



CRITERIA AND TACTICAL BEHAVIORS RELATED TO THE APPLICATION OF TACTICS DURING COMPETITIONS BY THE U21 FOOTBALL TEAM OF AN GIANG PROVINCE, VIETNAM

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Abstract:

In modern football, success depends not only on players' physical fitness but also on the effective use of tactical strategies. As such, developing appropriate tactics is crucial to a team's overall performance. This study aims to identify the key criteria and behavioral sequences associated with tactical implementation during matches by the U21 football team of An Giang province, Vietnam. To achieve this, the study employed a combination of methods including document analysis, surveys, pedagogical observations, and statistical techniques. The research involved 30 male players from the An Giang U21 team, with observations conducted over 19 official matches. Findings revealed two main categories of tactical criteria regarding attacking and defensive tactics, as well as two corresponding types of tactical behaviors reflecting offensive and defensive strategies in match play.

Keywords: criteria, tactical behaviors, tactic application, football, An Giang, Vietnam

1. Introduction

Over more than a century of development since its inception in 1863, football has witnessed remarkable global growth in both scale and quality. From its initial seven founding members, the world football governing body – FIFA - has evolved into a vast football community with over 200 member nations. Today, football is present and continues to thrive across all continents. Whether in underdeveloped and impoverished regions of Africa and Asia or in economically and technologically advanced countries such as the United States, Japan, and nations in Europe, football is embraced with great enthusiasm by people from all walks of life [1].

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, football began to follow a new direction that built upon the ideas of total football. This modern approach still aimed to create

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numerical advantages in both attack and defense, but it allowed for more flexibility and variety in how the game was played. Instead of applying pressure across the whole field, teams focused on specific key areas. This style is often referred to as flexible total football and is usually based on formations such as 4-4-2 or 3-5-2 [2].

Total football was a major breakthrough in the sport during the 1970s and 1980s. It was based on the idea that players should move forward together to attack the Opponent's goal and retreat together to defend their own. To play this way, athletes needed excellent physical fitness and the ability to handle the ball at high speed. Players also had to be versatile and able to take on both attacking and defensive roles. Only a few teams were able to play this style successfully, with the Netherlands, Poland, and Germany being notable examples. However, many other teams that tried to use this system without the right preparation often faced problems, such as confusion in their tactics and an increase in aggressive or overly physical play [2].

Anyone who is passionate about football enjoys talking about tactics. In recent years, there has been a lot of discussion about defensive styles with all eleven players behind the ball, the rise of the tiki-taka approach, the growing use of the 4-2-3-1 formation, and the spread of strategies like gegenpressing and counter-attacking football. A strong tactical plan for a match brings together some of the most remarkable elements in the world - artistry, hard work, intelligence, and the ability to unify different players into a cohesive unit.

To truly understand tactics, one must view them as a complete system, with one essential factor - clarity. This means that the success of tactic implementation depends on how clear the information is shared among the players. Every player needs to clearly understand their role in any given situation, and such clarity is the most important requirement of any tactical plan. Football involves thousands of split-second decisions, and a good tactical strategy helps guide players on what actions to take in each moment - where to win the ball back, where the first pass should go, how the far-side winger should move after a pass, and so on. Besides, each player must be aware of the roles of their teammates, making sure their teammates clearly understand what they will do. This enables the whole team to coordinate seamlessly. When such a shared understanding is achieved, the team operates smoothly and efficiently, resulting in a more cohesive and successful overall performance [3].

A great football team isn't defined by its ability to create a new tactic, but by its ability to bring together countless details into a cohesive strategy. The debate about whether counter-attacking is better than tiki-taka or the traditional 4-4-2 would lead to endless discussions, as history has shown that each tactic has its own strengths. The team that wins is the one that implements its tactical plans most effectively. Successful tactics require clarity, where every player understands their specific role within the system at any given moment [4].

After a match, new training sessions usually begin, making it crucial to analyze tactics carefully to pinpoint both strengths and weaknesses in the technical and tactical aspects of player performance. This analysis helps to identify areas for improvement and

informs the next training phase. Additionally, analyzing an opponent's tactical style before a match allows both coaches and players to stay confident, focus on key training priorities, and be better prepared to respond during the game [5]. Hence, it is suggested that pre-match tactical analysis plays a vital role in ensuring success in competition. Given its importance, this research focuses on the following topic: *"Criteria and tactical behaviors related to the application of tactics during competitions by the U21 football team of An Giang province, Vietnam"*.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Methods

2.1.1 Document Analysis

This method was employed to gather and analyze information from various sources related to the research topic. Relevant materials included scientific literature on research methodology, football coaching techniques, tactical strategies in offensive play, documents concerning the target team, and video recordings of training sessions and competitive matches.

2.1.2 Pedagogical Observation

This method was used to observe and systematically record data on the performance and tactical execution of the An Giang U21 football team. The analysis was based on video footage of 19 matches played by the team in the Second Division and the National U21 Championship during the 2016–2017 period, with a specific focus on offensive tactics.

2.1.3 Survey Method

This method aimed to gather expert opinions by surveying experienced and well-regarded football coaches and specialists. The objective was to identify tactical criteria and behavioral patterns in both offensive and defensive play. This information provided a foundation for analyzing tactical implementation during matches played by the An Giang U21 team. Both direct (face-to-face) and indirect (online or written) survey approaches were applied.

2.1.4 Statistical Methods

Statistical techniques were used to process and analyze the data collected through pedagogical observation. SPSS version 22.0 software was employed for data analysis to ensure reliability and accuracy in the findings.

2.2 Research Subjects

- 19 official matches played by the U21 football team of An Giang province, Vietnam.
- 30 male athletes from the U21 football team of An Giang province, Vietnam.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Observation Criteria for Tactical Application in Competitive Matches of the An Giang U21 Football Team

To establish the observation criteria for analyzing tactical applications in the competitive matches of the An Giang U21 football team, the study followed a two-step approach:

- **Step 1:** Collecting existing observation criteria related to tactical implementation in football matches.
- **Step 2:** Conducting expert and coach surveys to determine the observation criteria specifically for the An Giang U21 team's competitive performances.

3.1.1. Collection of Observation Criteria for the Application of Tactics in a Football Match

The collection of observation criteria for evaluating the application of offensive and defensive tactics in football matches was based on existing research and practices from both domestic and international sources.

A. Offensive Tactics

According to the INSAT match analysis software, key indicators should include ball control, passing through the opponent's half, quick attacks, counterattacks, coordinated attacks, attacks from set pieces, individual play, and wall passes [6].

In football coach training programs at C, B, and A levels, offensive tactics are categorized as individual play, small group attacks, whole-team attacks, overlapping runs, and attacks from the right and left flanks [7].

The youth football coaching program (ages 11–18) outlines offensive tactics as individual play, group attacks, whole-team coordination, central area penetration, counterattacks, and set plays [8].

Practical training conducted at football centers and clubs in provinces such as An Giang, Dong Thap, Vinh Long, Ho Chi Minh City, and Can Tho highlights central attacks, flank attacks, and group-based attacks.

At the An Giang Football Center, offensive tactics include individual play, coordinated attacks, quick counterattacks, and whole-team offensive movements.

B. Defensive Tactics

Based on INSAT match analysis software, defensive actions are categorized as stealing, ball disputes, blocking, heading, and defending against set plays [6].

C-, B-, and A-level coaching manuals divide defensive zones into three areas: the opponent's third, the midfield third, and the defensive third [7].

The youth football coaching curriculum describes defensive tactics as individual play, group defense, and whole-team defense [8].

Practical observations at training centers and football clubs across the Mekong Delta region identify individual, group, and whole-team defensive strategies.

At the An Giang Football Center, the focus is on individual defense, zonal (area-based) defense, and whole-team coordination in defense.

3.1.2. Surveys with Experts

Based on the aggregated results above, a questionnaire was developed and administered (see Appendix 1). The survey was conducted twice with coaches, experts, and football managers from An Giang, Dong Thap, Binh Duong, Ho Chi Minh City, and Can Tho. The two surveys were carried out one month apart, using the same evaluation method, identical content, and targeting the same group of respondents. The questionnaire responses were limited to "Yes" or "No" answers.

Table 3.1: Survey results for selecting observation criteria for the application of offensive and defensive tactics in the competitions of the U21 football team of An Giang province

No.	Criteria	1 st (n = 15)		2 nd (n = 14)	
		Agree		Agree	
		Number	%	Number	%
	Attacking tactics				
1	Individual play	15	100.0	14	100.0
2	Wall pass	15	100.0	14	100.0
3	Overlapping run	14	93.33	13	92.86
4	Left flank	15	100.0	14	100.0
5	Right flank	14	93.33	13	92.86
6	Central area	15	100.0	14	100.0
7	Counterattack	14	93.33	13	92.86
8	Set play	15	100.0	14	100.0
9	Others (interception, stepover, etc.)	13	86.67	12	82.71
	Defensive tactics				
10	Individual play	15	100.0	14	100.0
11	Group(s)	15	100.0	14	100.0
12	Area(s)	14	93.33	13	92.86
13	Whole team	15	100.0	14	100.0
14	Defensive set plays	14	93.33	13	92.86

Based on the survey results, the observation criteria that received more than 75% approval across both rounds would be selected. Consequently, the finalized observation criteria for evaluating the application of tactics by the U21 football team of An Giang province include:

- **Attacking Tactics:** individual play, wall passes, overlapping runs, attacks from the left flank, right flank, and central area, counterattacks, set-piece situations, and other coordinated actions (e.g., cutting inside, dropping the ball, etc.).
- **Defensive Tactics:** individual defense, group defense, zonal (area) defense, whole team defense, and defending set-piece situations.

3.2. Determination of tactical behaviors in the competitions of the U21 football team of An Giang province

To identify tactical behaviors used in the competitions of the U21 football team of An Giang province, the study was conducted in two steps:

Step 1: Collecting the common tactical behaviors observed during competitions in a football match.

Step 2: Surveying experts, specialists, and coaches to determine certain behaviors related to the application of tactics in the competitions of the U21 football team of An Giang province.

3.2.1. Collection of the Common Tactical Behaviors Observed during Competitions in a Football Match

Based on the criteria identified in section 3.1.1, the study arranges them in a logical order that reflects the typical progression of tactical behaviors, starting from ball control to the completion of an attacking or defensive phase, highlighting the most commonly observed actions. Observational data reveal that during attacks, various offensive tactics occur frequently and are often repeated in zones 4, 5, and 6 (the midfield area). To make observation more practical, the study focuses only on the final two tactical behaviors of each attack and classifies them into two groups based on their outcome: successful and unsuccessful, as follows:

A. Attacking Tactics

- a) **Successful Sequences:** Combination Play 1, Combination Play 2, Counterattack, Individual Play, End.
- b) **Unsuccessful Sequences:** Attack not completed.

B. Defensive Tactics:

- a) **Successful Sequences:** Opponent's off-target attempt.
- b) **Unsuccessful Sequences:** Opponent's shot on target, Opponent scores a goal.

3.2.2. Surveys with Experts

Based on the aggregated results, a questionnaire was developed and administered twice to coaches, experts, and football managers in An Giang, Dong Thap, Vinh Long, Ho Chi Minh City, and Can Tho. The two survey rounds were conducted one month apart, using the same evaluation method, identical content, and targeting the same participants. The questionnaire used a simple yes/no response format.

Table 3.2: Survey results of a series of tactical behaviors using tactics in the attack and defense of the U21 football team of An Giang province

No.	Criteria	1 st (n = 15)		2 nd (n = 14)	
		Agree		Agree	
		Number	%	Number	%
A. Attacking Tactics					
a. Successful Action Sequences		Number	%	Number	%
1	Combination play 1	15	100.0	14	100.0
2	Combination play 2	14	93.33	13	92.86
3	Counterattack	15	100.0	14	100.0
4	Individual play	14	93.33	13	92.56
5	Shot on goal	15	100.0	14	100.0
b. Unsuccessful Action Sequences		Number	%	Number	%
6	No shot attempt	14	93.33	13	92.86
B. Defensive Tactics					
a. Successful Action Sequences		Number	%	Number	%
7	Opponent's off-target attempt	15	100.0	14	100.0
b. Unsuccessful Action Sequences		Number	%	Number	%
8	Opponent's attempt on goal	15	100.0	14	100.0
9	Opponent's goal	14	93.33	13	92.86

Based on the survey results, the tactical behavior that received more than 75% agreement from respondents in both rounds would be selected. As a result, the study identified a set of tactical behavior sequences related to offensive and defensive tactics of the U21 football team of An Giang province, as follows:

A. Attacking Tactics

- a) **Successful Action Sequences:** Combination play 1, Combination play 2, Counterattack, Individual play, and Shot on goal.
- b) **Unsuccessful Action Sequences:** No shot attempt.

B. Defensive Tactics

- a) **Successful Action Sequences:** Opponent's off-target attempt.
- b) **Unsuccessful Action Sequences:** Opponent's shot on goal, and Opponent scores a goal.

Observations of football matches revealed that the behavior sequences in Combination play 1 and Combination play 2 occur continuously as part of a strategy to stretch the opponent's formation and create space for attacking opportunities. Similarly, the defensive behavior sequences are used to interrupt the opponent's attacking play. It is important to note that these behavior sequences are those that should be statistically observed throughout the match.

4. Conclusion

The criteria and behavior sequences for evaluating the effectiveness of tactical application in the matches of the An Giang U21 football team are summarized as follows:

4.1 Observation Criteria

- **Attacking Tactics:** Individual play, wall pass, overlapping run, attacks from the left and right flanks, central area attacks, counterattacks, set-piece situations, and other actions such as interceptions and stepovers.
- **Defensive Tactics:** Individual defense, group defense, zonal (area) defense, whole-team defense, and set-piece defense.

4.2 Behavioral Sequences

- **Attacking Tactics**
 - **Successful Action Sequences:** Combination play 1, combination play 2, counterattack, individual play, and shots on goal.
 - **Unsuccessful Action Sequences:** Attacks that do not result in a shot attempt.
- **Defensive Tactics:**
 - **Successful Action Sequences:** Opponent's attempt that misses the goal.
 - **Unsuccessful Action Sequences:** Opponent's shot on target or when the opponent scores a goal.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

Nguyen Ngoc Hai has been a physical education teacher at University of Labour and Social Affairs (Campus II), Vietnam.

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