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Athletes reap benefits of Vizual Edge

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By **MARK PERLMAN**

Certainly the old adage, practice makes perfect rings true for athletic teams. But at Deerfield High School, no chances are being taken, as the Warriors are tossing in a bit of technology for good measure.

Deerfield tennis, softball and baseball athletes are all using the latest in eye training technology, Vizual Edge. The technology, developed by Vernon Hills ophthalmologist, Dr. Barry Seiller, enables athletes to evaluate and train their visual skills. Vizual Edge uses a CD Rom on a computer, through a series of visual exercises.

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Josh Gross keeps his eye on the ball at the Deerfield High School tennis courts. Gross has become a believer in the benefits of the Vizual Edge techniques. - (Dan Luedert/Staff Photographer)

"Evaluating and training visual skills provides a new tool to allow high school athletes to make it to the next level of play," said Dr. Seiller, who also performs Lasik surgery. "The earlier they are exposed to this training, the more impact it can have on their sports career."

Deerfield was the first high school in the country to use this type of training for more than one athletic program. Colleges such as Northwestern University, the University of Tennessee, Georgia Tech, University of Arizona and the College of Lake County are all

using the program.

Coach Sees Benefits

For Deerfield tennis coach Josh Leighton, the advantages of the technology are readily apparent.

"Anytime the ball is traveling fast, whether it's return of serve or volleys at the net, our players need to react quickly to be more accurate," Leighton said. "The training really makes a difference."

One of the more committed Warriors to the technology was Josh Gross, who teamed up with his partner Danny Mihalov to finish a surprising fifth at state in doubles. Seeded 9-16, the Warriors won seven of their eight matches in the IHSA tournament last May.

"Some of the shots that Josh came up with at state, you wouldn't necessarily think he'd be able to do," Leighton said. "Both Josh and Danny had quick reaction times and were constantly coming up with big shots."

"At first I thought it (training) might be a waste of time," Gross said. "But I was able to rip back 100 mile-an-hour serves and make some amazing shots at the net. It was happening two to three times a match, so it wasn't a fluke."

"We kept hitting shots on our strings," Mihalov said.

A Wide Net

It's not just Warrior tennis that's noticed the impact. The softball and baseball teams have also benefited from the technology.

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"I jumped on board right away for my athletes," said Warriors softball coach Susan Johnson, who was an All-Area softball player back in the early 80's at Deerfield. "You're only 40 feet away (pitching mound) in softball, so it's all about the batter tracking the ball quickly.

"One of the biggest advantages for us is the ease and convenience of the technology," Johnson added. "The kids work on the training two days a week (at the school). They love being on the computers. It makes training fun."

Patriot Believes

Word is spreading about the advantages of vision technology. Stevenson tennis star Blake Bazarnik, who finished fifth as a freshman last year at the IHSA state tournament, has employed vision training to augment his other preparation.

"It helps me to concentrate and focus," Bazarnik said. "My eyes don't wander, which makes it a lot easier to see the ball."

While Deerfield was the first, other schools are now jumping on the vision training bandwagon to improve their athletic performance, from Knoxville, Tenn. to Bakersfield, Calif.

Of course sports are wonderful at the high school level, but it's really about being a student in the student/athlete equation.

"One of our players said that she got to be a more efficient reader, which is a logical result of the training and icing on the cake," Johnson said.

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