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Is the team fit? Focus on game plan performance



“Preparing our team to successfully perform the game plan is the best way to create a fit team.”

We will start to explain the traditional understanding and, then, we will show our vision about fitness in soccer.

A myriad of factors can influence physical performance during the football match, such as: tactical role, technical capabilities; position; opponent quality; season phase; game importance and climatic and pitch conditions. It's a consensus that in elite matches players need to be ready for the worst-case scenarios. In order to achieve this is fundamental to improve physical capabilities to maximize performance and prevent injuries.

About the ability to produce repeated efforts with short recovery time, the player has to develop his VO₂ max, velocity at anaerobic threshold and running economy. While taking into account the importance of specific mobility, strength and power.

Regarding to soccer context, we recognize that the most demanding game moments are related to actions that influence the match result. The ability to perform repeated sprints with low rest; explosive moments such

as accelerations, decelerations, changes of direction and jumps could make the difference. The fittest player probably will win the duel or take advantage to score or stop a goal situation (with hypothetical same initial conditions). Furthermore, the capacity to do more actions per minute throughout the match without losing quality decisions and execution is crucial to impose our game style.

However, in our point of view, this vision is incomplete. “Preparing our team to successfully perform the game plan is the best way to create a fit team.”

Following this idea, the coach must search for the results he wants for his team through the game plan and prepare training sessions as a way to achieve these results. Thus, the training must focus on three inseparable aspects:

- Correcting errors and difficulties from the previous match;
- Practicing team game principles relevant to the next game;
- Defining strategic adjustments that aim to prepare for problems that the opponent may put into match.

The identification of errors and difficulties of the previous match is possible through the observation and interpretation of team match performance. Thus, we can verify the fit level of the team. It is considered to be in good shape if they perform successfully the game plan. When observing, it is important to look at the team’s game principles and specific strategic nuances of that game plan, as well as reflect on the possible reasons for the evidenced behaviors. For example, the way the team allows goals and opportunities for the opponent to score is something that the coach must always analyze.

In addition, other aspects to consider:

- How did we build up from GK?
- How did we do First phase build up?
- How did we do Second phase build up?
- How did we get to finishing zones?
- How did we create chances to score?
- Were we balanced when we had the ball possession?
- Were we balanced when we won the ball?
- How did we transition to attack?
- Was the team compact?
- How did we press?
- How did we defend set pieces?
- How did we attack set pieces?

The selection of the most relevant principles to train in the preparation of the game are dependent on what was mentioned in previous points and the opponent’s observation. The coach must seek to identify the principles of his team that will be decisive for successfully confronting the opponent’s strengths and weaknesses. For example, if it is identified as an opponent pattern that when they recover the ball, they take a long time to remove it from the pressure zone and often use lateral pass or driving the ball. Therefore, during the preparation of the game, it will be important to reinforce a principle in the way the team plays: an aggressive, high and pressing reaction to loss in the opponent’s field.

Furthermore, some features of the opponent may lead to adjustments in the way we play. For example, a team that privileges positional attacks involving many players and different rhythms of ball circulation to create spaces in the opposing team, should choose a more vertical game if the opponent leaves space in the back and has difficulty controlling the depth.

Finally, we believe that predicting the scenario for the next match, designing and training a game plan is

fundamental. As a result, the team will be ready and in shape to succeed.

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