

Using StatSports to Boost Performance on the Soccer Field

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The Innovation

In this data-driven age we are living in, modern sports can benefit greatly from innovative tools such as wearable devices to help make informed decision making and improve athletic performance. Tools like the sports GPS tracking system called “StatSports” used to be limited to elite clubs with large sports medicine budgets but are now products that have become less costly and accessible to even smaller sized athletic organizations.

At the professional Spanish soccer club of Haro Deportivo, the implementation of wearable devices would help the club to be able to better analyze individual performance and make more effective coaching decisions based on clear data. Haro Deportivo was founded in 1914 (Zurdo, 2019), it competes in the Spanish Segunda División B, 2nd group and plays its home games at the Estadio El Mazo in the town of Haro, province of La Rioja.

Haro Deportivo has gone through a challenging season, resulting in potential relegation to a lower league. Because of the size of a soccer field and the constant running in the game of soccer, knowing the workload of each individual player helps to inform the coaching and training staff regarding the demands on the body as well as the output of each player, and helps the staff to better manage adaptation and the risk of injury.

The way the system works is through a little device that is put on the back of a small vest and positioned between the shoulder blades (Taylor, 2018) that every player would have to wear.

That device tracks all kinds of information like how much mechanical strain is being placed on the body as well as the amount of work each player generates. Then, decisions can be made on a more custom level to ensure that each athlete avoids injury and can perform to their highest potential.

Although this particular innovation would introduce a completely new product to the organization, it would be an incremental innovation because it concerns an organization whose performance would be significantly enhanced or upgraded. However, since it involves a new product, most might think that we're simply dealing with a product innovation, but interestingly, I think that this product innovation brings a process innovation along with it. This is because, the tracking system requires staff to adjust and work in new ways to be able to gather, store and use the data properly. It also presents the coaching staff with the opportunity to change and use new methods based on the information gathered. Finally, I think there's no doubt that this is a technological innovation, because it introduces the latest technology in the sports industry into the organization.

The Team

The group of people involved that will form the team to ensure that this innovation will be implemented correctly is made up of a leader, followers, two champions and some stakeholders.

The main leader of this project is the club president, who is the highest representative of the team and the person in charge of the whole financial aspect of the organization.

The two champions would be the head coach and the strength and conditioning coach. According to Chris Miles in "The Project Champion: A Management Best Practice," a project champion is "the person within an organization implementing a project who takes on the burden of ensuring everyone involved is on board and behind the ultimate success of the project." In this case, I believe that the two people listed above are the ones that would share that burden.

The followers in this scenario are the players, without which this system couldn't be implemented. The players have to understand that wearing a vest with a small device in it might be uncomfortable, but it's crucial for obtaining valuable information about factual performance and endurance.

Finally, the last component of this team are the stakeholders, which in this case are going to be the board of directors of the organizations, as well as the remaining members of the coaching staff not mentioned above. That includes the assistant coach, athletic trainers and medical staff, just to name a few.

The Business Impacts - Financial

The financial impacts would be that the system is very expensive. In fact, according to the StatSports website, the simplest pack, which includes a vest, a device and access to the StatSports App, is on sale for \$234.99. Keeping in mind that there are somewhere between 20 to 25 players on a roster each season, the organization would have to buy 25 packs to have everyone covered. That raises the cost to a total of \$5,874.75.

Another cost that will have to be incurred is the cost of training the staff on how the devices work, and how to analyze all of the data it provides. The whole process also includes downloading the information after each session onto computers and a database that need to be up to speed. This brings me to the third cost of having to purchase at least one new computer to be able to store all of the data. The staff training cost is hard to quantify, but I think that since it's something that can be done in one day, it shouldn't go above \$250.

Finally, since everyone on the coaching staff uses an iPhone, it would probably be in the organization's best interest for the computer that the data will be stored on to be an Apple device.

This way, the coaching staff could benefit from the service that the cloud provides, and they could easily sync and transfer information from one device to the other. The cheapest desktop Mac is currently on sale for \$1,099. As a reminder, if we sum up the three costs, it would amount to a total of \$7,223.75.

In this context of Haro Deportivo having lost practically all of its chances to not be relegated, I believe that the implementation of this innovation can have a direct impact in obtaining promotion back to the Segunda División B the following year, which would translate into an increase of \$35,000 of the club's income.

Meanwhile, if the innovation is used properly, it can help in reducing injuries by monitoring each player's information and keeping the workload under control. By minimizing injuries, the medical staff might become overstaffed. This means that the club could probably get rid of some of the physical therapists, saving the organization money in the process.

A third financial benefit for the organization is that at the end of the season, it has all kinds of factual performance information on all of its players. This can help in negotiating future contracts with players, and it may allow the organization to have the upper hand in the negotiation process. The second and third benefits just mentioned are a bit difficult to quantify, because they depend on the data gathered through the devices. However, there's no doubt in my mind that both benefits would be substantial.

The costs described above would have to be incurred immediately, so that the organization can start gathering data and tracking player performance as soon as possible. On the other hand, the benefits would take longer to show up, especially the income growth. The injury prevention and the negotiation benefits may show up as soon as a few weeks or months from the implementation of the innovation, but the growth in income would happen at least a year from then.

The Business Impacts – Non-Financial

Interestingly, the area in which the investment mentioned previously can result in some meaningful benefits is non-financial. The main benefit is that with the information gathered, the coaching staff can focus training to get the best out of each player according to his individual needs.

Since physical performance is being analyzed with detailed individual metrics, players will feel rewarded for their individual efforts and this can also be motivating. This generates a greater sense of satisfaction and helps players to see that the extra energy they are giving to the club is being noticed and valued. It will also take heat off of coaches for communicating about weaknesses because it is hard to argue with hard data and players will have a sense that this kind of sensitive data is being relayed to them in a non-personal and non-threatening way.

Because of the more precise data, players can scale back at the right time to rest, recover and build so that they can be used exactly at the right time and in the right positions for the situation. This is rewarding and motivating since players don't feel that they are being run into the ground and pushed equally, when their individual needs dictate otherwise.

Haro Deportivo players can feel like the club is investing in their health and well-being as people and they will in turn, be more dedicated to the club. They will have the sense that training hard but smart will be a decisive factor in their long-term success and they will likely want to remain at Haro Deportivo and pursue renewing contracts with the club. All of this positive energy is non-financial but, in the end, affects the bottom line through employee satisfaction and overall output. Hopefully that will translate to winning more games.

In addition, as an organization, it's clear that by pursuing this opportunity, they will be showing their shareholders and fans that the organization is investing in the development of its players and doing everything in its power to improve and offer the best tools on the market to its professionals.

Finally, there would be a considerable impact on new knowledge transfer, because this brand-new tool would be brought into the way that things get done on a daily basis. Not only that, the information that the tool (GPS tracking system) provides will also be new for players and coaching staff, so there would definitely be a learning curve involved with the whole process. But because of the novelty and sense that this tool is going to improve the way training is conducted, there would be a greater interest in how to put the new information to work and how to benefit the most from the tool.

Risks

In the first place, there might be quite a few people opposed to the idea of implementing this innovation because things haven't been going terribly bad for Haro Deportivo in recent years. In fact, the team earned promotion two years ago and they've played in two consecutive editions of the Spanish Copa del Rey, battling against first and second division teams like CA Osasuna or Rayo Vallecano (De Vicente, 2020).

Another important aspect of this innovation is that the team (leader, champions, followers and stakeholders) needs to see this through. The risk of some of the people on the team "jumping ship" and not believing in the GPS tracking system is present at all times. They may be intimidated by change in and of itself.

Additionally, a quite obvious risk is that since it's a completely new system that deals with information that some people might be completely unfamiliar with, acquiring that new knowledge and being able to pass it on is crucial. Since the system involves highly technological steps there is the potential for knowledge to become sticky and difficult to pass on from one person to another.

Another risk may be that some players will simply be inconvenienced or uncomfortable wearing the vest and put off by the idea of new technologies being complicated. The conditioning coach and the medical staff might be demotivated with idea that the new process is going to require more of their time and energy.

Finally, it's important to put an emphasis on the fact that the implementation of this system doesn't guarantee that the team is going to win more games than they have up until now, it's just a tool to try to put the team in a better position to do so. The idea of overall failure is definitely one of the key risks however, if the idea is effectively sold to all of the components of the team up front, the benefits, both financial and non-financial, by far outweigh the risks.

Conclusion

In soccer and in sports in general, often times, key decisions are made by coaches based on a gut-level call and coaches know there is a fine line between adequate pressure and overworking players in the run up to game day. In the case of Haro Deportivo, by incorporating player tracking devices into their performance analysis, much of the guessing involved in how far to push players can be replaced with methodical decisions which are customized to each player. This innovation removes the guesswork and makes it possible to use precise athlete metrics to decide when to back off or when to go all out so that the whole team can be in top form on game

day. With custom designed player workouts, the Haro players can now have both adequate rest and sufficiently rigorous practice sessions that yield maximum performance improvement throughout the long, hard season of the Spanish soccer league.

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