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BRIEF NOTE

Assessment of the maximal aerobic speed in young elite soccer players: Université de Montréal Track Test (UM-TT) vs. treadmill test



Évaluation de la vitesse aérobique maximale chez les jeunes joueurs de football d'élite: Test sur piste de l'Université de Montréal (UM-TT) vs épreuve sur tapis roulant

A. Los Arcos^{a,*}, J.S. Vázquez^b, F. Villagra^c, J. Martín^d,
J. Lerga^d, F. Sánchez^e, J. Bertó^f, J.J. Zulueta^f

^a Department of Physical Education and Sport, University of the Basque Country, EHU/UPV, Lasarte 71, 01007 Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain

^b School of Medicine, University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain

^c Institute of Biological Environmental and Rural Sciences, Aberystwyth University, Aberystwyth, Wales

^d Club Atlético Osasuna, Pamplona, Spain

^e ASPIRE Academy for Sports Excellence, Doha, Qatar

^f Respiratory Medicine Service, Clínica Universidad de Navarra. University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain

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Football;
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Summary

Objective. – The main aim of this study was to examine the association between the Maximal Aerobic Speed (MAS) measured by the Université de Montréal Track Test (UM-TT) and on a running treadmill test in young elite soccer players.

Equipment and methods. – Fourteen U-16 male soccer players (mean \pm SD: age = 15.5 \pm 0.7 years; height = 1.76 \pm 0.5 m; weight = 67.7 \pm 4.5 kg) from a Spanish First Division club academy participated in the study. The participants were submitted to the Université de Montréal Track Test (UM-TT) and an intermittent treadmill test with a one-week interval.

Results. – The MASs, the speed at the last completed stage (16.6 \pm 0.8 km h⁻¹) and calculated using the formula of Kuipers et al. (17.2 \pm 0.7 km h⁻¹), were substantially higher (Effect size > 0.8) than that measured on the treadmill (15.9 \pm 0.9 km h⁻¹). The MAS measured by the UM-TT correlated highly ($r > 0.6$) with the MAS measured on the treadmill.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: asier.losarcos@ehu.eus (A. Los Arcos).

MOTS CLÉS

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Test de laboratoire

Conclusion. – Despite the large association between both values, the MAS measured by the UM-TT differs considerably from the MAS measured on a running treadmill in young elite soccer players. It suggests that, in soccer training, caution should be applied when using the velocity of the MAS measured on the UM-TT or in a laboratory interchangeably.

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Résumé

Objectif. – L'objectif principal de cette étude était d'examiner l'association entre la vitesse aérobic maximale (VAM) mesurée par le test de la piste de l'Université de Montréal (UM-TT) et un test sur tapis roulant chez les jeunes joueurs de football d'élite.

Équipement et méthodes. – Quatorze footballeurs U16 (moyenne \pm écart-type: âge = $15,5 \pm 0,7$ ans, taille = $1,76 \pm 0,5$ m, masse corporelle = $67,7 \pm 4,5$ kg) d'une académie d'un club de première division espagnole ont participé à l'étude. Les participants ont été soumis à l'examen sur piste de le test de l'Université de Montréal (UM-TT) et d un test intermittent sur tapis roulant avec un intervalle d'une semaine.

Résultats. – Les VAM, la vitesse à la dernière étape atteint achevée ($16,6 \pm 0,8$ km h⁻¹) et calculée en utilisant la formule de Kuipers et al. ($17,2 \pm 0,7$ km h⁻¹), étaient nettement plus élevés ($ES > 0,8$) que celle mesurée sur le tapis roulant ($15,9 \pm 0,9$ km h⁻¹). Le VAM mesuré par l'UM-TT est fortement corrélé ($r > 0,6$) avec le VAM mesuré sur le tapis roulant.

Conclusion. – Malgré la grande association entre les deux valeurs, le VAM mesuré par l'UM-TT diffère considérablement de la VAM mesurée sur un tapis roulant en cours d'exécution chez les jeunes joueurs de football d'élite. Ces résultats suggèrent que, lors de l'entraînement au football, il faut faire preuve de prudence lorsqu'on utilise la vitesse du VAM mesurée sur l'UM-TT ou dans un laboratoire de façon interchangeable.

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1. Introduction

Maximal Aerobic Speed (MAS) constitutes a well-defined physiological identity that, together with maximal sprinting speed, determine the human locomotion profile [1]. MAS, the running speed which elicits maximal oxygen uptake (VO₂max), is a field-based measure that reflects a player's maximal aerobic power [2] integrated with his/her running economy [3]. It directly determines the relative neuromuscular load/strain that players encounter during soccer games and training sessions [4]. Therefore, this kind of information can be highly valuable when programming individual training plans and exercise intensities [2,5], as well as when monitoring training/competitive load [2].

Several methods have been proposed to evaluate MAS [5], but field tests are preferred due to the practical advantages. Field tests require little equipment, are easy to administer, and allow the evaluation of a large group of subjects simultaneously. Since Léger and Boucher [6] proposed the Université de Montréal Track Test (UM-TT), this and its modifications [7] are commonly used to assess the MAS in young soccer players. Although several studies carried out with adults showed that MAS measured by the UM-TT and on a treadmill were very similar and correlated highly ($r = 0.88$ – 0.93) [5,8,9], little is known about the association between these two methods on young soccer players. In a study performed with adolescents (8 males and 7 females) [10], there was no significant difference between the MAS measured by the UM-TT and on a treadmill, and the correlation between both velocities was very large ($r = 0.80$), but they were not involved in

vigorous activities and were not especially trained in running.

Therefore, the main objective of this study was to examine the association between the MAS measured on the UM-TT and on a running treadmill in young elite soccer players.

2. Methods

2.1. Subjects

Fourteen U-16 male soccer players (mean \pm SD: age = 15.5 ± 0.7 years, height = 1.76 ± 0.5 m, weight = 67.7 ± 4.5 kg), from a Spanish First Division club academy participated in the study. All players had a minimum of 8.5 years of experience in competitive soccer and competed for the same youth category at a national level. The Research Ethics Committee of the Navarra University Clinic (Clínica Universidad de Navarra) granted approval for the study. All players and parents were notified of the research procedures, requirements, benefits and risks before giving written informed consent.

2.2. Study design and procedures

The study was carried out immediately after the last competition match (i.e., June). With a one-week interval, the participants were submitted to the UM-TT [6] and an intermittent treadmill test [11] on the soccer pitch and in the laboratory, respectively. The players did not train during

the week between the field and the laboratory tests. During both tests Heart Rate (HR) was recorded using short-range telemetry (Polar Team Sport System 2, Polar Electro Oy®, Kempele, Finland).

2.2.1. Treadmill protocol

The running protocol consisted of a progressive maximal exercise on the treadmill. The duration of each running stage was 4 min followed by a 1 minute rest interval. The initial speed was set at 10 km h⁻¹ (2.78 m/s⁻¹) and it was increased by 1.5 km h⁻¹ (0.42 m/s⁻¹) at each subsequent stage. The first three stages were used for warm-up, and testing continued until the subject could no longer maintain the required v [11]. Throughout the test, players were given verbal encouragement by the testers and coaches. During the test, respiratory gas exchange values were measured breath-by-breath using Vmax Encore metabolic cart (CareFusion, San Diego, USA). Both the metabolic cart and the treadmill were calibrated periodically following the manufacturer's recommendations. Immediately after the test, players rated their perceived level of exertion separately for respiratory and leg musculature effort [12] using Foster's 0–10 scale [13]. This scale was applied during the previous four months in soccer training sessions so players were highly familiarized with it [14]. Moreover, capillary blood samples were taken immediately after each stage of the test by a standard puncture of a fingertip. Blood lactate concentrations were measured with the Lactate Scout+ (LS, SensLab GmbH, Germany).

2.2.2. Université de Montreal track test (UM-TT)

The UM-TT is a continuous, indirect and maximal multistage track test [6]. The speed of the multistage was initially set at 6.00 km h⁻¹; thereafter, the speed was increased by 1.20 km h⁻¹ by stages of 2-minute duration [6]. Players ran guided by cones placed at specific points on the field following instructions delivered with whistles. The test was stopped when the subject was at least 9 meters behind the appropriate cone at the sound signal or felt that he could not complete the stage [6]. Throughout the test, players were given verbal encouragement by the testers and coaches. The speed at the last completed stage measured with the UM-TT was considered to be the MAS [6] (MAS_{UM-TT}) in km h⁻¹. Furthermore, MAS was calculated using the formula of Kuipers et al. [15]: $MAS = Sf + (t/60 \cdot 0.5)$ ($MAS_{Kuipers}$), where Sf was the last completed speed in km h⁻¹ and t the time in seconds of the uncompleted stage. The VO_{2max} (ml·kg⁻¹·min⁻¹) was assessed from both MASs (i.e., $VO_{2maxUM-TT}$ and $VO_{2maxKuipers}$) with the formula of Léger and Boucher [6] where MAS was expressed in km h⁻¹: $VO_{2max} = 0.0324 (MAS)^2 + 2.143 MAS + 14.49$.

2.3. Statistical procedures

Descriptive results are presented as means \pm standard deviations (SD). Practical significance was also assessed by calculating the Cohen's d effect size. Effect sizes (ES) between <0.2, 0.2–0.6, 0.6–1.2, 1.2–2.0, and 2.0–4.0 were considered as trivial, small, moderate, large and very large, respectively [16]. Probabilities were also calculated to establish whether the true (unknown) differences

were lower, similar or higher than the smallest worthwhile difference or change (between-subject SD/5, based on Cohen's effect size principle). Quantitative chances of higher or lower differences were evaluated qualitatively as follows: <1%, almost certainly not; 1–5%, very unlikely; 5–25%, unlikely; 25–75%, possible; 75–95%, likely; 95–99%, very likely; >99%, almost certain. If the chance of having higher or lower values than the smallest worthwhile difference were both >5%, the true difference was assessed as unclear. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients were used to determine the relationships between the MAS obtained on the UM-TT and MAS and VO_{2max} assessed on the treadmill. The magnitude of correlation (r (95% Confidence limits)) between test measures were assessed with the following thresholds: <0.1, trivial; 0.1–0.3, small; 0.3–0.5, moderate; 0.5–0.7, large; 0.7–0.9, very large; and 0.9–1.0, almost perfect [16]. If the 90% confidence limits overlapped positive and negative values, the magnitude was deemed unclear; otherwise, that magnitude was deemed to be the observed magnitude. Data analysis was performed using a modified statistical Excel spreadsheet [17].

3. Results

The MAS (i.e., MAS_{UM-TT} and $MAS_{Kuipers}$) obtained on the UM-TT were substantially higher (very/most-likely moderate/large) than on the treadmill (Table 1), while the estimated VO_{2max} were considerably lower (most-likely large/very-large) than the directly measured VO_{2max} (Table 2). The HR_{max} was 199 ± 6 on the UM-TT and 201 ± 7 on the treadmill (ES = 0.28 ± 0.17 ; 79/21/0 likely small). After the treadmill test, blood lactate concentration was 11.3 ± 2.3 mmol l⁻¹, while the respiratory and leg musculature efforts were 9.0 ± 1.0 and 9.2 ± 1.0 Arbitrary Units, respectively.

The MAS_{UM-TT} (Fig. 1) and the $MAS_{Kuipers}$ obtained by the UM-TT correlated substantially with the MAS measured on the treadmill test, $r = 0.67$ (0.31–0.89, Very likely positive) and $r = 0.60$ (0.17–0.88, Very likely positive), respectively.

4. Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the association between the MAS measured on the UM-TT and on a running treadmill in young elite soccer players. The main findings were: a) while the field-MAS was most-likely greater (ES = large) than the laboratory-MAS, the VO_{2max} estimated by the UM-TT was most-likely lower (ES = large/very-large) than the VO_{2max} measured on the treadmill, and b) the association between the MAS measured by the UM-TT and on treadmill was large.

In previous studies, the field-MAS was slightly higher than treadmill-MAS within adult runners [8] but both speeds were not significantly different in adult physical education students [5,9]. In addition, the direct measurement of VO_{2max} and estimated VO_{2max} were similar [5,9]. However, in our study, field-MASs were most/very-likely greater (ES = moderate/large) than the laboratory-MAS, while the VO_{2max} estimated by the UM-TT using the formula proposed by Léger and Boucher [6] (i.e.,

Table 1 Practical differences between UM-TT and Treadmill test: MAS (km h⁻¹) and VO₂max (ml·kg⁻¹·min⁻¹).

Test	Test	Effect Size	Magnitude-based inference
UM-TT MAS	Treadmill MAS ^a		
MAS _{UM-TT}	15.9 ± 0.9	- 0.82; ± 0.37	0/1/99 Very-likely moderate ↓
MAS _{Kuipers}	17.2 ± 0.8	- 1.45; ± 0.41	0/0/100 Most-likely large ↓
UM-TT VO ₂ max	Treadmill VO ₂ max ^a		
VO ₂ max _{MAS_UM-TT}	68.7 ± 5.5	2.07; ± 0.54	100/0/0 Most-likely very-large ↑
VO ₂ max _{MAS_Kuipers}	60.9 ± 2.4	1.71; ± 0.57	100/0/0 Most-likely large ↑

UM-TT: Université de Montréal Track Test; MAS: Maximal Aerobic Speed; MAS_{UM-TT}: The speed at the last completed stage measured with the UM-TT; MAS_{Kuipers}: MAS calculated using the formula of Kuipers et al. [15].

^a At highest VO₂max.

Table 2 Practical differences between UM-TT and Treadmill test: VO₂max (ml·kg⁻¹·min⁻¹).

UM-TT VO ₂ max	Treadmill VO ₂ max ^a	Effect Size	Magnitude-based inference
VO ₂ max _{MAS_UM-TT}	68.7 ± 5.5	2.07; ± 0.54	100/0/0 Most-likely very-large ↑
VO ₂ max _{MAS_Kuipers}	60.9 ± 2.4	1.71; ± 0.57	100/0/0 Most-likely large ↑

UM-TT: UM-TT: Université de Montréal Track Test; MAS: Maximal Aerobic Speed; MAS_{UM-TT}: The speed at the last completed stage measured with the UM-TT; MAS_{Kuipers}: MAS calculated using the formula of Kuipers et al. [15].

^a At highest VO₂max.

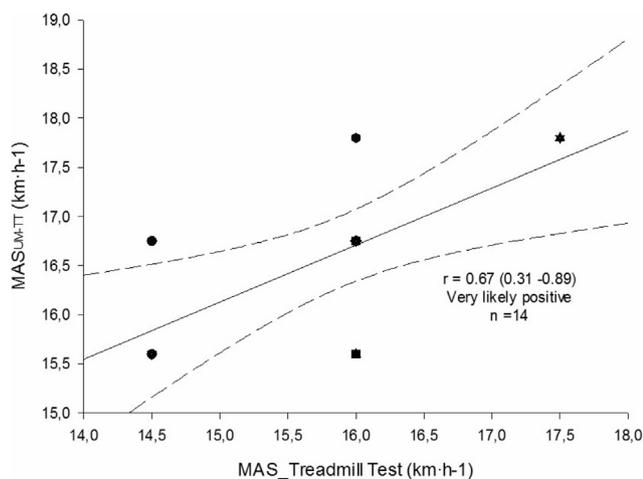


Figure 1 Association (r (95% Confidence limits)) between the MAS_{UM-TT} (the speed at the last completed stage measured with the Université de Montréal Track Test) and the MAS measured on the treadmill ($n = 14$).

VO₂max = 0.0324 (MAS)² + 2.143 MAS + 14.49) was most-likely lower (ES = large/very-large) than the VO₂max measured on the treadmill. It suggests that caution should be applied when: a) field-MAS and laboratory-MAS values are used interchangeably in soccer training to program individual training plans and exercise intensities [2,5] and to monitor training/competitive load [2], and b) the direct and estimated VO₂max measurements are compared in order to assess the aerobic fitness level of young soccer players. Among other factors, the type of treadmill test protocol [5,8,9], and the biomechanical requirements of each test [8,9] could explain these differences. Respect to the treadmill test protocol, the differences between UM-TT and treadmill test in the starting speed, increments and stage lengths could

explain the substantial differences between field-MAS and laboratory-MAS and the contradictory results in comparison with the previous studies. However, in these studies the protocol of the UM-TT and of the treadmill test also were different [5,8,9]. Therefore, the age of the athletes (adults vs. youth) could explain the differences between studies.

Several studies performed on adults showed a large association between the MAS measured on the UM-TT and on a treadmill [5,8,9]. Lacour et al. [8] and Berthoin et al. [5] found an almost perfect correlation ($r = 0.92$ and 0.93) between the MAS_{UM-TT} and the MAS measured during an intermittent graded treadmill test with experienced runners (23 ± 5 years) and physical education students (22 ± 3 years), respectively. Similarly, Ahmaidi et al. [9] described a very large ($r = 0.88$) association between the MAS_{Kuipers} and the MAS determined by the treadmill test (i.e. incremental progressive protocol) with physical education students (23 ± 1 years). In comparison with our study, although the relationship between the field-MASs and the treadmill-MAS was also substantial ($r = 0.6-0.7$, large) in young elite soccer players, it was lower than the association found in adults. Therefore, among others factors [9], the age of the athletes seems to influence in the magnitude of the association between field (i.e. UM-TT) and treadmill MAS. Due to the aforementioned substantial differences between field-MAS and laboratory-MAS, it is necessary to be cautious about overplaying the importance of a high correlation.

5. Conclusion

Despite the large association between both values, the MAS measured by the UM-TT differs considerably from the MAS measured on a running treadmill in young elite soccer players. The MAS measured by the UM-TT should not be compared directly with the MAS measured on the treadmill in

young elite soccer players. Caution should be applied when this field-MAS and laboratory-MAS values are used interchangeably in young soccer training.

Disclosure of interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interest.

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