

THE IMPORTANCE OF SET PLAYS IN HIGH PERFORMANCE FOOTBALL

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Abstract: *The constant recording and evaluation of goal scoring characteristics are important and can present changes and evolutionary trends in football. The objective of this study was to analyze the importance of set plays actions for high performance football, checking the incidence of goals scored through these actions during the 2018 FIFA World Cup. 169 goals scored in 64 matches played in the tournament were analysed. The data were obtained from the FIFA website database, through official summaries and videos of the goals scored. According to the results, 68 goals (40.2%) were scored in actions originating from set plays. This high number of goals scored shows that these actions can be an important means of determining victory in high performance football matches, especially between teams of the same level. Among the main reasons to explain the results, we can suggest the following: greater training and tactical improvement, causing a better collective efficiency of the teams in the execution of these actions; and the insertion of VAR technology, mainly causing a greater number of penalties.*

Key words: *video analysis, match analysis, Russia World Cup, soccer.*

INTRODUCTION

After the end of any a significant football tournament the researchers investigate the new trends in tactic and more specific the way the goals are scored (Yiannis, 2014). In the literature of football, several studies were focused on some indicators in the analysis of goals scored, e.g.: time the goals were scored throughout the match (Leite, 2013a); the impact of the first goal for the final result of the match (Leite, 2015); type of play that the goals were scored (Yiannakos & Armatas, 2006); among other indicators.

Despite the large number of studies, it is important to constantly record and evaluate the characteristics of scoring goals in football, because they can present changes and evolutionary trends (Yiannakos & e Armatas, 2006). In football, the goal is the most important aspect of the match and it is important to study it in order to understand it more specifically and to apply the gathered knowledge in real sport settings (Santos, Mendes, Maurício, Furtado, Sousa & Pinheiro, 2016).

Not surprisingly, any researchers are dedicated to the study of the offensive process in football, seeking to establish a relationship between the offensive match methods implemented, and the success in obtaining the goal (Santos et al., 2016). Among the main indicators studied in high performance football, the set plays actions are among the most important. Set plays suppose an opportunity as valid, spectacular and effective as any other action in the match (Herráez, 2003). At the high levels of competition, when you reach a stage when there's not much difference between teams and defences are very well organised, then set plays become a vital weapon (*Fédération Internationale de Football Association [FIFA]*, 2018). In this way, the study of set play actions in competition has shown marked development over time (Loureiro, Teixeira, Costa, Prudente & Sequeira, 2014).

In addition, several researchers began to study patterns of goals scored in World Cup matches due to the importance that this event has for world football (Marques Jr., 2012), being the most important level of football and serving as a parameter for the more varied researches related to football (Silva & Campos Jr., 2006). Thus, the aim of this study is to analyze the importance of set plays for high performance football, verifying the incidence of goals scored through this action during the 2018 FIFA World Cup. Our hypothesis was that set plays represent an important element tactic of the match, resulting in a considerable amount of goals.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Sample

169 goals scored in 64 matches played at the 2018 Russia World Cup were analysed. The data were obtained from the database of the FIFA website (www.fifa.com), through technical report and videos of the goals scored. The scored goals were analysed, obtaining the sequence of actions from the moment of recovery of ball possession. When it was not possible to clearly identify the origin of the play that resulted in a scored goal, the full video of the matches was used. All the evaluated videos were obtained through the Footballia website (www.footballia.net).

Method

The methodology used for this study was observational descriptive or match analysis. The use of match analysis in football is justified by the importance of understanding the behavioural patterns related to the dynamics of the sport, as well as to subsidize the planning of training and competition processes, aiming at maximum individual and collective performance (Hughes & Franks, 2005). An objective assessment derived from video analysis offers analytical, realistic, and more accurate information, illustrating the performance profile of the team and players in real match conditions (Hohmann & Rommel, 1994).

Definition of parameters

In order to increase the reliability of the observation, we defined the concepts that support this inquiry.

Open play: characterized as all actions in which the objective is to unbalance the opponent's defence, usually through pre-established concepts and match patterns.

Counterattack: situations in which the team was on defence and, after regaining ball possession, reached the opponent's goal dynamically.

Set plays: situations of penalties, free-kicks, corners and throw-ins. For all actions of corners, indirect free-kicks and throw-ins, a goal from set play was considered when the ball was touched, at most, up to three times during the action (including the restart shot).

- **Penalty:** occurs when the team is being attacked commits an infraction within the penal area. A direct free kick is awarded to the opposing team.
- **Corner:** consists of the restart of the match from a kick in the ball of the corner area, using one of the feet.
- **Direct free-kick:** free kick kicked directly to the goal.
- **Indirect free-kick:** following a free-kick, trying to find another player better positioned for finalization.
- **Throw in:** consists of restarting the match, throwing the ball from the sideline of the field, using both hands.
- **Own goal¹:** some own goals were counted in this category, because, even though it was not the defender's intention, they originated from set plays actions (example: figure 1).

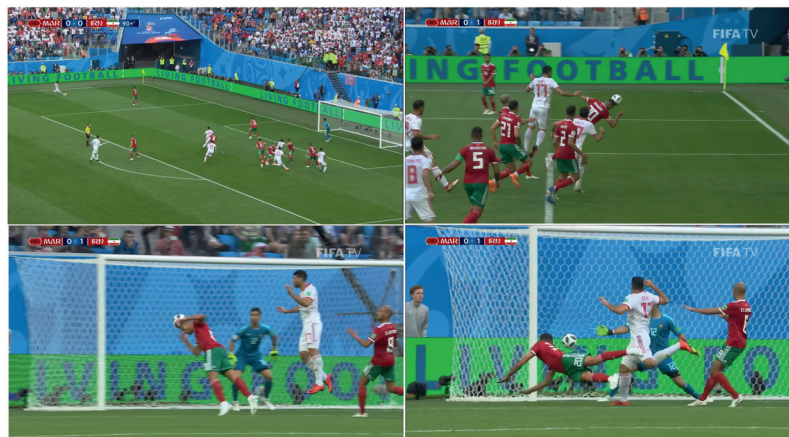


Figure 1. Own goal originating from set play (Morocco 1 vs. 0 Iran)

¹This is the same methodology adopted by FIFA. In the technical report of the tournament, the entity counts own goals originating from set plays in this category (goals scored in set plays).

Data analysis

For the presentation of the results we used descriptive statistics, consisting of frequency distribution. Statistical data were reproduced with Absolute Frequency (number of goals) and the Relative Frequency (percentage of goals).

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the type of play that goals were scored during the tournament. Of the 169 goals scored, 81 goals were scored through open play; 68 goals were scored in plays originating from set play actions; 16 goals were scored in counterattack actions; and 4 goals were own goals.

Table 1. *Number of goals scored, divided by type of play.*

Goal type	Goals
Open play	81
Counter attack	16
Set play	68
Own goal	4

Table 2 shows how the set play goals were scored. Of the 68 goals scored, 22 goals were scored through penalties; 19 were scored through plays from corners; 7 goals were scored in direct free-kick; 11 goals were scored in indirect free-kick; 1 goal was scored in a throw-in; and 8 goals were own goals in actions originating from set plays.

Table 2. *Number of goals scored originating from set plays, divided by set play action.*

Set play	Goals
Penalty	22
Corner	19
Direct free-kick	7
Indirect free-kick	11
Throw-in	1
Own goal	8

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to make an analysis of the actions that occurred from the recovery of ball possession to the achievement of the goal scored by elite national teams; checking the incidence and importance of goals scored through set plays during the 2018 Russia World Cup.

The results of this study show that 68 (40.2%) goals, of all 169 goals scored in the tournament, originated through set plays. This result shows that there is a great importance of these actions for high performance football.

The analysis of relevant studies about goals scored in a national team tournament, since the beginning of the 21st century (2001-20), shows the importance of actions originating from set plays in the main football competitions (table 3).

Table 3. Football tournaments and number of goals scored from set play actions (GSP), absolute and relative frequency.

Tournament	GSP
2002 World Cup (FIFA, 2002)	45 (28%)
Euro 2004 (Yiannakos & Armatas, 2006)	27 (35.6%)
2006 World Cup (Armatas & Yiannakos, 2010)	48 (36.2%)
Euro 2008 (UEFA, 2008)	16 (20.8%)
2010 World Cup (FIFA, 2010)	35 (24.1%)
Euro 2012 (Leite, 2013b)	22 (29%)
2014 World Cup (FIFA, 2014)	38 (22.2%)
Euro 2016 (UEFA, 2016)	32 (29.6%)

As noted, the analysis of these studies shows ranges ranging from 20.8% to 36.2%. Thus, the present study presents a result higher than the interval observed in previous studies. Such a result may be due only to a punctual finding or a consequence of an evolutionary trend in football, caused mainly by 2 aspects:

i) *greater training and tactical improvement*: realizing the importance of dead balls for modern high-performance football, teams may be increasing the training sessions of these actions, seeking to improve collective efficiency and increase the probability of victory;

ii) *Video Assistant Referee (VAR)*: the insertion of VAR technology in football allows important decisions by referees to be reviewed and corrected. In this way, it also contributed to the increase in the number of goals scored in set play actions, considering that the number of penalties awarded in the group stage significantly increased from previous editions, partly due to the presence of VAR (FIFA, 2018).

Apart from penalties, the biggest change at this year’s tournament in terms of set plays concerned corners. At the 2018 World Cup, one in every 29 corners led to a goal, whereas the figure was 61 at South Africa 2010 and 36 at Brazil 2014. This trend of superior effectiveness continued through the knockout stage in Russia, where teams scored from one in every 31 corners compared to every 41 in Brazil (FIFA, 2018).

Gaining more and more importance in today’s football, the training of set plays is essential (Herráez, 2003), being considered one of the most important aspects in modern football (Dunn, 2009). According to Mombaerts (2000), goals arising from set plays are becoming increasingly decisive and can determine the outcome of a match between teams of the same level often being crucial to winning matches in a World Cup tournament (Rumpf, Silva, Hertzog, Farooq & Nassis, 2017).

At the 2018 World Cup many matches were won in set play situations. Final champions France offered a prime example of the importance of set plays at this tournament, notably in the semi-final against Belgium and then again in the final. Indeed, their first two goals in the final came from set plays: a free kick and a penalty. When a match is tight, set plays can make all the difference and win trophies (FIFA, 2018).

CONCLUSION

According to results of this study, the actions of set plays have become increasingly important for high performance football, as a considerable number of goals are scored through these actions. These actions can be an important means of determining victory in a dispute between teams of the same level, in an important tournament. Among the main reasons to explain the results, we can suggest: greater training and tactical improvement, causing a better collective efficiency of the teams in the execution of these actions; and the insertion of VAR technology, mainly causing a greater number of penalties.

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ZNAČAJ POSTAVKE IGRAČA U VRHUNSKOM FUDBALU

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Sažetak: Konstantno beleženje i ocenjivanje karakteristika postizanja golova je važno i može predstavljati promene i evolucione trendove u fudbalu. Cilj ovog istraživanja bio je analizirati važnost postavke igrača za vrhunski fudbal, provjeravajući učestalost postignutih golova kroz ove akcije tijekom Svjetskog prvenstva u fudbalu 2018. godine. Analizirano je 169 postignutih golova u 64 odigrane utakmice. Podaci su dobijeni iz baze podataka FIFA web stranice, službenih zapisnika i video zapisa postignutih golova. Prema rezultatima, postignuto je 68 golova (40,2%) u radnjama koje proizilaze iz postavljene igre. Ovaj veliki broj postignutih golova pokazuje da ove akcije mogu biti važno sredstvo za određivanje pobjede u fudbalskim utakmicama visokih performansi, posebno između timova istog nivoa. Među glavnim razlozima za objašnjenje rezultata možemo navesti: veću obuku i taktičko unapređenje, što će rezultirati boljom kolektivnom efikasnošću timova u izvođenju ovih akcija; i postavljanje VAR tehnologije, uglavnom uzrokuje veći broj penala.

Ključne reči: video analiza, analiza meča, Svetsko prvenstvo u Rusiji, fudbal