



ESPN Introduces a New Era in MLS Coverage with STATS' Tracking Technology

Traditionally, when fans think of compelling sports statistics, they aren't thinking international football. The beautiful game has never produced many stats — leaving analytical fans in the dark. Until now. Utilizing a proprietary motion tracking technology from sports information leader STATS — ESPN incorporated ground-breaking statistics and graphics into its broadcast of the MLS Cup.

ESPN introduced American soccer fans to graphics featuring a player's average speed during the game, the number of sprints taken and the amount of time spent in various parts of the field with player "heat maps." Because of soccer's natural continuous flow, ESPN primarily used tracking data during game breaks such as halftime and postgame. "We definitely think this is going to be a great tool," said ESPN Senior Coordinating Producer Matt Sandulli.

Toward the end of 2008, STATS purchased SportVU, a Tel Aviv-based technology company, and since then has been active testing the technology at numerous MLS regular-season and playoff games. STATS utilizes a sophisticated technology to collect positioning data of the ball and participants (players and referees) within the playing field in real time. All aspects of the data collection process are completely non-intrusive to game action.

Globally, STATS has implemented motion tracking on a larger scale with several international football/soccer properties, including UEFA and the Asian Football Confederation.



Beckham/Beckerman Match Comparison

During ESPN's half-time coverage of the MLS Cup, commentators compared key performance metrics for Los Angeles' David Beckham and Real Salt Lake's Kyle Beckerman using heat map graphics rendered from STATS' tracking technology.

Analysis of the heat map shows Beckham began the match out wide as a right midfielder, but found himself pushing inside in the first half and influencing the match mainly in the middle third, running 3.3 miles at a rate of 4.7 mph. As a result, Galaxy defenders were tasked with thwarting Real Salt Lake's attacks up the left side.

However, Beckham's freelancing to the middle of the pitch paid dividends late in the first half as he carried the ball through the middle third before laying off a pass to the streaking Landon Donovan in a sequence that led to the Galaxy's lone goal.

Kyle Beckerman started the match as the defensive center midfielder and spent a heavy concentration of his time in the middle of the pitch, while still stretching from sideline-to-sideline. Beckerman ended the 120 minute contest covering more than 9.5 miles at a rate of 4.9 mph.



Possession Analysis

During a 10 minute stretch early in the second half, Real Salt Lake dominated through ball control and possession. During this period, Real Salt Lake possessed the ball for more than 80% of the time. Their constant pressure and control led to numerous goal scoring opportunities, a near penalty and ultimately the equalizer in the 65' minute by Robbie Findley.



Donovan's Offensive Mindset

Landon Donovan, the USA's all-time goal scoring leader, spends much of his time contributing to the Galaxy's offensive efforts. While Donovan started the match as a midfielder his heat map demonstrates he spent most of the match in an attacking position. The Galaxy captain attempted 3 shots (none on target) and was fouled seven different times for the match, while running 8.65 miles at an average rate of 4.42 mph. One of Donovan's 17 sprints occurred on his assist to the streaking Mike Magee in the 41' minute.

