

WHO WE ARE

We develop the coach.
The coach develops the player.

The Football Coaching Institute is a coach development institute. We help clubs build one pedagogical learning line and one shared vision, and we make it easy for every coach on the staff to keep growing.

WHY WE EXIST

You know these three players

The player you cannot seem to reach, whatever you try and however you say it.

The player who goes into every duel in training and avoids them all on matchday.

The good player who has no real connection with the group and does not fit the culture in your team.

No session plan has an answer for any of them. No licence course spends a day on them. **That is the part of coaching we teach.**

"It goes beyond the tactics and will help coaches of all levels have a positive impact on their player development as well as their own team management development. It's a first class program developed by first class people."

Tom McIntosh
HEAD COACH, UNIVERSITY OF TULSA · NCAA D1

"The Football Coaching Institute understands that exceptional coaching starts with the person behind the tactics and the person on the pitch. This human-first methodology is exactly what the modern game requires to build meaningful, long-term success."

Jose Angel Robles
ASSISTANT COACH, LEXINGTON SC · USL CHAMPIONSHIP

THE TRAINING & MATCHDAY CHECK

Four questions before you judge a player

1

THE RESULT · OUTCOME BIAS

If I didn't know how it ended, what would I think of this decision?

2

THE BELIEF · CONFIRMATION BIAS

What have I seen that does not fit my current opinion of this player?

3

THE PATTERN · RECENCY BIAS

Is this repeated across matches, or is it just the latest thing I saw?

4

THE QUIET · SALIENCE BIAS

What did this player do that nobody applauded?

Screenshot this page and keep it on your phone for training and matchday. This is one lesson from Level 1: the full course turns these checks into a habit, with a real match observation assessment.

THIS WAS ONE LESSON

Look differently before you coach differently.

Spotting a bias is step one. **Level 1: Foundations of Player Development** takes you the rest of the way: how to observe a player clearly, understand the person behind the behaviour, and decide what he actually needs from you.

MODULE 1	**The Coach Behind the Coach.** How your identity, values and preferences shape what you notice.
MODULE 2	**The Person Behind the Player.** How personality, background and stage of development drive behaviour.
MODULE 3	**Observing Player Behaviour.** Observe before judging, and manage bias. This ebook is one lesson of it.
MODULE 4	**From Observation to Understanding.** Move from behaviour to cause and pattern, and let that point to what the player needs.

Video lessons · Lesson PDFs · Real match observation assessment · FCI certificate · Self-paced

START LEVEL 1 · €50

footballcoachinginstitute.com

14-day refund if you have completed less than 20% of the course.

ENROL IN LEVEL 1

LEVEL 1
Foundations of Player Development

LEVEL 2
Applied Player Guidance

LEVEL 3
Leading the Group

Responsible for a coaching staff? Our club and academy packages give every coach the same learning line, from your youngest age group to your oldest. Request a quote for your club at footballcoachinginstitute.com/clubs.

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