



## Module 3. Player Observation



In Module 3, you'll learn how to observe players by focusing on various key parameters to objectively form a first impression of them. With a second or, if necessary, a third observation, you'll be able to draw more solid conclusions about the player.

You should pay attention to the player's performance factors. All performance factors have a genetic component that can either limit or enhance their improvement. This genetic influence is stronger in areas related to physical performance and less significant in cognitive learning. However, sports science acknowledges that the most critical factor for improving an athlete is the quality of the teaching and learning process, the training, and the competitive experience gained, which can help push or even surpass genetic limits.

You'll need to assess the player's physical condition, technical abilities, tactical knowledge, and psychological and emotional behavior. A player can stand out by having a balanced skill set or by excelling in a particular area compared to peers of the same age. In either case, they could be a valuable candidate for recruitment. If that's the case, you should also look into their contract status and, if applicable, their representation agency.

This section will cover the key inputs to focus on when observing a player. We'll always consider two main aspects: the club's needs and talent identification. This means you should focus on the age groups and positions the club wants to fill, but keep an eye on the broader goal of spotting talent. When you come across exceptional talent, the club's specific needs become secondary. We'll go over both general aspects to observe as well as more specific details based on the player's position on the field.

Finally, we'll discuss the difference between a scout's intuition ("a scout's eye") and a more structured method, and how a scout's tactical background influences player observation.

☰ **The skill of observation**

☰ **Conclusion**

# The skill of observation

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## 1.1. Introduction

In this section, you'll learn what to focus on when observing players, first on a general level and then in more detail based on their positions. We'll cover the specific traits of goalkeepers, defenders, midfielders, and forwards.

The evaluation of players varies by position, so it's important to know the physical, technical, and tactical factors specific to each role. It's also important to consider the player's behavior both on and off the field.

In the end, you'll reach a conclusion about the player by factoring in all these elements, which will allow you to later produce a complete report.

## 1.2. What to observe

Observing players is a detailed process with specific techniques that can be taught and learned. And like any other skill, it improves with practice and experience.

When observing, a scout should always have a way to take notes, whether manually or digitally, to record what happens during the match. In general, especially during the high-volume phase mentioned in the previous module, you should note the player's positions and whether there have been changes since prior observations, as well as the game system in which they're playing. Slight differences in roles can occur based on the system or style of play being used.

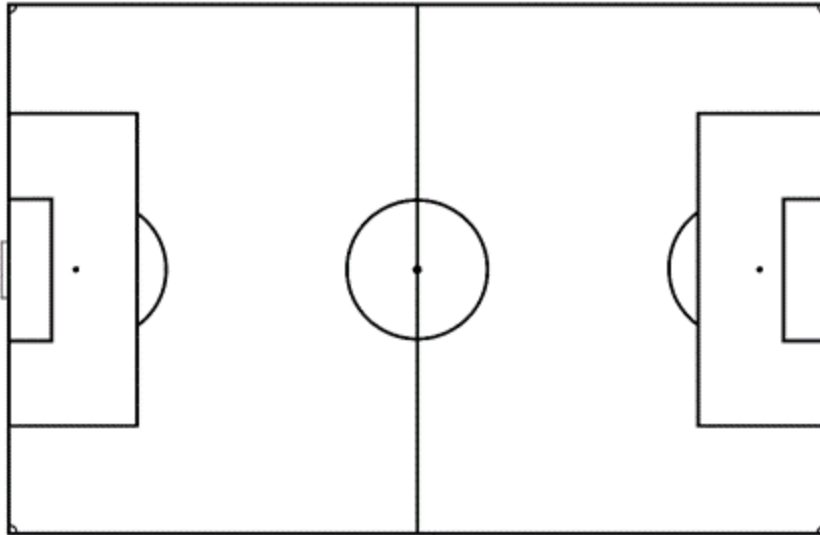
Figure 1 shows an example of a template that allows scouts to quickly jot down the date, match, and category being observed. It also includes a fully marked field diagram to note player positions quickly.

**Figure 1: Example of a player observation template**

CAPTADOR		FECHA	
PARTIDO		CATEGORÍA	

Equipo 1:

Equipo 2:



SCOUT		DATE	
MATCH		CATEGORY	

Team 1:

Team 2:

Source: original work.

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Figure 2 adds to Figure 1 by providing quick inputs that allow scouts to highlight key points from the match. There's space for the player's name, jersey number, position, and team. Brief evaluations are included to give a quick overview of the player, which can be completed with a checkmark or circled at the end.

**Figure 2: Example of an individualized player observation template**

<b>Nombre:</b>	
<b>Dorsal:</b>	
<b>Demarcación:</b>	
<b>Equipo:</b>	
Percepción • 360*	
Velocidad	
Duelos	
Protec. posesión	
Golpeo	
Finta	
Comunicación	<i>Sabe</i> S N
Desequilibrio	<i>Quiere</i> S N
Cap Asociarse	<i>Puede</i> S N
<b>MEDIA</b>	<i>ACCIÓN S N</i>
<b>NOTAS</b>	

<b>Nombre:</b>	
<b>Dorsal:</b>	
<b>Demarcación:</b>	
<b>Equipo:</b>	
Percepción • 360*	
Velocidad	
Duelos	
Protec. posesión	
Golpeo	
Finta	
Comunicación	<i>Sabe</i> S N
Desequilibrio	<i>Quiere</i> S N
Cap Asociarse	<i>Puede</i> S N
<b>MEDIA</b>	<i>ACCIÓN S N</i>
<b>NOTAS</b>	

<b>Nombre:</b>	
<b>Dorsal:</b>	
<b>Demarcación:</b>	
<b>Equipo:</b>	
Percepción • 360*	
Velocidad	
Duelos	
Protec. posesión	
Golpeo	
Finta	
Comunicación	<i>Sabe</i> S N
Desequilibrio	<i>Quiere</i> S N
Cap Asociarse	<i>Puede</i> S N
<b>MEDIA</b>	<i>ACCIÓN S N</i>
<b>NOTAS</b>	

<b>Nombre:</b>	
<b>Dorsal:</b>	
<b>Demarcación:</b>	
<b>Equipo:</b>	
Percepción • 360*	
Velocidad	
Duelos	
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Golpeo	
Finta	
Comunicación	<i>Sabe</i> S N
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Cap Asociarse	<i>Puede</i> S N
<b>MEDIA</b>	<i>ACCIÓN S N</i>
<b>NOTAS</b>	

<b>Nombre:</b>	
<b>Dorsal:</b>	
<b>Demarcación:</b>	
<b>Equipo:</b>	
Percepción • 360*	
Velocidad	
Duelos	
Protec. posesión	
Golpeo	
Finta	
Comunicación	<i>Sabe</i> S N
Desequilibrio	<i>Quiere</i> S N
Cap Asociarse	<i>Puede</i> S N
<b>MEDIA</b>	<i>ACCIÓN S N</i>
<b>NOTAS</b>	

<b>Name:</b>				
<b>Jersey Number:</b>				
<b>Position:</b>				
<b>Team:</b>				
360° Awareness				
Speed				
Duels				
Ball Protection, Possession				
Striking				
Feinting				
Communication:		They know	Y	N
Imbalance		They want to	Y	N
Ability to Connect with Others		They can	Y	N
<b>AVERAGE</b>				
<b>NOTES:</b>				

Source: original work.

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### 1.3. Scout's General Observations

There are certain aspects and actions in the game that a scout must be aware of regardless of the player's age or position. These general

elements not only help assess a player but can also be crucial in determining whether they have potential. All of these elements are game-related.

### **1.3.1. General observable elements**

These include:

- The player maintains optimal spacing relative to their position and game context.
- The player constantly adjusts their position based on the game, showing both dynamism and awareness of teammates' needs.
- They draw attention through their movements, fixing opponents or creating space for others.
- They reposition to control space or opponents and stay ready for a ball recovery or turnover.
- They prioritize short, multidirectional passing.
- They demonstrate fundamental knowledge of combination play, like one- or two-touch passing, receiving the ball at their feet, and playing forward.
- They make passes that allow the receiver to maintain game flow with ongoing communication.

- They repeat passes to draw in the opponent and set up the next action for themselves or a teammate.
- They know how to disguise their passing intentions, using feints to surprise the opponent and keep the game flowing.
- They know when to turn, considering passing options beyond just advancing the play.
- They play with natural confidence and freedom.
- They have the ability to influence and control the pace of the game and maintain that influence throughout the match.
- They show initiative and proactivity during play.
- They are keen to help their teammates and show empathy for them in different game situations.
- Their performance is not significantly affected by the score or the outcome of the game.

**Table 1: Example of a template to collect player**

PLAYER INFORMATION		
INFORMATION	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
PHYSICAL ASPECTS		
TECHNICAL ASPECTS		
TACTICAL ASPECTS		
EMOTIONAL PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS		
OTHER REMARKABLE ASPECTS		
CONCLUSION		

Source: original work.

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### 1.3.1. Physical elements

Football players need to have specific fundamental coordination skills that form the basis of all their other abilities, which include:

- Jumping.
- Moving.
- Turning.

- Balancing.
- Stopping/starting.
- Changing direction.
- Providing support.

All players, regardless of their position on the field, must acquire these skills, as they are used by everyone and become evident in the game.

In terms of physical attributes, modern football generally favors the following parameters:

- Bioenergetic structure. Height is generally seen as a favorable factor since football is a contact sport and height can provide advantages in certain game situations.
- Conditional structure. Maximum levels of explosive strength, power, endurance, and speed in both running and performance.
- An appropriate weight for height with a low body fat percentage.
- A muscular and strong build to win individual duels.
- Long, muscular legs.
- They have 360° awareness with excellent peripheral vision regarding the ball-player-rival relationship.

### **1.3.2. Technical elements**

We assess the technical skills every player should have, regardless of their position, focusing on the following concepts:

- Oriented control.
- Dribbling.
- Long and short passing.
- Accurate shooting.
- Aerial ability.
- Ball control skills.
- Dribbling or beating an opponent one-on-one.
- Feinting ability.
- Tackling.

### **1.3.2. Tactical elements**

When it comes to tactics, we differentiate between offensive and defensive tactical principles. Ideally, players should be as complete as

possible, embodying as many tactical principles from both categories as they can. We will focus on:

### **Offensive tactical principles**

- Support
- Constant support
- Off-the-ball movement
- Offensive overlaps
- Attacking play
- Counterattacking
- Open spaces
- Orientation change
- Play speed
- Progression in the game
- Awareness
- Give-and-go plays
- Offensive timing
- Ball retention and game control
- Game Pace

- Changes in the pace of the game

### **Defensive tactical principles**

- Marking
- Falling back
- Tackle
- Awareness
- Constant support
- Defensive timing
- Load
- Covering
- Exchanging
- Anticipation
- Interceptions
- *Pressing*
- Defensive overlaps

Every tactical aspect is related to the intended objective, and depending on the phase of play, the scout must assess whether the player aims to:

- Maintain possession
- Progress the play
- Finish the attack
- Reorganize the team

### **1.3.2. Psychological and emotional elements**

In this area, the clear goal is for players to have high levels of self-esteem, concentration, leadership, and self-control. It's clear that emotional stress can affect a player and reduce their performance. Therefore, the scout should be aware of the player's family environment and the influence of their agent or representative, as much as possible. It is important to recognize potential emotional weaknesses, loss of control, and off-field behaviors that could negatively impact the player's performance.

## **1.4. Specific observation by position**

From a certain age, players tend to specialize in a specific position based on their characteristics, skills, and abilities. We will now present

a proposal of some abilities and aptitudes to consider when evaluating players according to their position.

### **1.4.1. Goalkeeper**

The goalkeeper is a unique and specific position, so their attributes differ from those of other players. The general aspects we will focus on include:

- Ability to feel comfortable in different areas of the field, not just inside the box.
- Ability to identify distances with nearby teammates to stay involved in ball recovery.
- A strong understanding of the game and decision-making skills.

#### **When in possession of the ball**

- Ability to control the game with their feet, interpreting situations to play short or long, either to feet or into space.
- Ability to use both feet to pass the ball to teammates with various trajectories.
- Positioning, interpreting, and making decisions in different game situations, including restarts such as goal kicks.

- Passing with hands (precision and power).

### **When recovering the ball**

- Defending the goal, nearby space, and space behind.
- Mastery of all game situations, including aerial play and balls behind the defense.
- A leader in ball possession and recovery. A communicator who can direct the team's organization at all times.
- Focused and capable of managing multiple tasks simultaneously.
- High self-esteem and the ability to bounce back from mistakes.
- Prepared to maintain self-control, even under intense pressure.
- In hand play: intercepting, stopping, and catching.

### **1.4.2. Central players**

#### **When in possession of the ball**

- Ability to play out from the back in short, controlled situations during buildup play. This skill should be assessed primarily under opponent pressure, which increases the difficulty and discomfort

of playing short. It's not just about playing the ball out; it's specifically about doing so under opponent pressure.

- Ability to play long and accurately when needed, providing useful progression in the game by bypassing lines of pressure while maintaining possession.
- Ability to pass into tight spaces with narrow passing lanes between opponents, such as passes that break through the opposing defense.
- Ability to readjust positioning, stay alert, move with the team, and prepare for potential ball loss, reinforcing positioning and marking duties.

### **When not in possession of the ball**

- Ability to step forward intuitively to challenge the opponent, anticipating play.
- Ability to turn quickly and recover, with good speed when turning.
- Ability to control the space around the ball, arriving at the right time to tackle with the necessary force based on timing and tackle concepts.
- Ability to win aerial duels and maintain possession.

### **1.4.3. Full-backs**

#### **When in possession of the ball**

- Ability to position while maintaining width, either inside or outside, not just based on the sidelines or team structure but constantly moving dynamically during possession.
- Ability to observe and connect with central players, such as center-backs, midfielders, and forwards, showing patience with the ball and not just being seen as a progressive option.
- Ability to manage the timing of arriving in advanced areas.

#### **When not in possession of the ball**

- Ability to adjust positioning in relation to the ball, teammates, and nearby opponents, not just based on field boundaries or team structure, but being dynamic in recovery positioning.
- Ability to direct the opponent through body positioning, timing the tackle based on the space available, like the touchline or goal line.

- Ability to recover into ball zones if beaten, respecting the recovery triangle with teammates through support, covering, and switching roles.

#### **1.4.4. Midfielders**

This group includes all players who can operate in the midfield, such as central midfielders, pivots, or interior players.

##### **When in possession of the ball**

- Ability to play in tight spaces and under pressure, both with and without the ball, receiving it in intermediate areas.
- Ability to consistently provide passing options, positioning as a key player near the ball, and standing out for game vision.
- Ability to break the opponent's structure through positioning, runs off the ball, and passing, with deep runs and long-range finishing.
- Ability to prioritize ball control, usually playing with 1-2 touches.
- Ability to deliver the final pass or assist.
- Strong long-range shot, with goal-scoring potential from outside the box. Also capable of making second-line runs into the box for

finishing opportunities.

### **When not in possession of the ball**

- Ability to anticipate the ball's trajectory and intercept it by reading the play.
- Ability to assess distances from the ball carrier, teammates, and opponents, adjusting positioning to stay in key areas.
- Ability to time tackles well and follow the opponent if they maintain possession, reducing their space and time.

### **1.4.5. Forwards**

This refers to players occupying advanced positions like wingers or central forwards.

### **When in possession of the ball**

- Ability to position and move from different areas, participating actively in the game with constant off-the-ball movements.
- Ability to alternate between receiving the ball at feet and running into space, creating uncertainty for defenders.

- Ability to time finishes well, identifying and creating optimal conditions to place the ball away from the goalkeeper, highlighting goal-scoring ability. Excellent finishing ability in the box, using various techniques (first-time shots, controlled finishes, headers, right foot, left foot...) and situations (outside the box, crosses, runs into space, 1v1 with the goalkeeper...).
- Ability to dribble or destabilize opponents in 1v1 situations, especially for wingers.
- Ability to deliver accurate crosses or final passes.

### **When not in possession of the ball**

- Ability to press the ball carrier, reducing their passing options and forcing quicker decisions, limiting their space and time with constant pressure.
- Ability to stay close to teammates recovering possession, providing consistent support when outnumbered.
- Ability to identify key areas from which they can assist in recovery or position themselves as a passing option if the team regains possession.

## **1.5. The scout: intuition or method**

The intuition-method debate doesn't refer to opposing ideas. Both are scientifically-based processes, though they differ in nature, and both are essential for a scout's work. Using both together and complementing each other increases the scout's effectiveness.

The scout follows a structured method. A method is an organized set of rules and procedures followed in a specific order and plan to ensure the whole process works properly.

For example, following a method involves taking meticulous notes or using statistics, as discussed in the first module, to evaluate players more systematically.

Intuition also plays an important role in a scout's work. Intuition is a cognitive process where a person analyzes what they see and compares it to their mental database, built from both experience and learning. It's like quick access to stored information, allowing for rapid processing and giving the impression of understanding without an obvious reasoning process.

Intuition is useful, for instance, when evaluating a player in situations where objective data may not apply or be sufficient. In this sense, intuition may seem like an unreflective process in a scout's decision-making, but it provides valuable information.

Ultimately, the best approach for a scout is to combine both intuition and method. By adding the objective structure of a method to intuition based on experience and learning, the scout's player evaluations will have less risk and a higher degree of accuracy and reliability.

**CONTINUE**

# Conclusion

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With this third module, the goal is for scouts to acquire as much objective knowledge as possible for identifying talent. We started by explaining the role of observation, then listing key aspects to note when observing a player.

This module dives into the player's physical and conditional aspects, followed by technical and tactical elements, and ends with psychological and emotional factors. It also addresses collecting personal and athletic background information about the player, if possible, to provide additional context. All these aspects should help the scout draw conclusions that will be useful for creating a player report. Two sample templates for observing players in matches have been provided.

Various general qualities that scouts should look for in all players were discussed, followed by a deeper analysis of specific aspects for each position on the field, from goalkeeper to forward, including center-backs, fullbacks, and midfielders. Two key moments for each

position were distinguished, depending on whether the player is in possession of the ball or not.

The final section discussed whether scouts should rely on intuition or method. It was noted that intuition is based on experience and learning, while the method relies more on the direct collection of objective data through prior planning. Both are useful, and using them together improves the quality and reliability of evaluations.

In the next module (Module 4), scouts will learn the skills needed for data collection and player observation assessment based on the lessons from this module.

[CONTINUE](#)