

Effectiveness of Sliding Tackles in the First Round of the FIFA World Cup 2006

Shigeru Sekine*, Kouzou Ogawa** and Yoshimi Nakatsuka***

*Horikoshi High School

2-56-2 Chuo, Nakano, Tokyo 164-0011 Japan

fc.shigeru.1949@nifty.com

**Nippon Physical Education College

7-1-1 Fukazawa, Setagaya, Tokyo 158-8508 Japan

***University of Tsukuba Senior High School at Otsuka

1-9-1 Otsuka, Bunkyo, Tokyo 112-0012 Japan

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Soccer is a competitive sport in which teams aim to score as much as possible and concede as few goals as possible. Soccer players are therefore expected to have skill in intercepting their opponent's shots by making aggressive sliding tackles. In this study, the effectiveness of sliding tackles on defense and their influence on game results were clarified through an analysis of the games played by the top teams of the respective groups of the first round of the 2006 FIFA World Cup Germany. To be more specific, the frequencies, areas, and success ratios of the sliding tackles made by the teams and their opponents were analyzed. Based on the analysis data, the effectiveness of these sliding tackles and their influence on the game results were evaluated. This study has revealed that the top teams of the respective groups of the first round of the 2006 World Cup utilized sliding tackles more effectively than their opponent teams did.

Keywords: Sliding Tackle, Game Analysis, Defense, FIFA World Cup 2006, 1stRound

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1. Introduction

Soccer is one of the world's most popular sports. It is played with the aim of scoring goals, and victory is won by scoring more goals than the opposing team does. At the final whistle, supporters for the winning team scream with delight and vigorously applaud the players, who wave to them to express appreciation for their support. As Desmond Morris says in *The Soccer Tribe*, this is the moment when all the team players, staff and fans become intoxicated in perfect unison with the charm of soccer.

In soccer games, it is important to try to score goals and, at the same time, not to concede goals to the opponent team. With defense tactics formulated specifically against the opponent, each team plays while aiming to concede no goals. In order to obtain the ball, players tend to put the opponent under pressure by intercepting the ball aggressively while it is still in the opponent's area, and individual players are required to have skill in making sliding tackles boldly in order to block the opponent's shots.

It is of merit, therefore, to undertake an empirical study on the effectiveness of sliding tackles and their influence on game results through an analysis of international soccer competitions.

2. Aim of Study

With the aim of clarifying how sliding tackles affect defense and game results, games of the 2006 FIFA World Cup Germany (hereinafter referred to as the World Cup), in which world-class soccer teams competed, were investigated and analyzed in this study. To be more specific, three games of the first round played by the top team of each first-round group were examined in order to analyze the sliding tackles attempted in the games in terms of frequency, area, and success. Based on the analysis thereof, the effects of sliding tackles on defense and game results were evaluated.

Prior to the start of the investigation, it was predicted that the teams which won the first round at the top of their respective groups would have utilized

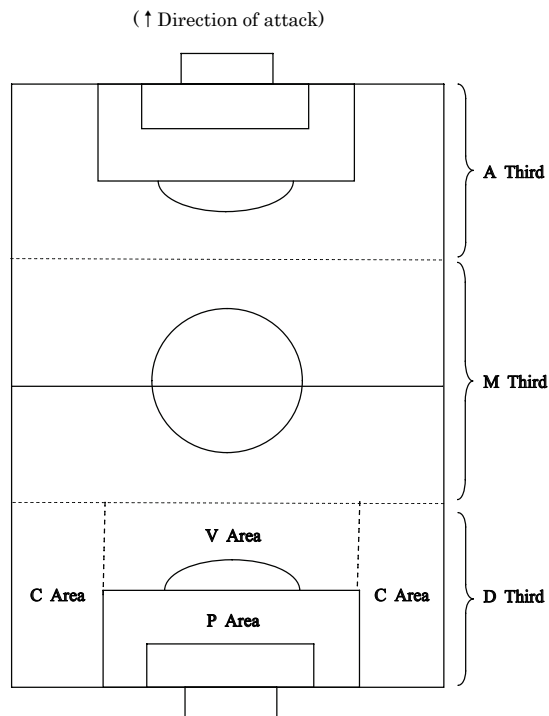


Figure 1 Areas used for analyses

sliding tackles more effectively than their opponents had during the course of the individual games.

3. Methodology

3.1. Subjects and Materials

All 64 games of the World Cup 2006, which were broadcast by NHK Satellite, were recorded on video. The three games of the first round played by each of the teams that ended the first round at the top of the respective groups (Groups A – H) were investigated as the subjects of this study.

3.2. Analysis method

Area-based sliding tackles attempted by the subject teams and their opponents were classified by team. The areas of the pitch are as shown in **Figure 1**.

The touchline of the pitch (105 meters long) was evenly divided into thirds; namely, the defending third (D third), the middle third (M third), and the attacking third (A third). The D third was divided into the penalty area (P), the vital area (V), being vital to a successful middle-distance shot or through pass, and the remaining two areas (C) being respectively located outside of P and V areas along touchlines. The frequency and success of the

sliding tackles attempted in each of these areas were analyzed. Sekine, an S-level licentiate officially authorized by the Japan Football Association, judged the success or failure of each of the sliding tackles from a unified viewpoint throughout the games. The judgment standards for sliding tackles were as follows:

- Success
 - When a sliding tackle contributed to:
 - blocking a shot.
 - intercepting a pass.
 - cutting a dribble.
 - limiting the dribble direction. (The player who covered took the ball from the opponent.)
 - taking the loose ball from an opponent.
 - delaying the attack of the opponent.
 - leading the opponent to fail in making a shot or pass.
- Failure
 - A player attempting to make a sliding tackle was unable to touch the ball at all.
 - An attempted sliding tackle allowed the opponent to have a free kick. (The sliding tackle ended up being judged a foul.)
 - An attempted sliding tackle gave the team no advantage, allowing the opposing team to maintain possession of the ball.
- Not counted
 - A shot or a pass that was made by a sliding tackle. (However, if a pass was made through a sliding tackle attempted while scrambling for the ball, the sliding tackle was counted as successful.)

4. Results and Speculation

The results of each group in the first round are as shown in **Tables 1-8**. The Tables indicate that the top team of each group had stable defense capability with the smallest number of goals conceded in the group. The defense capability of Switzerland (**Table 7**) was particularly notable. It won the first round with no goals conceded, though its total score was lower than that of any of the other top teams in the first round. (Naito, K. ed.; "A Complete News Flash" in *WE-ELe*, an extra edition issued in September 2006 by Konami Digital Entertainment); ("2006 FIFA World Cup Germany: The 4th Victory for Italy," *Technical News*

Table 1 Group A

Ranking	Team	Pts	GF	GA	GD
1	Germany	9	8	2	+6
2	Ecuador	6	5	3	+2
3	Poland	3	2	4	-2
4	Costa Rica	0	3	9	-6

Table 3 Group C

Ranking	Team	Pts	GF	GA	GD
1	England	7	8	1	+7
2	Netherlands	7	3	1	+2
3	Côte d'Ivoire	3	5	6	-1
4	Serbia and Montenegro	0	2	10	-8

Table 5 Group E

Ranking	Team	Pts	GF	GA	GD
1	Italy	7	5	1	+4
2	Ghana	6	4	3	+1
3	Czech Republic	3	3	4	-1
4	USA	1	2	6	-4

Table 7 Group G

Ranking	Team	Pts	GF	GA	GD
1	Switzerland	7	4	0	+4
2	France	5	3	1	+2
3	Korea Republic	4	3	4	-1
4	Togo	0	1	6	-5

Pts = total points accumulated/ GF = total goals scored/ GA = total goals conceded/ GD = goal difference (GF - GA)

no. 14, July 2006, p2-6, Japan Football Association)

Regarding the games played by the top team of each group in the first round, the area-based number of sliding tackles and number of successful sliding tackles are shown in **Tables 9-16**. In each game, the upper cells show the success ratios of the sliding tackles implemented by the top team against the opposing team, while the bottom cells show the success ratios of the sliding tackles implemented by the opposing team against the top team. The figures in each cell represent the number of successful sliding tackles / number of sliding tackles and the success ratio (%), which is given in parentheses. Regarding the three games of the first round played by the top team of each group, the area-based total numbers of sliding tackles and success ratios are shown in **Tables 17-24**. The total number of sliding tackles and the success ratios of the 8 top teams are shown in **Table 25**.

The group-based analysis results are shown below with the speculations of the researcher.

Table 2 Group B

Ranking	Team	Pts	GF	GA	GD
1	England	7	5	2	+3
2	Sweden	5	3	2	+1
3	Paraguay	3	2	2	0
4	Trinidad and Tobago	1	0	4	-4

Table 4 Group D

Ranking	Team	Pts	GF	GA	GD
1	Portugal	9	5	1	+4
2	Mexico	4	4	3	+1
3	Angola	2	1	2	-1
4	Iran	1	2	6	-4

Table 6 Group F

Ranking	Team	Pts	GF	GA	GD
1	Brazil	9	7	1	+6
2	Australia	4	5	5	0
3	Croatia	2	2	3	-1
4	Japan	1	2	7	-5

Table 8 Group H

Ranking	Team	Pts	GF	GA	GD
1	Spain	9	8	1	+7
2	Ukraine	6	5	4	+1
3	Tunisia	1	3	6	-3
4	Saudi Arabia	1	2	7	-5

4.1. Analysis of the individual games of the first round

Group A: Germany (See Table 9)

- The first game: against Costa Rica

Germany was quick in its transiting between attack and defense. Mounting a defense in the area that was far from their opponent's goal and adjusting their respective positions, Germany took the ball from Costa Rica and attacked aggressively. Though not such a large number in total, most of Germany's sliding tackles were made in the M third or the A third of the field, as shown in **Table 9**. The low success ratio of the sliding tackles they attempted in the P area and the team's failure to make sliding tackles when they were expected to against Costa Rica's shots, however, led to their conceding goals. Meanwhile, because of the need to suppress Germany's speedy attack (including their shots), Costa Rica was prompted to make sliding tackles a number of times in the D third.

- The second game: against Poland

Against Poland, who had regarded this game as

Table 9 Sliding tackles made in the games played by Germany in Group A
Number of successful sliding tackles/ number of sliding tackles (Success ratio)

Germany		D third				M third	A third	Total
		P	V	C	Subtotal			
Against Costa Rica W: 4 - 2	G	1/3(33%)	0	1/1(100%)	2/4(50%)	7/10(70%)	3/5(60%)	12/19(63%)
	C	4/7(57%)	3/4(75%)	4/4(100%)	11/15(73%)	2/9(22%)	0	13/24(54%)
Against Poland W: 1 - 0	G	2/2(100%)	4/4(100%)	2/2(100%)	8/8(100%)	6/11(55%)	3/4(75%)	17/23(74%)
	P	5/7(71%)	2/3(67%)	3/6(50%)	10/16(63%)	5/11(45%)	1/2(50%)	16/29(55%)
Against Ecuador W: 3 - 0	G	1/1(100%)	4/6(67%)	7/9(78%)	12/16(75%)	8/10(80%)	0	20/26(77%)
	E	1/2(50%)	3/5(60%)	1/3(33%)	5/10(50%)	5/8(63%)	0	10/18(56%)

Table 10 Sliding tackles made in the games played by England in Group B

England		D third				M third	A third	Total
		P	V	C	Subtotal			
Against Paraguay W: 1 - 0	E	0	5/5(100%)	3/5(60%)	8/10(80%)	9/10(90%)	2/4(50%)	19/24(79%)
	P	3/3(100%)	2/2(100%)	2/2(100%)	7/7(100%)	5/9(56%)	0/2(0%)	12/18(67%)
Against Trinidad and Tobago W: 2 - 0	E	0	3/3(100%)	1/1(100%)	4/4(100%)	6/10(60%)	2/3(67%)	12/17(71%)
	T	2/2(100%)	3/6(50%)	2/2(100%)	7/10(70%)	3/7(43%)	0	10/17(59%)
Against Sweden W: 3 - 0	E	4/5(80%)	2/3(67%)	3/6(50%)	9/14(64%)	2/3(67%)	4/6(67%)	15/23(65%)
	S	1/3(33%)	3/4(75%)	0/2(0%)	4/9(44%)	1/10(10%)	3/3(100%)	8/22(36%)

Table 11 Sliding tackles made in the games played by Argentina in Group C

Argentina		D third				M third	A third	Total
		P	V	C	Subtotal			
Against Cote d'Ivoire W: 2 - 1	A	4/6(67%)	2/4(50%)	6/9(67%)	12/19(63%)	7/11(64%)	2/3(67%)	21/33(64%)
	C	1/1(100%)	0/1(0%)	1/1(100%)	2/3(67%)	2/5(40%)	1/1(100%)	5/9(56%)
Against Serbia and Montenegro W: 6 - 0	A	2/2(100%)	2/2(100%)	4/4(100%)	8/8(100%)	1/5(20%)	0	9/13(69%)
	S	1/4(25%)	0/2(0%)	1/1(100%)	2/7(29%)	5/12(42%)	0/4(0%)	7/23(30%)
Against Netherlands D: 0 - 0	A	1/1(100%)	5/6(83%)	4/5(80%)	10/12(83%)	5/7(71%)	0	15/19(79%)
	N	3/3(100%)	2/3(67%)	4/5(80%)	9/11(81%)	4/8(50%)	2/2(100%)	15/21(71%)

Table 12 Sliding tackles made in the games played by Portugal in Group D

Portugal		D third				M third	A third	Total
		P	V	C	Subtotal			
Against Angola W: 1 - 0	P	0	2/3(67%)	0	2/3(67%)	11/18(61%)	0/1(0%)	13/22(59%)
	A	0/3(0%)	4/5(80%)	4/6(67%)	8/14(57%)	6/13(46%)	0/3(0%)	14/30(47%)
Against Iran W: 2 - 0	P	1/1(100%)	0	3/5(60%)	4/6(67%)	11/19(58%)	2/2(100%)	17/27(63%)
	I	3/5(60%)	4/5(80%)	11/13(85%)	18/23(78%)	5/12(42%)	0/1(0%)	23/36(64%)
Against Mexico W: 2 - 1	P	3/5(60%)	1/2(50%)	2/4(50%)	6/11(55%)	6/9(67%)	0	12/20(60%)
	M	1/1(100%)	0/2(0%)	1/2(50%)	2/5(40%)	1/8(13%)	2/4(50%)	5/17(29%)

Table 13 Sliding tackles made in the games played by Italy in Group E

Italy		D third				M third	A third	Total
		P	V	C	Subtotal			
Against Ghana W: 2 - 0	I	2/2(100%)	2/3(67%)	4/4(100%)	8/9(89%)	6/8(75%)	2/2(100%)	16/19(84%)
	G	5/7(71%)	1/2(50%)	1/3(33%)	7/12(58%)	5/7(71%)	0/4(0%)	12/23(52%)
Against USA D: 1 - 1	I	3/3(100%)	1/2(50%)	1/2(50%)	5/7(71%)	2/5(40%)	0	7/12(58%)
	U	1/1(100%)	2/4(50%)	3/5(60%)	6/10(60%)	7/11(64%)	1/1(100%)	14/22(64%)
Against Czech W: 2 - 0	I	1/1(100%)	2/3(67%)	3/4(75%)	6/8(75%)	5/11(45%)	1/1(100%)	12/20(60%)
	C	0/3(0%)	2/3(67%)	0	2/6(33%)	3/5(60%)	2/3(67%)	7/14(50%)

their final chance to survive the first round, Germany played dominantly with excellent defense as well as offense. Throughout the game, the two teams struck back and force each other, implementing sliding tackles in every area of the pitch. With 100% of the success ratio of sliding tackles in the D third, Germany won the game, conceding no goals to Poland. The gross success ratio of Germany's sliding tackles was 74% (Table 9).

- The third game: against Ecuador

Germany put a great deal of pressure on Ecuador in the midfield in order to counteract their attack at the early stage of the game. This was reflected in the high success ratio (80%) of Germany's sliding tackles in the M third. The success ratio of their sliding tackles in the P area was 100%. Germany did not allow Ecuador to score any goals. In order not to allow Ecuador to send a cross, Germany attempted sliding tackles in the C area more often (9 times) than they had done in any of their previous games. Meanwhile, the success ratio of Ecuador's sliding tackles was as low as 50%, a ration that was reflected in the game result.

Group B: England (see Table 10)

- The first game: against Paraguay

Paraguay defended steadily, remaining alert for any chance to counterattack. Trying to mount a defense in the area which was away from the opponent's goal, England put considerable pressure on Paraguay with sliding tackles made in the A third. England also made sliding tackles in the M third to counteract Paraguay's attack at the early stage (success ratio: 90%), England played dominantly throughout the game. The success ratio of the sliding tackles they made against the shots in the V area was 100%. With the gross success ratio of sliding tackles being 79%, England allowed Paraguay

Table 14 Sliding tackles made in the games played by Brazil in Group F

Brazil		D third				M third	A third	Total
		P	V	C	Subtotal			
Against Croatia W: 1 - 0	B	2/4(50%)	2/3(67%)	1/1(100%)	5/8(63%)	8/9(89%)	1/2(50%)	14/19(74%)
	C	0	2/2(100%)	3/5(60%)	5/7(71%)	11/22(50%)	1/1(100%)	17/30(57%)
Against Australia W: 2 - 0	B	3/3(100%)	6/7(86%)	4/6(67%)	13/16(81%)	2/4(50%)	0	15/20(75%)
	A	3/5(60%)	5/6(83%)	2/4(50%)	10/15(67%)	2/3(67%)	1/1(100%)	13/19(68%)
Against Japan W: 4 - 1	B	2/3(67%)	3/4(75%)	1/1(100%)	6/8(75%)	5/5(100%)	0/1(0%)	11/14(79%)
	J	2/5(40%)	3/6(50%)	0	5/11(45%)	7/14(50%)	2/4(50%)	14/29(48%)

Table 15 Sliding tackles made in the games played by Switzerland in Group G

Switzerland		D third				M third	A third	Total
		P	V	C	Subtotal			
Against France D: 0 - 0	S	4/5(80%)	4/5(80%)	4/4(100%)	12/14(86%)	3/7(43%)	1/2(50%)	16/23(70%)
	F	0	2/3(67%)	1/1(100%)	3/4(75%)	2/7(29%)	0/4(0%)	5/15(38%)
Against Togo W: 2 - 0	S	3/4(75%)	1/3(33%)	3/3(100%)	7/10(70%)	9/15(60%)	0	16/25(64%)
	T	0/1(0%)	2/4(50%)	4/4(100%)	6/9(67%)	3/6(50%)	1/1(100%)	10/16(63%)
Against Korea W: 2 - 0	S	3/3(100%)	6/7(86%)	1/1(100%)	10/11(91%)	4/6(67%)	1/1(100%)	15/18(83%)
	K	1/2(50%)	2/3(67%)	1/1(100%)	4/6(67%)	4/8(50%)	0/2(0%)	8/16(50%)

Table 16 Sliding tackles made in the games played by Spain in Group H

Spain		D third				M third	A third	Total
		P	V	C	Subtotal			
Against Ukraine W: 4 - 0	S	1/1(100%)	3/3(100%)	2/2(100%)	6/6(100%)	4/10(40%)	0	10/16(63%)
	U	1/4(25%)	3/5(60%)	0/1(0%)	4/10(40%)	5/12(42%)	0/2(0%)	9/24(36%)
Against Tunisia W: 3 - 1	S	0/1(0%)	2/2(100%)	0	2/3(67%)	3/5(60%)	0/1(0%)	5/9(56%)
	T	6/12(50%)	4/5(80%)	6/11(55%)	16/28(57%)	6/17(35%)	0/1(0%)	22/46(48%)
Against Saudi Arabia W: 1 - 0	S	0	3/4(75%)	0	3/4(75%)	1/2(50%)	2/3(67%)	6/9(67%)
	Sa	3/6(50%)	0/6(0%)	7/9(78%)	10/21(48%)	5/11(45%)	1/2(50%)	16/34(47%)

to score no goals.

- The second game: against the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

In terms of ball possession and number of shots, England showed itself to be the dominant team, though the first half ended in a tie score of 0-0. In the second half, they moved aggressively to take the ball from the Trinidad and Tobago team and made sliding tackles twice as often as they had in the first half. Attacking from the corner, they scored 2 goals and defeated their opponent. The Trinidad and Tobago team made two successful sliding tackles against the cross sent from one side of the C area (**Table 10**) to the other side. They did not, however, make any other sliding tackles, allowing England to deliver crosses easily and to score goals.

- The third game: against Sweden

Hoping to avoid having to face off against Germany, the top team in Group A, in the second

round, England aggressively attacked Sweden. Against Sweden's counterattacks, England actively sought to deliver sliding tackles in both sides of the C area (6 times; the highest frequency in this area of all 3 games played by England in the first round) trying to prevent Sweden's crossing. England also tried not to concede any goals by making sliding tackles in the P area (the success ratio: 80%) to act against Sweden's critical shots. England's level of enthusiasm was reflected in the difference of their gross success ratios for sliding tackles.

Group C: Argentina (see Table 11)

- The first game: against Côte d'Ivoire

Consisting of four markedly high-level teams, Group C was referred to as the "Group of Death." They started competing with each other in a cautious manner. Limiting the attack direction of Côte d'Ivoire in the area far from the opponent's goal, Argentina made a number of sliding tackles in the M third in order to exert high pressure on Côte d'Ivoire and to interfere with the team's attack. Argentina also tried to prevent Côte d'Ivoire from sending a cross. Argentina made aggressive sliding tackles in the P area (6 times) in order to prevent Côte d'Ivoire from shooting. With 33 sliding tackles in total, Argentina skillfully controlled the game and won the victory.

- The second game: against Serbia and Montenegro

Having conceded no goals throughout the preliminary matches in Europe, Serbia-Montenegro was said to be the strongest of all the participating teams of the 2006 World Cup in terms of defense. However, they suffered from Argentina's tremendously aggressive offense and their skillful passes. Compared to the first game, Argentina made sliding tackles less frequently in this second game. Their success ratio in the D third, an area that carries with it a high risk of conceding a goal, however, was 100%, indicating the perfect state of their defensive capability. They defeated Serbia-Montenegro without allowing the team to make any wide-open shots.

Table 17 Germany's area-based final total for sliding tackles and gross success ratio
ST = sliding tackle; SST = succeeded sliding tackle

Area	D third				M third	A third	Total
	P	V	C	Subtotal			
Final total of ST	6	10	12	28	31	9	68
Final total of SST	4	8	10	22	21	6	49
Gross success ratio	67 %	80 %	83 %	79 %	68 %	67 %	72 %

Table 18 England's area-based final total for sliding tackles and gross success ratio

Area	D third				M third	A third	Total
	P	V	C	Subtotal			
Final total of ST	5	11	12	28	23	13	64
Final total of SST	4	10	7	21	17	8	46
Gross success ratio	80 %	91 %	58 %	75 %	74 %	62 %	76 %

Table 19 Argentina's area-based final total for sliding tackles and gross success ratio

Area	D third				M third	A third	Total
	P	V	C	Subtotal			
Final total of ST	9	12	18	39	23	3	65
Final total of SST	7	9	14	30	13	2	45
Gross success ratio	78 %	75 %	78 %	77 %	57 %	67 %	69 %

Table 20 Portugal's area-based final total for sliding tackles and gross success ratio

Area	D third				M third	A third	Total
	P	V	C	Subtotal			
Final total of ST	6	5	9	20	46	3	69
Final total of SST	4	3	5	12	28	2	42
Gross success ratio	67 %	60 %	56 %	60 %	61 %	67 %	61 %

Table 21 Italy's area-based final total for sliding tackles and gross success ratio

Area	D third				M third	A third	Total
	P	V	C	Subtotal			
Final total of ST	6	8	10	24	24	3	51
Final total of SST	6	5	8	19	13	3	35
Gross success ratio	100 %	63 %	80 %	79 %	54 %	100 %	69 %

Table 22 Brazil's area-based final total for sliding tackles and gross success ratio

Area	D third				M third	A third	Total
	P	V	C	Subtotal			
Final total of ST	10	14	8	32	18	3	53
Final total of SST	7	11	6	24	15	1	40
Gross success ratio	70 %	79 %	75 %	75 %	83 %	33 %	75 %

▪ The third game: against Netherlands

Probably because it had already been decided that both teams would advance to the second round, they competed with each other while saving the best players of their respective teams for the second

round. Both teams mounted their defenses in the area which was far from each other's opponent's goal, tried to limit the direction of the opponent's attacks, readjusted positions swiftly and systematically, made sliding tackles in every area of the pitch, added pressure on each other in the midfield and tried to prevent each other from attacking as they wished. Especially against medium range shots, which were characteristics of the 2006 World Cup, Argentina made sliding tackles in the V area with an 83% success ratio. Both teams ended in a draw with a score of 0-0.

Group D: Portugal (see Table 12)

▪ The first game: against Angola

Against Angola, a team that was participating in the World Cup for the first time, Portugal, a team rich in international experience, attacked aggressively from the beginning of the game and scored the first 4 goals, effectively utilizing passes and dribbles. Recovering their sense of composure, Angola gradually became aggressive enough to attempt to score a goal. However, their attempts were countered by Portugal, who pressured them with sliding tackles in the midfield (18 times in the M third). In spite of their having prevented Portugal's attacks by making sliding tackles in the V area and both sides of the C area, Angola ended up having to concede a goal to Portugal with 0% of success ratio of sliding tackles in the P area.

▪ The second game: against Iran

Aiming to counterattack, Iran played with its focus on defense with a number of sliding tackles (13 in both sides of the C area; 36 in total). This could hardly be seen as an aggressive defense. It rather implies that they were unable to keep up with Portugal's attacking speed and that they had no way to prevent the attacks other than making sliding tackles. However, an error in their sliding tackle in the P area in the second half of the game allowed Portugal to take PK, score a goal, and win a victory. Meanwhile, Portugal played dominantly throughout the game with sliding tackles in the midfield (19

Table 23 Switzerland's area-based final total for sliding tackles and gross success ratio

Area	D third				M third	A third	Total
	P	V	C	Subtotal			
Final total of ST	12	15	8	35	28	3	66
Final total of SST	10	11	8	29	16	2	47
Gross success ratio	83 %	73 %	100 %	83 %	57 %	67 %	71 %

Table 24 Spain's area-based final total for sliding tackles and gross success ratio

Area	D third				M third	A third	Total
	P	V	C	Subtotal			
Final total of ST	2	9	2	13	17	4	34
Final total of SST	1	8	2	11	8	2	21
Gross success ratio	50 %	89 %	100 %	85 %	47 %	50 %	62 %

Table 25 Top teams' final total for area-based sliding tackles and gross success ratio

Area	D third				M third	A third	Total
	P	V	C	Subtotal			
Final total of ST	56	84	79	219	210	41	470
Final total of SST	43	65	60	168	131	26	325
Gross success ratio	77 %	77 %	76 %	77 %	62 %	63 %	69 %

times in the M third).

- The third game: against Mexico

Hoping to ensure themselves a berth for advancement to the second round, Portugal took an excellent defensive position in the midfield and made sliding tackles against Mexico's shots in an attempt to concede no goals. Due to an error in a sliding tackle, Mexico took PK, which was performed unsuccessfully. In the end, Portugal defeated Mexico, reflecting the gross success ratio of Portugal as higher than that of Mexico (29%).

Group E: Italy (see Table 13)

- The first game: against Ghana

Mounting a defense in the area away from the opponent's goal, both teams played speedily with vigorous attacks and defense played out in the midfield. Ghana mounted an aggressive defense with 7 sliding tackles in the P area against Italy's shots. When Ghana failed to make a speedy enough approach and made an error in a back pass, however, Italy made most of this chance and scored a goal. The game result mirrored the difference in match experience between Italy and Ghana. Ghana was playing in the World Cup for the first time. Italy's gross success ratio for sliding tackles in this game was 84%, which was higher than any gross success

ratios in the games examined in this study.

- The second game: against USA

Having been defeated by the Czech Republic in their first game, the USA put aggressive pressure on Italy in the midfield with sliding tackles. Both teams played so vigorously that 3 players (USA: 2; Italy: 1) were eventually forced to leave the field. In this disadvantageous situation, the USA allowed Italy to score no more than one goal. Having more players than USA by one, Italy positioned a first defender and formed a well-synchronized defense block and took the ball from the USA with few sliding tackles. This was why the total number of Italy's sliding tackles in this game was not very high (12 in total). Italy conceded a point with an own goal. Though their gross success ratio for sliding tackles was lower than that of the USA, their success ratio in the critical P area was 100%,

which contributed to their preventing the USA from scoring more than one goal.

- The third game: against Czech Republic

Both teams had a chance to advance to the second round. At 44 minutes in the first half, one of the Czech players was forced to leave the field after making a needless sliding tackle. This put Italy in a numerically advantageous situation, and Italy pressed the advantage by forming a well-synchronized, effective defense block. Against Czech's shots, Italy defended with sliding tackles in order not to allow Czech the opportunity to make wide-open shots. Italy, a team with extensive experienced in match play, played an excellent game with even more tactical skill and finesse than they had exhibited in their previous 2 games, which was reflected in their gross success ratio of sliding tackles.

Group F: Brazil (see Table 14)

- The first game: against Croatia

Against the world's top-ranked team, Brazil, Croatia aggressively pursued sliding tackles in the midfield (22 times in the M third) in the hope of preventing their attacks. Croatia, however, showed a tendency to shoot from right in front of the GK and missed scoring a goal. Meanwhile, Brazil, which was not in good condition in this game, suffered

from the pressure that Croatia was putting on them. Making a number of errors, Brazil was unable to take advantage of their true strength. However, they made sliding tackles against Croatia's shots and conceded no goals.

▪ The second game: against Australia

Taking advantage of their well-built physiques, Australia put tremendous pressure on Brazil with aggressive sliding tackles (6 times in the V area). Australia did not allow Brazil to score in the first half. However, Australia's success ratio of sliding tackles in the P area, which was 100% in the first half, dropped to 50% in the second half. Their failure to make sliding tackles when they were expected to prevent them from providing an effective defense against Brazil's shots, and they conceded 2 goals. On the other hand, the success ratio of Brazil's sliding tackles in the D third was as high as 81%. Brazil attempted 7 sliding tackles in the V area for a success ratio that was as high as 86%.

▪ The third game: against Japan

Japan scored the opening goal of the game. In terms of the ratio of ball possession and the number of shots, however, their inferiority was apparent. They were slow in transiting between attack and defense, and they were unable to keep up with the individual members of the Brazilian team in terms of keeping possession of a ball and match speed. Japan's gross success ratio for sliding tackles was as low as 48%, indicating that they were forced by necessity rather than choice to make sliding tackles. They tended to misjudge timing and distance when they attempted sliding tackles against Brazil's shots, which resulted in their conceding goal after goal. On the other hand, the Brazilian team members exhibited excellent individual ability, prediction, and positioning for challenge and cover. Without facing the need to make as many sliding tackles, they were able to take the ball from Japan and attack successfully.

Group G: Switzerland (see Table 15)

▪ The first game: against France

This game was played in a town which was geographically closer to France than it was to Switzerland. Under this circumstance, which was similar to a home-away match, Switzerland played to avoid risk as much as possible throughout the

game. Mounting a defense in the area far from the opponent's goal, challenging and covering well-synchronized, and taking the ideal position, they took the ball from France and made most of their opportunities. With skillfully balanced space marking and aggressive sliding tackles, with a success ratio in the D third was 86%, Switzerland conceded no goals.

▪ The second game: against Togo

Having been beaten in their first game, Togo mounted a vigorous defense and played the game aggressively. Being unable to challenge the cross made by Switzerland, however, Togo conceded a goal. Togo also failed to make an effective sliding tackle against Switzerland's shot and conceded the second goal. Both were regrettable cases for Togo. On the other hand, Switzerland delivered a balanced defense and allowed Togo to score no goals with effective sliding tackles in the midfield (15 times in the M third).

▪ The third game: against Korea

In the hope of advancing to the second round, both Switzerland and Korea defended aggressively and rapidly transited between attack and defense. As they had done in the second game, Switzerland mounted a balanced defense, took the ball from Korea, and attempted to score. When Korea had a chance to shoot, Switzerland delivered effective sliding tackles (success ratio in the D third: 91%) and prevented Korea from scoring a goal. Switzerland made sliding tackles in the V area (7 times) more frequently than any of the other teams that were the subjects of this study. Their gross success ratio was as high as 83%. Conceding no goals, they advanced to the second round, though their total score was the lowest of the top teams in the respective groups. This result proves the importance of defensive skills (as shown in the form of successful sliding tackles).

Group H: Spain (see Table 16)

▪ The first game: against Ukraine

Defending from the midfield and interfering with Ukraine's attack at an early stage to kill their speed, Spain allowed Ukraine no chance to shoot. Spain exhibited good skill at making a swift approach and taking up positions designed for systematic challenge and cover. The success ratio of their sliding tackles in the D third was 100%. They did not allow Ukraine

to score any goals. Meanwhile, Ukraine conceded 4 goals to Spain. The gross success ratio of Ukraine's sliding tackles was as low as 36%.

- The second game: against Tunisia

Spain was overwhelmingly stronger than Tunisia. Tunisia, however, was aggressive in its attempts to make sliding tackles. Their total number of sliding tackles was 46, the largest number among the teams examined in this study. The opening goal was scored during their counterattack and was attributable to Spain's error in its sliding tackle in the P area. Spain, however, was exhibited excellent skill in positioning with a focus on challenge and cover, as had been the case in the first game. Taking the ball from Tunisia, Spain attacked and won the game. Though Tunisia made a large number of sliding tackles, their gross success ratio was as low as 48%, reflecting the level of the individual players' defensive abilities and tactics. Many of their sliding tackles were delivered in an unsystematic, bad-synchronized manner. This indicates the importance of developing the correct sliding tackle skills and seeing that they are delivered after systematic positioning.

- The third game: against Saudi Arabia

Because of their obvious superiority in strength, Spain played this game without their top players. Being excellent in terms of team tactics in both defense and attack, Spain played dominantly and scored the opening goal in the first half through FK. Saudi Arabia was slow in transiting between attack and defense. Being unable to prevent the attack of Spain, they were led to attempt sliding tackles, achieving a gross success ratio of only 47%. If not for the sliding tackles in the P area (6 times) and in both sides of the C area (9 times), they would have conceded another goal.

4.2. Total number and gross success ratios of the sliding tackles attempted in the first round by the top teams of the respective groups

The total number and gross success ratios of the sliding tackles attempted in the first round of the 2006 World Cup by the top teams of the respective groups are shown in **Tables 17-24**, respectively, **Table 25** gives a complete listing. The total number of sliding tackles made by these teams was 51-69 times (average: 17-23 per game). Of these, Spain (34

times) was the lowest. The low number of Spain's sliding tackles was partly attributable to the situation in which they played with the other constituent teams of Group H who lacked solid past accomplishments.

The effectiveness of sliding tackles, however, cannot be clarified simply from the number of the attempted tackles. In some of the matches, such as Japan against Brazil, Tunisia against Spain, and Saudi Arabia against Spain, there were situations in which Japan, Tunisia, and Saudi Arabia, respectively, were forced by necessity to make sliding tackles. Meanwhile, Brazil and Spain controlled games by taking the ball from their opponents without making sliding tackles. This suggests that the number of sliding tackles of the respective teams does not correspond to their levels. In high-level games played by teams who were equally matched in terms of skill and who tended to form systematically designed defensive blocks, however, the success of sliding tackles seemed to affect the game results.

Tables 17-24 show that the gross success ratios of 4 teams were in the 60 to 69% range and those of another 4 teams were in the 70 to 79% range. When examined on a game by game basis (**Tables 9-16**), the gross success ratio of Switzerland against South Korea was 83%, that of Italy against Ghana was 84%, and that of Brazil against Japan was 79%. In 22 of the 24 games that were played by the top teams of the respective groups, their gross success ratios of sliding tackles were higher than those of their opponent teams. Even in the remaining 2 games, the top teams' gross success ratios were 100% in the P area where the potential risk of conceding goals was high. This confirms that it was their defense skills which prevented their opponents from taking the control of the ball near the goal. All these results indicate that the high success ratios of sliding tackles contributed to team wins through the first round.

5. Conclusion and Training Suggestions

In this study, the number and success ratios of sliding tackles in the respective areas of the pitch were investigated through an analysis of the 24 games played by the top teams of the individual groups which were to advance to the second round. Based on these data, the effectiveness of sliding tackles was evaluated. The results of this analysis were as follows:

- Teams with a high success ratio of sliding tackles

were likely to win a victory in the matches they played. In particular, sliding tackles in the P area, where players were at high risk of conceding a goal, tended to affect the results of the game. The top teams' success ratios in the D third were higher than those in the M third or the A third (**Table 25**).

- The effectiveness of sliding tackles could not be judged merely from the number of sliding tackles made during a game. In certain cases, players took the ball from their opponents without making a sliding tackle. In certain other cases, players were forced by circumstances to make sliding tackles. In order to have a positive effect, sliding tackles should be made systematically within a well-synchronized defense.
- Failure in sliding tackles in the P area could fatally affect game results, especially when the failure allowed the opposing team to take a PK or an effective shot.
- Through aggressive sliding tackles, it was possible to pressure the opposing team and contribute to making it commit an error. Sliding tackles were especially effective in preventing the opposition from taking a good shot in front of the goal or from making an attack from the midfield.
- It was possible for a team to transit between attack and defense rapidly by taking the ball from the opponent by making use of sliding tackles and by passing it to the other players of their own team.

Based on the above analyses, some suggestions on daily training can be made. First of all, players should acquire proper defending skills such as the shoulder charge and improve individual tactics such as positioning, so that they become proficient in taking the ball from opposing players without making sliding tackles. Then, they should improve team tactics so that they become proficient in playing in an organized way and making sliding tackles in a synchronized defending situation. Furthermore, they should have constant training so that they reduce the number of failed sliding tackles. (Ono, T; 1998; *Creative Soccer Coaching*; Taishukan)

In today's soccer which requires a swift transit between attack and defense, it is necessary for a team to try to limit the attacking direction of the opponent in the area away from the opponent's goal

and to slow down their attacking speed. In order to achieve a victory, a team should play in an organized way, take up systematic, well-synchronized defensive positioning, press back the opponent aggressively to take the ball from them, and engage in attacks and defense in a successive manner. The more speedily the opponent team attacks, the more important the sliding tackles become in taking the ball from them. Through sliding tackles, players can take the ball from their opponent, block the shot, intercept the pass, clear, limit the pass course and intercept the ball by covering, slow down the attack, pressure the opponent to evoke errors, scramble for the ball and pass it to their own team members, concede no goals, and gain a victory.

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Name:
Shigeru Sekine

Affiliation:
Horikoshi High School

Address:
2-56-2 Chuo, Nakano, Tokyo 164-0011 Japan

Brief Biographical History:
1968-1972 Nippon Physical Education College
1972-1974 Kawaguchi High school(Saitama prefecture)
1975-1980 Akashi-Kita High school(Hyogo prefecture)
1980-1982 Nagata High school(Hyogo prefecture)
1982- Horikoshi High school(Private school)

Membership in Learned Societies:

- jssf
- Tokyo High School Athletic Federation(Soccer Department)