

Transition to attack in elite soccer

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Introduction

Since the early work of Reep and Benjamin (1968) on possessions, and shots at goal, there has been a lack of detailed, informative research in the area. The aim of this study was to investigate the influence of turnover zone, and immediate 'on the ball' player actions upon scoring goals and creating scoring opportunities (S.O.'s).

Methods

A total of 3,077 turnovers and subsequent transitions from all 29 games of the 2014-15 Champion's League knockout stages were coded. Multidimensional qualitative data using 11 ordered categorical variables were obtained to characterise each transition. Data were analysed using chi-square analysis.

Results

Winning turnovers in offensive areas increased the chance of scoring a goal and creating a S.O. ($p < .001$). Teams were almost 7 times more likely to create a S.O. from transitions initiated in the offensive zone than the defensive zone, and over 11 times more likely to score a goal; nearly half of all turnovers in the offensive zone, 49.45% ($n=45$) resulted in a S.O., and 7.69% ($n=7$) lead to goals. Teams created significantly more S.O.s and scored more goals when the first and second actions after the turnover were forward ($p < .05$); successful dribbles, runs with the ball and long passes were the optimal player actions.

Discussion and Conclusion

It was concluded that teams should press high to win turnovers and create S.O.'s, supporting some of the original findings of Reep and Benjamin (1968). It was further concluded that the immediate player actions after winning the turnover are critical to the outcome of the transition.

References

Reep, C. & Benjamin, B. (1968). Skill and chance in association football. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, **A**, 581–585.

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