INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE COLLOQIUM

i-SPEAK 2025

SPORTS AND PHYSICAL EXERCISE ASSEMBLY OF KNOWLEDGE SHARING

COLLOQIUM PROCEEDINGS

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Gameplay Comparison Between Champions of Euro 2024 and Euro 2020

Muhamad Hafizdzul Syahmi Abdul Rahman[1], Muhamad Noor Mohamed[1], & Muhamad Safiq Saiful Annur[1*]
[1]*Faculty of Sports Science and Recreation, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Negeri Sembilan Branch, Seremban Campus, Negeri Sembilan, MALAYSIA*
**Corresponding author: msafiq@uitm.edu.my*

Keywords: *EURO 2020, EURO 2024, Tactical analysis, Defending patterns, Attacking strategies*

I. Introduction

Comparative tactical analyses in professional football often emphasize specific seasons or competitions, offering only a fragmented understanding of long-term strategic developments [1]. Previous studies have highlighted how passing networks, defensive structures, and pressing behaviors evolve within domestic leagues [2]. However, there has been little comparative research into tactical differences between international champions over consecutive European Championships. This study fills that gap by analyzing integrated tactical and performance data to compare Italy (UEFA EURO 2020 champions) and Spain (UEFA EURO 2024 champions) defensive and attacking systems. This provides vital insights into how national teams adjust and develop their tactical identities in a variety of tournament scenarios and situations of competition.

II. Methods

Teams were selected based on the final UEFA EURO 2020 and 2024 ranking tables, as published on the official UEFA website (UEFA, 2021; UEFA, 2024). Official match reports provided by UEFA served as the primary source of data, which included 13 key performance indicators related to both attacking and defensive aspects of the game. These indicators consisted of goals, total attempts, attempts on target, attempts off target, offsides, corners taken, tackles, blocks, fouls committed, clearances completed, balls recovered, yellow cards, and red cards. The use of UEFA's official database is considered reliable and valid for academic research, as UEFA serves as the governing authority for European football and ensures the standardization and accuracy of competition data [3]. This study employed descriptive secondary data extracted from UEFA's official statistical records and tactical analyses to examine performance trends. A total of 14 matches were analyzed, seven from Italy's EURO 2020 campaign and seven from Spain's EURO 2024 campaign. The analysis aimed to identify key patterns and trends in both defensive and attacking performance across the two tournaments. Descriptive analysis is commonly applied in football performance research to explore tactical and technical patterns.

III. Results and Discussion

A. Attacking Patterns

With very slight variations, Italy and Spain displayed comparable attacking efforts. Italy scored 1.86 ± 0.90 goals compared to Spain's 2.14 ± 1.07 on average, although the difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.589$). Overall, Italy made more total attempts than Spain (17.57 ± 9.40) (18.29 ± 8.04), although the difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.881$). Spain had marginally higher shots on target, as seen by their slightly higher percentage of shots on target (6.00 ± 3.65), Spain (5.43 ± 2.15), Italy, and their p-value is 0.727. With the lowest p-value = 0.057 of all the indicators, Italy had more offsides (3.57 ± 2.37) than Spain (1.43 ± 1.27). Off-target attempts were almost the same for both teams, but Spain had more corners (5.71 ± 4.31) than Italy (4.14 ± 2.85), and their p-value = 0.457. All the attacking indicators' p-value is more than 0.05, fail to reject HO. In conclusion, there is no significant difference in the attacking indicators between Spain and Italy. All of the data is used in Student's T-Test, except for the attempt off target. The attempt off target used the Mann-Whitney U test. According to the data, neither Italy's nor Spain's attacking performances at UEFA EURO tournaments were statistically the best. Nonetheless, Spain's marginally higher goal and shot-on-target averages point to improved finishing efficiency, which is consistent with earlier research showing that winning teams frequently convert fewer opportunities more successfully [4]. Although there isn't any obvious dominance, the similarity in total attempts and corners also shows how aggressively both team's attack.

B. Defending Patterns

Italy averaged more tackles (15.57 ± 5.19) than Spain (12.57 ± 3.82), indicating slightly more defensive involvement, though the difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.242$). In comparison to Italy (2.86 ± 2.19, $p = 0.828$), Spain had somewhat more blocks (3.14 ± 2.61). Similar discipline was demonstrated by the two teams' equal foul averages (12.14); meanwhile, the p-value is 1.000. Spain's disciplinary record showed somewhat more for tactical fouls or rule-breaking, with more yellow cards (2.43 ± 2.15) than Italy (1.86 ± 1.57), and the p-value is 0.688. Furthermore, Italy recorded no red cards, although Spain was the only team to do so (0.14 ± 0.38), indicating that Spain had greater problems with discipline that resulted in disciplinary actions; meanwhile, the p-value is 0.391. Italy had more clearances completed (15.29 ± 6.10) than Spain (12.86 ± 8.30), which is indicative of Italy's defensive priority when it comes to removing danger, and the p-value is 0.544. Last but not least, balls recovered gave Spain a tiny advantage over Italy (41.43 ± 12.31) despite the fact that both teams consistently regained

possession, and the *p*-value is 0.843. In conclusion, all the defending indicators' *p*-value is more than 0.05, fail to reject HO. This means there is no significant difference in the defending indicators between Spain and Italy. All of the data used Student's T-Test, except for the yellow and red cards received. Both of the indicators are used Mann-Whitney U test. There is no statistically significant difference between Spain and Italy's defensive performance, according to the analysis. In keeping with their traditionally defensive style, Italy placed more emphasis on defensive plays like tackles and clearances. Despite playing a slightly less aggressive defense, Spain recovered the ball more frequently, indicating strong positional play and pressing [3]. Spain occasionally commits tactical fouls, as suggested by the disciplinary data. This is consistent with research showing that top teams frequently compromise discipline for tactical defensive disruptions [5].

TABLE I
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Indicators	Italy (Mean ± SD)	Spain (Mean ± SD)	Statistics (t)	Effect Size	p-value
Goals	1.86 ± 0.90	2.14 ± 1.07	0.541	0.289	0.598
Total Attempt	18.29 ± 8.04	17.57 ± 9.40	-0.153	-0.082	0.881
Attempt On Target	5.43 ± 2.15	6.00 ± 3.65	0.357	0.191	0.727
Attempt Off Target	7.14 ± 5.15	7.00 ± 3.74	-0.059	-0.032	0.954
Offside	3.57 ± 2.37	1.43 ± 1.27	-2.107	-1.126	0.057
Corners Taken	4.14 ± 2.85	5.71 ± 4.31	0.804	0.43	0.437
Tackles	15.57 ± 5.1	12.57 ± 3.82	-1.231	-0.658	0.242
Blocks	2.86 ± 2.19	3.14 ± 2.61	0.222	0.11	0.828
Fouls	12.14 ± 6.52	12.14 ± 4.10	0.000	0.000	1.000
Yellow Card	1.86 ± 1.57	2.43 ± 2.15	0.568	0.303	0.581
Red Card	0.00 ± 0.00	0.14 ± 0.38	1.000	0.535	0.337
Clearances Completed	15.2 ± 6.10	12.86 ± 8.30	-0.624	-0.334	0.544
Ball Recovered	40.00 ± 14.10	41.43± 12.31	0.202	0.108	0.843

IV. CONCLUSIONS

According to the findings of this analysis, Spain outscored England in crucial attacking and defensive performance metrics to win the UEFA EURO 2024. Spain had superior attacking efficiency with more shots on target and goals scored, which is consistent with earlier studies emphasizing the relevance of shot quality and efficiency in predicting match outcomes at the elite level [3]. Furthermore, Spain displayed greater tactical discipline and consistency throughout the tournament, particularly in ball recoveries and defensive blocks, emphasizing the importance of a balanced attack-defense strategy for international football success [1]. These findings support previous research indicating that tactical adaptation and efficiency in both offensive and defensive phases are critical for success at the highest levels of competition [2]. This comparative analysis of the EURO 2020 and EURO 2024 champions demonstrates how gameplay philosophies and tactical patterns change over time. Future research could build on this approach by incorporating data from group-stage teams or conducting comparative analyses of other major international competitions, such as the Copa América or the AFC Asian Cup, to see if similar performance trends emerge across confederations. Furthermore, including player-specific indicators like positional heatmaps and passing networks may provide greater tactical insights into team strategy [6]. Longitudinal studies that look at numerous tournaments across time might help us better understand how successful tactical patterns originate and evolve in international football.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author gratefully acknowledges all of the lecturers and friends at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) for their invaluable guidance and continuous support throughout this research.

REFERENCES

[1] Sarmento, H., Anguera, M. T., Pereira, A., & Araújo, D. (2018). Talent identification and development in male football: A systematic review. *Sports Medicine, 48*(4), 907–931. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40279-017-0851-7.

[2] Bradley, P. S., Carling, C., Gómez Díaz, A., Hood, P., Barnes, C., Ade, J., & Mohr, M. (2013). Match performance and physical capacity of players in the top three competitive standards of English professional soccer. *Human Movement Science, 32*(4), 808–821. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.humov.2013.06.002.

[3] Liu, H., Gómez, M.-A., Lago-Peñas, C., & Sampaio, J. (2015). Match statistics related to winning in the group stage of 2014 Brazil FIFA World Cup. *Journal of Sports Sciences, 33*(12), 1205–1213. https://doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2015.1022578 .

[4] Lago-Peñas, C., Lago-Ballesteros, J., Dellal, A., & Gómez, M. (2010). Game-related statistics that discriminated winning, drawing and losing teams from the Spanish soccer league. *Journal of Sports Science and Medicine*, 9(2), 288–293. https://www.jssm.org/vol9/n2/18/v9n2-18text.php.

[5] Dellal, A., Chamari, K., Wong, D. P., Ahmaidi, S., Keller, D., Barros, R., & Carling, C. (2011). Comparison of physical and technical performance in European soccer match-play: FA Premier League and La Liga. *European Journal of Sport Science*, 11(1), 51–59. https://doi.org/10.1080/17461391.2010.481334.

[6] Rein, R., Raabe, D., & Memmert, D. (2017). "Which pass is better?" Novel approaches to assess passing effectiveness in elite soccer. *Human Movement Science, 55*, 172–181. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.humov.2017.07.010.