

FIFA World Cup 2014: Which players have the best chance at goal scoring?

RMIT University



On the eve of the 2014 FIFA World Cup, researchers investigated the productivity of top goal scorers in international football. The RMIT University team applied advanced econometric techniques to a sample of 66 top goal scorers in the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Champions League between 1991 and 2011.

They found that a player's height and being left footed had a positive effect on the probability of scoring a goal — and that carefully timed substitutions were crucial.

Unsurprisingly, the research also found evidence of a concave relationship between age and productivity, which suggests that teams should be seeking young goal scorers who are less than 25 years old.

Dr. Alberto Posso, Professor Tim Fry and Guillaume Galanos, from RMIT's School of Economics, Finance and Marketing, have had their findings published in the *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*.

"These results have important implications for managers, both in looking to sign on new players and to maximize their potential during a competitive match," Posso said.

"Recruiting top-quality strikers based on their previous performance may be an imperfect strategy, when these players have been around for too long. Managers should be careful to pick players that are yet to peak."

Posso said that, along with team selection, tactics need to be implemented and conducted in a manner that enhances the chances of a team winning.

"Managers must carefully consider the timing of substitutions to successfully influence a game's result," he said. "Our research indicates that substituting a player at any time during a match will not increase the team's probability of winning, all things being equal.

"Our research showed player productivity reaches a peak late in a game. Managers should think twice about substituting players late in the second half — when the productivity of their goal scorers will be at its highest."

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