Dear designers of the NY Times,

I would like to send you some feedback about my experience with one of your sports information display tools, in the hope that some of the issues I faced as a user would allow you to keep up with your outstanding informative services. I am particularly speaking of the display utilized in the last world cup opening game:


I have reserved my comments on the heat map visualization feature adopted to highlight field occupation. It is indeed very interesting, since it can reveal a great deal of the teams’ strategies, for example, who defended more or played more compact or who spent more time on the adversary’s half.

I would suggest, however, a few changes to the offered heat map interface. First, these maps should show different colors for different teams’ occupations on the field, and ideally the user should be able to overlay these maps on top of each other at their best convenience. As it is, the user cannot explore the individual dynamics of each team. Perhaps the French would be interested in only seeing their national team's behavior, for instance, thus they should have an option to do so. It looks to me that this will not change the kind of data collection that is already used to produce the maps; therefore it should be just a matter of displaying the information in a different way. It would be also interesting to have an optional continuous display of the maps so that users can see the heat flow during the match. That would be convenient both from the usability perspective, since the interface currently requires the user to drag the time tracker button to see the motion minute after minute, and also would allow a better appreciation of some velocity patterns in the game. One way of smoothing out the transition between one minute and another would be to interpolate in between the already computed heat maps.

My final criticism concerns the circular placeholders for the shots on top of the heat maps, which I find confusing and inconsistent: for example, after half-time, players are supposed to switch sides and although the heat maps reflect that change, these shot circles don’t, since they remain in the same positions (French shots on the left side of the field, Uruguayans’ on the right) from the beginning to the end of the game. Consistency is key, and lack of it can cause bad judgment of the information displayed or even mistrust.

Again, thank you for offering us high-quality visual game analysis technology, and I truly hope the information provided in this letter will be of good use for your future design of such visualization tools.

Kind regards,

Leonardo Claudino