This helps explain why psychology is gaining greater acceptance within football. Dr Steve Peters, for example, worked with cyclists, track and field athletes and sneaker star Ronnie O'Sullivan before more recently helping Liverpool and England footballers. “It’s certainly an expanding area, though I’d say it’s still under-utilised in football compared with other sports,” says Bradley Bush, of Imer Drive, a London-based performance psychology consultancy. Busch, who has worked with players at Tottenham, Sunderland and Crystal Palace, teaches techniques including helpful “self-talk” methods for each player, emotional control, performing under pressure and concentration. “We teach them to focus on things you can influence and control, such as their role on the pitch, movement and attitude,” he says. “But in the 30th minute of a football match, your focus needs to be on the 30th minute of a football match.”

Do the scientific insights into football mean it’s game over for those for whom the seemingly random and unquantifiable are central to the human dramas played out on the pitch? “Depicting oneself as someone who’s able to make sense of things, and who can learn something, is a psychological advantage,” says Dr Steve Peters. “It’s about the ability to learn.”

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PHYSICISTS: Sports psychologists such as Dr Steve Peters, left, are increasingly being used by football clubs, having originally found favour in cycling and athletics.

Louise Chunn

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