

Original Article

Comparison of soccer players' tactical behaviour in small-sided games according to match status

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Abstract:

Introduction: One way to qualify training and consequently improve players' performance is through comparative analysis by means of contextual variables, such as match status. This type of contextual variable provides information about the players' behaviour according to the different game scenarios. Hence, assessing players' tactical behaviour in SSGs in different match status provides information regarding a context that supports the teaching process in soccer. **Objective:** This study aimed to compare soccer players' tactical behavioural small-sided games according to match status. **Methods:** The sample was comprised of 62 U-17 male Brazilian top-level academy players (16.9 ± 0.6 y/o) who compete at national level. In order to establish the match status, the momentary result of a game was considered (winning, losing, or drawing). Players performed 4.988 tactical actions (1030actions in winning, 2928actions in drawing, and 1030actions in losing scenarios). These actions were coded by the System of Tactical Assessment in Soccer (FUT-SAT), which was used to assess players' tactical behaviour based on the core tactical principles of soccer. To line-up teams in a balanced manner, players' game reading and decision-making skills were assessed through the TacticUP® video test for soccer, also based on the core tactical principles of soccer, and the general index provided by the test was used. The comparison between match status was made through the Kruskal-Wallis test. **Results:** Results indicated that, while winning, players displayed higher tactical behaviour efficiency for the principles of offensive coverage, defensive coverage, as well as higher overall defensive efficiency, compared to the losing match status ($p < .05$). The comparison of drawing and losing match statuses showed that, when drawing, players displayed higher tactical behaviour efficiency for the overall defensive efficiency ($p < .05$). **Conclusions:** We conclude that match status influences the tactical behaviour of U-17 soccer players in small-sided games, based on the core tactical principles. In winning scenarios, players displayed more efficient tactical behaviours, mainly in actions near the ball in both offensive and defensive situations (offensive coverage and defensive coverage principles), as well as higher overall defensive efficiency compared to when they were losing. Moreover, in drawing scenarios, players displayed higher tactical behaviour efficiency for the overall defensive efficiency compared to losing situations. Finally, this study was the first to assess the core tactical principles using complementary instruments (TacticUP® and FUT-SAT) that evaluated both game reading and decision-making skills, as well as tactical behaviour.

Keywords: decision-making, tactical knowledge, perceptual-cognitive skills, perceptual-motor skills, tactical assessment, football.

Introduction

The variability of events in small-sided soccer games (SSGs) generates information about players' and teams' behaviours, making it necessary to carry out an appropriate analysis of this activity (Ford, Yates, & Williams, 2010). Small-sided games are relevant activities to develop soccer players' performance as they progress through different youth and professional rankings (Ford & Williams, 2012; Ford et al., 2010). Indeed, SSGs are smaller and modified versions of soccer matches that provide a certain degree of representativeness with respect to competitive contexts (Machado, Padilha, González-Villora, Clemente, & Teoldo, 2019; Pinder, Davids, Renshaw, & Araújo, 2011). The essence of analysis in SSGs includes registering and assessing players' and teams' behaviours, as a means to understand their characteristics and enrich the quality of training sessions in order to improve their performance (Carling, Williams, & Reilly, 2005).

In studies investigating SSGs, researchers have manipulated task constraints (e.g., number of players, rules, field markings) to analyze and assess their effects on soccer players' physical (Halouani, Chtourou, Gabbett, Chaouachi, & Chamari, 2014), technical (Clemente & Sarmiento, 2020), and tactical behaviours (Ometto et al., 2018; Padilha, Guilherme, Serra-Olivares, Roca, & Teoldo, 2017). In general, players' behaviour has

changed in several types of SSGs, showing that modifying task constraints is a method that develops soccer players' physical, technical, and tactical skills (Davids, Araújo, Correia, & Vilar, 2013). Although it is possible to design different types of SSGs within new contexts, some of these contexts may not be manipulable, as they emerge in soccer matches and SSGs depending on match status (Sarmiento et al., 2014).

Match status refers to the evolving score of a match, according to which a team can be either winning, losing, or drawing (Marcelino, Sampaio, & Mesquita, 2011). It is a contextual situation of the match which may be altered by the teams whenever a player scores a goal (e.g., 1-0, 1-1, 2-1) (Marcelino et al., 2011; Sarmiento et al., 2014). As for the studies on match status in SSGs, Vito and colleagues (2019) reported significantly lower values in the number of corridor variations (NCV) and the number of depth variations (NDV) when teams were winning, compared to when they were losing. Also, Sampaio and colleagues (2014) verified that teams in numerical superiority covered shorter distances while winning, compared to when they were losing. On the other hand, in situations of numerical inferiority, they covered greater distances while winning, compared to when they were losing. Both studies mentioned above led to scientific progress regarding the research on physical performance and collective tactical behaviour in SSGs according to match status. However, it is also important to understand how match status and individual tactical behaviour interact, as each player can adapt his/her actions in different game situations (Grehaighe, Godbout, & Bouthier, 1999). The tactical component is an essential factor for players to achieve high performance (Garganta, 2009), since tactics in soccer is understood as the management of playing space by players and teams regarding their positioning, displacement, and movement (Teoldo, Guilherme, & Garganta, 2017). In that sense, tactical behaviour is related to players' movement in the field to meet the situational demands of the game, based on a model of play (Teoldo, Garganta, Greco, & Mesquita, 2009). Players perform individual tactical behaviour through the core tactical principles which enable players to achieve solutions for the problems encountered in the field (Teoldo et al., 2009).

The core tactical principles of soccer are strictly related to training content and its transfer to the game (Teoldo et al., 2017). These principles have already been assessed according to the final scores of SSGs, and findings indicated that soccer players' tactical behaviour and performance differ according to game results (Carvalho, Scaglia, & Teoldo, 2013; Moniz & Teoldo, 2014). Moreover, authors suggest the assessment of tactical behaviour and performance according to match status, as it is one of the factors related to the team's performance during a match and, as a result, should also be assessed (Taylor, Mellalieu, James, & Shearer, 2008). These findings seem to indicate important reasons for carrying out the assessment of players' tactical behaviour based on a tactical proposal that highlights players' movements and respective positioning on the field, according to match configurations (Teoldo, Garganta, Greco, Mesquita, & Maia, 2011).

Hence, assessing players' tactical behaviour in SSGs in different match status provides information regarding a context that supports the teaching process (Américo et al., 2016; Machado & Teoldo, 2016; Serra-Olivares, Clemente, & González-Villora, 2016). Moreover, this type of assessment based on assumptions that are strictly related to training and matches – such as the core tactical principles and match status – reinforce the context of representativeness that may contribute to the structure of practice in soccer (Barquero-Ruiz, Arias-Estero, & Kirk, 2019; Serra-Olivares et al., 2016). These relations display a coherent transfer from training to formal matches, due to the fact that these principles are present in both contexts (González-Villora, Serra-Olivares, Pastor-Vicedo, & Teoldo, 2015; Teoldo et al., 2017). In addition, this type of assessment – related to the core tactical principles – must be in line with the tactical contents expected for players' respective development stages (Américo et al., 2016; Barquero-Ruiz et al., 2019; González-Villora et al., 2015).

This kind of study, which allows to identify how tactical behaviour may vary according to different match status, provides a source of information for coaches to base decisions related to the match, such as lineup selection and substitutions, as well as to training, with action rules to improve team efficiency in such situations (Sarmiento et al., 2018). For example, according to research findings, coaches could learn about the better way to apply some strategies according to different match status (Sarmiento et al., 2018). Thus, this study aimed to compare soccer players' tactical behavior in small-sided games according to match status.

Material & Methods

Ethical procedures

The present study had the approval of the Ethics Committee for Research with Human Beings of the lead institution and is under the norms established by the National Health Council (466/2012) and by the Declaration of Helsinki (2008) for research with human beings. Participants' legal guardians signed an informed consent.

Participants

The sample was comprised of 62 U-17 male Brazilian top-level academy players (aged 16.9 ± 0.6 years) who compete at national level. Participants trained between four and five times a week and were selected from four different teams from different cities in Brazil. For inclusion criteria, participants should be affiliated to their respective state soccer federation and should be training regularly at the club. For exclusion criteria, participants could not be returning from injury one week before the test application. A total of 4.988 tactical actions were analyzed (winning = 1030, drawing = 2928, and losing = 1030).

Experimental design

We carried out an analytic-observational study of U-17 male Brazilian top-level academy players who compete at national level. Twelve small-sided games (GK + 3 x 3 + GK) were played. These small-sided games had their scores changed by goals, resulting in the winning, losing and drawing statuses for the teams. In order to establish the match status, the current score was considered, and the team could be winning, losing, or drawing. Before the start of data collection, researchers contacted the club’s representatives and the coaching staff of the U-17 team. Contact was made through a technical visit to the club to clarify the purposes, procedures, and benefits. An important aspect to be taken into account regarding the assessment of tactical behavior is the criterion for building the teams, as this is a factor that might influence players’ tactical behavior, depending on their cognitive skills, such as game reading and decision-making skills, as previously indicated by literature (Andrade, Machado, & Teoldo, 2016; Bruce, Farrow, Raynor, & Mann, 2012; Machado, González-Villora, Sarmiento, & Teoldo, 2020; Machado & Teoldo, 2020). Therefore, in order to ensure a fair balance during the assessment, the organization of the games between the teams should take into account players’ game reading and tactical decision-making skills. For this purpose, one should resort to instruments that assess players’ game reading and tactical decision-making skills based on the same theoretical assumptions for the assessment of tactical behavior, such as the core tactical principles (see Table 1) (Machado & Teoldo, 2020).

Hence, the distribution of players among the teams accounted for the general index (average of the performance indexes of the offensive and defensive tactical principles) provided by the online platform TacticUP® (Machado & Teoldo, 2020). The test was performed in groups of five participants. Each participant was provided with a computer with internet access to connect to the platform and performed the test individually. The test was carried out by the leading researcher. The games used to assess tactical behavior through the System of Tactical Assessment in Soccer (FUT-SAT) were built to be tactically balanced according to the results provided by TacticUP®. According to this procedure, each team included a defender (full-back or center backs), a midfielder (defensive or attacking midfielders), and forwards (center forwards or strikers), each of them ranked according to their general TacticUP® indexes. According to these indexes, teams were lined up as follows: the defender, midfielder and forward’s place in their respective rankings should be the same (e.g., team A lined up with the best ranked defenders, midfielders and forwards; team B lined up with the second best ranked defenders, midfielders and forwards, and so forth).

Table 1. Description of the core tactical principles of soccer (Source: Teoldo, Guilherme & Garganta, 2017).

Phases of Play	Principles	Description
Offensive	Penetration	Reduction of distance between the player in possession of the ball and the opponent’s goal or goal line.
	Offensive Coverage	Providing offensive support to the player in possession.
	Mobility	Generation of organizational instability in the opposing defense.
	Width and Length	Utilization and increase of the effective play-space in width and depth.
Defensive	Offensive Unity	Progression movements or offensive support by the player (s) who compose (s) the last transversal line (s) of the team.
	Delay	Opposition to the player in possession.
	Defensive Coverage	Providing defensive support to the player performing delay.
	Balance	Numerical stability or superiority in opposition relations.
	Concentration	Increase of defensive protection within the riskier zone to the goal.
	Defensive Unity	Reduction of the opposition’s effective play-space.

Instruments

Assessment of game reading and decision-making skills - TacticUP® video test for soccer

The instrument used to assess players’ game reading and tactical decision-making skills was the TacticUP® video test for soccer (Machado & Teoldo, 2020), which is available online (www.tacticup.com.br). This platform allows the assessment of players’ game reading and tactical decision-making skills, based on the core offensive and defensive tactical principles of soccer (see Table 1) (Teoldo et al., 2017). These principles enable players to find effective solutions for game situations through the management of playing space and were chosen because they represent central aspects of the teaching process of tactical skills. Besides, these principles have objective measures of players’ movements related to the management of playing space.

Assessment of tactical behavior – System of Tactical Assessment in Soccer (FUT-SAT)

The instrument used to assess tactical behavior was the System of Tactical Assessment in Soccer (FUT-SAT)(Teoldo et al., 2011). In FUT-SAT, tactical actions related to the core tactical principles of soccer are observed and assessed (see Table 1). This system enables the identification and assessment of tactical actions performed by the players, through spatial references in the playing field, taking into account the tactical principle performed, the quality of the principle performed, the player's location in the field at the moment he/she performs and the action outcome(Teoldo et al., 2011). Actions such as throw-ins, free kicks, and corner kicks are not considered for analysis. Tactical behavior was measured through the *tactical behavior efficiency*, defined by the *number of correct actions*, divided by the *total number of actions* of each principle performed by the players.

Procedures

Assessment of tactical decision-making skills–TacticUP® video test for soccer

The TacticUP® video test for soccer comprises video sequences (scenes) of 11vs.11 offensive and defensive actions from official soccer matches. Each scene lasts between 5 and 7 seconds. The videos are displayed from a panoramic perspective, which is an elevated view of an object from above. This perspective enables players to visualize the offensive and defensive core tactical principles, near or far from the ball. The test includes scenes of each of the core tactical principles, in both offensive and defensive phases of play. In each scene, four possibilities of solution for the respective situation are shown. Participants should select the most appropriate solution for each scene. Prior to the start of the test, the online platform provides participants with instructions about the test structure and assessment procedures, in addition to three trial scenes, for familiarization with the task.

Assessment of tactical behavior– System of Tactical Assessment in Soccer (FUT-SAT)

The FUT-SAT field test was carried out in an area of 36 meters long by 27 meters wide, in a 4vs.4 configuration (a goalkeeper + 3 outfield players vs. 3 outfield players + a goalkeeper), during 4 minutes. The players were instructed to play in accordance with the official rules of soccer, including the offside rule. Prior to each game, players were provided with 30 seconds to familiarize with the test. In order to facilitate their identification during video analysis, players wore numbered vests, and each team was provided with vests of a particular color.

Materials

TheTacticUP® video test for soccer was applied in laptop computers (Dell Inspiron 15 3000, Intel i3-7020U processor). The video footage for analysis through FUT-SAT was obtained through a Sony HDR-XR100 video camera. Video edition and analysis of the games were carried out through the software Soccer View®.

Statistical analysis

Descriptive analysis (means and standard deviation) was performed for tactical behavior efficiency data. Tactical behavior efficiency was compared between the three match statuses (winning, drawing, and losing). The normality of data distribution was verified through the Shapiro-Wilk test. Subsequently, the comparison of means among the three match statuses was performed through the Kruskal-Wallis test. In order to identify the differences between match statuses, the Mann-Whitney post-hoc test was performed. A Bonferroni correction was applied for .05 level of significance and all effects were reported at ($p < .017$)after the correction. Effect sizes for the Mann-Whitney test were calculated through the formula described below(Fritz, Morris, & Richler, 2012). Effect size values were interpreted according to the following reference(Cohen, 1988): small effect (.1 - .29); medium effect (.3 - .49); and large effect (> .5).

$$r = \frac{Z}{\sqrt{n}}$$

Test-retest reliability for the FUT-SAT was performed respecting a 21-day interval for reanalysis, thus avoiding task familiarity issues (O'Donoghue, 2012). For the calculation of reliability, the Cohen's Kappa test was used. Analyses were verified through the reassessment of 562 tactical actions, corresponding to 11.2% of the overall sample, which is greater than the reference value (10%) suggested by literature(Tabachnick& Fidell, 2001). Two trained evaluators participated in this procedure and presented inter-evaluator reliability values between .871 (SE =.025) and .941 (SE =.022). As for intra-evaluator reliability values ranged between .885 (SE =.017) and .953 (SE =.014). Statistical procedures were carried out through SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) for Mac, version 22.0.

Results

Results displayed significant differences between match statuses for the tactical principles of offensive coverage, defensive coverage, and in the defensive phase of play($p < .05$)(see Table 2). When winning, players displayed higher tactical behavior efficiency for the principles of offensive coverage, defensive coverage, as well as higher overalldefensive efficiency, compared to the losing match status. The comparison ofdrawing and losing match statuses showed that, when drawing, players displayed higher tactical behavior efficiency for the overall defensive efficiency.

Table 2. Means and standard deviation of tactical behavior efficiency related to the core tactical principles of soccer and the phases of play, according to match status.

Measure	N	Match Status			Kruskal-Wallis test	Pairwise Comparisons	p	r
		Winning	Drawing	Losing				
Offensive Principles								
Penetration	241	89.1 ± 28.6	83.8 ± 31.5	83.6 ± 29.3	H (2) = 1.513, p = .469	Winning vs. Drawing Winning vs. Losing Drawing vs. Losing	.251 .266 .891	- - -
Offensive Coverage*	541	98.9 ± 5.9	97.6 ± 6.2	87.3 ± 25.8	H (2) = 10.733, p = .005	Winning vs. Drawing Winning vs. Losing Drawing vs. Losing	.106 .004 .020	- .369 -
Width and Length	1151	92.3 ± 11.3	92.6 ± 15.5	92.3 ± 10.3	H (2) = .859, p = .651	Winning vs. Drawing Winning vs. Losing Drawing vs. Losing	.689 .803 .339	- - -
Depth Mobility	75	71.4 ± 48.7	85.8 ± 32.0	100.0 ± 0.0	H (2) = 3.196, p = .202	Winning vs. Drawing Winning vs. Losing Drawing vs. Losing	.444 .068 .134	- - -
Offensive Unity	380	80.4 ± 32.4	82.0 ± 27.9	70.0 ± 38.1	H (2) = 1.612, p = .447	Winning vs. Drawing Winning vs. Losing Drawing vs. Losing	.776 .298 .255	- - -
Defensive Principles								
Delay	481	74.3 ± 28.5	74.5 ± 29.9	67.5 ± 36.3	H (2) = .463, p = .794	Winning vs. Drawing Winning vs. Losing Drawing vs. Losing	.926 .622 .496	- - -
Defensive Coverage*	183	91.9 ± 18.8	75.1 ± 39.3	53.7 ± 43.6	H (2) = 9.093, p = .011	Winning vs. Drawing Winning vs. Losing Drawing vs. Losing	.131 .003 .045	- .480 -
Balance	807	84.9 ± 19.1	80.2 ± 22.7	71.9 ± 30.6	H (2) = 3.255, p = .196	Winning vs. Drawing Winning vs. Losing Drawing vs. Losing	.269 .084 .280	- - -
Concentration	254	99.2 ± 4.0	96.9 ± 9.3	83.9 ± 33.4	H (2) = 3.198, p = .202	Winning vs. Drawing Winning vs. Losing Drawing vs. Losing	.210 .075 .327	- - -
Defensive Unity	875	78.2 ± 29.5	81.2 ± 23.4	72.6 ± 33.2	H (2) = .665, p = .717	Winning vs. Drawing Winning vs. Losing Drawing vs. Losing	.964 .528 .428	- - -
Phases of Play								
Offensive Phase	2388	91.1 ± 12.4	90.3 ± 8.9	88.8 ± 11.5	H (2) = 2.222, p = .329	Winning vs. Drawing Winning vs. Losing Drawing vs. Losing	.164 .212 .830	- - -
Defensive Phase*	2600	83.8 ± 13.7	81.5 ± 13.4	70.8 ± 19.8	H (2) = 13.185, p = .001	Winning vs. Drawing Winning vs. Losing Drawing vs. Losing	.302 .002 .001	- .364 .308

* Significant difference (p < 0.05)

Discussion

The aim of this study was to compare soccer players' tactical behavior in SSGs according to match status. Results showed significant differences for one offensive principle (offensive coverage), one defensive principle (defensive coverage), as well as for the overall defensive phase. All statistically significant results displayed medium effects. This suggests that match status had a considerable effect on players' tactical behavior efficiency in SSGs. Overall, while winning, players displayed better tactical behavior efficiency, compared to the losing status.

Regarding the principle of offensive coverage, it is characterized by actions performed inside the center of play and is related to the creation of passing lanes near the player in possession, thus generating numerical superiority and/or instabilities for the opponent's defensive structure. The most common actions of this principle are "one-twos" and triangular passing (Teoldo et al., 2017). Superior offensive tactical behaviour efficiency in winning scenarios may be explained by the tendency of the teams, while winning, to increase their shooting opportunities through sequences of short passes, both inside or near the center of play, such as movements of offensive coverage (Fernandez-Navarro et al., 2018; Praça et al., 2019).

These movements favor the efficient execution of actions of offensive support near the player in possession (offensive coverage), as, while winning, players are better able to exploit the empty spaces left by the opponents (González-Rodenas et al., 2019). A possible explanation for players' lower efficiency while losing the game is that they also tend to take more time thinking and choosing before making a play (Cardoso, Neves, Roca, & Teoldo, 2020; Lago-Peñas & Dellal, 2010). Consequently, it decreases their decision-making speed, as the

speed of ball transmission decreases (Moraes, Cardoso, & Teoldo, 2014). This decrease in decision-making speed may interfere negatively in the movements for creating passing lanes ahead of the ball performed inside the center of play (offensive coverage). In turn, for the defensive phase, players performed more efficient tactical behaviour of defensive coverage while winning. The defensive coverage principle is performed inside the center of play and refers to supporting actions of a player in the back of the first defender (Teoldo et al., 2017). The appropriate execution of this defensive principle allows players to support their teammates inside the center of play to better perform actions of delay, as well as to obstruct eventual passing lanes and to mark players who could potentially receive the ball (Teoldo et al., 2009). A likely reason for better tactical efficiency when winning, is that players are able to limit opponent's offensive options, thus increasing their difficulty to generate instabilities in their defence and restricting forwards' movements (Pascual-Verdú & Carbonell-Martínez, 2018; Worthington, 1974). With respect to the phases of play, the results for the defensive phase indicate that tactical actions were more efficiently performed when players were winning or drawing compared to when they were losing. These results may also be linked to players' psychological state when facing losing scenarios (Pratas, Volossovitch, & Carita, 2016). As for the teams facing a situation of not being able to score in losing scenarios, they tend to lose motivation and display considerable performance decrement (Gomez, Reus, Parmar, & Travassos, 2020). This finding shows a lower efficiency of players from the losing team for positioning themselves in an organized and balanced fashion throughout the effective play-space, to hinder the opponent's actions (Liu, Gomez, Lago-Peñas, & Sampaio, 2015). Overall, the findings from our study showed that players were more efficient when performing tactical actions in both offensive and defensive phases near the player in possession of the ball (inside the center of play) while winning, compared to when they are losing. To our knowledge, this is the first study investigating the influence of match status that analyzed the core tactical principles in SSGs.

We acknowledge that this study was the first to assess the core tactical principles using complementary instruments (TacticUP[®] and FUT-SAT) that evaluated both game reading and decision-making skills, as well as tactical behavior. We followed previous research suggestions (Machado & Teoldo, 2020) that highlighted that this type of approach could improve future practical applications by soccer practitioners and the quality of study once it aligned theoretical assumptions and enabled the link between different instruments. Furthermore, it allows for a more in-depth analysis of game reading and decision-making skills, tactical behaviour, perceptual-cognitive skills, and perceptual-motor skills. Therefore, this type of study design should be used in future studies and adopted in research considering other categories of tactical principles (e.g., operational and general principles) and the interaction among them. A limitation of this study is the absence of biological maturation data, as previous studies identified an imbalance between chronological and biological ages of youth soccer players (Baxter-Jones & Malina, 2001), as well as a relationship between biological maturation and improved tactical efficiency (Gonçalves et al., 2017). We recommend for future studies the control of biological maturation status. We also suggest future studies together information about the history profile of players related to their developmental activities in soccer (e.g., deliberate play and practice), as such variable can influence their current performance level (Machado et al., 2020). Additionally, we suggest the inclusion of more players from different age groups, gender, and competitive levels, in order to verify whether tactical behaviours vary according to these different contexts, with respect to match status. Besides, it would be interesting to complement the analyses with other methodological processes. Authors could resort to instruments to observe spatiotemporal relations of tactical behaviours and their nonlinearity, through a dynamic systems-based approach applied to the sport context.

Conclusions

It is possible to conclude that match status influences the tactical behaviour of U-17 soccer players in small-sided games, based on the core tactical principles. In winning scenarios, players displayed more efficient tactical behaviours, mainly in actions near the ball in both offensive and defensive situations (offensive coverage and defensive coverage principles), as well as higher overall defensive efficiency compared to when they were losing. Moreover, in drawing scenarios, players displayed higher tactical behaviour efficiency for the overall defensive efficiency compared to losing situations. As for the practical implications, this study provides information that can be used to support the teaching process in soccer. For example, coaches could apply more efficient strategies in different match status in small-sided games in order to foster players' tactical behaviour. In losing situations, we suggest focusing on the more efficient execution of the principles of defensive coverage and offensive coverage. In these scenarios, coaches can design smaller drills that focus on actions inside the centre of play, in order to enable the occurrence of "one-twos" and quick triangular passing. It is also possible to resort to drills in larger dimensions so that players could be able to be rewarded for actions played inside the centre of play. In defensive terms, the division of the field into quadrants can also be used to favour the occurrence of the principles of defensive and offensive coverage by showing to the players where they can perform better these principles. Finally, this study used a novelty in its methodology. It was the first to assess the core tactical principles using complementary instruments (TacticUP[®] and FUT-SAT) that evaluated both game reading and decision-making skills, as well as tactical behaviour.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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