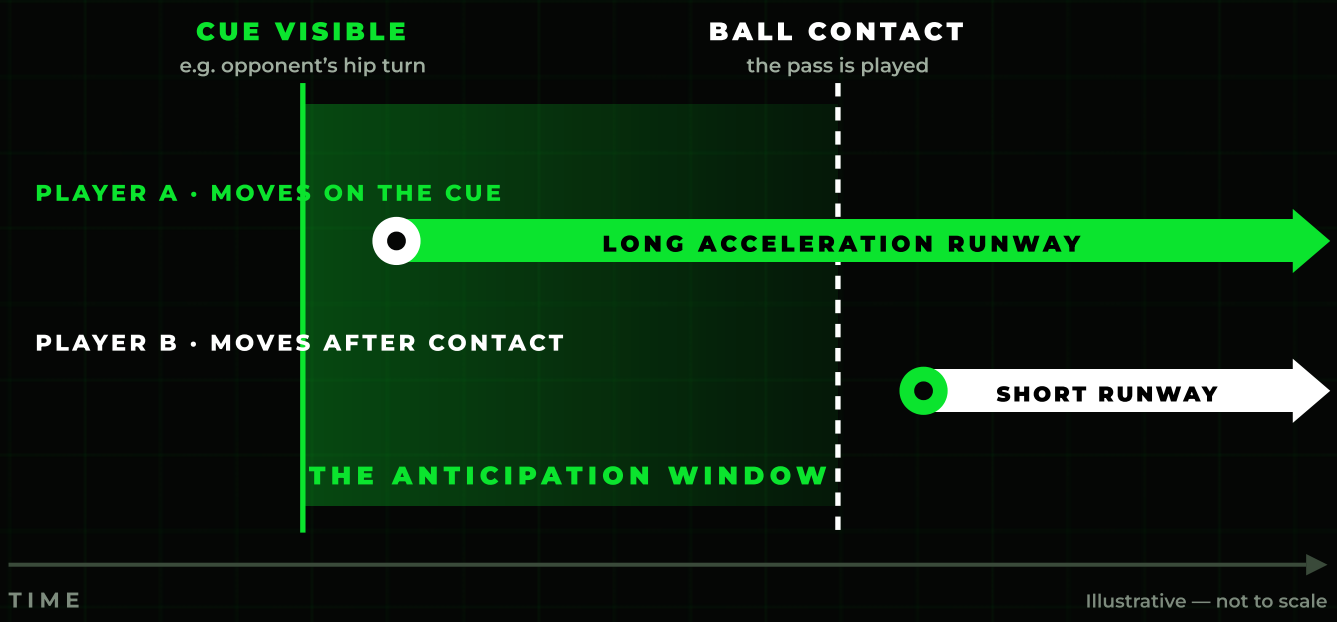
PERFORMANCE TRUTH

THE ANTICIPATION WINDOW

Elite players don't just move faster — **they start earlier.**



THE WINDOW

The time between a cue becoming available and a player starting to move. It shifts coaching from pure sprint metrics to perceptual-cognitive speed.

WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR

02

FOUR QUALITIES. ONE EARLIER START.

Even great anticipation fails if the body isn't ready — and a ready body is wasted if the player waits for certainty. **Anticipation + readiness = usable speed.**

1 VISUAL CUE RECOGNITION

Spotting the earliest usable information before an action happens — predictive information, not just the ball.

LOOK FOR

- Opponent's hip angle before pressing
- Supporting runner's body orientation
- Passing-foot shape
- Scanning before reception

SCORE 1	SCORE 5
Ball watcher	**Reads cues pre-contact**

2 CONTEXTUAL PATTERN RECALL

Connecting early cues to patterns stored from experience, so the player narrows the options and predicts the next action.

LOOK FOR

- Wide player sees the full-back overcommit
- ... and anticipates the inside channel opening
- Less thinking, faster commitment

SCORE 1	SCORE 5
Reactive	**Consistently anticipates patterns**

3 PRE-MOVEMENT POSTURE

The body organised to move the instant a decision is made. Poor posture can cost around 150–300 ms before acceleration begins.

LOOK FOR

- Centre of mass slightly forward
- Split or open stance
- Heel lightness
- Subtle pre-tension

SCORE 1	SCORE 5
Flat-footed	**Constant athletic base**

4 TRIGGER THRESHOLD

How much confirmation a player needs before committing to move. Novices wait for certainty; elite players commit at roughly 60–70% probability.

LOOK FOR

- Novice: reacts after ball contact
- Elite: trusts the predictive model
- Early commitment creates separation

SCORE 1	SCORE 5
Waits for certainty	**Commits on high-probability cues**

WHY IT MATTERS ON THE PITCH

The earlier a cue is recognised: **the longer the acceleration runway**, the fewer emergency reactions, and the higher the interception and pressing success rate. Elite players begin moving before ball contact because they recognise intention early.

HOW TO MEASURE IT

03

TWO WAYS TO SCORE IT: LIVE, AND ON VIDEO.

METHOD 1 · LIVE FIELD RUBRIC (USE IT AT TRAINING)

Watch the session and rate each quality 1–5. The anchors below are 1, 3 and 5; use 2 and 4 for in-between. Track posture at defensive transition, the press trigger and before reception.

QUALITY	1	3	5	SCORE
Visual cue recognition	Ball watcher	Sees cue at contact	**Reads cues pre-contact**	___ / 5
Contextual pattern recall	Reactive	Sometimes predicts	**Consistently anticipates patterns**	___ / 5
Pre-movement posture	Flat-footed	Inconsistent readiness	**Constant athletic base**	___ / 5
Trigger threshold	Waits for certainty	Occasional early commits	**Commits on high-probability cues**	___ / 5

ADD THE FOUR SCORES → OVERALL ANTICIPATION PROFILE (OUT OF 20)

4–8	9–14	15–20
Reactive mover	**Transitional anticipator**	**Proactive game reader**

METHOD 2 · THE ANTICIPATION DELTA (VIDEO)

ANTICIPATION DELTA = CUE-VISIBLE FRAME → FIRST-MOVEMENT FRAME

1 Film the session on VEO, Hudl or Wyscout.

2 Find the **first frame the cue is visible** (e.g. the hip turn).

3 Find the **first frame the player moves**.

4 Count the frames between. **Shorter = earlier.**

Frames to milliseconds: frames × (1000 ÷ frames per second). Example: 6 frames at 25 fps = 6 × 40 = **240 ms**.

TAG EVERY ACTION (VIDEO)

- Cue visible: **before** / at / after contact
- Movement begins: **pre** / at / post contact
- Decision quality: early & correct · early & incorrect · late & correct · late & incorrect

FIELD MARKERS TO SPOT LIVE

- Head movement before the ball arrives
- Subtle weight shift before the pass
- Movement triggered before contact
- Trend across games: are they committing earlier?

HOW TO TRAIN IT

EIGHT GAMES. TRY ONE THIS WEEK.

04

CUE RECOGNITION **A**

EARLY-CUE PRESSING GAME

4v4 + 2 neutrals. 2 points for an interception before clean reception.

"What told you the pass was coming?"

CUE RECOGNITION **B**

DELAYED VISION GAME

Players start facing away. Coach calls the stimulus after the pass is played — forces rapid cue acquisition and posture adjustment.

PATTERN RECALL **C**

FREEZE & REWIND

Pause the SSG at a key cue. Players answer: what do you see, what happens next, when do you move?

PATTERN RECALL **D**

PATTERN REPETITION WAVES

Run the same overload scenario 6–8 times. Players must call the next action before it occurs.

POSTURE **E**

PROBABILITY SPRINT GAME

Attacker has 3 options. Defender must move at the first hip turn, not ball contact. Score rewards early movement.

POSTURE **F**

REACTIVE BASE DRILL

Players hold a split stance. Coach gives an unpredictable directional cue. Movement only counts if posture was kept before the cue.

TRIGGER THRESHOLD **G**

EARLY-COMMIT INTERCEPT GAME

Defender scores double for pre-contact movement; single point for a post-contact interception.

TRIGGER THRESHOLD **H**

PROBABILISTIC CHANNEL GAME

Attacker chooses inside, line or drop. Defender must move at the first directional cue. Points for early correct reads.

4 COMMON COACHING ERRORS

- Coaching **reaction speed** instead of recognition speed
- **Talking over play** — loading players with instruction mid-action
- Rewarding **outcomes** while ignoring cue timing
- **Punishing** an incorrect early move

TRAINING LEVERS THAT WORK EVERYWHERE

- Scanning constraint: check the shoulder before passing
- Touch restrictions to limit ball-watching
- Reward early decisions in the scoring

ROLL IT OUT

WK 1–2	WK 3–6	WK 7–10	WK 11+
Measure baseline	**Layer cue constraints**	**Probability commitment games**	**Integrate into tactical periodisation**

YOUR NEXT SESSION

05

THREE THINGS TO DO AT YOUR NEXT SESSION.

1 SCORE BEFORE YOU COACH.

You can't train what you haven't seen. Use one session to take a baseline with the four-line rubric.

DO THIS
Rate each quality 1–5 and add them up out of 20. Note the lowest-scoring quality.

LOOK FOR
Where the gap is: cue recognition, pattern recall, posture or trigger threshold. Start there.

2 RUN THE EARLY-CUE PRESSING GAME.

4v4 + 2 neutrals. Two points for an interception *before* clean reception. Ask after the rep, not during it.

DO THIS
Ask: *"What told you the pass was coming?"* Keep mid-play talk to a minimum.

LOOK FOR
Defenders moving before the ball arrives — and answering with a cue (hip, foot shape), not "I just went".

3 REWARD THE EARLY COMMIT.

Players wait for certainty because waiting is safe. Change the scoring so moving early is the smart choice.

DO THIS
Early-Commit Intercept Game: double points for pre-contact movement, single for post-contact. Normalise false starts.

LOOK FOR
Players committing on 60–70% certainty and more pre-contact movement as the weeks go on.

REMEMBER

Speed is not only neuromuscular. The race starts before the first step. Earlier recognition means a longer acceleration runway — and **anticipation is trainable.**

WHAT'S NEXT

THIS GUIDE GIVES YOU THE MEASUREMENT. THE MEMBERSHIP GIVES YOU THE FULL COACHING CYCLE.

Measuring is the start. When a player or team has a speed problem, you need a way to find the cause and act on it. Inside the Speed Intelligence System membership, coaches get support for the whole coaching cycle — built around their speed problem, not a pre-set session plan. Founding coaches are helping shape the future of coaching performance.

1 ASSESS · 2 HYPOTHESISE · 3 INTERVENE · 4 RE-ASSESS

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