

Abstract

Across the top six European football professional male leagues in the first twenty seasons of the 21st century, are champions top scorers, top defenders, both or none?

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The objective of this study was to analyse and compare the goals scored and goals conceded in the top six European football leagues (Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, England, and Germany) from 2001 to 2020. The champions in these leagues typically achieved a mean combination score (an indicator that factors in both attack and defence rankings) ranging from 1 to 1.40. Notably, the French and Italian leagues stood out as the only ones where the variation coefficients of this combination score exceeded 50%, with percentages of 71% and 59%, respectively, in contrast to the other football leagues. Further examination revealed significant distinctions between the Portuguese and French leagues compared to Italy concerning the best attack positions of the champions

($Z=3.196$; $p=0.01$; $\eta^2=0.123$). Similarly, when assessing defensive rankings, Portugal and Italy displayed notable differences from France ($Z=3.763$; $p=0.003$; $\eta^2=1.42$).

Additionally, the only two countries exhibiting substantial disparities in their positions for goals scored and conceded were France (with a stronger focus on attack than defence; $t=-3$; $p<0.01$; $d=2.236$) and Italy (prioritising defence over attack; $t=2.881$ $p<0.01$; $d=1.164$). Consequently, in the context of the French football league, superior attacking performance appeared to be a hallmark of champions. In contrast, in the Italian football league, champions traditionally excelled in defensive prowess, even if their performance in scoring goals was not on the same level.

Keywords: scored goals, conceded goals, football, performance indicators.