

COMMITTEE FOR SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND EVALUATION OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

FACULTY OF SPORT AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHING SCIENTIFIC BOARD

Objective: Committee report about assessment and evaluation of the doctoral dissertation proposal – Mehdi Amini Farsani, PhD student

On the 10th teaching-scientific board meeting of the University of Belgrade – Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, which was held on 4th of June 2026, decision was made about forming the committee for scientific background evaluation of the doctoral dissertation proposal written by Mehdi Amini Farsani under the title “**A Comparative Analysis of Ball Possession and Packing on Team Performance and Success at the 2022 FIFA World Cup**” (Компаративна анализа поседа лопте и продора кроз одбрану на учинак и успех екипа на Светском првенству ФИФА 2022).

Committee members:

1. Dr. Bojan Leontijević, full professor, University of Belgrade - Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, Chair
2. Dr. Radivoj Mandić, associate professor, University of Belgrade - Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, Member
3. Dr. Zoran Milanović, full professor, University of Niš - Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, Member

After evaluation of the material Committee is handing in the following:

R E P O R T

Biography

Mehdi Amini Farsani was born on August 25, 1991, in Iran. He completed his undergraduate studies in the field of sport sciences at the University of Shahrekord in Iran. After that, he obtained his master's degree in sport sciences from the University of Tehran, the leading university in Iran in the field of sport sciences. He is currently a PhD student at the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Sport and Physical Education.

Since 2016, he has been actively involved in football in Iran, where he has worked with several clubs in the second and third divisions as a performance analyst. His most recent position was assistant coach and performance analyst at Red Star Belgrade U12.

His master's research focused on anticipation in football, while his current doctoral research is directed toward performance analysis in football. Mehdi holds an IELTS certificate with an

overall score of 6.5 and has Serbian language proficiency at a B1 level. His native language is Persian. In addition, he has experience working with football analysis software and statistical tools.

Bibliography

Articles in scientific journals

1. **Amini Farsani, M.**, Shahbazi, M. and Tahmasebi Boroujeni, S. (2023) Improvement in soccer goalkeepers' spatial anticipation during penalty kicks as a result of PETTTLEP imagery intervention. *Journal of Imagery Research in Sport and Physical Activity*, Vol. 18 (Issue 1), pp. 20230022. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jirspa-2023-0022>

Conference paper

1. Mehdi Shahbazi, **Mehdi Amini Farsani**, Ali Zahiri. Designing and creating football analysis software. The first student national conference of motor behaviour and psychology; 2017.
2. Abedi, N., Elahi, A. K., Lotfi, F., Bogdanović, Z., **Amini Farsani, M.**, & KhezriRad, S. (2025). Predicting heart disease among males based on performance analysis using machine learning technology: an unsupervised feature selection approach. *E-Business Technologies Conference Proceedings*, 4(1). Retrieved from <https://www.ebt.rs/journals/index.php/conf-proc/article/view/225> (Original work published November 17, 2025)

Doctoral Dissertation Proposal

Mehdi Amini Farsani proposed the topic for his doctoral dissertation: “**A Comparative Analysis of Ball Possession and Packing on Team Performance and Success at the 2022 FIFA World Cup**”. In accordance with Article 31, Paragraph 2 of the Rulebook on Doctoral Academic Studies, a public presentation of the doctoral dissertation project proposal was held on October 28th 2025 in front of the members of the Council of Doctoral Academic Studies. Based on the presentation, the topic proposal and the research project for the doctoral dissertation were positively evaluated.

Proposal contains five chapters. The first chapter covers: the definition of the fundamental concepts in football that are relevant to this study, particularly those related to football tactics, with special emphasis on ball possession and the main fitness indicators. Second chapter includes literature review. The third chapter, following a review of the relevant literature, defines the main research problem and the overall aim of the study. The fourth chapter covers the formulation of the research hypotheses as well as an explanation of the research methods. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the expected results. The fifth chapter presents the overall scientific contribution of the research. There is also a proposed references and an appendix.

Theme rationale

In the first chapter (**Introduction**) author states that football is the most popular sport in the world and that its global appeal stems from its simplicity, accessibility, and significant social, cultural, and economic impact. The author points out that, despite its simple rules, football at the elite level is characterized by considerable tactical, technical, and physical complexity. Special emphasis is placed on match analysis, which, supported by modern technologies, has become an indispensable tool for improving both individual and team performance. The author defines the key performance indicators examined in this study, with particular focus on ball possession and packing as contemporary measures of tactical efficiency. Furthermore, it is explained that ball possession reflects a team's ability to control the game, whereas packing describes a team's capability to bypass opponents through passes or ball progression and disrupt their defensive organization. The author also highlights the importance of defensive, offensive, and fitness indicators in assessing team performance and their relationship with ball possession and packing. Finally, it is concluded that the combined analysis of these indicators provides a more comprehensive understanding of team performance and success in modern football.

The author **reviews the literature** on ball possession and packing as two important indicators of team performance in modern football. It is emphasized that ball possession is influenced by several contextual factors, including match location, team quality, match status, and playing formation. The reviewed studies indicate that teams with higher ball possession generally demonstrate better offensive performance, greater passing accuracy, and a higher probability of success, although the relationship between possession and match outcomes remains inconclusive. The author also highlights that teams with lower possession often exhibit stronger defensive metrics and rely more on counterattacking strategies. Furthermore, the literature introduces **packing** as a relatively new performance indicator that quantifies the number of opponents bypassed through passes or ball progression actions. Existing studies suggest that packing is associated with offensive effectiveness and may predict team success as effectively as traditional indicators. Finally, the author concludes that integrating ball possession, packing, and physical performance variables provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding team performance and success in elite football.

Following the literature review, the author defines the **research problem** as the still inconclusive relationship between ball possession and team success, as well as the limited understanding of the role of packing as a modern performance indicator in football. The author also emphasizes the need to examine how these variables are associated with technical–tactical, physical, and success-related performance indicators. The **overall aim** of the study is to investigate the relationship between ball possession, packing rate, and team performance and success at the 2022 FIFA World Cup by integrating traditional and modern performance indicators.

The fourth chapter presents the research **hypotheses**, methods, variables, statistical procedures, and expected results. The author formulates a total of nine hypotheses:

H1a: Teams with higher ball possession will display higher values in passing volume, passing accuracy, and offensive metrics (shots and xG) than teams with lower ball possession.

H1b: Teams with lower ball possession will show a higher frequency of defensive actions (tackles, interceptions, and clearances) and a more frequent counterattacking pattern.

H1c: A higher level of ball possession will be positively associated with match success (wins, goals scored, and xG efficiency), although possession alone will not be sufficient to fully explain success.

H2a: Teams with a higher packing rate will create more goal-scoring opportunities (shots and xG) and score more goals than teams with a lower packing rate.

H2b: Packing rate will explain additional variance in offensive performance and success beyond that explained by ball possession.

H2c: A higher packing rate will be associated with more effective penetration through opponents' defensive lines and better xG efficiency.

H3a: Teams characterized by both high ball possession and high packing rate will exhibit the highest probability of match success and superior offensive indicators.

H3b: Teams with low possession but high packing rate will demonstrate a distinct tactical and physical profile, characterized by greater high-intensity running and sprinting, which are typical of counterattacking styles.

H3c: Physical running performance, particularly high-intensity running distance, will partially mediate the relationship between integrated possession–packing profiles and team success.

The primary data source will consist of official FIFA match statistics obtained from the FIFA World Cup 2022 database and the FIFA Training Centre. These data will include technical and tactical indicators such as ball possession percentage, number of passes, passing accuracy, forward passes, final-third entries, shots, shots on target, goals scored, defensive actions (tackles, interceptions, and clearances), and expected goals (xG).

In addition, packing rate data will be obtained from IMPECT or an equivalent performance analysis provider, allowing the assessment of offensive effectiveness through the number of opponents bypassed by passes or ball progression actions.

Furthermore, official FIFA tracking data will be incorporated to evaluate the physical performance of teams. These variables will include total distance covered, high-intensity running distance, sprint distance, and the number of sprints, enabling the analysis of teams' physical running profiles during matches.

By integrating technical–tactical, packing, and physical performance data, the study will enable comparative and explanatory analyses of different team profiles based on varying levels of ball

possession and packing rate, as well as their association with match success indicators, including match results, goals scored, and xG efficiency.

The **independent variables** are:

- ball possession (%),
- packing rate and
- integrated possession–packing profiles:
 - high possession–high packing,
 - high possession–low packing,
 - low possession–high packing and
 - low possession–low packing).

The **dependent variables** include:

- attacking indicators (shots, shots on target, expected goals and goals scored),
- passing indicators (number of passes, forward passes, pass accuracy and passes into the final third),
- defensive indicators (tackles, interceptions, clearances and turnovers),
- success indicators (match result, goal difference and xG efficiency) and
- physical running indicators (total distance covered, high-intensity running, sprint frequency and sprint distance).

In addition, **covariates** such as opponent ranking, tournament phase, and ball possession are included to control for contextual influences on performance outcomes.

To test these hypotheses, the author applies a comprehensive set of statistical procedures. **Descriptive statistics** (means, standard deviations, ranges, and distribution plots) are used to summarize the data, while **Pearson and Spearman correlation analyses** examine relationships between performance variables. Differences between groups are assessed using **t-tests, ANOVA/MANOVA, and Kruskal–Wallis tests**, whereas linear, logistic, multinomial logistic, and hierarchical regression models are employed to determine the predictive value of ball possession and packing rate for various performance and success indicators. In addition, **generalized linear models, chi-square tests, post-hoc comparisons (Bonferroni)**, and **mediation analyses** are performed to further explore the relationships among tactical, physical, and success-related variables.

Finally, the author expects that teams characterized by higher ball possession and packing rates will exhibit superior offensive performance and greater match success, while physical running performance is anticipated to partially mediate these relationships and contribute to explaining differences in team effectiveness.

The author states that the **main scientific contribution** of this study lies in integrating traditional (ball possession) and modern (packing rate) performance indicators to provide a more comprehensive understanding of team performance and success in elite football. Furthermore, by analyzing all matches of the 2022 FIFA World Cup and combining tactical, technical, and physical variables, the study is expected to offer new insights into the

relationships among possession, offensive penetration, running performance, and match outcomes. Finally, the author emphasizes that the findings may have important practical implications for coaches, performance analysts, and sport scientists by supporting evidence-based decision-making in tactical planning, match analysis, and training design.

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CONCLUSION

The topic of Mehdi Amini Farsani's doctoral dissertation and the planned research aim to address important questions related to the role of ball possession and packing rate as traditional and modern performance indicators in elite football. The proposed research focuses on examining their relationships with technical–tactical performance, physical running indicators, and match success during the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

In preparing the dissertation proposal, relevant scientific literature was used, encompassing studies on ball possession, tactical efficiency, physical performance, and the recently introduced concept of packing in football analytics. The research problem is clearly defined, the objectives and hypotheses are well formulated, and the proposed methodology is thoroughly described and aligned with the stated aims. In particular, the study adopts a comprehensive approach by integrating technical, tactical, and physical performance indicators within a single analytical framework.

The expected results of the research are anticipated to contribute to a deeper understanding of how ball possession and packing rate influence team performance and success in elite football. Furthermore, the findings may provide valuable practical implications for coaches, performance analysts, and sport scientists by supporting evidence-based decision-making in tactical planning, match analysis, and training design.

We propose that the Teaching and Scientific Council of the Faculty accept the Committee's Report and adopt the draft decision approving the doctoral dissertation topic with the suggestion to the candidate to partly change the title in the Serbian language, so that instead of **“Komparativna analiza poseda lopte i prodora kroz odbranu na učinak i uspeh ekipa na Svetskom prvenstvu FIFA 2022”**, the title of the doctoral dissertation should be **“Komparativna analiza poseda lopte i direktnosti u progresiji napada na učinak i uspeh ekipa na Svetskom prvenstvu FIFA 2022”**, and, in accordance with positive legal regulations, refer the proposal to the Council of Social and Human Sciences for further consideration.

Proposal of the mentor, the mentor's consents and a list of their publications

Considering the nature of the problem proposed by the candidate as the topic of his doctoral dissertation, as well as the cooperation established during the preparation of the research, we propose that the following be appointed as mentors in the realization of the doctoral dissertation: **Dr. Dejan Suzović**, Full Professor at the University of Belgrade - Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, and **Dr. Filipe Manuel Batista Clemente**, Research Center in Sports Sciences, Health Sciences and Human Development (CIDESD), Polytechnic University of Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal.

- **Dejan Suzović, Ph.D.**, full professor, meets the requirements of the Standards for Accreditation of Doctoral Study Programs and agrees to be the mentor in the realization of Mehdi Amni Farsani's doctoral dissertation on the proposed topic. A list of selected papers that Dr. Dejan Suzović, full professor, published in international scientific journals in the last 10 years, which by their topic belong to the scientific field of Physical Education and Sport, and which are closely related to the proposed topic:
 1. Curovic, I., Grecic, D., Lekic, A., Suzovic, D., Toskic, L. & Curovic, I. Between words and practice: a qualitative exploration of physical literacy understanding and application, *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, vol. 7 (2025), doi: 10.3389/fspor.2025.1703265
 2. Vojinovic A, Janicijevic D, Petrovic R. M, Garcia-Ramos A, Simic M, and Suzovic D. Free weight training vs. elastic band training: what is a more effective strategy for increasing maximal velocity ability during handball throws? *Kinesiology* 55(2023) 1:21-29
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 4. García Ramos A, Suzovic D, Pérez-Castilla A. (2019). The load-velocity profiles of three upper-body pushing exercises in men and women, *Sports Biomechanics*, 12:1-13
 5. Zivkovic M, Djuric S, Cuk I, Suzovic D & Jaric S. (2017). muscle force-velocity relationships observed in four different functional tests, *Journal of Human Kinetics*, vol. 56/2017, 39-49.
 6. Zivkovic M, Djuric S, Cuk I, Suzovic D & Jaric S. (2017). A simple method for assessment of muscle force, velocity, and power producing capacities from functional movement tasks, *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 35:13, 1287-1293,
 7. Markovic P, Suzovic D, Kasum G and Jaric S. (2016). Effects of training against elastic resistance on jab punch performance in elite junior athletes, *Kinesiology* 48(2016)1:79-86,
- **Dr. Filipe Manuel Batista Clemente** is a Portuguese professor and researcher in the field of Sport Sciences, meets the requirements prescribed by the Standards for Accreditation of Doctoral Study Programmes and has agreed to serve as a mentor in the realization of Mehdi Amini Farsani's doctoral dissertation on the proposed topic. Based on his scientific achievements, he is considered one of the most productive researchers in football science over the last decade. Professor Filipe Clemente is the author or co-author of more than 330 papers published in international scientific journals and ranks among the most highly cited researchers in the field of football. His research interests and previous scientific work demonstrate the highest level of competence for mentoring the proposed doctoral dissertation topic. The following is a list of selected papers published by Dr. Filipe Clemente in international scientific journals over the last ten years, whose subject matter falls within the scientific field of Physical Education and Sport and is closely related to the proposed doctoral dissertation topic:

1. Clemente, F. M., Sarmento, H., & Aquino, R. (2020). Player position relationships with centrality in the passing network of World Cup soccer teams: Win/loss match comparisons. *Chaos, Solitons & Fractals*, 133, 109625. [JCR Impact Factor: 5.944; Quartile 1 Mathematics, interdisciplinary; Quartile 1 Physics, mathematical; JIF RANK 4/108 Mathematics, Interdisciplinary Applications TOP 5%]
2. Clemente, F. M., Sarmento, H., Praça, G. M., Nikolaidis, P. T., Rosemann, T., & Knechtle, B. (2019). Variations of network centralities between playing positions in favourable and unfavourable close and unbalanced scores during the 2018 FIFA World Cup. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 1802. [JCR Impact Factor: 2.067; Quartile 2 Psychology, Multidisciplinary]
3. Clemente, F. M., Praça, G., Brecht, S., van der Linden, C. M. I., & Serra-Olivares, J. (2019). External load variations between medium-and large-sided soccer games: ball possession games vs regular games with small goals. *Journal of Human Kinetics*, 70, 201-208. [JCR Impact Factor: 1.664; Quartile 3 Sport Sciences]
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Committee members:

Dr. Bojan Leontijević, full professor,
University of Belgrade – Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, chair

Dr. Radivoj Mandić, associate professor,
University of Belgrade – Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, member

Dr. Zoran Milanović, full professor,
University of Niš – Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, member