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Dueling in the penalty box: evidence-based recommendations on how shooters and goalkeepers can win penalty shootouts in soccer

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Abstract

In soccer, penalty kicks can decide the outcome of a match and in recent years, much effort has been invested in trying to identify the factors that influence successful performance. This overview presents some of the most important findings in order to compile a reliable set of facts that can improve the probability of success for either penalty takers or goalkeepers. Particular attention is paid to various strategic aspects in the shooter-goalkeeper interaction as previous research suggests that the chances of success on both sides may be greatly enhanced by applying findings from research in sport psychology. The article ends with a checklist that goalkeepers and penalty takers may use to improve their chances of success alongside recommendations to continue and intensify the efforts to carry out ecologically valid experiments in future research.

Keywords:

- penalty shootout
- goalkeeper
- penalty taker
- choking

Notes

1. In 1997, a rule change was designed to give goalkeepers a better chance in a shootout by allowing them to move along the line at any time but not forward toward the penalty taker. Before the rule change, goalkeepers had to remain stationary in the center of the goal until the ball was kicked. However, since the introduction of this rule, penalty takers have increasingly turned to a kicking technique first popularized by the soccer legend Pelé in the 1970s and commonly known as the ‘Paradinha’ (little stop). Using this technique, penalty takers stop their movement as they are about to take the penalty sending the goalkeeper the wrong way with a dummy before aiming the ball into the empty corner of the goal. In response to this behavioral pattern of penalty takers, in 2010 a new rule was introduced prohibiting a stop at the end of the run-up.

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