

The Physical Demands of a Soccer Player

A breakdown of movements players perform in the course of a game!

Studies have shown that a soccer player has to make many different types of movement in a game to play at all. The physical demands needed to play a game are quite great. When you add up all of these movements for a player over the course of a season (which includes practices and games) the numbers are staggering!

One such study (Withers) showed that a player (assume playing a full 90 minute game) averages 9.4 jumps per game, 13.1 tackles per game, turns (agility) 49.9 times per game and has 26.1 contacts with the ball.

The first-time motion study over a full season was done by Everton FC (Liverpool, England). The study looked at how much running and turning was done in a game. Players averaged just over 5 miles per game (5.16 miles). Players averaged close to 100 sprints of various distances (1.5 yards to 95 yards). There was a change in direction of play every 5-6 seconds.

In many practices, some of these numbers can triple for a player depending on what the coach is working on with his/her team. When you add up the cumulative efforts of a player over the course of a year, (assuming a youth player who practices/plays 100 times per year), a player can jump and turn thousands of times. Making their movement as efficient, explosive and safe as possible is paramount to their success. Their need to sprint and change direction explosively is also critical.

As expected, midfielders run the most followed by outside defenders. Central defenders and strikers run the least. Of this 5.16 miles covered, approximately 2/3 of it was covered at the low intensities of walking and jogging and around 1200 to 1400 yards were sprinting. A player was in control of the ball for an average of 200 yards for a total of 90 seconds per game. (That means the player was spending 88.50 minutes trying to get the ball or keep someone from getting the ball.)

Coaches, (when putting a training session together) should consider the physical demands their players have and structure their session around these needs as well as the technical and tactical needs of the team.