

Help or hindrance: The use of video analysis to aid player development

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Richard Allen



VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS: The CoachMyVideo App, which offers split screen technology and the facility to highlight individual players.

- **Seeing yourself on video enables both the athlete and coach to identify strengths and weaknesses, evaluate performances and use it as a benchmark.**
- **You can have the best analysis software in the world, but it is useless unless a coach can interpret the footage.**
- **Grass-roots sport is not about vast amounts of stats, the emphasis is on learning more about the players.**
- **The key message is to know what you want to get out of video analysis and what is going to benefit the players you are working with.**

If you were to ask sports coaches two or three years ago for a ‘hands up’ of who uses video in their coaching, I doubt many would have raised their arms.

But the picture has changed dramatically in a short space of time. Ask the same question now to Level 1 coaches and above from every compass point in the country, and it would, I imagine, be like a Mexican wave of hands shooting into the air as the popularity of video analysis continues to grow exponentially.

Motivated by ConnectedCoaches Community and Content Champion [Richard Allen](#) 's excellent blog post, [Linking player development plans to performance analysis](#), I wanted to explore in more detail the positive impact video technology can have on athletes, and find out if profound benefits can be achieved

at every level of the performance pyramid.

As a former performance analyst, Richard has used video in his work with Nottingham Forest first team and Derby County Ladies, as well as in his current school-based role with The FA, coaching five to 11 year olds.

His overriding message is that technology is a tremendous asset when used wisely but, potentially, a major time-wasting tool if coaches become slaves to their iPads and camcorders.

So, before you can push the boundaries of performance, you must know your own boundaries, and assess how deeply you need to immerse yourself in the use of video.

Ideas man

Still only 24, Richard wanted to start at the top and work his way down, from grand stage to grass roots, turning the traditional talent pathway model on its head for his own personal career development purposes.

He wanted to see what coaching looked like in professional environments, in first teams and academies, before branching out.

‘I have taken so many ideas from reading, watching sessions and coaching. I’ve got so many now and I am keen to share those that actually work from my own experiences,’ he says. ‘I’m a big believer in opening your eyes to new ideas.’

That refreshing proactive philosophy will not only stand him in great stead going forward, it means he has already compiled copious amounts of [evidence](#) to support his views on the use of technology in coaching.

‘Video analysis interests me because you can see an individual performance for what it is,’ says Richard.

‘When I’ve worked with players, even at grass-roots level, giving them [feedback](#) through video is such a powerful tool. Seeing themselves on video is massively important to them because they can see strengths and weaknesses, evaluate performances and use it as a benchmark.

‘It is how they interpret the information. So you can have the best software in the world but, unless they can make sense of that correctly, it’s nowhere near as useful. That’s where the coach comes in.’

Easy does it

A smartphone or camcorder is fast becoming an essential part of the coach’s kit as they dispense with the traditional accoutrements of watch, notepad and pen.

At the highest level, no expense is spared when it comes to providing coaches with the latest in high-end technology.

But a grass-roots coach should not be analysing their team’s performances à la Gary Neville and Jamie Carragher on Super Sunday, armed with more stats than you can shake a stick at and technology straight out of the film *Minority Report*.

‘Amateur sport is not about that, it’s all about the player,’ says Richard. ‘The key message is to know what you want to get out of it and what’s going to benefit the players you are working with.

‘Grass-roots coaches should not be spending six hours on the laptop going through every performance. You can spend as much or as little time as you want on it, depending on what you

want to find out.’

So how exactly **should** grass-roots coaches use video to aid player development?

The good news is that there is room on the bandwagon for self-confessed technophobes. Or to put it another way, coaches won’t need any coaching on how to use the coaching software!

This should come as a relief. After all, there is no point in having a shiny new car in the driveway if you haven’t first learned how to drive, or haven’t yet passed your test. Equip yourself with any smart device and you will be up and running in no time.

And bearing in mind every man and his dog owns a phone or tablet that records video, it doesn’t even require any outlay.

‘The analysis side of things can be really simple,’ explains Richard. ‘I used software called Focus X2 when I was at Forest Academy and Derby County Ladies, and it was very user-friendly. But even if you only use the record function itself, or more basic video editing software, knowing what to look for is more important than knowing the intricacies of the software.’

‘The culture of performance analytics is changing. It’s no longer about the technical side and how capable you are of using a computer – you really need to know the game.’

For immediate, on the spot feedback, Richard uses the free app CoachMyVideo. There are others, like Coach’s Eye ([reviewed here by ConnectedCoaches members](#)) and HudlTechnique (formerly UberSense, [reviewed here by ConnectedCoaches members](#)), that cost a nominal fee.

You can buy connection cables to transfer your video camera footage onto your iPad, smart device or PC, or hook it up directly to the TV screen.

Apps will allow you to view replays in slow motion or frame by frame, highlight footage with lines or circles, overlay text and share the footage with your players via email or YouTube.

‘For someone like a Level 1 coach, this software can provide all the basic data you need. It’s not just about the stats. They are only really used at the top level. They will be looking for key performance indicators (KPIs) within game plans or individual learning plans.’

Simple but effective

The framework for achieving performance development lies in creating an individual learning plan. The video analysis will help to highlight a team or player’s strengths and weaknesses, which, set against those targets, will help you measure any positive change.

One of the easiest ways to benefit from the use of video is to simply film a game – having first of all requested parents’ permission, of course.

‘If you are in a game situation and have set up a camera, ask a parent to film it,’ Richard suggests. ‘You can then upload the videos to YouTube and save, export and email the clips to the kids.’

‘Watching the game back will allow you to see if the player has achieved their learning plan. So, for example, has the player run with the ball as much as possible, or have they tracked back to help the defence when you lose possession?’

The chances are that young players will probably never have seen themselves in action before.

If they have had a poor game, watching themselves back will help them understand the reasons why.

[Replay Analysis](#) is an online platform that allows you to distribute video and track which player has watched what and for how long, but it is expensive. Richard recommends social networking sites Google+ and Facebook as more cost-efficient video portal options, allowing amateur coaches to create online communities.

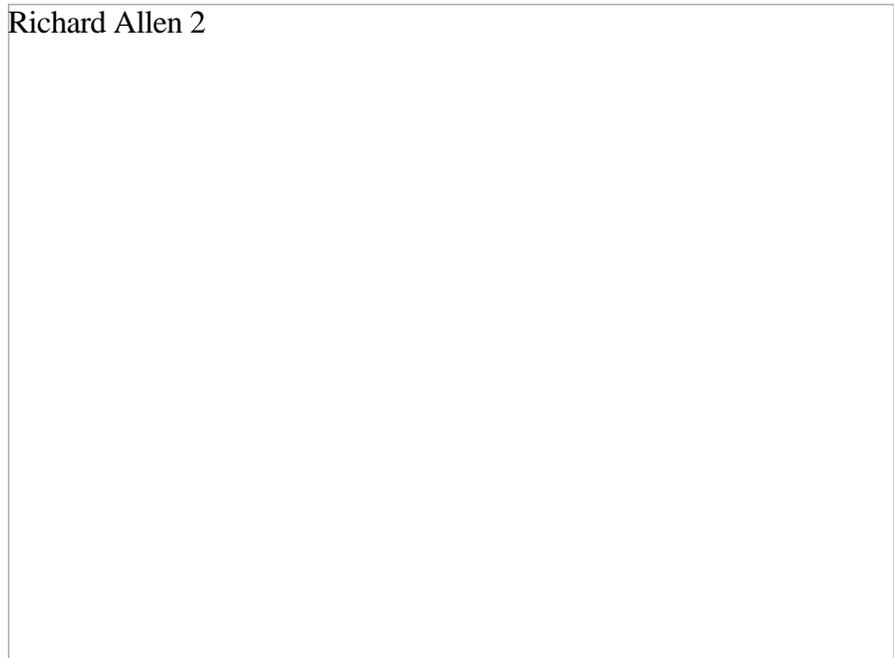
It is important for a coach to create an environment where the players take ownership of their own development and learning. And what better way to do this than asking them to track their own performance targets through video footage?

This will significantly increase their level of enthusiasm, and will save coaches a lot of time viewing the intricacies of every player's display after each match.

'Game plans and performance target goals don't take too long to analyse, and if you have worked with players to highlight their personal goals, that will free you up to concentrate on the evaluation side,' says Richard.

'So for a striker, I could tell him straight away what his conversion rate was in a game, or that 90% of his shots went wide, as within the game they would only have had three or four chances. All easy stuff to examine and an example of what coaches should be looking to do at grass-roots level.'

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LOOK AND LEARN: The players watch intently as Richard shows them some video footage of their training session

Spot the difference

Richard runs through some other examples of performance traits that can be easily exposed through video analysis and used to influence individual development plans.

The subtle differences that exist between players in the same position, for example, can be observed, compared and contrasted, and then acted on.

'If a player receives the ball in front of the defender, facing the goal, you could see through replays how beneficial it was for them, in terms of having more shots,' he says. 'A lot of strikers can finish well, it's about maximising those opportunities to score.'

'Another striker may have great movement and body positioning but they struggle to convert in a one-on-

one situation, needing three chances to score one goal. It's about knowing the player, and video technology will allow you to do just that.

'There are so many different characteristics between players, even those who play in the same position. So you can have a commanding, traditional ball-winning centre back or your ball-playing centre back, and each will have their own specific development points.'

A coach can also use instant, intimate feedback in training, focusing on isolated techniques such as striking the ball, heading or set pieces.

iPads can get up close and personal, which means you don't have to set up a camera.

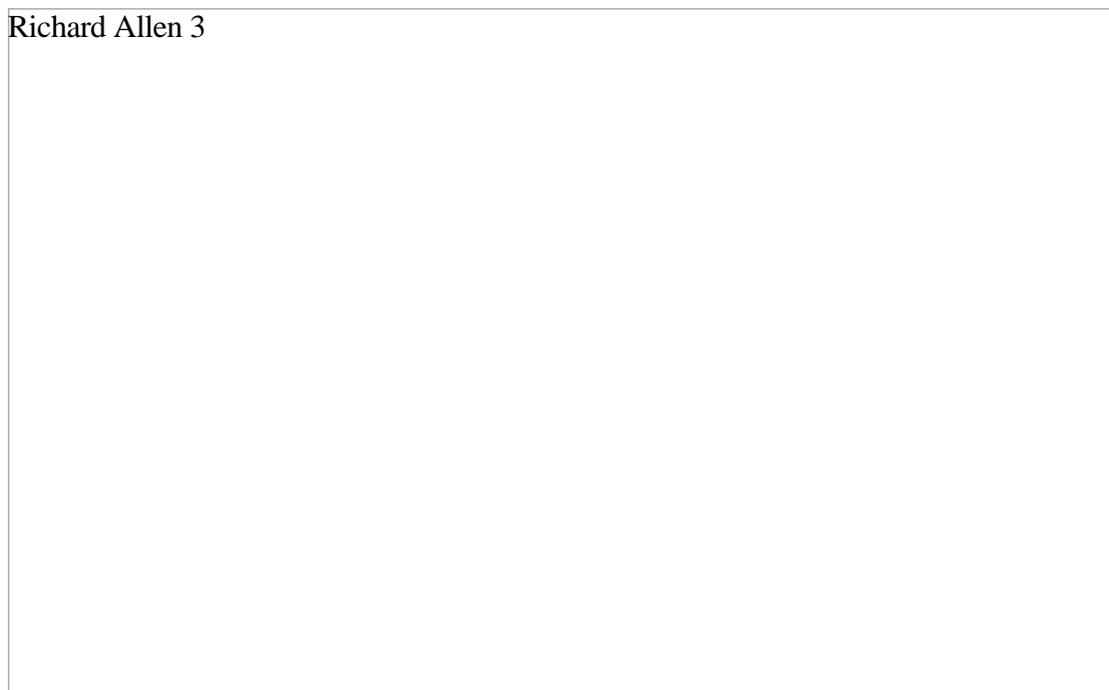
Players can gather round, and you can evaluate who has done something particularly well, whose technique is flawed and why. But it is up to the coach as to how they manage the process. For example, asking an entire group to look at a detailed analysis of defending a free kick can render the exercise pointless.

'Some of my sessions at the moment are on protecting the ball so I might just show one group that, or individually. Ten, 11, 12 players can't all see the iPad at the same time. And you won't know if they have all interpreted that information.'

When he worked for Nottingham Forest, Richard would analyse the goalkeepers' technique by having one video camera running all the time and one iPad taking close-up footage.

It provided instant feedback, in slow motion and with a split screen function to show the same mistake from different angles.

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Digging for data

There are no limits to how far you can take things if you have the manpower, the money and the motivation.

Tagging is the process of filing your video by adding keywords to help you or other people find your content.

If you succumb to the addictive nature of video analysis, and have the right software, you can build up a vast database of individual players' strengths and weaknesses or team analytics.

Before the analysis process, you need a game plan. When Richard was working with Derby County Ladies, this involved personal development plans for each of the players, where they listed what they wanted to **stay** doing, **stop** doing and **start** doing.

Through his filming, he would capture zonal stats and possession stats to identify KPIs associated with the goals that were on their development plans.

A coach may also have a team strategy that involves analysis of several key areas, tagging it each time they see that event occur in the game.

'An example would be, if we lose possession, I want us to go from a 4-3-3 to a 4-1-4-1 formation so we've almost got four or five defensive lines.

'If I was planning to tag some key events in my post-match analysis, I would set up those key events almost like tagging buttons on the computer screen before the game had even started. So I knew what I was looking for while the game was being filmed.'

No substitute for evidence

A sensible approach to video analysis, then, can reap rich rewards for a coach.

Go overboard, and you will be drowning in data and just treading water in your attempts to drive player development.

Hopefully, the advice contained in this article will help those considering dipping their toes in the water to take the plunge.

For Richard, scrutinising performance through video review is indispensable as a means of measuring and driving progress. The alternative to evidence-based analysis – to trust your own experienced judgement – isn't much of an alternative at all.

As he concludes: 'Performance analysis helps shape behaviours, beliefs and culture within the team. Without it, people just rely on emotions and ideas, based on their beliefs, experiences and influences, which don't actually hold any substance.'

Richard's Top Tips

1. Performance analysis is highly accessible at grassroots level, with many iPad and software apps available for little cost or for free. Anything can be achieved on a small budget. At Derby County Ladies we weren't professional and only trained twice a week. We made use of buying a cheap JVC camera, tripod and buying a Focus X2 software licence for just £50. The rewards were unbelievable!
2. Make sure what you interpret back to the players is meaningful and positive, and something that is part of their

short, medium or long-term development. This will make your players gravitate towards analysis a lot sooner.

3. Be creative - filming your training sessions for reflection, getting players to film each other, peer reviewing and getting players to lead video analysis sessions are a number of ways that can benefit your environment. Why not put together a few clips from the season for an end of season video? Trophies collect dust, memories last a lifetime.
4. It doesn't have to be time consuming or involve you spending hours crunching data. Why not just use the video to measure your game-plan objectives, unit challenges or player development plans? Players can even clip up their own bits, or write down the times of their key events and e-mail you their thoughts. Performance analysis at grassroots level is largely a vehicle to enhance your coaching environment.
5. My final and most important tip, make sure you have image consent from players, including the opposition! If this isn't possible, filming your training sessions is so valuable. It's a fantastic reflection tool that informs better decision making in future sessions.

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