



Margins in football – Article 3: Decision making and movements without the ball

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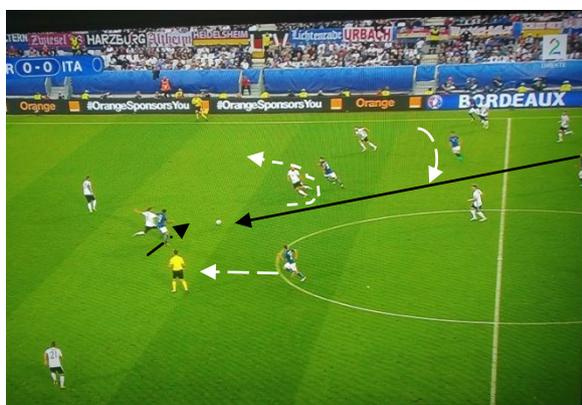
1.0 Introduction

The objective for this third article about margins in international top football was to find out which margins we can find in regard to decision making and movements without the ball. The main skills (variables) were forward runs to the back of the defence and teamwork movements in relationship with other skills. I analysed 16 Norwegian and international matches from the last 25 years, plus all or half of the goals for two Norwegian top teams, and all goals in the 2014 World Cup.

2.0 Method

I use indirect match analysis so it was possible to watch the same match situations many times.

Teamwork movements are movements in relation to another team mate without the ball. It includes one player who exploits space created by another player, opposite movements, and synchronized movements between the player with the ball and at least two other team mates.



Picture nr. 1: Italia had three teamwork movements at the same time against Germany in the Euro 2016. The pass (long black arrow) and the movement to the striker (short black arrow) start the situation. White arrows are movements according to that run (teamwork movements). I call this a “Classic Italian pattern of play”.

Forward runs to the back of the defence are runs without the ball behind the opponent’s defence, and which start before the pass.

3.0 Results and discussion

3.1 Forward runs to the back of the defence and teamwork movements

The number of forward runs to the back of the defence was 13-44 per half, and with an average of 31 per half. The teams with most of these runs were AC Milan against Bodø/Glimt in the Europa League qualification 2020, Rosenborg in two Norwegian matches from 1999 and 2000, and Bodø/Glimt against Rosenborg 2020. In these matches they had more than 40 forwards runs to the back of the defence per half. In regard to this, Benzema dropped back 18 times and did a deep forward run 12 times, versus 24 and 10 for Aspas, in the match between Real Madrid and Celta Vigo i La Liga 1.2.2021.

There was a variation of 13-44 teamwork movements per match, with an average of 21 per half. The highest number of teamwork movements in one half was 38. Both Bodø/Glimt and Everton reached this number in the first half in their match against Rosenborg (6.25.2020) and Manchester United (4.22.2012) respectively. Beside this, both Rosenborg in the matches from 1999 and 2001, and AC Milan in their match against Bodø/Glimt in 2020, had more than 30 teamwork movements in the first half. Interestingly, Barcelona had only 18 teamwork movements in the first half against Real Madrid 11.29.2010, where Barcelona won 5.0. Moreover, the analysis of goals for Rosenborg and Bodø/Glimt, and all goals in the World Cup 2014, indicates that teamwork movements are an important element for goals scored. Totally, 7 out

of 10 goals in open play involved one or more teamwork movements.

3.2 Skills related to forwards run to the back of the defence and teamwork movements

In the match between Atletico Madrid and Barcelona in La Liga 12.1.2019 Suarez and Felix were not available for a pass a total of 17 times during the first 20 minutes of the second half. Juventus had 18 situations with a bad relation between the player with the ball and a forward run to the back of the defence in their match against Sassuolo in Serie A 1.20.2021. That means it was not possible to utilize the run or to get the ball. Manchester United had seven of these situations in the second half against Watford in the FA cup 1.9.2021. More, the Manchester United players exploited the right space and the right spot in the right space in the opponent's back line 43 (57 %) times in this match in total. That leaves us with 33 (47 %) movements that could have been smarter. Equivalent number for Juventus against Sassuolo was 46 (67 %) right versus 23 (33 %) wrong movements. In regard, Benzema did exploit the space behind the defence in the blind spot 8 out of 12 times versus 3 out of 10 times for Aspas.

Everton had 20 % more teamwork movements in their match against Manchester United 4.22.2012. An in depth analysis indicates that 65 % of the movements for Manchester United were good decisions (tactically smart) versus 58 % for Everton. More, Manchester United succeeded in utilizing these movements 61 % of the times versus 33 % for Everton. Hence, Manchester United did better decisions and performance with the ball in situations with a smart teamwork movement than Everton in this match.

3.3 An analysis of Bodø/Glimt – Rosenborg (2020) and Germany – Italy (Euro 2016)

I did two case studies about patterns of play. Bodø/Glimt used seven different patterns of play for a total of 75 times during their match against Rosenborg, and they used these patterns in 2 out of 3 goals in open play. Italy used the four most frequently patterns of play 25 times during the first half against Germany in Euro 2016.

Summary

Table nr. 1: A summary of the most important results, and an indication of which margins that do exist when it comes to decision making and movements without ht ball. "The best" means the team with the best score on these skills (variables), not the winner.

Skill/variable	Results
How many forward runs to the back of the defence did "the best teams" have?	40 % more than the average
How many teamwork movements did "the best team" have?	70 % more than the average
Did we see more teamwork movements in the matches 2016-2020 compared with matches from 1995-2001?	No, 20 versus 22 in average
How often did players exploit the wrong space in the opponent's back line?	33 % of all forward runs
How often is a teamwork movement involved in goals?	In almost 7 out of 10 goals
How often did "the best team" manage to combine a smart teamwork movement with good decision and performance with the ball?	61 % of the times
How often did "the best team" use a fixed pattern of play?	75 times during a match
How often did a team have a bad cooperation between a run and the ballkeeper?	18 times during a match