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Elite

Sports Sciences

Does video-based priming affect youth players' performance during small-sided games?

Diogo Coutinho^{1,2}(<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6605-9505>), Bruno Gonçalves^{3,4}(<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7874-4104>), Sara Santos^{2,5} (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4090-5790>), Sigrid Olthof⁶ (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7660-8448>), Rafa Ballester⁷ (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1602-6809>), André Roca⁸ (<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7038-1230>), Bruno Travassos^{2,9,10} (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2165-2687>)

¹ Department of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, University of Maia (UMAIA), 4475-690 Maia, Portugal

² Research Centre in Sports Sciences, Health Sciences and Human Development, CIDESD, 5000-801, Vila Real, Portugal.

³ Departamento de Desporto e Saúde, Escola de Saúde e Desenvolvimento Humano, Universidade de Évora, 7004-516 Évora, Portugal

⁴ Comprehensive Health Research Centre (CHRC), Universidade de Évora, 7004-516 Évora, Portugal

⁵ Department of Sports Sciences, Exercise and Health, University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro, Vila Real, Portugal

⁶ Research Institute for Sport and Exercise Sciences, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, UK

⁷ Faculty of Physical Education & Sport Sciences, Catholic University of Valencia "San Vicente Mártir", 46900, Torrent, Valencia, Spain

⁸ Research Centre for Applied Performance Sciences, Faculty of Sport, Technology and Health Sciences, St Mary's University, Twickenham, London, UK;

⁹ Department of Sports Sciences, University of Beira Interior, Covilhã, Portugal

¹⁰ Portugal Football School, Portuguese Football Federation, 1495-433 Oeiras, Portugal

*E-mail: diogoamcoutinho@gmail.com

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Small-sided games (SSGs) can be manipulated to emphasise tactical and creative performance, yet the influence of external stimuli, such as video priming, on these behaviours remains unclear. This study examined the effects of video-based priming on tactical and creative performance in SSGs among youth football players. Twenty-four U14 players (age: 13.8 ± 0.4 years) participated in three experimental conditions: (i) CONTROL condition (standard 6-a-side SSG); (ii) OFFENSIVE priming, where players were exposed to a 4-minute video emphasising possession-based play before the SSG; (iii) CREATIVE priming, in which players' were exposed to a 4-minute video showcasing innovative individual actions before the SSG. Tactical and physical performance were assessed using GPS data, while technical and creative performance were evaluated through video analysis. Results showed that in the OFFENSIVE

priming condition, players demonstrated reduced variability in distances to teammates ($p = .008$, $ES = -0.42$), increased physical workload, and improved passing decision-making and execution ($p < .001$). Additionally, players in this condition displayed better body orientation and dribbling deception ($p < .001$). These findings suggest that maintaining ball possession requires effective space utilization, leading to increased physical demands. The CREATIVE priming condition significantly enhanced spatial exploration compared to both the CONTROL ($p = .024$, $ES = 1.14$) and OFFENSIVE ($p = .036$, $ES = 0.90$) conditions. Players also showed greater fluency and versatility in dribbling actions ($p < .001$), reflecting an increased emphasis on individual creativity. Players' creative performance during SSG seems to improve when exposed to creativity-focused stimuli, leading them to explore novel solutions during SSG (Santos et al., 2023). However, creative passing and shooting did not significantly improve, possibly due to the complexity of SSGs and the need for better task alignment to foster creative play. Despite that, creative passing and shooting were not significantly improved, possibly due to the complexity of contextualised SSGs and the need for task alignment to enhance individual creative behaviours (Furley & Memmert, 2018). These findings indicate that pre-task instructional videos influence players' tactical and creative behaviours during SSGs, suggesting that coaches can integrate video-based priming as a strategic tool to modify players' performance. From a practical perspective, coaches may use OFFENSIVE priming to reinforce structured play, enhancing passing accuracy and decision-making, while CREATIVE priming may encourage players to experiment with unconventional shooting techniques and expand their spatial awareness on the field.

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