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Inattentional Blindness Affects Performance

Did you happen to see the gorilla? Psychology researchers Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons are now well known for their research ‘ The Invisible Gorilla’ where some participants who were watching a video failed to see a gorilla that walked across the screen.

The scientific name for this phenomenon is inattentional blindness and it speaks to important limitations to our cognitive abilities.

How often do we see a wide receiver drop a pass that hits him right in the hands or does a goalie let in a weak goal? On questioning, the athletes have no specific reason why.

What the researchers did discovered was that attention is an illusion. When athletes devote their attention to a particular area or aspect of their visual field they tend not to notice unexpected objects even when they are important and appear right where they are looking.

Houston we have a problem!! How can we ensure that our athletes are truly seeing and responding to objects in their visual field? Recent developments in visual training can now allow us to identify and track concentration errors especially in physically, sensory and cognitive stressful environments.

Interestingly, there is research currently underway evaluating the impact of positive, negative and neutral noise on cognitive and physical functioning, which will also allow them to track and link inattentional blindness to the quality of the auditory stress.

Once identified, custom training programs can be designed to teach athletes to improve their visual awareness and the processing of their visual data in increasingly difficult situations.

Chabris and Simons summary thoughts were that looking is necessary for seeing but looking is not sufficient for seeing. We need our athletes not just to look to see but to look and see the unexpected.

For further insights into inattention blindness and sport vision training in the GTA, contact Kevin Honsberger of Sport Sciences International at honsphysio@rogers.com or visit the website www.sportsciencesinternational.com