The Barça Way

Paul Bradley, Reader in Sports Performance at Liverpool John Moores University, uncovers some of the secrets behind the Catalan club’s on-field success.

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As the Barça model combines all aspects of training, the time for these sessions was over ten minutes less than those reported by other elite clubs.

Player Performance

include a lot of running-based physical preparation, but Barça specifically focused on physical-tactical drills that mimic key elements of match play and simulate certain game situations.

Being ‘game fit’

Another key difference our research revealed was how Barça worked players who don’t feature heavily in matches to keep them game fit. In the Barça model, players are expected to come into training in the days after a match. For instance, these sessions involved splitting the squad into two training groups. The first group included players who had completed more than 60 minutes of the match and conducted low impact activity combined with regeneration exercises to aid recovery. Players that had completed less than 60 minutes of the match and needed to ‘top up’ their physical and tactical sharpness took part in a technical/tactical circuit (conditioning exercises that are completed one after another) followed by an intense positional drill and a small-sided game. This additional training provided the appropriate stimulus to maintain the physical capacity of players and is an important tool used by the coaches to ensure players with limited game time are ready physically, technically and tactically when selected.

It would seem that the Barça model seeks to vary the physical/tactical load placed on players throughout a typical week and across the season to enable performance to peak and remain high for all players – including those not getting game time.

Tactics are key, as is rest and recovery. Many elite clubs will of course be doing their own versions of this but our research provides a unique insight into what makes one of Europe’s greatest football clubs what it is.