

Developmental activities that contribute to creative decision making in skilled soccer players

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The ability to produce creative decisions during match-play is a key attribute of team sports players (Memmert & Roca, 2019). Yet, very few researchers have studied how this type of creative behavior is acquired and developed in the sporting domain. The aim of this study was to assess the link between sport-specific creative decision making and prior engagement in developmental activities in skilled adult soccer players. Players were classified as either high- or low-creative decision makers based on their performance on an established soccer-specific video-based creativity test. Their decisions on the test were measured using the three observation criteria for creativity of originality, flexibility, and fluency. We used retrospective recall questionnaires to collect participation history data on their engagement in soccer and other sport development activities. Results showed that the high-creative decision-making group accumulated significantly more hours per year ($M = 345 \text{ h} \cdot \text{year}^{-1}$) in free, unstructured soccer-specific play activity during childhood and early adolescence (6-15 years of age) when compared to those classified as low-creative ($M = 192 \text{ h} \cdot \text{year}^{-1}$). No differences were reported for hours per year in soccer-specific formal practice or competition between the two groups throughout their development. Moreover, hours accumulated in other sports and milestones achieved did not differentiate groups. Our findings suggest that informal unorganized, free play in the primary sport is positively associated with and necessary for the development of superior levels of creative decision making in this sport.