

data that can provide insight into futsal's popularity in Canada and across the world. This article will briefly summarize the scientific literature specific to futsal that has allowed me to determine three reasons that Canadian soccer players should consider playing futsal.

Futsal is more intense than soccer

A recent study by Barbero-Alvarez et al. (2008) determine that elite level futsal players had higher average heart rates (90% of maximum, versus typical averages of 80% of maximum in soccer) and spent more time in high heart rate zones (an average of 83% of their total game time at a heart rate greater than 85% of their maximum, versus typical averages in soccer of 70-75%). Thus, when examining the time that players are on the pitch, futsal is played at a higher heart rate than soccer, indicating that development of the aerobic system will be accentuated in soccer players by playing futsal.

The same study also reported that futsal players performed a greater percentage of their total distances covered, running at high intensities. High speed running and sprinting (classified as running at speeds greater than or equal to 22 km/Hr) accounted for 22% of the total distances covered in futsal (as compared to typical averages of between 10-15% in soccer). Thus, not only is futsal played at a higher heart rate than soccer, it also requires more fast running and sprinting in relation to the total running done than soccer does. In layman's terms, this means that futsal provides a short-duration, high-intensity workout with a lot of fast running and sprinting – all of which is ideal to improve physical performance in soccer.

Futsal is more technically demanding than soccer

First of all, everything about the sport of futsal – including the rules, the pitch and even the ball – is specifically designed to encourage explosive, creative and attacking play. Consider for a moment the following equipment specifications and rules:

- The pitch is significantly smaller (40 metres long x 20 metres wide) than an 11 v 11 soccer field
- The ball is smaller (size 4), and lighter (400-440 grams) than a conventional 11 v 11 soccer ball, making it harder to play long balls accurately
- The ball is filled with foam, giving it 33% less bounce, so it requires more close control
- There is a 4-second rule on re-starts, encouraging quick play
- Goalkeepers are also limited to 4 seconds when re-starting from the hands
- Goalkeepers must throw from the end-line, which adds even further to the speed of play
- Goalkeepers cannot touch the ball by hand when passed back
- Only one pass-back allowed to the goalkeeper per possession, which encourages forward play

- There is no offside rule
- Team have unlimited “flying” substitutions, so tired players can be replaced without stopping play

Recent research has also identified that elite futsal players have significantly more touches on the ball during games than soccer players do. A comprehensive study by the English FA and FIFA Research Departments indicated that individuals playing Futsal receive the ball five times more often than they would do when they are playing 11-a-side soccer (with 2.60 touches per minute in futsal versus 0.60 touches per minute in soccer), and that the percentage of time that the ball is out of play in futsal is less than 1/3rd than it is in soccer (11.5% in futsal versus 34.6% in soccer).

Ultimately, the rules and equipment of the game, combined with the small pitch size and greater amount of touches per player, mean that futsal players will have the opportunity to perform more fundamental individual skills, enabling them to maximize the development of these skills in each and every match.

Futsal likely develops better tactical knowledge and game intelligence than soccer

Of course, these qualities in soccer players and/or futsal players are and always will be difficult to measure and quantify, however, we can make some reasonable assumptions based on point #2 above. Because futsal provides more individual touches on the ball than soccer, it also provides more interactions between small groups of opposing players (1v1, 2v1, 2v2, etc.).

Ultimately, these extra interactions should lead to the development of a better overall understanding of the basic attacking and defending principles of play. If players are exposed to these small-sided situations enough times, they should be able to predict the outcome of each situation more accurately, which in turn should lead to enhanced anticipatory ability and better positioning.

Over time, players who are better able to accurately position themselves earlier than their opponents should be able to execute any specific strategic and tactical plans more effectively, and their overall in-game performance should improve. More research examining the effectiveness of small-sided soccer games, including futsal, on markers of players' tactical performance, including through the use of software that can assess in-game player performance, is necessary before any definitive conclusions can be made.

Moving futsal forward in Canada – Three reasons ALL Canadian soccer players should play Futsal

Written by Administrator

Following the development of my presentation at the 2017 Futsal Canada Conference, the integral role that futsal can have in the development of young soccer players' physical, technical, and tactical abilities, has become crystal clear to me. All aspiring Canadian soccer players who wish to improve and maximise their development in these areas should consider playing futsal and help to "move futsal forward" in this country.

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