ELITE WATER POLO: A TECHNICAL AND TACTICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CENTRE FORWARD ROLE
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Introduction
Since its origin in the late 1800s, water polo evolved considerably over time according to the different rules adopted, which influence tremendously the physical and technical demands of players (Hughes et al., 2006; Smith, 1989; Smith, 1998). Furthermore, players’ skills and abilities vary according to the different roles. In particular with respect to other playing roles, centre forwards are more often in contact with opponents, frequently alternate horizontal and vertical body positions, and intense and all-out performances (Smith, 1991). Considering the crucial role of the centre forwards, the aim of this study was to analyze the technical and tactical aspects of their playing.

Methods
A notational analysis of 11 elite men’s water-polo matches (7 Italian Championship and 4 Champions League) was performed from VHS recordings. According to the number of players of the attacking and defending teams, the actions were categorized as even-play, counter attack, and man-up play. During even-play, the technical and tactical aspects of the centre forwards were examined, considering the occurrence of the following indicators: goal, shot with no goal (corner, block out, rebound in, saved or out), exclusion achieved, offensive fault, ball steal, bad pass to the centre. Preliminarily, an ANOVA ascertained that no difference (p<.05) was present between the Italian Championship and Champions League matches. Thus, data were pooled.

Results
The frequency of occurrence of actions was 76.28+/-4.85%, 3.43+/-2.61%, and 20.28+/-3.77% for even-play, counter attack, and man-up play, respectively. The centre forwards concluded 45.1+/-8.4% of the even-play actions. Considering only the indicators selected for the centre forwards, goal, no goal shot, exclusion achieved, offensive fault, ball steal, bad pass to the centre represented 6.7+/-7.4%, 7.2+/-6.5%, 41.4+/-12.2%, 17.9+/-8.8%, 16.6+/-10.3%, and 10.1+/-6.6% of total, respectively. Centre forwards also determined 67.58+/-17.16% of the exclusions fault, crucial to score a goal (even-play: n=36.79+/-18.73%; counter attack: n=7.52+/-7.70%; man-up: n=50.95+/-20.0%; penalty: n=4.74+/-7.89%).

Conclusions
The present data show that men’s water polo is highly dependent on the centre forward role. Despite it scores around 13% of total goals (around 29% of even-play), it determines the majority of exclusions fault achieved (around 68%), which in turn lead man-up actions strategies often ending with a goal (around 51%).

References
Keywords: Water Polo, Tactic, Game Analysis

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