

FOOTBALL PLAYERS' ABILITIES – THE ESSENTIAL CONDITION FOR AN EFFECTIVE GAME SYSTEM

Daniel CIOCĂNESCU¹, Camelia STĂNCESCU², Doru STOICA¹, Cătălin FORȚAN¹

¹University of Craiova, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Craiova, Romania

²University of Craiova, Faculty of Law, Craiova, Romania

*Correspondence address: daniel_ciocanescu@yahoo.com

<https://doi.org/10.52846/jskm/42.2023.1.3>

Abstract: *The aim* of the current paper is to highlight the advantage which derives from using a formation adapted to the physical, technical and tactical possibilities of the available players. In our research the aspects refer to the possibility to use the formation with four defenders by juniors in „Milan Academy” Craiova Football School, the players’ characteristics in different positions, the main strategies of organizing the team’s play from this point of view.

In this respect, there are several points which should be known and taken into account: good theoretical knowledge related to choosing the most efficient formation the players’ movement in the field during both phases of the game (attack and defense), the strategy of using the players within the formation according to the opponents’ value which will lead to positive results.

Conclusions: Physical preparation, the choice and use of a certain formation should be made according to the physical, technical and tactical features of the team players, Knowledge of theoretical concepts, Players’ movement in the pitch, The use of the most accessible formation will lead to an offensive and spectacular play based on attack and goals. The strategy of using the players according to the opponents’ players will help the coach get positive results.

Keywords: *football, training, juniors, formation.*

Introduction

The formation is defined by most authors as the way how the players in a team are positioned on the pitch (Barbu, 2008; Rădulescu, 2007). The footballers have specific tasks closely related to their physical, technical and tactical qualities. The choice and use of a certain formation is not a prerequisite for success; it is the frame for the organization of the game; it makes the game organized and orients the players toward effective actions, spontaneous or pre-determined ones. Strategy allows for more planning and deliberation, while tactical behaviours are made under strong time–pressure (Low et al., 2020).

It is advisable that throughout a tournament all football coaches should have at their disposal players who have good knowledge of the requirements of the used formation (duplicates for different positions and even polyvalent players) in order not to change the formation unless it is absolutely necessary according to tactical needs. Training

prescriptions in soccer should be based on established requirements specific to the playing positions, thereby ensuring that players are more able to fulfill their game duties and tactical responsibilities over the soccer match (Modric et al., 2019).

Playing formation constrained and promoted different tactical behaviors with different physical demands (Baptista et al., 2020). Therefore, the proposed formation has to meet the following conditions in order to be viable:

- The team should consist of players with qualities which integrate them perfectly into the system;
- The players should cover the pitch proportionally;
- The players will know the position tasks within the system;
- Offer the players the opportunity to participate in the attack and defense positions depending on the requirements of the game;

- The chosen formation should provide easy switch from defense to attack and vice versa;
- The game should be in accordance with national and worldwide requirements.

In all cases it is important that the players adapt to the weather conditions, the place where the game is played (home or away), etc., all in full accordance with the type of player used in the game system. Findings indicate that environmental factors have a strong influence on the variability and differences observed in match-running performances from match-to-match. Further understanding of the effect of match factors on match-running would allow better planning to minimise possible detrimental factors (Trewin, J. et al. (2017).

The research purpose: The paper aims to highlight the most important aspects related to the use of a formation according to which players are available.

The research hypothesis: The proper use of the formation according to the players' motrical characteristics and abilities will lead to positive results.

The research subjects and place: The research was conducted on the football pitch of "Milan Academy" Craiova Football School. The subjects of the research were a group of 18 children born in 2009, participating in Junior C Championship - experimental group.

Materials and methods

In training the athletes, the following working methods were used: the explanation and the demonstration (which the coach adapted to athletes' age particularities), the practice. All the way through each training sessions the following methods of investigation were used: *scientific documentation, observation, statistical method.*

Methodological considerations on the organization of the game within the formation

Throughout its evolution, the game of football has revealed a variety of formations used by coaches to meet the needs of the time, to counter other formations, or to address

deficits or strengths in different types of players to achieve victory.

In this respect we can mention: English formation in 1870 - 1-2-7; Scottish formation of the 1870s - 2-2-6; WM system, created by Herbert Chapman of Arsenal in 1925; pyramid formation - 2-3-5, used at that time not only by Blackburn Olympic, but also by the representative of Uruguay at the World Championship which they hosted and won in 1930; WW formation, a development of the WM, created by the Hungarian coach Bukovica Marton (1950), was intended to turn the 3-2-5 WM "upside down"; the "catenaccio" formation-1-4-3-2's Helenio Herrera, the legendary former coach of Inter Milano; 4-4-2 formation, or the wonder without wings; 4-3-3 formation; 4-4-2 formation, the total football with libero-1974; 3-4-3 formation; 3-5-2 formation (Argentina (1986) and Brazil (2002) won the World Championship playing in this formation).

Today various forms of lining up the team's defense, midfield, and forward line at the beginning of the match. has appeared in order to create superiority against opposing teams. Formations such as 4-2-3-1, 4-4-1-1, 4-1-3-2; 4-1-4-1, 4-3-1-2 derive from the formation with four defenders. In our country, under our players' profile the formation with four defenders is used and recommended for all football clubs. The findings suggest coaches prescribe specific training programs based on the influence of the playing formation and playing position on the physical demands and technical-tactical actions encountered by players during official match-play (Arjol-Serrano et al., 2021).

Priority tasks of each player in his position in the formation with four defenders

Regardless of the placement of the players on the field within the formation with four defenders adopted by the coach, it is imperative to have the players with appropriate profile who know virtually all their responsibilities within the system (Stoica & Barbu, 2019). Junior teams will consist of players with tactical and technical baggage which ensures individual sports development in order to integrate successfully in future senior teams. Identifying playing styles in

football is highly valuable for achieving effective performance analysis (Plakias et al., 2023).

SSGs can be used as an interesting methodological resource to work on technique and tactics in team sports at young ages (Fernández-Espínola, C. et al., 2020). In SSG training, different formats, pitch sizes, pitch configurations, tasks adjustments, and player age and expertise levels cause changes in the tactical behavior and collective dynamics of teams (Clemente et al., 2020).

Thus, we believe that the players will fulfil the following tasks:

Goalkeeper's tasks:

- He is usually a player with favorable height prognosis (information about the family);
- His role is to keep the goal by physically blocking attempted shots with any part of their body, placing himself according to the location of the ball;
- He chooses the best alternative to pass the ball to central defenders/the full backs, initiates the attack or counter-attack actions, etc.;
- He sends indications and information related to the play near the goal;
- He acts as the libero, if required, has a good ability to control the football (Rădulescu & Cojocaru, 2003);

Central defenders' tasks:

- These players are usually tall and with a favorable prognosis;
- They communicate well with the goalkeeper and adopt the best position for each phase;
- They provide dubbing;
- They have the ability to hit the ball with their heads;
- They have very good reaction speed in order to achieve an effective holding off (Barbu & Stoica, 2020) ;;
- They have good placement and spirit of anticipation of the phases and the ball trajectory;
- They pass the ball well and finalize during the fixed phases.

Left/ Right backs' tasks:

- They perform the blockage of strikers in their area;
- They participate in the construction of game, cooperating well with the goalkeeper and the other players on the field;
- They often attack up to the opponent line where they initiates crosses (the right handed usually on the right and the left handed on the left);
- They have good speed and effort capacity because they act on the whole side part, where they have to pull back quickly;
- They are good performers of fixed phases.

Midfielders' tasks within the formation with four defenders:

- They have a good effort capacity, they pass well, their intelligence is above average;
- They provide a link between defensive and offensive department so as to build a developed game based on tactical thinking adequate to the team's features;
- Defensive midfielders are usually strong players involved in the defense phase, performing interception and blocking the defense's actions;
- Offensive midfielders, those with "soft ankle" are intelligent, good performers and have direct free kick, they invent and build coherent relations during the game, they easily perform individual overtaking realized (dribbles), they have a huge stock of high-level knowledge, skills and technical procedures (Hagi, Baggio, Zidane, Messi). Such players have a high genetic stock;
- To assign positions to this category of players on the field is the coach's great responsibility, knowledge and experience, because in this part of the game special features of the used system appear.
- This concerns in particular own players' peculiarities and then those of the opponent players.

Strikers' tasks:

- Scoring goals is their priority as they are closest to the opponents (Stoica & Barbu, 2014);
- They make permanent demarcation and place exchange in order to get the ball;
- They have good speed in all its forms;
- They control and hold the ball perfectly and accurately related to the appropriate stage;

- They have good heading ability;
- They are the first to initiate defense by interception, seizures and holding off the defenders;
- They participate in keeping the goal during the phases initiated by the opponent;
- They adopt positions in the field based on the particular formation used: one forward / two advanced strikers / one advanced striker and a retired one / three forwards.

Practicing the organized game is achieved, if a logical sequence in teaching is followed when learning, consolidating and perfecting the system, taking into account all the principles of learning, especially the principle of accessibility and if the forms of theoretical and practical training are used rationally.

Learning a game system begins with the practice of the simplest tactical exercises and continues by adding new, more and more refined knowledge. Theoretical and practical learning is achieved by mastering the following aspects:

- The characteristics and basic principles of the system;
- The areas of action of the players in attack and defense;



Fig. 1. 1-4-4-2 formation

The first game was played in the commonly used formation, the next three in different formation, and the last in the initial formation. We have considered as relevant the following technical and tactical actions according to the players' age: short passes, 1v1, shots towards the goal, shots on the goal, goals.

- The basic tasks of the players in compartments and positions;
- Guidance and recommendations before and during the school game, even when the game is stopped;
- Detailed analysis after playing school, friendly and official games;
- Watching some edifying games on video.

Analysis and interpretation of results

The formation mainly used was 1-4-4-2 (*description*: two central defenders positioned in line and two full backs with the priority tasks to attack especially on the side of the field, two wingers who works closer to the center, two midfielders - one with defensive task, the other behind the two central strikers, one on the left, the other on the right, permanently changing places and roles).

In order to test the efficiency of the formation there were played five friendlies (60 min. long) with the same team - FC CSS, which always carried out the same formation: 1-4-4-2, with two defensive midfielders and two strikers, one advanced and one below.

Game 1: score 3-2, short-passes - 103, 1v1-14, shots towards the goal-12, shots on the goal - 6, goals - 3.

The formation used was 4-3-1-2 with a player behind the strikers and two wingers closer to the defensive central midfielder, who all created a good density in midfield, but without major efficiency during the attack phases. Full backs had limited defense tasks

and sporadic appearances on the sides of the field. The goals were the result of collaboration between the forwards and the play-maker (2) and one from the fixed phase.

Game 2: score 1-0, short-passes - 84, 1v1-11, shots towards the goal -13, shots on the goal – 3, goals-1.

The formation used was 4-2-3-1, with an advanced forward and the other with construction tasks. The team lost the ball possession and the spaces between the lines became an issue as the two forwards did not made effective combinations to get into the areas of the four opponent defenders; very often the central striker had no efficiency to finalise, being easily blocked in his actions by the two opponent central defenders. Due to the lack of impact strength at this age, full backs' crosses did not reached their target. The goal was the result of a long shot performed by the central defender.

Game 3: score 2-2, short-passes-96, 1v1-12, shots towards the goal-15, shots on the goal-6, goals-2.

The formation used was 3-5-2, which created high density in the central area, but with defense problems, the team failed to block the opponents' attack. During the attack phases there occurred many errors related to the transmission of the ball which was intercepted by the opponents, this way receiving two goals. Goals came as a result of combinations on gaps created among the opponent central defenders.

Game 4: score 6-1, short-passes-101, 1v1-17, shots towards the goal-18, shots on the goal-11, goals-6.

The formation used was 4-1-4-1, with an advanced striker, a defensive midfielder, two advanced in the center and two sides near the edge of the field. There was an effective collaboration, particularly on the sides of the field, a good ball possession especially in attack as well as outstanding individual and the couple (2-3 players) achievements. There were problems in the central area of the attack where the only striker did not achieve anything, being often surprised with his back to the goal was and forced to turn back midfielders' passes who sent to winger who made effective penetration between central defender and fullback.

Game 5: score 15-0, short-passes -148, 1v1-26, shots towards the goal-29, shots on the goal-24, goals-16.

The formation used was 4-1-3-2, with a lay-maker, full backs close to him, there were especially made opponents' overtaking through simple 1v1s and 1v1 for the third. The team managed to score most goals in position two to one with goalkeeper, succeeded to cover proportionally the field, especially through using the full backs as extreme lateral defenders. The two wingers were also pushed up in attack, creating prolonged ball possession in the opponents' area.

Here's how to statistically submit the development of technical and tactical procedures over the 5 games in which different formations were experienced:

Table 1. The results obtained by the players in the operation of the game system used

Th-tct Elements Games	short-passes	1v1	shots towards the goal	shots on the goal	goals
Game 1(1-4-3-1-2)	103	14	12	6	3
Game 2(1-4-2-3-1)	84	11	13	3	1
Game 3 (1-3-5-2)	96	12	15	6	2
Game 4(1-4-1-4-1)	101	17	18	11	6
Game 5(1-4-1-3-2)	148	26	29	24	16

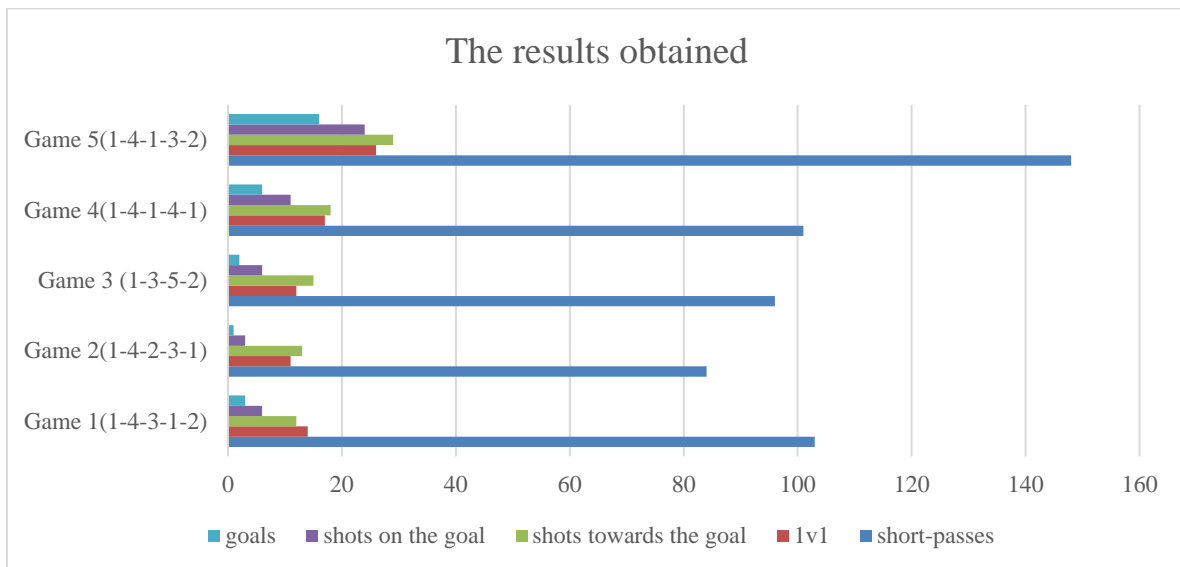


Fig.2. The level of technical and tactical achievements

Conclusions

Physical preparation is an essential condition for practicing sport at a higher level (Cosma et. al., 2017). It is extremely important for the training of young players. The choice and use of a certain formation should be made according to the physical, technical and tactical features of the team players (Barbu et. al., 2015). Knowledge of theoretical concepts related to the application of the formational is a prerequisite in the game. Players' movement in the pitch during both phases of the game (attack and defense) will be according to the area defense with other players' tasks refilled, not allowing the game to get boring.

There are differences in the manifestation of football players according to the position occupied on the field of play and according to the game system used, an aspect also noticed by other authors such as Riboli et al. (2021). The use of the most accessible formation will lead to an offensive and spectacular play based on attack and goals. The most effective playing systems are 1-4-1-4-1 and 1-4-3-1-2, which means that the players possess characteristics that are more effective in these formations in the field.

The strategy of using the players according to the opponents' players will help the coach get positive results.

References

Arjol-Serrano, J.L., Lampre, M., Díez, A., Castillo, D., Sanz-López, F., Lozano, D.

(2021). The Influence of Playing Formation on Physical Demands and Technical-Tactical Actions According to Playing Positions in an Elite Soccer Team. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*, 18, 4148.

Baptista, J., Travassos, B., Gonçalves, B., Mourão, P., Viana, J., Sampaio, J. (2020). Exploring the Effects of Playing Formations on Tactical Behavior and External Workload During Football Small-Sided Games. *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research* 34(7):p 2024-2030.

Barbu, D. (2008). Tehnica jocului de fotbal. Craiova, Edit. Universitaria.

Barbu, D., Stoica, D. (2020). Increasing the execution speed of offensive and defensive tactical actions in the football game at the time of transition. *Journal of Sport and Kinetic Movement*, 36(2), 5-13.

Barbu, D., Stoica, D., Ciocănescu, D., Barbu, M.C.R. (2015). The improvement of the offensive combinations within 1-4-3-3 system in the football game. *Journal of Sport and Kinetic Movement*, 26 (2), 25-30.

Clemente, F. M., Afonso, J., Castillo, D., Arcos, A. L., Silva, A. F., & Sarmiento, H. (2020). The effects of smallsided soccer games on tactical behavior and collective dynamics: A systematic review. *Chaos, Solitons and Fractals*, 134.

Cosma, G., Barbu, D., Nanu, M.C., Burcea B., Cosma M.A. (2017). *Pregătirea fizică în sportul de performanță*. Craiova, Edit. Universitaria.

Fernández-Espínola, C., Abad Robles, M.T., Giménez Fuentes-Guerra, F.J. (2020). Small-Sided Games as a Methodological Resource for Team Sports Teaching: A Systematic Review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*; 17(6):1884.

Low, B., Coutinho, D., Gonçalves, B. et al. (2020). A Systematic Review of Collective Tactical Behaviours in Football Using Positional Data. *Sports Med* 50, 343–385.

Modric, T., Versic, S., Sekulic, D., Liposek, S. (2019). Analysis of the Association between Running Performance and Game Performance Indicators in Professional Soccer Players. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*, 16, 4032.

Plakias, S., Moustakidis, S., Kokkotis, C., Papalexi, M., Tsatalas, T., Giakas, G., Tsaopoulos, D. (2023). Identifying Soccer Players' Playing Styles: A Systematic Review. *J. Funct. Morphol. Kinesiol*, 8, 104.

Rădulescu, M. (2007). *Tehnica – factor prioritar*. București, Edit. Răzeșu,

Rădulescu, M., Cojocaru, V. (2003). *Ghidul antrenorului de fotbal – copii și juniori*. București, Edit. Axis-Mundi,

Riboli, A., Semeria, M., Coratella, G., Esposito, F. (2021). Effect of formation, ball in play and ball possession on peak demands in elite soccer. *Biol Sport*;38(2):195–205.

Stoica, D., Barbu, D. (2014). The influence of specific football training methods during the preparation period upon the physical and motor development of 17-18 year-old juniors. *Palestrica of the third millennium – Civilization and Sport*, 15(1), 40–44.

Stoica, D., Barbu, D. (2019). Sports competitions on reduced pitch areas - a means of training and evaluation in the football game. *Journal of Sport and Kinetic Movement*, 34(2), 43-48.

Trewin, J., Meylan, C., Varley, M., Cronin, J. (2017) The influence of situational and environmental factors on match-running in soccer: a systematic review. *Science and Medicine in Football*, 1:2, 183-194.