

Ball Possession as a Determinant of Victory in Soccer

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Abstract

This study determined the relationship between ball possession and victory in soccer. The study was limited to analysis of three (3) matches out of the six (6) matches played by Nigeria Female National team in 2010 FIFA Under-20 Female World Cup played in Germany.

The method used is the content analysis of the videotapes of matches played to determine the frequency of ball possession and other variables of the matches involved. The medium scores of frequency of ball possession in three videotapes of matches from three Research Assistants that monitored the videotapes separately were interpreted in percentage. The study revealed that ball possession is not a determinant of victory in soccer.

Keywords: Styles of play, principles of play, Team philosophy, fitness, grades of difficulty, strategic team behaviour.

Introduction

Soccer is a game played by two teams and can either result into a win, a draw or loss. A win when a team outscores the opponent ; a draws when the scoreline is the same and a loss when a team is out outscored at the expiration of the normal time of the game (90 minutes) or extra time (120 minutes). Soccer otherwise known as football is a game play by two teams whose network clash. Each team tries its best to prevent the opposing team's network from moving information from one zone on the field to another resulting to unpredictability results.

In some game, players have a perfect knowledge of the configuration of the game and the possible moves of the opponents, but in soccer, there are elements of surprises. These unpredictability and surprises endeared the game to people of all ages. Soccer is the most popular sport in the world today. In England, seven million people play the game every week, 30 million pass through the gates to stadium each season and 10.5 million are involved in grassroots. In Spain and Portugal four million citizens play football regularly. The average attendance at the stadia is over 75% every weekend, and the television audience share for the national team matches is 40% (FIFA, 2010). According to Risolo (2011) over 3.2 billion people or 46.4 percent of the global population watched at least one in-home television coverage of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, representing an eight percent increase on figure recorded during 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany. Egbamuno (2013) reported that 2.3 billion viewers watched 2013 African Nations Cup tournament held in South Africa.

Without doubt, Nigerians are passionate soccer lovers. Soccer artistry is very interesting. This has attracted so many Nigerians to the game. The game is simple to organize. Its rules are easy to understand and it also yield revenue for coaches, players and other soccer stakeholders (Amuchie and Amodu, 2002). Soccer's fluidity, it's limited requirement and facilities, it's obvious contributions to fitness and it's special blending of individual skill and team play help its popularity.

Soccer has a long history in Nigeria. It was introduced into Nigeria by the Colonial masters around 1920. At the onset, the game was popular among the whites and was only known at the coastal towns like Port-Harcourt, Lagos, Calabar and Bonny. Some inland areas also enjoyed the earliest introduction of the game e.g. Abeokuta, Ibadan and Jos. The earliest Nigerians that enjoy the game as would be expected are the soldiers who played it for recreational purposes.

Soon after soccer or football as it was known became super popular, football clubs were formed, the first being Marine (Nigeria Port Authority) Football Club of Lagos which was formed in 1931. Serious soccer administration did not start in Nigeria until 1945 when the Nigeria Football Association now Nigeria Football Federation was formed. Today, soccer has moved from what it used to be in 1920 when it was introduced to Nigeria. It has gone scientific. Sir Alex Ferguson was reported as saying that "football has changed in all sorts of ways from what it was when he entered coaching in 1974". According to him changes such as the introduction of sports science has brought a lot of improvement to soccer (FIFA, 2012). Coaches and soccer administrators all over the world are aware that for a team to continue to win matches, such team must understand the science of soccer. When College students or football fans are discussing their team, the general question is what is the percentage of ball possession of the two teams. To them, ball possession is the 'magic wand' that helps teams to

win matches. Ball possession as defined by Amuchie and Amodu (2002) is the ability of player or team to be in control of the ball against the opponent persistently as a result of acquisition of skills, speed and confidence inspite of pressure from the opponent. In other words, it is the ability and capability of players in a team to keep the ball as long as they can, while the opposing team tries to intercept the passes. Hughes (1991) averred that a team with good ball possession always provides a chance to start an attacking movement as well as to keep the opponent off the ball. He added that a team with poor ball possession may not score. Ball possession is thought of as central to success in soccer, but question remain about its impact on positive team outcome (Collet, 2012). The aim of this study is to find out if actually ball possession is a determinant of victory in female soccer.

Research Methodology

Methodology for this study was a content analysis of matches played at the 2010 Under-20 Female World Cup played in Germany. While earlier researches used passing time as ball possession, this study used frequency of ball interception and control for ball possession. A simple random sampling was used to select three (3) videotapes out of the six video tapes of matches played by team in the championship. The investigator played the three (3) selected videotape of matches and the frequency of ball possession and other variables such as throw-ins, free-kicks, goal-kicks, attempts at goal, corner kicks, cautions and goal scored were monitored by three research assistants. The medium scores of the Research Assistance of frequency of ball possession and other variables were interpreted in percentage.

Results

The results of the study are presented based on the frequency of ball possession recorded.

Table 1a Cross-sectional Analysis variables U.S.A. Vs Nigeria match

Results	PERCENTAGES				
	U.S.A	NIG	TOTAL	U.S.A.	NIG
Throw in	42	29	71	59.2	40.8
Free-Kick	23	6	29	79.31	20.69
Goal kick	12	16	26	46.15	53.85
Attempt at goal	18	18	36	50	50
Corner-kick	15	6	21	71.43	28.57
Off side	1	1	2	50	50
Total	111	74	185	60%	40%
Normal Time Score (Followed by Penalty)	1	1			

Final Score: USA 2 : Nigeria 4

From the analysis of the match played between U.S.A. and Nigeria in table 1a, U.S.A had a total number of 42 throw-in (59.20%) and Nigeria 29 (40.80%). This shows that U.S.A had more throw-in than Nigeria by 18.40%.

The table further shows that U.S.A had 79.31% of the total free-kicks in the match while Nigeria had 20.69%. This explains that U.S.A had 58.62% of the free-kicks than Nigeria. The table explains further that U.S.A had 12 goal-kicks (46.15) and Nigeria 16 goal-kicks (53.85%). The difference between Nigeria and U.S.A was 7.70%. U.S.A and Nigeria made the same attempts at goal 18 (50%). The record shows that U.S.A had a total of 15 corner-kicks (71.43%) while Nigeria had 6 corner-kicks (28.57%). The difference between U.S.A and Nigeria was 42.86% both U.S.A and Nigeria had one (1) off-side each. The normal time score at the end of the match was one-one (1-1). The final score by penalty was U.S.A 2 : Nigeria 4.

Table 1b : Evaluation of Ball Possession of USA Vs Nigeria match

	First Half	%	Second Half	%	Whole Match	%
U.S.A	51	60%	60	59.41	111	59.68
NIGERIA	34	40%	41	40.58	75	40.32
TOTAL	85	100%	101	100%	186	100%

From the analysis in table 1b, it was revealed at the end of the first half that U.S.A had 60% of the ball possession while Nigeria had 40%. In the second half, U.S.A had 59.41% of the ball possession while Nigeria had 40.58. U.S.A had a total of 59.68% of the whole match (full-time) and Nigeria had 40.32%. The difference in ball possession between U.S.A and Nigeria was 19.36%.

Table 2a: Cross Sectional Analysis of variables of Nigeria Vs Japan match

Variable	NIG	JAP	TOTAL	Percentage	
				NIG	JAPAN
Throw –in	19	41	60	31.67%	68.33%
Free-Kick	5	13	18	27.78%	72.22%
Goal-Kick	6	7	13	46.15%	53.85%
Attempt at goal	11	14	25	44%	56%
Corner-Kick	5	8	13	38.46%	6.54%
off side	2	3	5	40%	60%
Total	48	86	134		

Score Nigeria 2 : Japan 1

The analysis of the match play between Nigeria and Japan as revealed in table 2a shows that Nigeria had a total of 19 throw-ins (31.67%) and Japan had 41 throw-ins (68.33%). The difference between Japan and Nigeria was 36.66%. It was further shown that Nigeria had 5 free-kicks (27.78%) while Japan had 13 free-kicks (72.22%). The difference between Japan and Nigeria was 44.94%. Nigeria had 6 (46.15%) goal-kicks while Japan had 7 (53.85%). The difference between Japan and Nigeria was 7.70%. The analysis revealed further that Nigeria made 11 attempts at goal (44%) while Japan had 14 attempts at the goal (56%). The difference between Japan and Nigeria was 12%. The total numbers of corner-kicks made by Nigeria was 5 (38.46%) while Japan was 8 (61.54%). The difference between Japan and Nigeria was 23.08%. It was also revealed that Nigeria had 2 off-sides (40%) while Japan had 3 off-sides 605. The difference in off-side between Nigeria and Japan was 20%. The final score was 2:1 in favour of Nigeria.

Table 2b: Evaluation of Ball Possession of Nigeria Vs Japan

	First Half	%	Second Half	%	Whole Match	%
Nigeria	21	33.87	28	38..36	49	36.30
Japan	41	66.13	45	61.64	86	63.79
Total	62	100%	73	100%	135	100%

In the first half of the match, Nigeria had 33.87% of the ball possession while Japan had 66.13%, (table 2b). The difference between Japan and Nigeria was 32.26%. The table also revealed that Nigeria had 38.36% in the second half while Japan had 61.64%. The difference between Japan and Nigeria was 23.28%. At the end of the match, Nigeria had a total of 36.30% of the ball possession while Japan had 63.79% ball possession for the full match. The difference between Japan and Nigeria was 27.49%.

Table 3a : Cross Sectional Analysis of variables of Nigeria Mexico match

Variable	NIG	JAP	TOTAL	Percentage %	
				NIG	Mexico
Throw –in	34	37	71	48.89%	52.11%
Free-Kick	5	13	18	27.78%	72.22%
Goal-Kick	3	13	16	18.75%	81.25
Attempt at goal	8	8	16	50%	50%
Corner-Kick	2	6	6	25%	75%
off side	-	-	-	-	-
Total	52	86	134		

Score Nigeria 1 : Mexico 1

The analysis in table 3a revealed Nigeria had 34 throw-ins (48.89%) while Mexico had 37 throw-ins (52.11%). The difference between Mexico and Nigeria was 3.22%. The table also revealed that Nigeria had 5 free-kicks (27.78%) and Mexico had 13 free-kicks (72.22%). The difference between Nigeria and Mexico in free-kicks was 44.44%. Furthermore, the table revealed that Nigeria had 3 goal-kicks (18.75%) while Mexico had 13 goal-kicks (81.25%).

The difference between Mexico and Nigeria was 62.50%. It was recorded in the table that Nigeria and Mexico made the same 8 attempts each at goal. The table also revealed that Nigeria had 2 corner-kicks (25%) while Mexico had 6 corner-kicks (75%). The difference between Mexico and Nigeria was 50%. The match ended 1-1.

Table 3b: Evaluation of Ball Possession of Nigeria Vs Mexico match

	First Half	%	Second Half	%	Whole Match	%
Nigeria	23	38.98	29	41.43	52	40.31
Mexico	36	61.02	41	58.57	77	59.69
Total	62	100%	70	100%	129	100%

As revealed in table 3b, Nigeria had 38.98% of the ball possession in first half of the match while Mexico had 61.02%. The difference between Mexico and Nigeria was 22.04%. In the second half, Nigeria had 41.43% of ball possession while Mexico had 58.57%. The difference between Mexico and Nigeria was 17.14%.

It was recorded the overall ball possession by Nigeria in the whole match was 40.31% while Mexico had 59.69%. The difference between Mexico and Nigeria was 19.38%.

Discussion

The results of this study uphold that ball possession is not a determinant of victory in soccer. This is in consonance with Bate (1988) and Stanhope (2001) which found ball possession to be unrelated to success in soccer particularly at international tournaments. The major determinant of victory in soccer, according to Hernandez, Gomez-Rigo, Castro, Gonzalez-Molina, Quiroga and Gonzalez-Romero (2011), is the status of team philosophy or strategic team behavior. According to Lago-Penas (20012) soccer is dominated by strategic factors. Team philosophy or strategic team behaviour is the manner in which a team plays together. It is the personality that a team exhibits on the field of play. A team philosophy is how players defend and attack in unit. It is a general concept or idea agreed upon by the team members with the intension to outwit the opponent (Perez, 2011). He posited that lack of strategic development is one of the major reasons for poor performance in soccer. Team philosophy creates total team confidence and this is critical to team success in soccer (Martin, 2003). This may be dictated by the grades of difficulty, the ability and fitness of your players, your opponents' skill, fitness and experience (LA84 Foundation, 2012).

The formulation of team philosophy is the blend of good techniques, principles of play and styles of play. Successful football at all levels is determined by good technique. It is the building block for great team. A team without good mastery of techniques of football, cannot develop good tactics. Good tactical movements can only be achieved when players are kept abreast of the principles of play in defense and in attack e.g. width, depth, balance, constraints and restraint delay etc.

Also fundamental to effective football and successful game is clear understanding of styles of play. It is very essential that coaches understand the styles of play and teach it to their players, if they want to be successful. According to American Youth Soccer Organization (2004), it is the 'rule of action' that supports the basic objectives of soccer. It is the foundation of any coaching strategy. Any team that wants to succeed in soccer must give consideration to 'styles of play'. This will enable players understand their roles and responsibilities on the field of play. Ouellette (2004) commented that when players understand the game, they are more creative on and off the ball. LA84 Foundation (2012) study maintained that the degree of ball possession is determined to large extent by the style of play a team employs in attack and defense i.e. direct attack, indirect attack, low pressure defense and high pressure defense. If a team uses the low pressure defense, such team may have low ball possession while a team with indirect attack may have high ball possession. The level of ball possession in a match is therefore a function of the effectiveness of principles of play and styles of play employ by such teams. LA 84 Foundation, (2012) was of the opinion that the blend of good techniques, styles of play and principles of play within a clear team philosophy will lead to victory in soccer. These elements must also be arranged in defense and attack formation (Dobson and Goddard, 2008). Team chose between 'defensive' and 'attacking' formations irrespective of the status and location of the match. These strategic choices influence the probabilities of scoring and conceding goals. Collet (2012) reported that in European and International football, from 2007-2010, the effect of greater possession of ball as determinant of victory was consistently negative. In the same vein, Carling, Williams and Reilly (2005) noted that most goals scored in 1998 and 2002 World Cup tournaments were through adventurous strategies. They observed that in 2002 World Cup, less successful teams had higher proportion of sequence involving 1-5 passes than successful teams (92 % vs. 77 %). So, scoring goals depends more on rational strategic behavior (philosophy) on the part of the team throughout the duration of match more than any other thing (Goddard, 2005). Andreff and Andreff (2010) cited that strategic element is a significant and important factor in explaining the possibility of scoring in soccer. With recent records, Spain National Team is the best in the world today. This is because it has evolved a soccer philosophy that permeates all levels of soccer development in the country. According to Cotta, Mora, Merelo-Molina and Merelo (2011), Spain won the latest World Cup because their playing style was directed at winning games without depending on external factors. This playing style is referred to as " tiki-taka";which can be translated 'touchy-touch'. That of Brazil is referred to as 'Samba'. These known philosophies form the template for recruiting players for teams for both local and international competitions in these countries. This may explain while these countries have done well in international soccer competitions.

Conclusion

This study is of the opinion that ball possession is good in soccer. However, the study is recommending that players in teams should be taught principles of play and styles of play to allow for improvisation and creativity. A good knowledge of the principles of play must be emphasized from the formative stage of soccer development so that players can become better at higher level of play. The styles of play must be consciously taught in the elite team.

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