Relative Speed Monitoring and Conditioning Protocols in Elite Football

Integrating Relative Speed Bands, Sprint Exposure and Conditioning Load Targets

Author: Blake Ashby
Head of conditioning/sport science, Adelaide United Football Club

Abstract

Monitoring locomotor demands in elite football has traditionally relied on fixed absolute speed thresholds such as high-speed running (>19.8 km/hr) and sprinting (>25.2 km/hr. These metrics are commonly used in FIFA reporting frameworks and match analysis systems and provide useful benchmarking data for comparing player outputs across teams and competitions.

However, absolute thresholds may inadequately represent the physiological intensity experienced by individual athletes. Differences in maximal sprint speed (MSS) between players mean that the same absolute running speed may represent substantially different relative intensities.

Recent sport science literature has therefore proposed the use of relative speed thresholds expressed as percentages of maximal sprint speed to better quantify locomotor intensity in team sports.

This report outlines an applied monitoring framework integrating:

• Relative speed band monitoring
• Weekly sprint exposure protocols
• Seasonal conditioning load targets

I put forward a suggestion; The running intensity is categorised using three relative speed zones:

- Band 3: 55–70% MSS
- Band 4: 70–85% MSS
- Band 5: 85–100% MSS

These zones allow practitioners to monitor locomotor output relative to each athlete's sprint capacity. The framework also emphasises the importance of weekly sprint exposure >85% MSS, which has been associated with improved neuromuscular performance and reduced soft tissue injury risk.

The integration of absolute benchmarking metrics with relative athlete monitoring provides a comprehensive framework for managing speed exposure, conditioning loads and performance monitoring within elite football environments. With the ability for competition comparison when unanimous relative speed bands are decided upon.

1. Introduction

Elite football is characterised by intermittent bouts of high-intensity locomotor activity including sprinting, accelerations, decelerations and repeated high-speed running efforts (Barnes et al 2014). These actions frequently determine decisive moments in match play such as counterattacks, defensive recoveries and goal-scoring opportunities.

In order to monitor these physical demands, professional teams commonly utilise global positioning system (GPS) technology to quantify external training load.

Within football, running intensity has historically been categorised using absolute speed thresholds, most commonly:

Metric	Threshold
High-Speed Running	>19.8 km/hr
Sprinting	>25.2 km/hr

These thresholds have been widely used within FIFA performance reporting frameworks and match analysis systems (Bradley et al 2013).

Absolute thresholds provide several advantages, including:

- enabling comparisons between players and teams
- supporting large-scale league benchmarking
- assisting recruitment and opposition analysis

However, several limitations of absolute speed thresholds have been identified within the sport science literature. Elite football squads frequently demonstrate substantial variation in maximal sprint speed, with values often ranging between 29–36 km/hr within the same team.

As a result, a fixed speed threshold may represent significantly different physiological intensities between athletes. For example, running at 20 km/hr may represent a relatively high intensity for a slower athlete but only moderate intensity for a faster athlete. To address this limitation, researchers have proposed monitoring locomotor demands relative to each athlete's maximal sprint speed (MSS) (Buchheit & Simpson, 2017).

Relative monitoring allows practitioners to better quantify the true physiological intensity experienced by athletes during both training and competition.

2. Relative Speed Band Framework

Relative speed monitoring categorises locomotor intensity as a percentage of an athlete's maximal sprint speed. This approach allows running intensity to be expressed relative to individual athlete capacity.

The following relative speed band structure is proposed:

Band	Relative Speed	Interpretation
Band 3	55–70% MSS	Moderate intensity running
Band 4	70–85% MSS	High-speed running
Band 5	85–100% MSS	Sprint exposure

These thresholds align with several studies examining relative speed zones in team sports (Buchheit et al 2014; Harper et al 2021).

Derived locomotor metrics may also be calculated by combining speed bands:

Metric	Calculation
Relative Hard Running	Band 3 + Band 4
Relative High-Speed Running	Band 4 + Band 5
Sprint Exposure	Band 5

Relative monitoring provides several practical advantages for practitioners:

- improved individualisation of load monitoring
- more accurate interpretation of locomotor intensity
- improved training prescription
- better tracking of sprint exposure

Importantly, relative monitoring does not replace absolute thresholds but rather complements them. Absolute thresholds remain valuable for match benchmarking and league comparison, while relative metrics provide improved individual athlete monitoring. But, let's not forget with universal agreement relative speed bands can also be shared and compared amongst teams worldwide just like the absolute bands.

3. Weekly Sprint Exposure

Regular sprint exposure is considered a critical component of physical preparation in elite sports. High-speed running and sprinting place unique neuromuscular and mechanical demands on the musculotendinous system and are associated with both performance development and injury resilience. Several studies have demonstrated that consistent exposure to high-speed running may reduce hamstring injury risk in professional football players (Malone et al 2018; Duhig et al 2016). In addition to injury mitigation, sprinting contributes to improvements in neuromuscular coordination, horizontal/vertical force production, tendon stiffness and sprint mechanics, all of which are fundamental qualities for elite football performance (Morin et al 2015).

Within applied performance environments, it is therefore important that athletes are exposed to sprinting on a regular basis throughout the training cycle. However, the practical implementation of sprint exposure must also consider contextual factors such as fixture congestion, player availability, injury history and training load management. As a result, practitioners may want to adopt a weekly sprint exposure process that ensures athletes achieve at least one meaningful sprint stimulus within each 7 to 9-day exposure cycle.

A rolling Monday-Sunday monitoring structure may be used to guide this process. While match day (MD) varies depending on the competition schedule, maintaining a consistent weekly monitoring framework allows practitioners to track sprint exposure and also using a capturing process of a rolling seven-day averages can still capture physical preparation with the MD-to-MD training cycle.

Within this framework, sprint exposure is monitored using a structured weekly approach. A Monday-Sunday monitoring cycle is used as the primary reference point to maintain consistency in weekly reporting and provide a stable framework for interpreting athlete outputs. Although match day (MD) may vary throughout the season depending on competition scheduling, maintaining a consistent weekly monitoring window allows practitioners to assess whether athletes are receiving adequate high-speed exposure across a defined training cycle. In addition to this fixed weekly framework, rolling seven-day averages are also monitored to provide greater day-to-day insight into athlete workload. This approach allows practitioners to evaluate sprint exposure dynamically while still maintaining a consistent weekly reference point.

For athletes placed within an individualised or alternative sprint exposure process, sprint monitoring is also assessed across a match day to match day (MD–MD) cycle. This secondary monitoring approach aligns sprint exposure with the athlete’s competitive schedule and ensures that each player receives at least one meaningful speed stimulus within the period between matches. Within this framework, match play often provides the primary sprint stimulus during the week, particularly for players completing full match minutes. Pre-match warm-ups also provide an opportunity to expose athletes to high-speed running, as teams typically perform progressive sprint strides prior to kick-off. Players identified within the sprint exposure monitoring group may be encouraged to “open up” during these warm-up strides in order to maximise meaningful sprint exposure.

Following each match, practitioners review whether the athlete has achieved the required sprint exposure threshold within the monitoring cycle. If the athlete has not reached the minimum effective dose target, a post-match exposure may be implemented immediately following the match. These top-ups are typically minimal and controlled, such as a single stride performed across a rolling 40-60m distance at approximately 85-93% maximal sprint speed. This approach allows athletes to achieve their weekly sprint exposure target with minimal additional fatigue while still ensuring that the neuromuscular stimulus associated with high-speed running is maintained.

Within this monitoring structure, sprint exposure prescriptions are typically delivered using either a minimum effective dose or an optimal effective dose, depending on the weekly fixture schedule and recovery constraints.

Minimum Effective Dose (Short Turnaround)
During congested fixture periods or short turnaround weeks, the objective is simply to maintain exposure to high-speed running while minimising additional fatigue.

Minimum sprint exposure target:
60-80 m at 85-93% MSS

This may be achieved through:
• Two strides across a rolling 40 m
• First stride at roughly 80-85% MSS
• Second stride at roughly 85-93% MSS

This dosage ensures athletes maintain exposure to high-speed running while respecting the recovery constraints associated with congested match schedules. Sometimes if the turnaround is short, and the players that have achieved low volume of a medium intensity on MD, but align with main speed exposure process there could be room for 1 stride @ 85-93% with a sufficient warm up instead of the 2 on the main session. It's using your objective data and coaching intuition to follow your processes but know you can alter the method if the context fits.

Optimal Effective Dose (Normal Turnaround)
When the weekly schedule allows greater recovery time between matches, a larger sprint stimulus may be prescribed to maximise neuromuscular adaptation.

Optimal sprint exposure target:
80–120 m at >85–100% MSS

This may be achieved through:
• three strides across a rolling 40 m
• first stride at roughly 80–85% MSS
• second stride at roughly 85–93% MSS
• third stride at 93%+ MSS

This structure progressively increases sprint intensity across the strides, allowing athletes to safely build toward higher velocities while accumulating meaningful sprint exposure.

Individualised Application
Athletes may be placed within the alternative sprint exposure protocol based on a range of contextual factors including:

• previous soft tissue injury history
• athlete age

• training age and experience
• recent training loads
• medical staff recommendations

Using an MD-to-MD framework ensures that sprint exposure is distributed appropriately across the weekly cycle while still allowing practitioners to respond to individual athlete needs.

This approach allows teams to maintain a consistent minimum sprint stimulus across the squad while preserving flexibility to adjust sprint dosage according to weekly scheduling constraints and individual athlete profiles.

4. Seasonal Conditioning Framework

Managing conditioning loads across the competitive season is a central challenge within elite football environments. While match preparation remains the primary focus of in-season training, practitioners must also ensure that athletes maintain the physical capacities required to repeatedly meet the demands of competition. This requires a structured conditioning framework that balances performance preparation, load management and long-term athlete development.

Within the monitoring model proposed in this report, seasonal conditioning is guided using key locomotor metrics derived from GPS monitoring, including metres per minute, relative hard running (Band 3 + Band 4) and relative high-speed running (Band 4 + Band 5). These variables allow practitioners to track both the intensity and volume of locomotor activity, providing insight into whether athletes are maintaining the physical outputs required during competition.

A key principle underpinning this approach is that conditioning should not only prepare athletes for match day but also progressively develop their physical capacity over the course of the season. While tactical preparation and recovery strategies often dominate the in-season training schedule, carefully designed conditioning exposures can still produce meaningful physiological adaptations when implemented consistently.

<u>Pre-Season Conditioning Targets</u>
The primary objective of pre-season training is to develop athletes to workload capacities that exceed the demands of competition. Building athletes to locomotor outputs of approximately 130-150% of match demands creates a physiological buffer that improves tolerance to the stresses of competition. Research examining training load and injury risk has demonstrated that athletes with higher chronic workloads often demonstrate greater resilience to match demands and may be at reduced risk of injury when compared with athletes experiencing sudden spikes in workload (Gabbett, 2016; Malone et al 2017).

Achieving these conditioning targets during pre-season typically involves a combination of:
• structured running conditioning sessions
• tactical drills performed at higher intensities
• large-sided or transition-based games
• repeated high-speed running exposures

These training modalities allow practitioners to progressively increase locomotor loads while also maintaining football-specific movement patterns and decision-making demands.

<u>In-Season Conditioning Strategy</u>
Once the competitive season begins, the primary focus of the training week shifts toward match preparation. However, it remains important that athletes maintain the physical capacities developed during pre-season. If weekly training loads fall substantially below match demands, athletes may experience progressive reductions in aerobic capacity, neuromuscular performance and sprint readiness.

For this reason, in-season conditioning should focus on maintaining training intent and physiological stimulus, while recognising that the primary performance objective remains match readiness. Conditioning exposures during the competitive season should therefore aim to maintain key locomotor outputs while gradually building athlete capacity over time through consistent exposure to match-like intensities.

Importantly, this approach recognises that physical development does not need to stop once the season begins. Through careful planning and the use of targeted conditioning drills, athletes can continue to develop physiological qualities such as aerobic capacity, repeated sprint ability and locomotor efficiency across the competitive season.

<u>Key Conditioning Metrics</u>
Within this monitoring framework, several key locomotor variables are used to guide linear conditioning targets.

Metres per Minute
Metres per minute represents a simple but highly valuable indicator of session intensity. This metric reflects the rate at which locomotor work is performed and can provide insight into whether training drills replicate the intensity of match play. Practitioners often identify target metres-per-minute outputs associated with successful match performances and design training drills that replicate or exceed these intensities.

Achieving appropriate metres-per-minute values during training is particularly important during in-season conditioning sessions, where drill design must balance tactical objectives with physiological stimulus. Transition-based drills, large-sided games and repeat running conditioning circuits are often effective methods for achieving these targets.

Relative Hard Running (Band 3 + Band 4)
Relative hard running represents locomotor activity performed between 55-85% of maximal sprint speed and typically forms the largest component of high-intensity running during match play.

Typical match targets for relative hard running may range between:
800-1000 metres per match

Across a full training week, practitioners may aim to accumulate approximately:
1800-2000 metres of relative hard running

These volumes can be achieved through a combination of match play, tactical drills and structured conditioning sessions. Small-to-medium sided games, transition drills and repeat running conditioning blocks are commonly used to accumulate these distances while maintaining football specificity.

Monitoring relative hard running allows practitioners to track whether athletes are accumulating sufficient high-intensity locomotor volume to maintain match readiness.

Relative High-Speed Running (Band 4 + Band 5)

Relative high-speed running represents locomotor activity performed above 70% of maximal sprint speed and is particularly important for replicating match-specific sprint demands.

Typical match outputs for relative high-speed running may range between: 150-250 metres per match

Across a full training week, practitioners may aim to accumulate approximately: 350-450 metres of high-speed running

Training drills designed to expose athletes to high-speed running may include:
- transition-based tactical drills
- large-sided games with open space
- repeat sprint conditioning exercises
- structured speed exposure protocols

These drills allow athletes to accumulate meaningful high-speed locomotor exposure while maintaining tactical relevance.

Sprint Exposure (Band 5)

Sprint exposure represents locomotor activity performed above 85% of maximal sprint speed and is primarily monitored on a weekly basis rather than through fixed distance targets.

Sprint exposure may vary significantly depending on factors such as:
- fixture congestion
- athlete availability
- injury management
- tactical training priorities

For this reason, sprint exposure is typically monitored using weekly exposure protocols rather than strict distance targets. Ensuring athletes reach at least one meaningful sprint stimulus per week remains a key objective within the conditioning framework.

Practical Implementation

To achieve these locomotor targets, practitioners may utilise a variety of conditioning strategies throughout the training week. These may include:

- structured running conditioning sessions
- large-sided tactical games
- transition drills
- repeat sprint training
- positional conditioning circuits

By combining football-specific drills with targeted conditioning exposures, practitioners can ensure that athletes accumulate sufficient locomotor load while maintaining the tactical and technical objectives of the training session.

Monitoring these key variables across both training and match play allows performance staff to evaluate whether athletes are maintaining the physical outputs required for elite football performance.

Metric	Match Target	Weekly Target	Purpose
Metres/min	Match specific	Match specific	Intensity replication
Band 3+4	800-1000 m	1800-2000 m	Hard running capacity
Band 4+5	150-250 m	350-450 m	High-speed running exposure
Band 5	Weekly exposure	Protocol based	Sprint stimulus

5. Limitations of Absolute Speed Thresholds

Absolute thresholds may introduce monitoring bias when applied to athletes with different sprint capacities.

For example:

Athlete	MSS	Absolute Threshold	Relative Intensity
Athlete A	30 km/hr	19.8 km/hr	66% MSS
Athlete B	35 km/hr	19.8 km/hr	56% MSS

Although both athletes accumulate identical high-speed running distance, the relative physiological intensity differs substantially.

This discrepancy may result in:

- underestimation of workload in faster athletes
- overestimation of workload in slower athletes
- inaccurate interpretation of locomotor intensity

Relative monitoring corrects this limitation by expressing running intensity relative to maximal sprint speed.

6. Scope of Locomotor Monitoring: Linear vs Multidirectional Demands

The monitoring framework presented in this report focuses specifically on linear locomotor intensity, quantified using relative speed bands derived from maximal sprint speed (MSS). Metrics such as Band 3, Band 4 and Band 5 distance provide valuable insight into the intensity and volume of straight-line running performed by athletes during both training and competition.

However, it is important to recognise that football is a multidirectional sport, characterised not only by high-speed linear running but also by frequent accelerations, decelerations, changes of direction (COD), and reactive movements performed in multiple planes. While the present framework emphasises linear speed monitoring, it does not attempt to capture the full multidirectional physical demands associated with match play.

Modern athlete monitoring systems provide a range of additional metrics capable of quantifying these multidirectional demands. Some of the most commonly used variables we use include:

Metric	Description
Accelerations (>2 m/s)	Frequency of rapid speed increases
Decelerations (<−2 m/s)	Frequency of rapid braking actions
High-intensity accelerations (>3 m/s)	Explosive speed generation
High-intensity decelerations (<−3 m/s)	High mechanical braking loads
Acceleration–Deceleration Efforts	Combined explosive movement count
Metabolic Power	Estimation of energetic cost of acceleration-based movements

Accelerations and decelerations are particularly important in football because they represent substantial mechanical loading on the musculoskeletal system, particularly the quadriceps, hamstrings and tendon structures (Harper et al., 2019). Research has shown that high-intensity decelerations may impose greater mechanical stress than accelerations due to the eccentric braking forces involved. Similarly, change of direction actions require rapid adjustments in velocity and body orientation, placing unique demands on neuromuscular control and lower limb joint loading. These movements are fundamental to football performance, as players frequently accelerate, decelerate and change direction in response to tactical situations.

Despite their importance, these multidirectional locomotor metrics are not the primary focus of the current report. The purpose of this framework is specifically to examine linear speed exposure and conditioning loads, particularly in relation to high-speed running, sprint exposure and relative speed monitoring.

The decision to focus on linear locomotor metrics allows practitioners to develop clear guidelines for managing sprint exposure and conditioning loads across the weekly training cycle. However, it should be acknowledged that a comprehensive athlete monitoring system should ideally integrate both linear locomotor intensity metrics and multidirectional mechanical load metrics.

Future monitoring frameworks may therefore incorporate a broader range of variables including acceleration load, deceleration load and change of direction frequency to provide a more holistic representation of the physical demands of football.

Ultimately, while linear running metrics provide valuable insight into speed exposure and conditioning demands, they represent only one component of a much broader physical performance profile. A complete assessment of athlete workload should consider the interaction between linear running intensity, multidirectional mechanical load, tactical context and individual athlete capacity.

7. Discussion

The monitoring framework presented in this report integrates three core components of modern athlete monitoring in elite football: relative speed monitoring, structured sprint exposure protocols, and seasonal conditioning targets. Together, these elements provide practitioners with a practical model for managing locomotor load across both training and competition while maintaining exposure to the physical demands required for high-level football performance.

A central concept within this framework is the use of relative speed thresholds based on maximal sprint speed (MSS). Traditional monitoring systems have historically relied on fixed absolute speed thresholds to quantify high-speed running and sprinting activity. While these thresholds remain valuable for benchmarking performance across teams, competitions and positional groups, they may not accurately represent the physiological intensity experienced by individual athletes. Differences in sprint capacity within elite squads mean that the same running speed can represent substantially different relative intensities between players.

Relative speed monitoring addresses this limitation by expressing locomotor intensity as a percentage of an athlete's maximal sprint speed. This approach allows practitioners to better understand how close an athlete is operating to their physiological capacity during training and competition. In practice, this can improve the interpretation of GPS-derived locomotor metrics and support more individualised conditioning prescriptions.

However, the use of relative speed thresholds should not be interpreted as a replacement for absolute metrics. Absolute thresholds remain highly valuable for global competition benchmarking, scouting and match analysis, as they allow comparisons across teams and competitions using standardised reference points. In applied environments, the most effective monitoring systems often integrate both approaches, using absolute thresholds for benchmarking and relative thresholds for athlete-specific monitoring. As mentioned, if a uniformity of agreeance came to fruition with Relative Speed Bands percentages, then global competition benchmarking and scouting can be used for comparison across all teams and competitions.

The implementation of weekly sprint exposure protocols represents another key component of this monitoring framework. Exposure to high-speed running is not only important for performance development but also appears to play a role in maintaining tissue resilience and reducing injury risk. Previous research has demonstrated associations between regular sprint exposure and reduced hamstring injury incidence in professional football players. Beyond injury prevention, sprinting also stimulates neuromuscular adaptations including improvements in horizontal force production, sprint mechanics and tendon stiffness.

Within applied environments, the challenge for practitioners lies in ensuring that athletes receive adequate sprint exposure while still managing the recovery demands associated with congested competition schedules. The minimum and optimal sprint exposure protocols described in this report provide a structured method of achieving this balance. By adjusting sprint dosage according to weekly match scheduling, practitioners can maintain exposure to high-speed stimuli while minimising unnecessary fatigue.

The seasonal conditioning model outlined in this framework further emphasises the importance of maintaining locomotor capacity across the competitive season. Pre-season training periods provide a valuable opportunity to build athletes to workloads exceeding match demands. Developing players to approximately 130-150% of match locomotor outputs create a physiological buffer that improves resilience to the stresses of competition. However, once the season begins, maintaining these capacities becomes more challenging due to the increasing emphasis placed on tactical preparation and recovery.

Rather than abandoning conditioning development during the competitive season, the framework proposed in this report advocates for maintaining training intent and physiological stimulus throughout the year. Carefully designed conditioning exposures embedded within tactical drills, transition games and structured running sessions can help athletes maintain the locomotor outputs required for match performance. Over time, this approach allows practitioners to gradually build athlete capacity while still prioritising match readiness.

From a broader perspective, the evolution of athlete monitoring reflects a wider philosophical shift within sport science. Early monitoring systems were largely focused on describing workload, often through simple measures such as total distance covered. Advances in tracking technology have since allowed practitioners to capture increasingly detailed information about athlete movement patterns and physical outputs. However, the challenge moving forward is not simply collecting more data but rather developing frameworks that allow practitioners to interpret that data in meaningful ways.

Relative monitoring represents one example of this shift. Rather than viewing speed thresholds as fixed categories, relative monitoring recognises that athletic performance is inherently individual. Two athletes performing the same action may experience very different physiological demands depending on their individual capacities. A monitoring system that acknowledges these differences allows practitioners to better understand the true intensity of performance and to prescribe training loads more effectively.

Looking ahead, the future of athlete monitoring will likely involve increasingly integrated systems combining locomotor intensity metrics, multidirectional movement tracking, physiological monitoring and contextual match analysis. Technologies capable of measuring accelerations, decelerations and changes of direction already provide valuable insight into the multidirectional mechanical loads experienced by football players. When combined with relative speed monitoring and sprint exposure tracking, these systems may provide a more holistic understanding of athlete workload.

Ultimately, the goal of sport science is not merely to measure performance but to support better decision-making within the high-performance environment. Effective monitoring systems should therefore aim to simplify complex information into practical insights that can guide coaching decisions. The framework proposed in this report represents one applied example of how relative speed monitoring, sprint exposure management and conditioning load tracking can be integrated to support athlete development and performance in elite football.

8. Relative Sprint Exposure Index (RSEI)

Monitoring sprint exposure within elite football environments typically involves tracking peak running speed and the total distance accumulated at high velocities. While these metrics provide useful information independently, practitioners may benefit from a simple metric that integrates both sprint intensity and sprint volume into a single monitoring variable. To address this, the Relative Sprint Exposure Index (RSEI) is proposed as a practical tool that may assist practitioners in quantifying the weekly sprint stimulus experienced by athletes.

The RSEI combines the relative intensity of sprinting with the total volume of sprint exposure accumulated during a given monitoring period. It is calculated using the following formula:
RSEI = (Peak Speed / MSS) × Band 5 Distance

Where:

- Peak Speed represents the highest velocity achieved during the monitoring period
- MSS (Maximal Sprint Speed) represents the athlete’s maximal sprint capacity
- Band 5 Distance represents the distance covered at speeds greater than 85% of MSS

By combining these variables, the RSEI attempts to provide a simplified representation of the overall sprint stimulus achieved within a given week. This concept aligns with broader sport science principles suggesting that training stimulus is influenced not only by the volume of work performed but also the relative intensity at which it is executed (Buchheit & Laursen, 2013). Sprint exposure research has also highlighted the importance of athletes regularly reaching near-maximal velocities to maintain neuromuscular readiness and tissue resilience (Malone et al 2018).

From an applied perspective, the potential advantage of the RSEI is that it allows practitioners to capture both how fast an athlete ran and how much sprint exposure they accumulated within the same metric. Traditional monitoring approaches may track peak speed and sprint distance separately, which can make it difficult to interpret the overall sprint stimulus achieved across the weekly training cycle. By combining these variables, the RSEI may provide a clearer snapshot of the sprint stimulus experienced by the athlete.

However, it is important to recognise that the RSEI should not be viewed as a validated scientific metric but rather as a practical applied monitoring concept. While the individual components of the equation are supported by existing research, the combined index itself has not yet been empirically validated within the sport science literature. As such, the metric should be interpreted with caution and used alongside other established monitoring variables rather than as a standalone indicator of athlete readiness or load.

Another limitation of the RSEI is that it focuses exclusively on linear sprint exposure and does not account for multidirectional mechanical loads such as accelerations, decelerations or changes of direction. These movements contribute substantially to the mechanical stress experienced by football players and are often associated with high eccentric loading. Therefore, a comprehensive monitoring system should ideally integrate both linear sprint exposure metrics and multidirectional movement metrics to provide a more holistic representation of athlete workload.

Despite these limitations, the RSEI may offer value as an applied monitoring tool within elite football environments. The metric provides a simple and intuitive method for evaluating whether athletes are receiving adequate sprint stimulus across the weekly training cycle. For example, practitioners may identify athletes with low RSEI scores and consider implementing additional sprint exposure through structured speed drills or post-session top-up runs.

In this sense, the RSEI should be viewed not as a definitive scientific measure but rather as a practical monitoring concept that may help guide decision-making within high-performance environments. As with many applied performance metrics, its true value may lie in how effectively it helps practitioners interpret athlete workloads and communicate information within the coaching and medical team.

Future research may explore whether composite metrics such as the RSEI provide meaningful insight into sprint exposure patterns and whether they are associated with performance outcomes or injury risk. Until such evidence is available, practitioners interested in implementing the metric within their monitoring systems are encouraged to treat it as an exploratory tool that complements existing monitoring approaches.

Ultimately, the goal of athlete monitoring is not simply to generate more data but to provide clearer insights that support better decision-making. If a composite metric such as the RSEI helps practitioners better understand sprint exposure and guide training prescription within their environment, then its practical value may justify its inclusion within the broader athlete monitoring framework.

9. Conclusion

The purpose of this report was to outline a practical framework for monitoring speed exposure and conditioning load in elite football environments through the integration of relative speed monitoring, structured sprint exposure protocols and seasonally aligned conditioning targets. The framework presented in this report aims to provide practitioners with a clear and applied approach for managing locomotor demands while ensuring athletes maintain the physical capacities required to perform in the modern game.

A central objective of this model is the implementation of relative speed thresholds based on maximal sprint speed (MSS) across the performance monitoring system. While traditional absolute speed thresholds remain valuable for benchmarking performance and analysing match demands across competitions, relative speed bands allow practitioners to better interpret locomotor intensity at the individual athlete level. By expressing running speeds as a percentage of maximal sprint speed, practitioners can more accurately understand how close athletes are operating to their physiological capacity during both training and competition. Integrating relative monitoring within the performance environment therefore provides a more individualised and meaningful interpretation of athlete workload.

In addition to improving load monitoring, this report emphasises the importance of maintaining consistent sprint exposure within the weekly training cycle. Sprinting represents one of the most demanding physical actions performed by football players and places unique stresses on the neuromuscular and musculoskeletal systems. Historically, sprint exposure has often been discussed primarily from an injury prevention perspective. However, the framework outlined in this report highlights that sprint exposure should also be viewed as a performance development opportunity.

Regular exposure to high-speed running provides a stimulus for a range of physiological adaptations, including improvements in neuromuscular coordination, sprint mechanics, tendon stiffness and horizontal force production. These adaptations are essential for the development of high-level athletic performance. Within the context of elite football, where the speed of the game continues to increase, ensuring athletes are consistently exposed to high-speed running may therefore play an important role in maintaining both performance capacity and physical robustness.

The conditioning framework presented in this report also reflects the importance of long-term physical development across the competitive season. While match preparation remains the primary objective during in-season training, practitioners should not overlook opportunities to continue developing athlete capacity over time. Carefully designed conditioning exposures embedded within tactical training can help maintain key locomotor outputs while gradually building physical capacity across the season. This approach recognises that athlete development is a continuous process rather than something confined solely to the pre-season period.

At a broader level, the monitoring philosophy underpinning this report is grounded in the principles of robustness and resilience. The goal of high-performance preparation is not simply to prepare athletes for the next match, but to build players capable of repeatedly tolerating the physical demands of the sport over long competitive seasons. Developing robust athletes requires exposure to the very stimuli that define the sport itself. In football, this includes the ability to accelerate, decelerate and sprint at high velocities in response to the unpredictable demands of match play.

Within this context, weekly sprint exposure can be viewed as a logical and necessary component of athletic preparation. If sprinting represents one of the most demanding physical actions in the sport, then regularly exposing athletes to this stimulus provides an opportunity to continually develop the physiological and mechanical qualities required to perform at the highest level.

Ultimately, the framework outlined in this report represents an applied model designed to support decision-making within elite football environments. By integrating relative speed monitoring, structured sprint exposure and targeted conditioning loads, practitioners can better manage athlete workload while supporting the long-term development of speed, conditioning and physical resilience.

As the physical demands of football continue to evolve, monitoring systems must also adapt to ensure that athletes are prepared for the realities of the modern game. Building players with the speed, endurance and robustness required to meet these demands remains one of the fundamental objectives of high-performance sport science.

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