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## *Tactics as an essential foundation in the soccer player's preparation process*

*La táctica como fundamento esencial en el proceso de preparación del futbolista*

*As táticas são uma base essencial no processo de preparação do jogador de futebol*

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### **ABSTRACT**

Soccer is a sport of opposition and cooperation, where the specific structures and functions that govern it are interrelated, of an eminently tactical nature and hence the need for players to relate to organize themselves collectively effectively in offensive, defensive, and the transitions of both actions, from which the rest of the technical, physical, theoretical and psychological capacities will emerge according to the needs of the game idea. This research,



framed in the tactical preparation process of the provincial senior soccer team of Pinar del Río, had the objective of determining the state of the tactical preparation of the players according to the game model planned to face the national tournament and define the training methodology supported by modern preparation systems based on the tactical component as a guiding dimension in the process. With the use of theoretical, empirical, and statistical methods, the entire research process is guided through observations of training, interviews, and measurements of tactical behavior in official matches, with which it was possible to corroborate in the results achieved a series of insufficiencies and tactical limitations in the valued dimensions and indicators that denote problems in preparation for the competition.

**Keywords:** tactical preparation, game model, roles in soccer, diagnosis.

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## RESUMEN

El fútbol es un deporte de oposición, cooperación, donde se interrelacionan las estructuras y las funciones específicas que lo rigen, de carácter eminentemente táctico y de ahí la necesidad que tienen los jugadores de relacionarse para organizarse colectivamente con eficacia en las situaciones ofensivas, defensivas, y las transiciones de ambas acciones, las cuales van a surgir el resto de capacidades técnicas, físicas, de teóricas y psicológicas según las necesidades de la idea de juego. Esta investigación, enmarcada en el proceso de preparación táctica de la selección provincial de fútbol de mayores de Pinar del Río, tuvo objetivo determinar el estado en que se encuentra la preparación táctica de los jugadores según el modelo de juego planificado para enfrentar el torneo nacional y definir la metodología de entrenamiento sustentada en los sistemas modernos de preparación fundamentado en el componente táctico como dimensión rectora en el proceso. Con la utilización de métodos teóricos, empíricos, y de nivel estadístico, se guía todo el proceso de la investigación a través de observaciones a entrenamientos, entrevistas y mediciones del comportamiento táctico en partidos oficiales, con lo cual se pudo corroborar en los resultados alcanzados una serie de insuficiencias y limitaciones tácticas en las dimensiones e indicadores valorados que denota que problemas en la preparación para la competencia.



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**Palabras clave:** preparación táctica, modelo de juego, roles en el fútbol, diagnóstico.

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## RESUMO

O futebol é um esporte de oposição, cooperação, onde as estruturas e funções específicas que o regem estão inter-relacionadas, de natureza eminentemente tática e daí a necessidade de os jogadores se relacionarem entre si para se organizarem coletivamente de forma eficaz em situações ofensivas e defensivas, e as transições de ambas as ações, que darão origem ao resto das capacidades técnicas, físicas, teóricas e psicológicas de acordo com as necessidades da ideia de jogo. Esta pesquisa, enquadrada no processo de preparação tática da equipe de futebol sênior provincial de Pinar del Río, teve como objetivo determinar o estado da preparação tática dos jogadores de acordo com o modelo de jogo planejado para enfrentar o torneio nacional e definir a metodologia de treinamento com base nos modernos sistemas de preparação baseados no componente tático como uma dimensão orientadora no processo. Com a utilização de métodos teóricos, empíricos e estatísticos, todo o processo da pesquisa foi orientado por meio de observações em sessões de treinamento, entrevistas e medições do comportamento tático em jogos oficiais, com os quais foi possível corroborar nos resultados alcançados uma série de insuficiências e limitações táticas nas dimensões e indicadores avaliados que denotam problemas na preparação para a competição.

**Palavras-chave:** preparação tática, modelo de jogo, funções no futebol, diagnóstico.

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## INTRODUCTION

Soccer is classified by specialists as one of the so-called collaboration-direct opposition team sports, that is, a sport where a high number of players develop these phases in an active and coordinated manner in a shared playing space.

According to Martín (2008), cited by Alcalá, *et al.* (2020), soccer is a sport with variable characteristics, it is essentially composed of skills that are performed in an environment dependent on situational demands, in which the player must constantly make decisions in



the face of changing situations, where a high component is perceptive needed towards this generally unpredictable game in its entirety.

The way of playing soccer is eminently tactical, hence the need for players to relate to collectively organize themselves effectively in offensive and defensive situations, from which the rest of the technical, physical, theoretical and psychological capacities will emerge (López, 2015).

Soccer, as a cooperation-opposition sport, is predominantly tactical, and its specific skills are open and predominantly perceptive; that is to say, they are the indissoluble union of a gestural component (technical-coordinative) and a tactical intention, which conditions the form and moment of executing the first and that acquires meaning in the close and synchronized communication with teammates and opponents, which that enables collective solutions to gaming problems (Parissi, 2019).

There are several criteria on the conception of sports tactics that support the evolution that it has had together with the development of sport.

Benarroch (2010) considers that tactics are all the attack and defense actions carried out by the players of a team to surprise and combat (offensive principles) or counteract and neutralize (defensive principles) the opponents in the course of the match with the ball in play. These principles must be balanced through good organization of the game.

In this same sense, Martín (2013), quoted by Maneiro (2022) understands it as the conduct of a player, a group of them and the entire team, duly planned, coordinated and adapted to their own performance capacity, that of their opponents and external circumstances in order to successfully resolve game situations in both attack and defense.

Modern soccer training methodologies are based on these concepts, which, by assessing the structure, internal logic and characteristics of this sport, allow them to methodologically design the strategy, planning and organization of the entire training process of the teams to face the different competitive dynamics in today's world.



López (2019) states that the soccer training methodology for years has been based on other sports specialties that, due to their characteristics and structures, are very far from the reality of this sport.

One of the most repeated phrases in press conferences by the most prestigious coaches in the world, Del Bosque *et al.* (2015), cited by Ricardo Torquemada (2019), refers to the direct relationship between training and competition: "it is played how it is trained". This statement makes clear the importance that any training methodology must be based on the competition towards which it is directed.

In this research, it is made explicit that designing a training methodology for its subsequent application in a certain sports specialty requires a detailed analysis, on the one hand, of the specific characteristics of the sport and, on the other, of the way in which the participants will develop in it. It is reaffirmed that each sports specialty is unique, since it presents characteristics, structures and a form of competition that no other sport can imitate; for each sport there must be a training methodology capable of reproducing and perfecting the needs of its participants in the competition.

Nowadays, every day there are more voices that consider that the soccer training methodology must respect, on the one hand, the specificity of this sport and, on the other hand, the uniqueness of the tactical game model that each team tries to apply in competition (Frade and Tamarit, 2019).

The objective is clear, to train by playing, to base the training on a continuous competition where the training methodology is subordinated to the characteristics-structure of soccer and the tactical model of the game that is intended to be developed in competition, by considering tasks that reflect real situations. of the game where the players jointly enhance all their capacities.

Each team, depending on its tactical game model, must develop its own training methodology, where the main characteristics of its game form and the most faithful transfer of training to each and every one of the training tasks will be transferred to each and every one of the training tasks to the competition.



Frade and Díaz Galán (2012, April 10), cited by Martín-Moya, R. (2022), explain the Methodology of Tactical Periodization, with emphasis on the assimilation of a way of playing, in its regulations, organization of the defense, of the attack and of the principles that are its borders. In other words, this is about how it is moved from one moment to the next, all of this is only done in concentration. Tactical periodization (modern Soccer training) always works in specificity, avoiding analytical and decontextualized exercises, which is why it rejects physical or technical training separate from the game model, since this leads to a lack of specificity in the process. with its subsequent consequences.

Frade's criteria (2015) specify that achieving a game model takes time, which is why it is necessary to train it from the first day and subordinate everything to the tactical dimension. This will be the principle of specificity that makes tactical periodization possible. On the other hand, this author suggests that in high-performance soccer, constant tactical demands are required of players, both in the match and in training. It is necessary that what they execute, they do it in a concentrated way.

In Cuba, soccer has become a sport of passion where the dizzying increase in those who practice it, follow it and make it more demanding, the rebirth of historical results, demand the need to achieve competitive soccer and the dream of a future participation in one of the greatest sporting events on earth, the World Cup.

Some difficulties have been determined from a factual perceptual study and taking into account the experience of the researcher as part of the structure of the team's coaching staff and the results of interviews with specialists and coaches from other teams, as well as observations made on practical experiences in training. In this sense, it was possible to corroborate that the tactical preparation process of this team is insufficient and decontextualized, lack of dynamics and intensity, lack of precision in the objectivity of the training according to what is wanted as an idea or game model, which analyzes and evaluations are evidenced to solve this problem. This led to setting the objective: to determine the state of the tactical preparation of the players according to the planned game model to face the national tournament and to define the training methodology supported



by modern preparation systems based on the tactical component such as guiding dimension in the process

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Population

To search for information, the sample was selected based on an intentional non-probabilistic sampling procedure in accordance with the research purposes described below.

- The subjects that make up the research sample are, on the one hand, players and, on the other, coaches.
- For the study and search for information about the development of tactical preparation from Soccer training, the provincial senior soccer team of Pinar del Río was selected, made up of a population of 25 players, who were preparing to participate in the classification and final of the Cuban National Soccer League.
- This group of players was part of a mix of young generation and experienced players who were strategically preparing to successfully face these competitions.
- The average age is 22.6 years, with competitive experience. In addition, the nine coaches with experience in sports were taken into account, who met the requirements for this work taken as a population.

Empirical methods were used such as:

Interview: It was applied to the coaches of the different provincial soccer teams, to know their criteria on tactical preparation, as well as how they use the methodologies of tactical training in this sport.

Observation: observations were made aimed at verifying how the development of the tactical condition occurs in the Pinar del Río provincial senior soccer team in training and matches, in the different stages of the research.



Measurement: the evaluations were applied through tactical studies of videos recorded of matches using the Adobe Premiere Pro CC 14 program.

Statistically, mathematical methods were applied where continuous quantitative data on the development of the tactic were assessed, which are recorded on a ratio or proportion scale.

Inferential statistics.

The following statistical techniques were used: calculation of measures of central tendency or proportion (arithmetic mean, confidence interval).

To fulfill the objective of this research, it is operated with different methods and instruments to verify the problem, the variable defined on tactical preparation in Soccer was taken into account and from it, its dimensions are defined that will give rise to the indicators to trace in each of the methods and instruments to verify the current state of the problem.

Dependent variable: The Tactical Preparation of Soccer players considered as the capacity to resolve game actions by the players according to the situation that arises on the field, taking into account the behavior of teammates and opponents, being the governing component of the entire training process, where the tasks of all the actions that occur in the game are organized, planned and oriented in an interrelated way, which respond to the moments of attack, defense, and the corresponding attack-defense and defense-attack transitions to the game model developed for the team, being evaluated by a group of indicators.

Dimensions:

Offensive actions: are those attacking actions that occur when the team is in possession of the ball and the opposing team is organized defensively or the team restarts the game with a set-piece action with the objective of scoring goals.

Defensive actions: those defensive actions that occur when the team is not in possession of the ball and is organized or the opposing team is going to restart the game with a set piece action, with the aim of hindering offensive actions and avoiding the scoring of the goal.



Defense-attack transition actions: they are those offensive game actions that occur immediately after the team recovers the ball while it is in play and the opposing team is ungrouped.

Transition actions, attack-defense: those defensive play actions that occur immediately after a team loses possession of the ball while in play.

To carry out the research, the diagnostic phase of the research was defined, where in this first phase a characterization of the reality under study was carried out (tactical preparation) and the conceptual bases that supported the research process were identified through investigative actions such as training observations, interviews and performance measurements in matches.

Observation of training: twelve training sessions distributed in four sessions were observed in each stage of preparation, general, special and competitive. As an observation guide, aspects such as:

- Training stages.
- Types of microcycles.
- Correlation in practice between game moments and the game model.
- Definition of the tactical fundamentals of the moment of play to work on.
- Correspondence between tasks and tactical training objectives.
- Orientation of planned tactical content.
- Part of the session where tactical exercises are worked on.

Observation of skills:

For this it was used open and structured observation, taking into account its methodological principles. It was carried out as a way of collecting statistical information in official matches to assess the offensive and defensive tactical behavior and their transition phases of the



players during the game, prioritizing the actions of the game moments, taking into account the model team game

To this end, an observation guide was developed considering the following indicators:

Offensive:

- Rational occupation of offensive spaces, ball possession, attack progression, offensive completion.

Defensive:

- Rational occupation of defensive spaces, ball recovery, Preventing the progression of the attack, Avoiding the goal.

Defense-Attack Transition.

- Maintaining ball possession, game progression, finishing.

Attack-defense transition.

- Rational occupation of the playing field. Recovery of the ball, Avoid the progression of the game, Avoid the goal.

For the application, the following were taken into account:

- The characteristics of the playing style of the opposing teams.
- The external conditions.
- The partial results.
- The matches observed were four official matches.

Interview:

An interview was applied to 9 coaches from the different soccer teams in the province, who have experience in this regard with the aim of exploring the theoretical knowledge they have about the development of tactical preparation in contemporary soccer.



The interview took into account:

- That the specialists had more than 5 years of experience in their work as coaches.
- The prior coordination to explain the purposes of the research and the topic that was going to be addressed during the interview.

The measurement:

During the research to control the tactical behavior of the players, data collection and analysis was used: control through analysis of matches recorded using the Adobe Premiere Pro CC 14 program.

Taking the aforementioned dimensions and indicators and sub-indicators as a guide for analyzing the matches, video cuts were made where evaluations were made of each of these indicators that allowed to determine the tactical behavior of the players to evaluate the functioning of the four tactics moments taking into account the proposed game model, through these analyses, the interaction between the indicators that define the game actions of the lines, the corridors, the groups and the team can be assessed, giving general information on the real behavior of tactics in matches.

## **RESULTS**

### *Results of the interview with coaches*

The result of the most frequent criteria raised by the coaches were the following.

References to tactics as the guiding component in the soccer player's preparation process, the majority of coaches understood that this is the determining component and some proposed that the technical and physical component, which shows different ways of characterizing the preparation of the football players.



Furthermore, it could be seen through the exchange that the coaches who disagreed, used to work with lower categories.

In the criteria issued on tactics as a determinant in the results of competitions, since this is what is put into operation in football as it is a game sport, the majority affirmed this position and two mentioned the vitally important physical preparation, especially for the minor categories, taking into account the competitive nature of the competitions.

Many of those interviewed stated that they used conventional training to develop tactics and four others referred to integrated training.

Regarding contemporary methodologies of tactical preparation, only four coaches mentioned that they knew tactical periodization as a contemporary methodology and the rest had theoretical references, but did not master the contents on which it is based.

Most of the coaches stated that they use integrated exercises with problematic situations as work methods for tactics and one reported that he trains tactics with modern methods.

In general, it can be said that the interview made the coaches reflect on the way in which they execute the tactical preparation process of their players, corroborating the need for a methodology that guides them to produce changes within the conception of the training planning (Table 1 and Table 2), aimed at the development of tactics, and the most striking thing is in the approaches given by the coaches when they list among the aspects to take into account the following:

- Explain the characteristics of the different types of tactical training today.
- That the way in which the use of tactical training should be planned within the macrostructure according to the competitive dynamics is assessed.
- That specific controls be established that can evaluate said training and game behavior in the players.



*Table 1. - Results of observation in training*

<b># of sessions observed.</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Training stages.</b>	General.	Special	Competitive.
<b>Training direction.</b>	Aerobic	Technical-Tactical.	Competence.
<b>Types of microphones.</b>	Ordinary.	Crashes, Special, Approach	Competitive
<b>Correlation between roles and game model</b>	Not required	Sometimes	Not intentional _
<b>tactical fundamentals and game moments</b>	It is not intentional	It is not intentional	Unintentional _ _
<b>Correspondence between tasks and objectives</b>	There is correspondence	Not always	There is correspondence
<b>Microphone orientation</b>	General	Special	Competitive
<b>Part of the session that works on tactics</b>	End of the main part	Development of the main part	End of the main part

*Table 2.- Quantitative results of the behavior of tactics during the diagnosis in the research process in the Pinar del Río senior soccer team*

Dimensions	Transition		Transition	
Matches	Attack	Attack-Defense	Defending	Defense-Attack
Matanzas	M	M	M	M
Cienfuegos	R	M	R	M
Havana	M	R	M	M
Villa Clara	M	M	M	M

In summary, it can be said that all this will produce changes in the conception of training in the current context.

*Measurement results during the diagnosis carried out*

It can be seen in table 3, the qualitative results achieved in the four matches evaluated during the diagnosis, where none of the dimensions corresponding to the game moments was evaluated as B, only three were evaluated as Fair (R) and thirteen obtained qualifications of Poor (M). These results translate into how the indicators valued by the tactical foundations on which the game roles are based, taking into account the defined game model, are not met according to the demands of the competition and directly influence the team's results.



This denotes that the tactical levels exhibited by this team in these matches are low for this type of competition, which confirms the non-functionality of the game model that it intends to show at this stage.

In summary, a training methodology is required that values all these aspects and allows for training that tactically prepares the players, both individually and collectively, to increase the tactical levels of the team, taking into account the moments of play and the specific objectives of the model of planned play (Table 3).

*Table 3. - Results of the behavior of the moments of play in soccer during the matches analyzed in the diagnostic research*

Adversary Application of the Methodology Evaluation	Dimensions (4) Diagnosis			Indicators (15) Diagnosis			Sub indicators (67) Diagnosis		Possession % Diagnosis
	B	R	M	B	R	M	P	N	-
<b>Matanzas</b>	-	-	4	1	6	8	33	34	34%
<b>Cienfuegos</b>	-	2	2	5	4	6	40	27	48%
<b>Habana</b>	-	1	3	1	3	11	24	43	19%
<b>Villa Clara</b>	-	-	4	1	2	12	26	41	21%
<b>Total %</b>	0	19	81	13	25	62	45	55	-

In table 3, it can be seen the quantitative results of the behavior of each of the four game moments during the evaluated matches, the foundations of each moment (indicators) and the sub-indicators related to the technical-tactical elements that define them in the four valued matches.

In these analyses, it is significant to specify that none of the game moments were evaluated as B, which translates into 0% compliance. Three for 19 % were assessed as R and 13 for 81 % were assessed as M, confirming a tactical malfunction of the team.



Of the 15 indicators assessed, 13 % were evaluated as B, 25 % as R and 62 % as M, which gives a correspondence of how the game actions define the game moments so that the objectives of the game model are met, do not respond to competitive demands. It is reported that the most affected indicator was ball possession corresponding to the offensive dimension, with low execution percentages ranging from 19, 21, 34 and 48 % in the different games.

This table also shows how of the 67 technical-tactical elements to be taken into account, in each match, in total the team complied with 45 % of the actions and 55 % of the others were negative actions.

All this denotes a lack of tactical order on the field and little judgment in the game model that the team must present.

In summary, a training methodology is required that values all these aspects and allows for training that tactically prepares the players, both individually and collectively, to increase the tactical levels of the team, taking into account the moments of play and the specific objectives of the model. of planned play.

## *DISCUSSION*

In the results achieved, from the observations, interviews and measurements carried out during the research process to characterize the tactical level presented by the players of the Pinar del Río soccer team, they reflect a low tactical level in performance, translated into the need for order in defensive and offensive actions, both individual and collective, as well as the interrelation of exercises and tasks taking into account the objectives based on the moments of play defined by the chosen model, which contrast and are related directly with a series of important aspects to be assessed according to the criteria of authors such as (Díaz Galán y Leitao, 2012; Tamarit, 2015; Frade y Seirulo, 2018, Barrero 2021; De Armas 2011; Arévalo 2020), among others, who from contemporary theories of the training process in the Soccer, tactics is considered as the guiding component and the other preparations are assumed by dragging according to the game model used. Furthermore, the importance of



tactical preparation is valued, taking into account the roles or moments of the game actions that occur during the matches to achieve a higher level of adaptability to the resolutions of each of the situations that may arise during the game.

All of this triggers the presence of a problem that requires tools and ways to solve it.

## *CONCLUSIONS*

From the contemporary theories of the training process in Soccer, tactics are considered as the guiding component and the other preparations are assumed by drag according to the game model used, in addition, soccer is scientifically founded as an open, team sport of direct cooperation-opposition, which requires working on specificity as an essential principle of training.

The results of the diagnosis carried out on the Pinar del Río senior soccer team, both in training and in competition, reflect a low tactical level in performance, translated into the need for order in defensive and offensive actions, both individual and collective, the weak intention to carry out transition actions during games and possession of the ball during offensive actions was also found to be the most affected indicator.

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The authors declare not to have any interest conflicts.

***Authors' contribution:***

The authors have participated in the writing of the work and analysis of the documents.



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