



A small taste of football knowledge (Kristian Holm Carlsen 2019)

Football is a complex sport, and the match outcome is determined of both individual, relational, and structural skills in a dynamic and changing environment¹. One normal strategy to make order of this complexity is to use match analysis². Today there are several companies that offer all kind of statistics, and most top clubs have staffs that work specific with analysis. However, it is often a challenge to find the variables that are strongest correlated with the match outcome, and to relate statistics to concrete skills that the players do understand and can teach themselves. In regard, I present the potential benefits of teaching the players in the defence line to teach themselves to master the skill “to drop off in time” or “avoid dropping back too late”.

In 2017 I did a small study of all the goals from open play in the FIFA 2010 and 2014 World cup³. This research indicated that by 65 % of the goals, the players did bad decision making or tactical choices in the defending part of the game. These choices were then categorized into six specific or concrete skills, and one of these skills was “to drop off in time”. Of curiosity, I followed up this skill for all the goals from open play in the FIFA 2018 World cup. The goals are from FIFA’s homepage: <https://www.fifa.com/worldcup/videos/all-goals/>.

Of these 167 goals, 71 goals (43 %) on set pieces were excluded from the analysis. The remaining 96 goals were analysed regarding the skill “to drop off in time” together with three other specific skills. The result indicates that in almost one out of five goals (20 %), the nearest third defender dropped too late, i.e.: <https://www.fifa.com/worldcup/videos/lionel-messi-goal-nigeria-argentina?autoplay=1>. In total, the four analysed skills were involved in almost 60 % of the analysed goals. And even this doesn’t mean that a team automatically can reduce the number of concede goals by 20 % if the players always drop off in time⁴, it is worth asking if coaches focus enough on the skills that decide the match outcome. More, are we using the most efficient pedagogical approach? I ask these questions because several coaches have experienced that top junior- and senior players use a short period of time to learn a specific/concrete skill. To master such skills almost 100 % it is normally enough to practice specific on this for a few weeks. Normally, it is sufficient to give the players a topic question or a work task, but it is also possible to complement this with some technical and tactical tips⁵. More about how the players could teach themselves such skills is beyond the theme of this short article. However, efficient methods are not always new. Socrates summed up one common denominator from several learning theories: *“I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think.”*

Coaches spend long hours at work in order to make their team win football matches, and their decisions are based on decades with experiences. At the same time it is important to challenge excising thoughts. For that reason, I wrote a knowledge book about football with 100s of specific skills organized after the four dimensions of the game¹. The result from this small study indicates that such a concrete approach for skill development in football might be beneficial.

¹ Sources: Bergo et al. 2002; Carlsen 2018; Olsen 2011.

² Sources: Brackenridge & Alderson 1983; Larsen 1992; Olsen 2011; Olsen & Larsen 1997; Olsen, Semb & Larsen 1994; Tenga 2010.

³ Source: Carlsen, K. H. (2017). How can we reduce the number of conceded goals in football? Oslo: KC Print

⁴ At the same time it might also result in fewer set pieces for the opponent, and some breakdown opportunities.

⁵ Sources: Giske 1997 & 2008.

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