

Research on the Tactical Impacts and Coping Strategies When Elite Athletes Are Substituted Due to Injury in High-Level Football Matches

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Abstract: In high-level football matches, the performance of elite athletes plays a crucial role in determining the outcome of the game. Their withdrawal due to injury often has a significant impact on the team's tactical system, not only increasing the difficulty of on-the-spot adjustments for coaches but also posing challenges to team morale and psychology. To explore the specific tactical impacts of elite athletes being substituted due to injury and effective coping strategies, this paper analyzes the issue from three levels: offense, defense, and overall tactics. Solutions are proposed, including tactical adjustments, personnel selection, psychological intervention, and preventive measures. This research not only provides a reference for improving teams' on-the-spot adaptability but also has important practical value in reducing the negative impact of player injuries on match results and enhancing football competitive levels.

Keywords: Football matches; Elite athletes; Substituted due to injury; Tactical impact

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In high-level football matches, elite athletes are typically the core of a team's tactical system, influencing the progress of the game with their exceptional technical skills, keen on-field awareness, and strong psychological qualities. However, intense competition and frequent match schedules make injuries an unavoidable issue. When elite players are sidelined due to injury, teams not only face direct challenges at the tactical execution level, but also need to deal with the implicit impacts of morale fluctuations and psychological pressure. Whether it is a decrease in sharpness on the offensive end or a compromise in the stability of the defensive system, player injuries can disrupt a team's overall deployment from multiple dimensions. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon and its solutions, an in-depth exploration of the tactical impacts of elite athlete injuries and corresponding strategies not merely holds theoretical value but also provides invaluable guidance for football practice.

1. The Impact of Elite Athletes Being Substituted Due to Injury on Tactics

(1) Sudden decline in offensive sharpness

Elite athletes play an irreplaceable and crucial role in the offensive end. Their individual technical characteristics

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and tactical wisdom on the field often serve as the core pillars of a team's offensive system. Once these players are sidelined due to injury, the team's offensive routes may become disrupted, and the original tactical coordination faces interruption. Especially in the context of rapidly changing game rhythms, substitute players often struggle to quickly integrate into the team's tactics, leading to stagnation in the team's offensive capabilities. Furthermore, constrained by the limitations of personnel adjustments, the team's original tactical planning may become difficult to implement, triggering a significant decline in offensive efficiency. In such situations, the sharpness and threat level of the team's overall offensive capabilities drop drastically, resulting in a predicament of scarce scoring opportunities.

(2) Disruption of system stability

Defense constitutes the fundamental line of defense in a high-level football match, and the absence of elite defensive players often weakens this foundational element. The withdrawal of key defenders or defensive midfielders directly disrupts the existing defensive chain, presenting opponents with opportunities to exploit. Leadership players in the defense not only undertake the task of intercepting the opposing team's core players, but also serve as the coordinators of the entire defensive tactic. Upon their loss, gaps may appear in zonal defense, and man-marking tactics may consequently fall apart. In the intense environment of a match, the tactical adaptability of newly substituted players often fails to keep pace with the demands of the game, rendering the team's defensive end hasty and even disorganized. Such a situation is easily capitalized upon by opponents, rapidly forming scoring threats.

(3) Dual impact from psychology to actual combat

The injury and substitution of elite athletes is not only a tactical issue but also a psychological cue—it sends a signal to teammates and opponents that the balance of power has shifted. Team morale can easily be swayed by the absence of core players, especially in tense matches, where players may feel anxious and lose their usual composure. More importantly, the balance of the tactical system is challenged. If key figures are lost on both the offensive and defensive ends, the team may have to adjust its strategy. For instance, the injury of an offensive player can lead to increased defensive pressure, while the absence of a defensive player may result in a more conservative approach to offensive organization. This state of offensive-defensive discoordination makes the overall tactics appear inadequate, and creates more opportunities for the opponent to counter-attack. Such multifaceted imbalances often take a long time to resolve, but time in a match is not on their side.

2. Strategies for Coping with the Substitution of Injured Elite Athletes in High-Level Football Matches

(1) Tactical adjustments

When a key offensive player is forced to leave the field due to injury, the team must swiftly find a new direction at the tactical level. The adjustment of offensive tactics can be approached from two aspects: "reshaping the overall offensive approach" and "leveraging wing breakthrough capabilities." Firstly, team offense requires strengthening the sense of responsibility of every player and emphasizing the versatile role of midfielders. The passing and controlling abilities of midfielders directly affect the team's offensive efficiency. In the absence of key players, tapping into the ball control and organizational potential of midfielders, and even encouraging them to try more forward runs and through passes, can relieve the pressure on the front line. At the same time, the speed and flexibility of wing players are crucial means to break through the opponent's defense. Coaches can repeatedly reinforce wing cooperation tactics during training, such as utilizing the cross-running of dual wingers to create opportunities.

Furthermore, wing attacks are advantageous in gaining temporal and spatial advantages in modern football matches. By utilizing wing passes, teams can swiftly break through the opponent's defensive line and create more offensive opportunities. Wing players often have broader movement spaces, and they can quickly pose threats by breaking past the opponent's wingers or delivering precise crosses. For example, many teams in Europe's top

leagues heavily rely on wing attacks during matches. Wingers from teams like Manchester City and Liverpool frequently use rapid passes and breakthroughs to effectively pressure the opponent's defensive line. Therefore, teams should focus on the training and application of wing attacks to enhance their offensive efficiency.

For teams that employ high pressure tactics, front-line players can moderately increase the frequency of interceptions and counter-pressing to minimize the negative impact of the absence of elite players on the offense. When adjusting defensive tactics, personalized responses are needed based on the specific role of the injured player. If the missing player is a key defender, the team's defensive approach can shift towards a zonal marking system, distributing defensive responsibilities more evenly to avoid over-reliance on the abilities of a single player. Furthermore, the compactness and layered structure of the defensive line need to be strengthened. Coaches can flexibly arrange midfielders and defenders to focus on marking specific opponents and covering certain areas based on the attacking characteristics of the opposition. For example, when facing a strong opponent, an additional defensive midfielder can be added to temporarily form a five-man defensive line as a transitional arrangement.

(2) Personnel adjustments

When it comes to replacing injured elite athletes with substitutes, selecting the right player is a delicate art. The abilities and characteristics of the substitute must play their due role within the specific tactical context. When choosing a substitute, coaches can consider from two main angles: whether the substitute can seamlessly integrate into the existing tactical system, and whether the player possesses unique individual skills that can inject new vitality into the current tactics. For instance, if the absent player is a key offensive figure, the substitute does not necessarily need to replicate their style exactly, but their responsibilities in positioning, passing, and even set-piece tactics should be clear and specific. Especially when facing different opponents, coaches can adopt more flexible substitution strategies. For example, against opponents with a height advantage, a forward with strong aerial abilities can be arranged, or against opponents with speed, a defender skilled in tracking back can be deployed.

When facing different opponents, coaches should flexibly devise substitution strategies. For instance, against opponents with an aerial advantage, deploying forwards with aerial combat ability is advisable; when up against speedy opponents, opting for defenders adept at tracking back is preferable. Additionally, the psychological adjustment of substitute players is equally crucial. They need to train actively, prepare thoroughly before matches, and enhance their competitive condition so that they can swiftly engage in the game at crucial moments. Effective communication with starting players and the coaching staff, understanding their own roles, and boosting their confidence during matches are also essential factors for the success of substitute players. Therefore, substitutes not only fill vacancies but also stimulate the team's potential, injecting new vitality into the overall tactical system.

Furthermore, the prompt integration of substitutes is crucial to the overall performance of the team. During routine training, coaches should anticipate potential substitution scenarios and simulate emergency situations akin to those in actual matches, ensuring that every player is aware of their tasks. During matches, captains and core players need to provide emotional and strategic support to substitutes, alleviating their nervousness. Off-court tactical guidance and psychological support are equally indispensable, enabling substitutes to swiftly transition from the role of "substitute" to becoming an integral part of the tactical system. In summary, the role of substitute extends beyond merely filling vacancies; they are also instrumental in unleashing the team's potential. The realization of this potential requires concerted efforts from coaches, teammates, and the players themselves.

(3) Psychological adjustment

When a key player is injured and forced to leave the game, the team's morale often suffers to varying degrees. At such moments, the coach and captain need to take center stage and stabilize the team's emotions. Verbal encouragement is a direct and effective means to help players regain confidence, whether through a brief speech in the locker room or words of encouragement on the sidelines. The coach can emphasize the team's collective strength, reminding players that victories are determined by teamwork rather than the performance of a single individual. Furthermore, tactical adjustments themselves can serve to boost morale; if the team performs well

shortly after the adjustment, this positive feedback can quickly restore morale to a positive state. Meanwhile, the captain can serve as a bridge between the coach and players by engaging in private conversations with them, listening to their concerns and pressures. In this emotional storm, a well-timed word of encouragement from a leader or a crucial decision can become a source of strength for the team to continue fighting.

Equally important is the mental adjustment of the players. In the face of sudden changes, maintaining calm and focus is fundamental to continuing the game effectively. Coaches can utilize brief intervals during the match to engage in emotional management dialogues with players, guiding them to concentrate on the next stage of the game's objectives rather than dwelling on the anxiety of losing a key player. Players also need to learn self-regulation techniques, such as deep breathing, visualization, or interacting with teammates. These small but specific actions can help them quickly calm down when emotions are heightened.

(4) Preventive measures

Physical fitness enhancement is not merely about boosting strength and speed, it is also a crucial safeguard for reducing the risk of injuries. A scientific and reasonable training program is key. The coaching team should design targeted programs based on the characteristics of individual players, such as focusing on explosive power training for forwards and enhancing endurance and flexibility for midfielders. Additionally, the intensity and pace of training need to be balanced, maintaining an appropriate load while avoiding excessive exhaustion that could lead to fatigue-related injuries. Recovery periods are equally integral parts of training, with reasonable rest and nutritional supplementation aiding players in maintaining optimal physical and mental conditions. Injury prevention management also requires comprehensive planning. Warm-ups before each match and training session serve as an important defense for protecting players, with dynamic stretching and joint activation exercises reducing the risk of sports injuries. Furthermore, regular health screenings and medical evaluations can identify potential risks early, allowing for timely intervention measures to be taken.

3. Conclusion

The substitution of an injured elite athlete in high-level football matches has a significant impact on a team's tactics. On the offensive side, it leads to weakened attacking power and limited tactical flexibility. On the defensive side, it increases defensive vulnerabilities and complicates tactical adjustments. Additionally, the overall tactical balance is disrupted, and team morale is affected. To address these impacts, teams can adopt strategies such as tactical adjustments, personnel changes, psychological adjustments, and preventive measures. Through reasonable tactical adjustments and personnel arrangements, teams can maintain a certain level of competitiveness after the injured elite athlete is substituted. At the same time, strengthening psychological adjustments and preventive measures can reduce the risk of injuries and enhance the team's overall strength. Future research can further explore more effective coping strategies and ways to better prevent injuries to elite athletes during matches.

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