

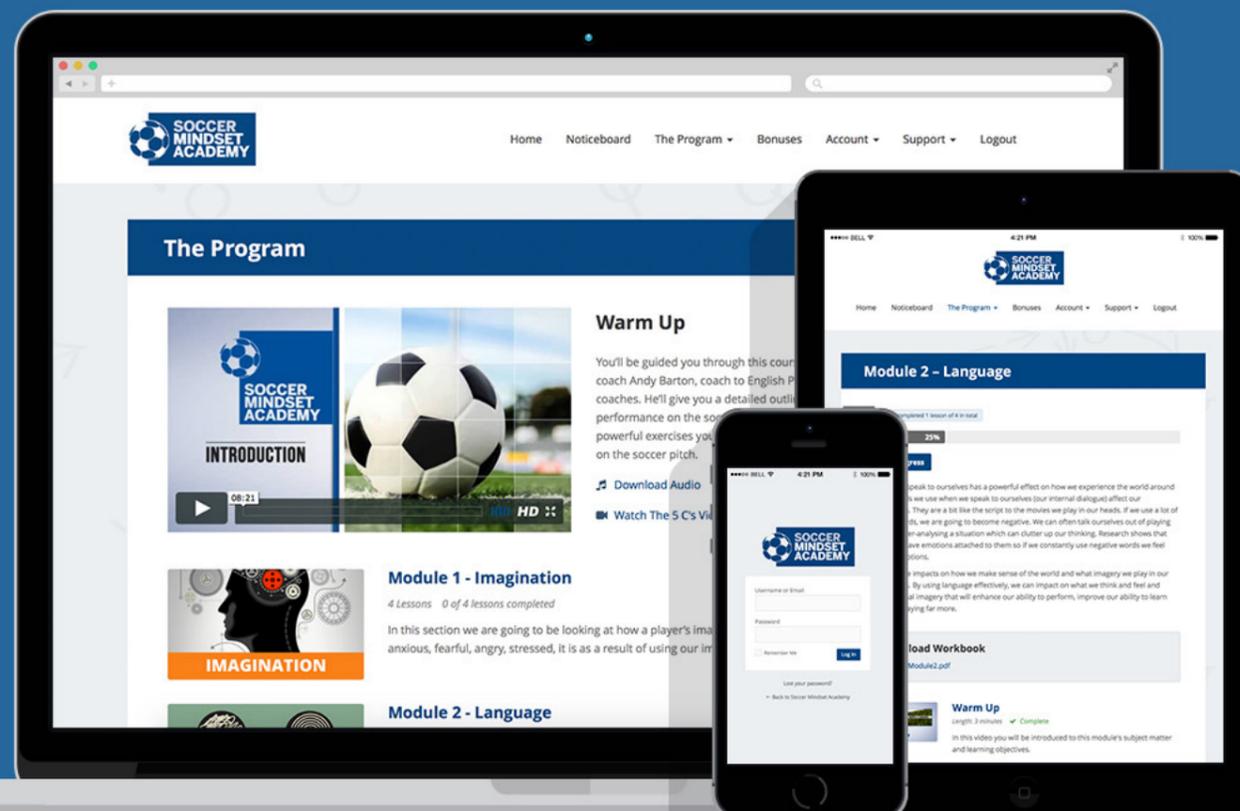
IN FOCUS: SOCCER MINDSET ACADEMY



# AUTHORING YOUR OWN ADVENTURE THE SOCCER MINDSET ACADEMY

Designed with the ethos of helping young players to master their thinking, Soccer Mindset Academy is a comprehensive 11-module video course, and it has been developed by one of the very best around, in Andy Barton. A leading light in mental performance coaching, Barton's clientele over the past 15 years has included elite-level figures from the sporting arena, with TV, radio and print media often calling upon him for discussion on performance issues.

WORDS Chris Brookes



**A**s Performance Director of Soccer Mindset Academy's in-depth course, Barton breaks down core mindset techniques into simple skills to practice and master, and with years spent working closely with Premier League players he shows how to incorporate this training into soccer situations. A key part of his efforts surrounds helping youngsters maintain the enjoyment and freedom that can so often be clouded by doubt and fear as they begin to make their way in the game.

Barton believes we play an internal movie of how we expect the future to be and it is essential for players to ensure that the script they write is the right one, with ownership of the story remaining with them. Having worked with England youth internationals he recognises the need to keep an entertainment factor in his training and he explains why the curiosity and adventure that we associate with falling in love with the game should never be lost.

"You see it a lot, even with people as young as ten or 11 who start playing well and they're put into top academies," he explained. "They can go from carefree, happy to make mistakes and trying different things like going around players, to focusing on protecting themselves and being fearful."

"It can be quite ruthless for a young person to experience and the worry that they might be getting dropped from the team or from the academy itself takes over. You see it with top-level players as well where they may feel they have to justify their fee or protect their status and they end up going into these negative spirals."

"My focus is on keeping that desire and freedom to learn, even at the highest level – it's such a key element of soccer."

Also a writer and speaker alongside his mentorship, Barton's clients include business leaders and performers such as actors and comedians, although it is sport he is particularly linked to. He has appeared on Newsnight, ITV and BBC News, Sky Sports and Channel 4, to name but a few, and as well as the elite, he also works with amateurs looking to break into professional sport.

Appreciation of how to refine the mental approach continues to increase in soccer and talk of this area surfaces in much of today's coverage, from interviews with players and coaches, to opinion columns. One of the UK's top performance consultants, Barton recalls the vastly different landscape of his subject area and the way in which it was utilised when he began.

"I studied a Sport Psychology degree but it was very much an academic thing at the time; people were learning the theory but there were not many who were actually applying it, maybe as few as three in the world. I'd started a career but it had always been something I'd kept an interest in, so 15 or 16 years ago I did the training and took the plunge."

"A few months later I found myself working with sports people like Premiership players, European Tour golfers, Olympians, you name it. I've worked with players who've gone from not even being in the first team to making the England squad, but sometimes it's a kid who wants to make their school team; it's just about how big their goal is."

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When it comes to the script we write for ourselves, Barton notes how the everyday language we speak becomes pivotal in shaping attitude and actions. Fitting strongly into this is body language, and his sporting hero, Olympic champion decathlete Daley Thompson, used this to big effect against his competitors.

Spectators can comment on what they see before them but behind that is the picture in the performer's mind, with Novak Djokovic and Wayne Rooney just two to have spoken about visualisation's role in their respective successful careers. Barton believes those at the top of the sporting tree share unusually vivid imaginations, allowing them to see, hear and feel elements of their game in such a way that ultimately sets them apart in a competitive scenario.

He recalls a client from English football's second tier demonstrating to him just how powerful imagination can be, depending on how we choose to implement it.

"There was one guy, a striker in the Championship at the time, and he came to see me about February that year and he'd scored two all season and none for a while. I asked him about one of his last games and as he was talking about it you could see he was reliving it and really feeling the chances he'd missed and how it hadn't gone well."

"It created fear for him thinking about the mistakes, but then when you got him talking about goals and feeding that imagination with positive imagery you could see the smile and the difference. From there, he went on to score nine in the next 13 or 14 games and went from being transfer-listed to a key player."

Underpinning the effectiveness of Barton's training is the enjoyment clients receive and that is a huge reason why he has become so sought after. SMA offers the next best thing to having his in-person mentorship and subscribers are able to discover performance secrets usually reserved for the elite, which provides fantastic appeal for parents looking to give their children an advantage, whether that goes towards a soccer career or simply in maximising their potential in life itself.

It was while Barton was delivering a workshop that he had met SMA's Founder and Academy Director Yal Bekar, who had realised when listening to him that the mindset

had been the missing piece which ultimately negated his promising career as a teenager with Glasgow Rangers. They spoke in greater detail and the first seeds were sown of how to give mindset techniques and training to youngsters through what has now become Soccer Mindset Academy.

"Yal's got a very curious mind and I like people who are curious because it means they're thinking about what's possible. With Soccer Mindset Academy he also presented me with a vision, and from his own experience he recognises the importance of mindset in the game."

"He's got a vision of developing mindset around the world and that resonates with me. He's got great passion and energy for what he's doing."

Over time, the 'one size fits all' approach to soccer management has made way for more careful consideration of individual personalities. This has proved paramount in helping coaches harness their players' abilities and just as that one-on-one attention has increased, Barton has witnessed a marked progression in how those in sport look at training the mental side.

"It's changed hugely; it used to be something that people were embarrassed about and only came to see you if it was something they were fearing. Back then, the club doctor would be the one who contacted you as it was looked upon as a medical issue, whereas now people recognise that it's part of the coaching side."

"It's definitely changed to more of a proactive approach; people now want to find out how to tap into their natural skills that bit more. I still think soccer is a little behind other sports with it because mindset is such an important aspect to achieving a goal."

With HD videos, transcripts, a workbook and a choice of world-class audio trainings young players can listen to whenever they wish, SMA is a unique and dedicated course and the only one with Barton's personal instruction. For young players in particular, it can seem as if their happiness starts to depend solely on achieving specific goals, while their view of the bigger picture diminishes the more they start to make headway in the game.

Barton's mentorship helps to preserve awareness and appreciation of a wider perspective and most importantly, he gives a picture to players that has them firmly in the driving seat of their own journey. It is this very idea which he wants to be the lasting mark of

his work with Soccer Mindset Academy.

"The overall thing I'd like to achieve from Soccer Mindset Academy is to help young people to recognise that their mind doesn't control them; they can control their motivation, their enjoyment, their emotional state and their planning for performance."

*fcbusiness* has teamed up with Soccer Mindset Academy to offer free trial for players and clubs. If you or your club want a free trial of Soccer Mindset Academy for your players contact Yal at [info@soccermindsetacademy.com](mailto:info@soccermindsetacademy.com).



Soccer Mindset Academy's Andy Barton