

## Vols use new visual aid training program

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KNOXVILLE, Tenn. -- The [Tennessee Volunteers](#) have a weight room full of machines to work nearly every muscle in the body. Now they can include their eyes.

During the offseason skill players have been regularly using the Vizual Edge Performance Trainer, a program set up on a laptop computer that tests vision and provides exercises to increase reaction time and recognition.

After a 5-6 season, the Vols wanted to get better in every area, and it may not be surprising the visual training revealed some players -- including receivers -- needed glasses or contacts or stronger prescriptions. The receivers struggled last year with dropped balls and few big plays.

Brian Gearity, assistant strength and conditioning coach, used the visual training seven years ago when he was working with the Cleveland Indians. Coaches were skeptical at first when he brought up the idea of using it at Tennessee.

"It's mystical to some people," he said. "People don't understand it. They won't learn it."

"He had to sell me on it," said Johnny Long, the head strength and conditioning coach.

The plan is for players to continue using it during the season.

"I figured we needed something, anything to help," Long said.

On Thursday, Gearity gave a demonstration to reporters. Receiver Jayson Swain and quarterback Jonathan Crompton wore 3-D glasses while they stared at the monitors and punched buttons on a video game control hooked up to computers in the weight room.

Swain worked on an exercise in which three arrows pointing either up, down, left or right appeared on the screen and then vanished. On the empty screen, he had to punch in the order of the arrows from memory. The training gets harder by increasing the speed and number of arrows.

Crompton had a different exercise for convergence and divergence. He had to punch in when he saw a diamond appear on the screen over a fuzzy background and follow it. Gearity said the exercise works on ocular flexibility.

Swain said his eyes hurt when he was finished, and he wasn't sure how much the exercises were helping.

"We'll see tomorrow," he said, referring to the first day of practice on Friday.

Another receiver told Gearity he was able to pick up the spins of the ball better after using the training.

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Georgia Tech and Northwestern are currently the only other colleges known to use the program, which is used professionally by several baseball teams and Olympic sports such as luge.

Tennessee baseball, softball and basketball teams have used it, Gearity said. In baseball, the five players with the highest batting averages had the highest scores on the program.

He had 25 football players test it last fall, and defensive tackle Jesse Mahelona had the highest score. Mahelona, an All-Southeastern Conference player drafted this spring by the Tennessee Titans, was known for his speed off the ball.

Between 35 and 45 football players are currently using it as part of their training, Gearity said.

Vizual Edge was developed by ophthalmologist Barry Seiller and is based in Vernon Hills, Ill.

Overall, the offseason conditioning program has gone well, Long said. He said the Vols are "close to one of the best-conditioned teams" he's had.

The players ran as a team early Friday mornings and wore 20-pound vests during some workouts.

Offensive coordinator David Cutcliffe said he wanted the offensive linemen and receivers to lose some weight and get faster. Long said he expects all of the players to report to preseason practice at their target weight.

On the Net:

Tennessee football: [www.utsports.com](http://www.utsports.com)

Vizual Edge: [www.vizualedge.com](http://www.vizualedge.com)

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