

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

### Book reviews

#### Penalty kicks in football – from lottery to science

Author: Gheorghe Dumitru

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462 pages; price: 45 RON (paperback)



I was very happy to be informed about the very existence of this important book. Penalty kicks in soccer are very interesting – from both the scientific and applied perspectives. Research on penalties has been conducted by sport scientists from different disciplines who aspire to help shooters and goalkeepers improve their respective performances. However, as Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman observed, penalties in soccer are highly rewarding tasks, performed under conditions of extreme stress and anxiety. As such, no wonder that an increasing number of psychologists and economists (as well as scientists from other disciplines) conceive the penalty kick situation as a wonderful field in which different general phenomena (e.g., action bias) can be investigated.

It took over 8 years for the author – Dr. Gheorghe DUMITRU – to finish this unprecedented project, namely to collect, translate into Romanian and systematize *de novo* the information (i.e., 364 bibliographic sources) published to date on penalty kicks in football/soccer. It was a long-lasting and exhausting intellectual endeavor which finally seems to have been accomplished, if we take into consideration that it resulted in a book of 462 pages – with 6 parts, 22 chapters and 35 tables, which approaches the penalty kicks not only from a technical and tactical perspective, but also from a psychological one.

This is one of the occasions where the advantage of being literate in a foreign language becomes evident: I really regret not speaking, reading or writing the Romanian language. I wish I could, only for the sake of being able to read this exciting book. Therefore, I recruited a friend who speaks this language, who informed me about the content of the book. Based on this information and the Table of Contents sent to me in English, I will try to share with the JHSRM readers my opinion on this book.

The first part provides general information, with the history and ways to approach the topic scientifically (Ch. 1); ball flight parameters (duration and speed) of the penalty kicks and their outcome within the official matches (Ch. 2).

The second part – the largest one, as reflected by the number of pages – is dedicated to the penalty takers, and contains four chapters. The first chapter presents actual information about how the kickers are nominated and practice for the respective task, while the second (Ch. 4) provides the readers with current knowledge on the kicker's actions after the ball is placed on the spot, and on gaze behavior. What strategies are at the disposal of the kickers, their advantages and disadvantages, and why the keeper-independent strategy is preferable over the keeper-dependent strategy are thoroughly explained in the next chapter (Ch. 5). The part ends with factors that can influence the outcome of the penalties awarded during play time (Ch. 6).

Part III is dedicated solely to the goalkeepers – more specifically, to the difficulties and dilemmas they have to solve (Ch. 7), to anticipation as a condition for success (Ch. 8), to their outcomes in official penalties (Ch. 9) and to the strategies, methods and means to prepare them for dueling with the kickers (Ch. 10). Part IV investigates their interrelation with the kickers. Therefore, after some consideration about the penalty kick as a particular form of social interaction (Ch.11), the next chapter teaches us how to rely solely on the non-verbal behaviors of the penalty taker – the keeper perceives the opponent and forms a given impression about him/her, and also in what manner the respective impression influences his/her own outcome expectations (Ch. 12). The final chapter of this part offers the scarce current knowledge about the penalty taker's perception of the keeper.

Part V addresses the very special and extremely exciting topic of shootouts. It starts with extensive considerations on the role, rules and rationale of the shootouts (Ch. 13), goes on to the attributes and characteristics of the players taking

penalty kicks within shootouts (Ch. 14), and continues with factors that influence the individual performance of the respective kickers (Ch. 15). The last chapter is dedicated to the factors that can influence the final outcome of penalty shootouts (Ch. 16).

Part VI of the book is entitled "*Stress, anxiety and penalty kicks*". It begins with a chapter (Ch. 17) named "*Stress in general and in sport*". Information about the factors of stress operating in ordinary penalties and in penalty shootouts is provided next (Ch. 18). The following chapter (Ch. 19) deals with emotions experienced in shootouts, especially with the problems and action mechanisms of anxiety, which is the main and most frequent emotion reported by the players involved. Then, the next chapter addresses coping (Ch. 20), while the following one develops the very special subject of choking in both ordinary penalties and in penalty shootouts (Ch. 21). Lastly, the final section (Ch. 22) provides some tips

and recommendations for football professionals. In other words, it presents in detail the so-called preparatory and practical components of a specific training program, undertaken to improve the likelihood of winning the penalty shootouts.

So, taking into account the table of contents – succinctly presented above, the exhaustive information on which it is based, and the merits of approaching the problems from both theoretical and practical perspectives, it may be concluded that with this book's release we are witnessing a real publishing event in the specific field of football, as well as in the general area of sports sciences.

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