



Space. The final frontier in sports. Be a space rider.

In a recent discussion with athletes from different sports, it finally dawned on me what the common denominator was for everyone in the room.

Space.

Space is the final frontier in all athletes' visual-processing strategies. Put in another way, great athletes see, measure and process the space between objects on a field faster and more accurately than their opponents.

Simply, the space in between point A and point B and how players measure and gauge the space explains the first-step quickness on a fly ball, a quarterback hitting a receiver down field, hitters estimating the time it takes to make contact with the ball, soccer or hockey goalies defending the net, golfers sizing up a putt and pitchers hitting the strike zone.

This type of three-dimensional strategy reminds one of open focus i.e. looking at nothing and seeing everything.

To see if you understand the strategy, try the following test below:

- While sitting in your room or outside, look around at all the different objects in your view.
- Blink to reset and then "see" the space in between the objects and the object at the same time.
- "Space riders," as we are calling this way of seeing, can be practiced daily.
- The harder and more one-dimensional we look at objects the less we see, especially once the object starts moving.

Some drills to practice space riding include:

- Taking batting practice and making the space in between the ball and home plate part of your focus. You want to use that space to calculate the time until collision. Remember, we hit or catch what we think we see based on all relevant cues (space being the biggest) we can gather in a small period of time.
- Having a catch or having someone kick soccer balls at you while estimating when the ball will arrive based on your space measuring skills.
- Thinking of the invisible road between objects as the ultimate tool to quickly calculate on the fly.
- Allocating parts of team practice to space riding between many objects (trees, fences, cars). The first player to see the space wins!

Being able to estimate when a moving object will arrive is more a function of how effective players use the process of space riding the "nothing in between."

Hitting coaches love talking about changing **movement patterns** to create more space and time in the swing.

Newsflash, if the brain doesn't effectively process the "space," the timing efficiency of the swing never shows up outside the laboratory.

Pitching coaches that want to improve their students' game-day command should introduce young pitchers to the space between the mound and home plate (the runway) and the soothing effect it has on target acquisition skills.

Infield coaches preaching first-step quickness and attack angles may see improved fielding efficiency by having a discussion with players on their pre-pitch and ball-flight visual focus levels and seeing how space affects their "go" time.

If you can embrace and measure space, you can be like Spock and the vision kings and queens of the sports world.