

ABSTRACT

Title: Analysis of differences in the goal kick as a set piece between the group stage and the knockout stage at UEFA EURO 2024

Objective: The aim of this study was to analyse differences in the goal kick as a set piece between the group stage and the knockout stage of UEFA EURO 2024.

Methods: This study employed the scientific method of indirect observation through video recordings of all 51 matches of the tournament, followed by an observational analysis of selected parameters of goal kick set-piece situations. To assess the significance of group differences, the effect size coefficient Hedges' g was used.

Results: The results of the analysis demonstrated differences between the group stage and the knockout stage of the tournament in selected goal kick parameters. A medium effect size was found for the space of the first pass into the penalty area (Hedges' $g = 0.64$), with more frequent use of this option during the knockout stage. Medium effect sizes were also identified for ground passes ($g = 0.54$) and for first passes directed to the centre-back position ($g = 0.70$). The success rate of goal kicks was higher in the knockout stage (42%, mean 5.4) compared to the group stage (35%, mean 4.1; $g = 0.54$), while the frequency of first passes played beyond the first third of the pitch was lower in the knockout stage (42%, mean 5.4) than in the group stage (51%, mean 6.0; $g = 0.18$). For successful goal kicks played within the first third of the pitch, a more frequent progression through wide areas was observed in the knockout stage (62%, mean 2.9) compared to the group stage (57%, mean 1.9; $g = 0.54$). The most pronounced difference was found in the parameter of ball carrying under opponent pressure following successful goal kicks played in the first third of the pitch, where a substantially higher frequency was recorded in the knockout stage, confirming a large effect size (Hedges' $g = 0.87$).

Conclusion: The findings expand current knowledge of the importance of the goal kick in modern football. During the knockout stage, teams more frequently preferred a controlled build-

up in the first third of the pitch, achieved higher success rates of goal kicks, and involved centre-backs more often in the first pass. Furthermore, successful goal kicks in the knockout stage were more frequently associated with ball carrying under opponent pressure and progression through wide areas. These findings can be applied in the training process, particularly in youth categories, where emphasis should be placed on practising controlled goal kick build-up, playing under pressure, and smooth construction of play from the defensive third of the pitch.

Keywords: football, goal kick, set pieces, match analysis, European Championship