

New Study Demonstrates Player Fatigue is Distorting European Football

- Clear performance deficit suffered by teams playing after only two days' recovery
- Domestic title and European qualification outcomes affected
- Study author, Raymond Verheijen, calls for mandatory three-day gap between matches

'If Atletico Madrid beat Athletic de Bilbao in the Europa League Final tonight, their success could end up costing them a place in next season's Champions League,' contends international football coach, Raymond Verheijen unveiling a new 27,000 match study he has undertaken into the effects of player fatigue.

'Equally, the fact that Spurs are still well placed to qualify for the Champions League is absolutely down to Harry Redknapp's refusal to play his first team in the Europa League last year,' he continues.

The new study, which incorporates top tier league, Champions League and Europa League matches across seven countries and ten seasons, offers emphatic proof that teams playing every three days are substantially disadvantaged by player fatigue, and for the first time quantifies this disadvantage across a season.

Verheijen contends that if Atletico Madrid had not played in the Europa League this season, they would have accumulated six more points and been placed fourth, rather than fifth, in La Liga with one more match to play. Spurs would probably have dropped points and now been out of the running for automatic qualification.

To restore fair play, its author, Raymond Verheijen, is calling upon national leagues, associations and international federations to make a three-day gap between matches mandatory in all fixture scheduling.

Across the study, teams playing after just two days' recovery against teams who had enjoyed at least a three-day gap were found to be 39% less likely to win at home and 42% less likely to win away.

Where both teams had just two days' rest, the away team suffered more, showing a 26% reduced likelihood of victory.

In terms of league points lost, teams playing on the Saturday following a Wednesday night Champions League fixture were found to reap 0.55 points less than average, and teams playing on Sunday following a Thursday night Europa League match were 0.41 points per game worse off.

This season, Celtic have fared 0.94 pts per game worse after Europa League fixtures than in other weeks. In the 2010/11 season, Stuttgart's form after their elimination from the Europa League improved by 1.08 pts per game, and they rose from bottom of the table to finish 12th.

Press Release

The study also focused upon 71,251 goals and when they were scored during games. In parallel with winning less and losing more after just two recovery days, teams scored 0.52 fewer goals per game, scored 0.3 goals less in the final third and conceded 0.45 more goals than average in the final half hour.

Verheijen, world football's foremost authority on player periodisation, has witnessed the effects of insufficient recovery throughout his career, in terms of both performance and player injury rates. The study now underlines what he knew to be true, that full recovery is not possible in just two days.

'The results are clear,' comments Verheijen, 'on the basis of this evidence, I don't see how the game's authorities can continue to ask teams to play twice in three days. It is simply not fair play.'

He contends, however, that this need not create issues for football's governing bodies. 'There is a lot of debate at the moment about player fatigue and injuries due to too many fixtures. The problem is not the number of fixtures, but the scheduling. The differences in performance between teams after a three and a six-day gap are almost imperceptible. In Portugal, for example, where the FA offers clubs involved in Europe the chance to play on Friday or Monday to allow full recovery, this effect does not exist.'

Verheijen continues, 'only two days recovery does not automatically mean a bad result, but most bad results can be explained by only two recovery days.'

'Look at the Premiership teams' attempts to qualify for the last 16 of the Champions League this season. The eight worst results all came after two-day gaps: Manchester City's away defeats to both Bayern Munich and Napoli, Manchester United's home draws against Basel and Benfica, Chelsea's away draw with Genk and defeat to Leverkusen and Arsenal's draws with Dortmund and Marseille.'

The outspoken Verheijen has worked alongside Guus Hiddink, Dick Advocaat and Frank Rijkaard at the last three World Cups and three European Championships, as a consultant for Chelsea, Manchester City, Barcelona, Zenit St. Petersburg and Feyenoord, and until recently worked alongside Gary Speed to elevate Wales into FIFA ranking's top 50 nations.

Last year, Verheijen joined forces with Guus Hiddink to launch the World Football Academy, an institute dedicated to bringing the world's best coaches and professionals to the doorstep of football people at all levels of the game.

For further information, visit: www.worldfootballacademy.com