

The Positions in Soccer and Marketing and Globalization of Soccer in the World

Zhejun Zhu

Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, the United States, 02115
zhu.zhej@northeastern.edu

ABSTRACT

With the rapid development of technology and science in recent decades, many professional soccer teams try all possible means to improve their strength and performance in the field of soccer. As a result, there are remarkable transformations of soccer, especially in the professional area. However, most of the common audiences in the world still regard soccer as a sport that depends only on physical confrontation and personal intelligence. In order to break through their cognitive limitations, this research helps people to understand soccer as an advanced sport further. This research paper explores the current trend of soccer, one of the most popular sport in the world, from two main perspectives, position in football, and the global marketing of soccer. Moreover, some theoretical knowledge such as business analysis, marketing, and economic knowledge is used to link academic knowledge with the transformation of soccer in recent years. The main conclusion of this article is that, first of all, each different position plays more roles and take more responsibilities in modern field of soccer; second, center back is good example for people to understand soccer as an entirety and an advanced sport; third, globalization has a significant effect on soccer in every respect; and finally, the marketing strategy is crucial for the success of soccer team nowadays.

Keywords: *Business, economic, transformation, tactics, center back, transfer market, globalization*

1. INTRODUCTION

The song, the dream, and millions of fans. Soccer is believed to be the best sport in the world by countless people. The special mechanism of soccer makes it extremely attractive and appealing. Millions of fans get used to watching games on TV, generating a fan's culture and atmosphere even at the level of society. However, it cannot guarantee that everyone who loves soccer can truly understand the inside theories of it. Therefore, this research paper will explore the field of soccer through two major perspectives, the position in soccer and the marketing and globalization of soccer. It is worth noting that these two perspectives are closely connected, because identifying the functions of identifying different positions in soccer helps to manage the business in soccer more successfully. Hoping this paper can provide some new information and ideas for the development of soccer in the future.

Although soccer originated in ancient times, it has strict requirements on players' physical strength at the professional level. But the fact that should not be ignored is soccer gradually becomes a scientific and advanced sport in the modern field of sports. With the

significant improvement of technology and data analysis skills in recent decades, the performance of soccer players on the pitch can be interpreted and summarize in many innovative ways. World-famous soccer teams even hire professional data analysts to train their players more scientifically. Based on data collection and analysis, team coaches will put higher demands on their players, thereby improving the players' comprehensive capabilities. This development has improved the efficiency of the management of soccer team, and the coach can also have a deeper understanding of the characteristics of each player and develop targeted tactics to make up for the team's weaknesses in the game. Therefore, under this trend, every player will play a more critical and comprehensive role in modern soccer.

In another aspect, marketing is also an essential part of modern soccer. The quality of the operation of the transfer markets can determine the level of a soccer team. Therefore, almost every team aims to find suitable players to improve the quality of the team economically. In addition, they seek for finishing transactions at low costs, saving money for long-term development. A capable business director in a

professional soccer team will help the team to make successful deals in the transfer market to a large degree. Furthermore, globalization affects modern soccer profoundly. In the international club arena, soccer has been largely commercialized. The trend of globalization is closely related to soccer's combination of commercialization and regulation.

2. ANALYSIS

The author takes the 20-21 season of Premier League as the research object. The reason is that soccer entered a new era in this year. Many transitions and transformations happened, and some innovative strategies were created.

Each position is one part of a well-oiled machine, and each part has a specific job to do in order for that machine to function properly. When everyone on the field does their job brilliantly, the team can work together seamlessly and experience more fluid gameplay. This is the core of team work optimization. Soccer's positions and formations continuously vary based on several factors, including the age of the player, the style of the league, coaching strategy and the culture of the team. In the Premier League season of 20-21, every position began to play a new and complicated role, adapting to the changes in modern soccer.[1]

Firstly, there is a technical term called Gegenpressing, which is a simple yet brilliant concept. Within a few seconds, players on the court will swarm from all directions, and players with the ball will be forced to take action with teammates covered and limited options. Normally, this is an inaccurate clearance that should fall back to the pressing team. But, if a player tries to play in his panicked state, there is a greater chance of him making a mistake, either being tackled or playing an inaccurate pass. If he plays an accurate pass to a teammate, then the cycle starts again. This cycle usually ends up with the pressing team regaining possession. In order to finish the task of using this tactic, players need to keep concentrating on the pitch with good discipline. Furthermore, this tactic requires players to use more energy. Even the strikers of some teams are required to engage in defense as an important part by coaches, stopping the attack of opponents as early as they can. The whole team, including 11 players on the pitch and several players on the bench needs to become integral to be more competitive. Based on the same principle, center backs are responsible for organizing the attacks from the backfield. In this case, the role of this position becomes even more crucial for the team. Therefore, this study will focus on the position of the center back as an example to explain the influence of the revolution that happened in recent decades, and show that how an individual in this position can improve the competitiveness of the entire team.

In the process of research, the author thought that the performance of all 20 clubs was influenced by two turning points of the Premier League 20-21 season. The first one was that Van Dijk was seriously injured in the game against Everton, and the second was about the signs of Ruben Dias's move to Manchester City. These two events further proved the importance of center back in the development of modern soccer, as they were given more responsibilities and played multiple roles.

Firstly, the official statistics of Premier League show that: Compared to 19-20 seasons, Liverpool had 30 fewer points in a single season of 20-21, and this embarrassing gap established a new record of all defending champions in Premier League history between two continuous seasons. Although Liverpool had the most serious injuries situations at that time, including the different levels of injuries of Van Dijk, Joel, Joe Gomez, Thiago Alcantara, Fabio, and Jordan Henderson, Van Dijk was the most indispensable one for the whole team. If someone cannot realize Van Dijk's importance, he can watch all match recordings in the past, making comparisons of the era before Van Dijk came and the era after he joined Liverpool. Then he will be persuaded and know-how Van Dijk improved the overall performance and quality of Liverpool in these years. Even the opponents of Liverpool have to acknowledge that Van Dijk is a historical center back, and nobody wants to play against him.

A similar story of how a remarkable center-back influenced a team happened in Man City in 2020: The Portuguese center back Ruben Dias, from Benfica, formed a great complementary combination with John Stones, making the integral line of defense much stable and tight on his own. As a positive result, the midfielders ahead of Ruben Dias and John Stones were liberated to join the attack and created more chances of scoring. For example, Gundogan showed amazing performance this season, especially in getting into the front box regularly and finishing scoring. Furthermore, due to the decreasing task of defense which he was assigned, he used intelligence and more energy of organizing the ball to the forward reasonably, like what he did in Dortmund, and this fact was quite unexpected for soccer fans. We can attribute his improvement to the reasonable tactics of the coach and the help of Ruben Dias and John Stones who provided plenty of efficient protection and key passes behind him. He played freely and comfortably in this circumstance.

These 2 similar stories prove that how a great center back improve the whole team, and we surely have more views and interpretations towards this crucial position in soccer development [2].

The basic definition of center back is the role which defends in the area directly in front of the goal and tries to prevent opposing players, particularly center-forwards, from scoring. In years gone by, center

backs were only expected to help the goalkeeper keep a clean sheet, and we can regard them as traditional center backs in soccer's history. There is a famous stereotype in the field of soccer, which states most of British defenders have rough techniques on their feet, and they only have strong muscles and know how to make simple clearance kick. Although this stereotype sounds absurd, it truly reflects the conditions of soccer in the past, emphasizing a fact that each position only needs to finish its own task. And it was simple to follow the instructions of coaches.

By contrast, with the rapid development of technology in the field of soccer, center backs are expected to be great on the control of ball and contribute to the team's buildup play by passing the ball around at the back and keeping possession as well in modern soccer games. The Spanish coach Guardiola's team is the most representative example. He always ensures compliance in his soccer philosophy, requires all his 11 players on the pitch to pass the ball smoothly for over 90 minutes, and the two center backs in his team also take part of the responsibility for passing the ball from the back to the front pitch.

Moreover, the top players in this position are good at using their impressive physique and brilliant reading of the game to position themselves in the right spots to clear dangerous balls while the ball is controlled by the opposite side. And when they win the ball from opposite, they will change their roles immediately. They can organize the attack from the backfield, passing the ball into front when their teammates find an ideal space to catch the ball. This task requires their 100% focus throughout the game to be prepared for anything. Some of players even plan their next action before getting the ball from each side, and this is what top stars usually on the pitch. Being such crucial position to the team's success, it can be an intimidating position to play, but helping to lead the team to victory with a clean sheet is an incredibly rewarding achievement for center back.

In conclusion, the characteristic of a great center back is the ability to read the game and take up great positioning. Besides, this role is required to have communication skills to work with different teammates and strong mental attribute to lead their teammates. This position further proves that team spirit and leadership are necessary for the long-term development of soccer. Center back, who usually stand on the defense line and command others, is suitable to show these qualities. In this research, it can be also found that smartness and creativity are as important as other qualities. Top-level plays nowadays need to be actively focused mentally and physically. They should pick up pace of the play, make a quick decision, and execute the pass in the most appropriate way. These are the comprehensive requirements that accelerate the development of soccer. They become a meaningful part of modern soccer, making soccer games more unique and competitive on the international stage.

3. MORE DETAILS OF VIRGIL VAN DIJK

Virgil van Dijk has all the qualities mentioned above, and he is approved to be the modern model of center back for other players in the same position to learn by many experts. To make a more comprehensive analysis of him, the 18-19 season is used as an example because the attendance rate of Van Dijk was high in this season. He played more than 90 percent of the league games for Liverpool [3].

The commanding presence at the heart of the defense is one area that Van Dijk has brought an undeniable improvement to this Liverpool side. He makes the overall defense more stable and more solid. An analysis of his percentage completions in both defensive duels and aerial duels proves him to be one of the most dominant center backs in the league and the most decisive player in Liverpool.

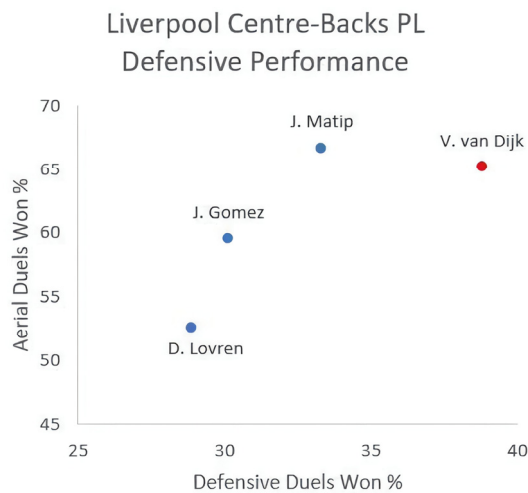


Figure 1 Van Dijk 1. defensive performance

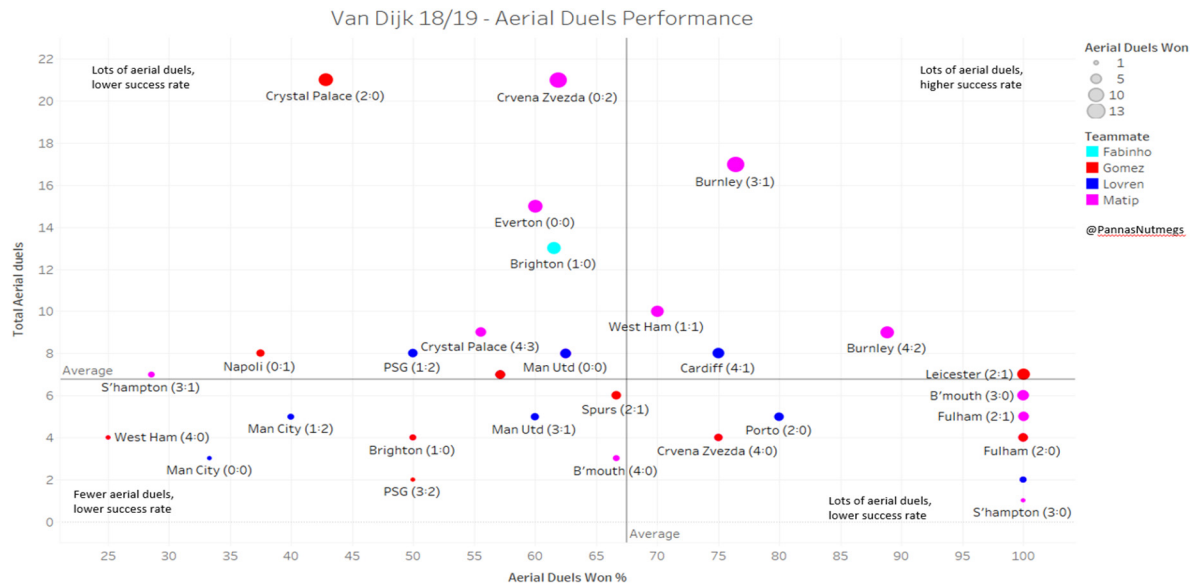


Figure 2 Van Dijk 2. aerial duels performance

On the face of it, there appears to be a conscious effort from Liverpool's management staff to pair Van Dijk with Matip when Liverpool is likely to face a large quantity of aerial duels. Klopp, the coach of Liverpool, though they were a pair of suitable partners after assessing their traits. This decision should not come as a surprise as Matip, 6"5, ranks third in aerial duels success percentage for Premier League center backs. Obviously, these are remarkable data of a player in the Premier League, which emphasizes aerial duels to a large degree. It can be seen that Matip and Van Dijk have almost identical performances in this metric with Matip recording 66% and Van Dijk recording 65%, and it only includes Premier League performances in this research. From another perspective, the fact is that Van Dijk generally plays the busier role of this pair, taking more responsibilities, because he registers 1.7 aerial duels per 90 minutes, more than his Cameroonian counterpart. This difference can be explained by their own characteristics of defensive, and it is also caused by the different tactical tasks assigned by their coach.

In the next step, the analyst can pay more attention to the right-hand side of the graph to observe performances where Van Dijk has registered 100% aerial duels completion. The data demonstrate this has happened 10 times in that season. This includes the away fixture to Bayern Munich at the Allianz, albeit only facing two aerial duels throughout the whole match. It is evident that he tends to achieve a higher percentage success rate against more stereotypically physical sides than the ball playing sides of Europe. For example, he reaches above average success rate against Cardiff and Burnley. It is worth noticing that Cardiff and Burnley are traditional teams with British style, and

their players have strong physical strengths. They usually use fierce confrontations and tactical fouls to stop their opponents from dribbling, and they like to put the ball into the air to take make use of their advantages, so it is extremely tough for Van Dijk to achieve this performance when he plays against these savage teams. In contrast, he registers below average performances for aerial duels success when playing against the top teams in the leagues such as Paris Saint-Germain, Napoli, and Manchester City, all of which fall a minimum of 15% below his average performance. Obviously, these top teams have a well-organized system of controlling the ball on their feet throughout the games, making pressure as long as their opponents get the ball. Surprisingly, it was the first season Van Dijk played for a highly competitive team in his professional career at the age of 27. The way of playing soccer in Liverpool was much different compared to the ways in Southampton. Therefore, this phenomenon was more common for a new member of a team as him. After gaining valuable experiences and collaborating with the whole team, he kept making progress and became a mature leader under huge pressure and argument. Finally, he succeeded to help Liverpool to win the champion title of 19-20 season, beating their strong opponent for these years-Man City and consolidating his place in the modern field of soccer [4].

Another interesting question is that whether Van Dijk is good at playing out from the back and organizing the attack. In order to answer it, it can be discussed that how Van Dijk progresses the ball forwards in relation to his teammates, and whether he is tasked with playing the progressive passes to break the first line of opposition defense.

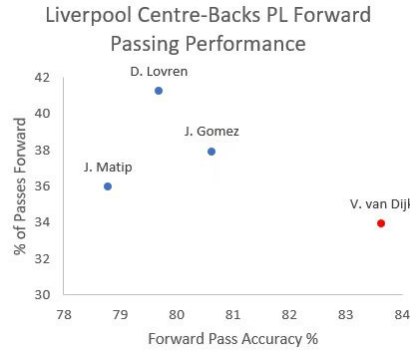


Figure 3 Van Dijk 3.forward passing performance

In general, Van Dijk is part of the core which ensures the wheels keep turning, has improved the side's overall rhythm, and added an extra edge to the attack, especially in forward passing.

In 18-19 season, Van Dijk ranks as the best performer in the forward pass accuracy percentage metric amongst his teammates, albeit by a small percentage. It is worth noting that Lovren appears to

play forward most regularly, and this phenomenon could be understood that this pairing provides Liverpool with the partnership most conducive to building play from the back. Van Dijk and Lovren both bring unique playmaking qualities to the team, and they complement one another perfectly. They also follow the instructions of their coach to play more aggressively when the team need to score. A view at a more detailed breakdown can go some way to provide an answer to this question.

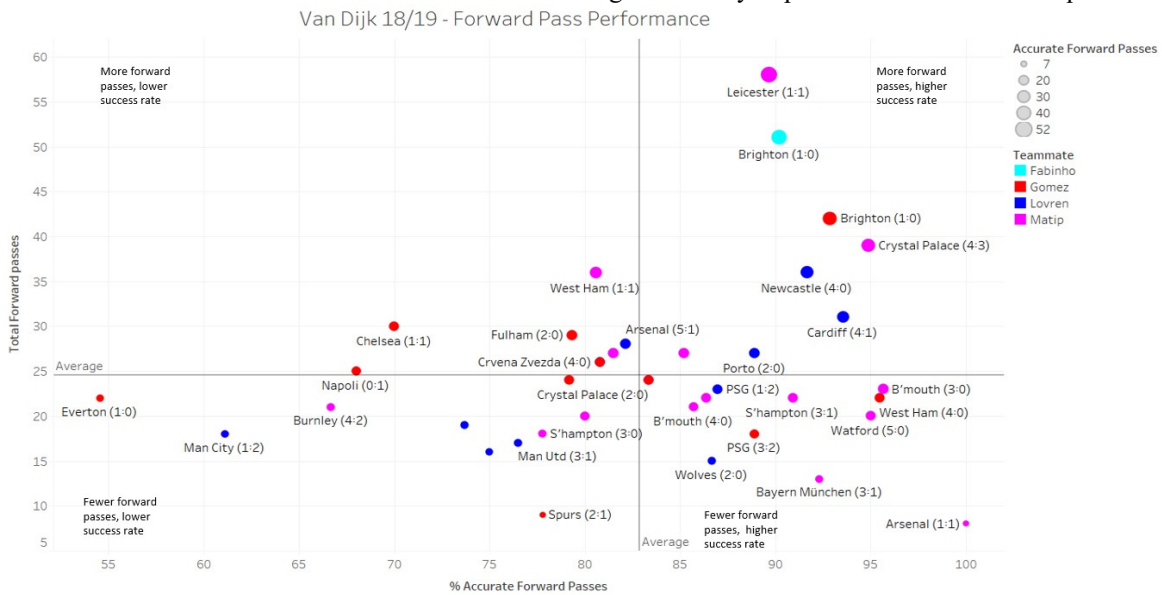


Figure 4. Van Dijk 4. forward passing performance

The top right quadrant indicates that there is no definite correlation between the partner Van Dijk has and his forward passing performance as all four partners feature in this area of the graph. However, once the analyst digs deeper, it is possible to see that 10 of Van Dijk's 15 appearances alongside Matip see him register above average forward pass accuracy. This can be viewed in contrast with Lovren who ranks above average in half of the games in which they are partnered, and four of 11 next to Gomez. They are not at the same level. To make the team more competitive in the league, Van Dijk should be the leader of the defense line. He is much more stable, and he can always provide supports for other teammates when they are not comfortable with their positions and make trouble during the game [5].

4. MARKETING AND GLOBALIZATION

Based on the analysis, all top clubs in the world realize that each position is crucial for the formation of a competitive team, so they are seeking remarkable players in the transfer market currently, aiming to improve the performance of the entire club. There are some roles that can make this goal to be accomplished more easily [6].

The director of Chelsea F.C , Marina Granovskaia, is one of the toughest and shrewdest operators in the transfer market. Her ability to analyze the marketing environment and risk control allows her to clearly understand the needs of buyers in the market, and at the

same time can identify, evaluate and control the risk to the club, such as financial uncertainty, legal liabilities, strategic management errors, accidents in the market.

Her decision at Chelsea F.C. provided new directions and ideas for the commercialization of the soccer market. For example, she coped with the contracts of players which Chelsea didn't need anymore, and she consulted with all the potential buyers in the market to help them to transfer efficiently. Tammy Abraham's departure for £36million to AS Roma is the biggest transfer of the summer of 2021. Besides, she extended Kenedy's contract by a year before sending him out on loan, as they have done with Batshuayi. It's also something the club has done with its youngsters. It means that they hold some value in a sale further down the road, and it is exactly what happened with Giroud as well as Chelsea got money for him rather than lose him on a free. These actions indicate that she has outstanding capabilities of using the residual values of these players rationally. It also means that she manages all resources of club well. Her proficiently uses of marketing strategies make these players transfer in a high price, earning a huge profit for future purchases and the long-term development of Chelsea.

In another aspect, Globalization changes the transfer market thoroughly on its own. In the past, soccer teams generally chose to sign players in their own country. The advantage was that these players were familiar with the local style of leagues, and they did not need a long process of adapting, which may generate a high cost for the team. However, globalization has made the world of soccer a more connected and interdependent place in the 21st century. All national leagues become more international and inclusive, having multi-continental franchises, and road trips will tire players even more.

Franchises and the surrounding sports league will see greater profit as the global market provides limitless expansions of revenue. The communication between teams from different countries is significantly increasing, and they can share their own perspectives of soccer conveniently, getting progress together in the current trend with shared benefits.

The increase in global interactions has caused a growth in international trade of players and also the exchange of them. This also results in a huge movement for players who are seeking a job and getting a higher salary. The percentage of international players continues to grow along with the popularity of global competitions. As a result, soccer teams all around the world are able to buy foreign players much more easily and efficiently than they do before. This means the quantity of choices significantly increases. The business directors need to take the advantage of globalization and find suitable players, improving the performance of the team and maximizing the profits they can make [7].

5. CONCLUSION

This research has explored the positions of soccer, interpreting the role and various functions of center back. This research offers an understanding of positions in soccer, providing some methods of observing the performance of players, especially the position of center back in the modern soccer games. In another aspect, to sign great players in the transfer market, marketing strategies are necessary for a competitive team. In addition, this research explains that globalization has a significant effect on the field of soccer, and globalization optimizes the operations of soccer teams in the market profoundly.

This study has certain limitations. As the required data is confidential in professional football clubs, it is difficult to obtain the corresponding data to understand the internal patterns of player training and the specific tactics of the team. In addition, there is a lack of details of transactions between different clubs in the world. It will be beneficial for understanding some further areas of the business of soccer. In the end, the two perspectives introduced by this research have strong connections, and they interpret soccer as an advanced sport in modern times, establishing a relationship with the business of soccer together.

REFERENCES

- [1] Megan Garcia. (2020). Positions In Soccer and Their Roles. <https://howtheyplay.com/team-sports/Positions-in-Soccer-and-Their-Roles>
- [2] Online Soccer Academy. How To Play Center Back. <https://www.onlinesocceracademy.com/soccer-training-videos/defending/how-to-play-center-back>
- [3] Dennis K. Mumby&Timothy R. Kuhn. (2019). Organizational Communication: A critical Introduction.
- [4] Nicholas Pardini. (2008). Globalization and Sports: An Overview (Part I).
- [5] Ron Walker. (2019). Who is Chelsea's Marina Granovskaia?
- [6] Gary Armstrong. Philip Kotler. (2020). Marketing: An Introduction 14th Edition.
- [7] Luiz Octávio Gavião, Annibal Parracho Sant'Anna, Gilson Brito Alves Lima, Pauli Adriano de Almada Garcia. (2020). Journal of sports sciences. Evaluation of soccer players under the Moneyball concept.