

Different ball game for male and female footballers

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Every year billions of people across the globe tune in to watch the UEFA Champions League in which men compete, yet the number who tune-in to watch the female equivalent is miniscule and research carried out at a North East University has discovered it is a whole different ball game.

For the first time both versions of the sport have been compared by the University of Sunderland to discover how the male game differs from that of the female game from a physical and technical point of view.

Research published in the journal 'Human Movement Science' analysed 54 male and 59 female football player observations in the UEFA Champions League. It is the first study to focus on high-intensity

running in football for both men and women.

They found that during the course of a typical UEFA Champions League match male players covered approximately 3-5 per cent more distance in total than females but covered around 30 per cent more distance at high intensity. The research also showed female players did not cover as much distance in the second half at a high intensity as they did in the first half, while male players did manage to maintain their running performances.

There were no gender differences shown between attackers and central defenders; however male full-backs, central and wide midfielders covered more distance at high intensity compared to female players in the same position.

The research, 'Gender differences in match performance characteristics of soccer players', also showed the difference in technical characteristics with female players losing the ball more frequently and having a lower pass completion rate.

Dr Paul Bradley, led the research and is a Senior Lecturer in Sport and Exercise Science at the University of Sunderland. He said: "We can clearly see that the male and female game at the top level is very different both physically and technically. It was very interesting to see fairly similar total distances but substantial differences at high intensity between gender. The larger drop off in running performance in the second half for females could be due to their lower physical capacity thus, the demands of the [game](#) cause fatigue in the second half."

It is now hoped the research can be used to provide gender-specific training for professionals in both male and female footballers to improve physical and technical performance.

More information: Paul S. Bradley, Alexandre Dellal, Magni Mohr, Julen Castellano, Anna Wilkie, "Gender differences in match performance characteristics of soccer players competing in the UEFA Champions League," *Human Movement Science*, Volume 33, February 2014, Pages 159-171, ISSN 0167-9457, [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.humov.2013.07.024](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.humov.2013.07.024).

Provided by University of Sunderland

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