

Football: it's all in the mind (control)

The modern game's gone a bit mental, according to mind magician Sam Kotadia, football's answer to telly freak Derren Brown



Kotadia: Look into my eyes, the eyes, not around the eyes

We've all been there, haven't we?

You're 2-0 down in a crunch game for your pub side when the team's loud-mouthed cajoler attempts to inspire with the usual stream of nonsense: "Eye of the tiger lads", "On your toes", "COME ON, FOR F****S SAKE!" The result: you end up getting trounced 5-0.

For players looking for motivation with a bit of substance, help is at hand. Literally. Sports psychologist Sam Kotadia – who has worked with Charlton boss Phil Parkinson since 2003 – has devised a set of cards to give every player, professional or amateur, a mental edge. Known simply as the Mindcard, each deck consists of 52 practical tips in a variety of different areas, from how to beat stress or prepare for an exam to ways of improving confidence in sport.

And it's with the help of Kotadia's card tricks that the Addicks have been powering up League One this season. "After a session it's nice to give players something they can take away with them," Kotadia tells *FFT*. "They can read the cards and try to master the techniques that we've talked about. Otherwise the advice I give can just go in one ear and out the other."

The process is simple. Kotadia goes through each card with Parkinson's



charges and uses his own positive approach to emphasise the difference that the psychological prompts on each card can make to every player that books a session.

And, as football's Derren Brown is keen to point out, the science behind

the cards is pretty straightforward, too. "It is easy to set personal development goals, but maintaining the discipline to complete your goal is harder. The gulf between intention and behaviour is often where positive change falls down.

"We are much more likely to engage in behaviours and activities that are accessible and easy to do, and positive change cannot happen without taking action," adds Kotadia. "Therefore the strategies within all the Mindcard packs (see box, below) are actionable and easy to digest, encouraging individuals to revisit them and act upon the advice they give with ease."

The players, according to Charlton's Portuguese midfielder Jose Semedo, are converts. "Lots of players have big quality and big strength but you need something up here," he says, pointing to his head. "I read them everyday, whether it's when I wake up in the morning or before I go to bed at night. Sam's approach has made a huge difference to my game."

This mental buffing isn't just for the pros, though. "I want to make sports psychology practical and accessible – the sort of thing that players at all levels can just pick up and go." Which is why his cards are now available online at mindcard.com.

Kotadia is keen to emphasise the point that he can't see into the future. Despite *FFT*'s constant nagging, he refused to divulge this week's Euro Millions lottery numbers for example. Up and down the country, though, the great, the good and the downright ordinary are hoping that his powers can help them achieve the proverbial 'eye of the tiger' – whatever that is.

THREE-CARD TRICK

What to expect from Kotadia's deck

Focus on the positives

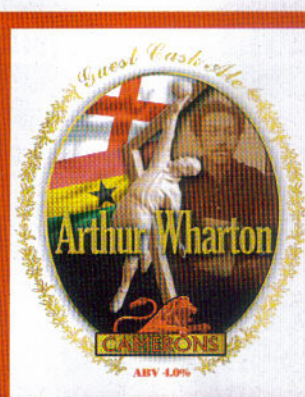
Every time you experience a loss, write down three (or more) things you have learned from it. This will ensure you continue to improve and progress as a confident, determined sportsperson. Practise this individually or confer as a team.

Explore the venue

Kotadia says get to know your surroundings. On arrival at a competition venue, take the time to explore it. This will boost your confidence by creating a sense of familiarity and comfort.

Back to basics

Directly after making a mistake, try something simpler. You're more likely to succeed at a basic task, and this small success will prevent the initial mistake from damaging your confidence. Once this simple task is completed, push beyond your comfort zone and try something more challenging.



ARTHUR PINT OF ARTHUR, PLEASE

The world's first black player gets his own ale

"Let's see... I'll have a pint of Pele, two pints of Shearer stout and half a Dean Windass for the missus." What a bizarre world we'd live in if all footballers had a drink named in their honour. Yet during this summer's World Cup, you could very well be placing a similarly odd order at the bar after Camerons Brewery introduced the Arthur Wharton ale for the tournament. The brew has a pale straw colour, and a fruity, spicy and floral aroma (so we're told), and it's been released to celebrate the life of the first black professional footballer.

"We decided to introduce Arthur Wharton ale to celebrate sporting greats from the North East," says Camerons marketing manager Yousef Doubooni. "Given that the World Cup is being held for the first time in Africa, and with Arthur originally coming from Ghana, the link was perfect. In addition, Arthur was born in 1865 – the same year the brewery was founded."

The commemoration doesn't stop at a frothy beverage: 10p of every pint of Arthur Wharton Ale sold will go towards building a statue of the former Newcastle, Darlington, Preston and Sheffield United stalwart. This unique tippie will be available nationally on Heineken's 'Britain's Got Cask' guest ale scheme throughout May and June 2010.

