# DEFENDING CORNER KICKS IN THE ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE: NEAR POST GUARD SET-UPS

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## INTRODUCTION

Previous research conducted on corner kicks has investigated the outcomes of corner kicks in relation to different delivery types of corner kicks (Schmicker, 2013); the status of the match (De Baranda & Lopez-Riquelme, 2012); the area of the delivery (Pulling, 2015) as well as defensive tactics (Pulling, Robins and Rixon, 2013). However, there has been no previous research that has analysed the actions of defensive players who are positioned close to the near post when defending corner kicks.

The aim of this study was to analyse near post guard defensive set-ups when defending corner kicks within the English Premier League Season 2015/16.

## METHOD

A total of 750 long corner kicks were sampled from 79 English Premier League soccer matches during the 2015-2016 season. The type of near post guard defensive set-up (zero, one or two guards in zone A and/or zero, one or two guards in zone B) (see figure 1) and the main outcome of the corner kick were recorded onto a specially designed Microsoft Excel spreadsheet (Microsoft Corporation, Excel 2010, Redmond, WA).

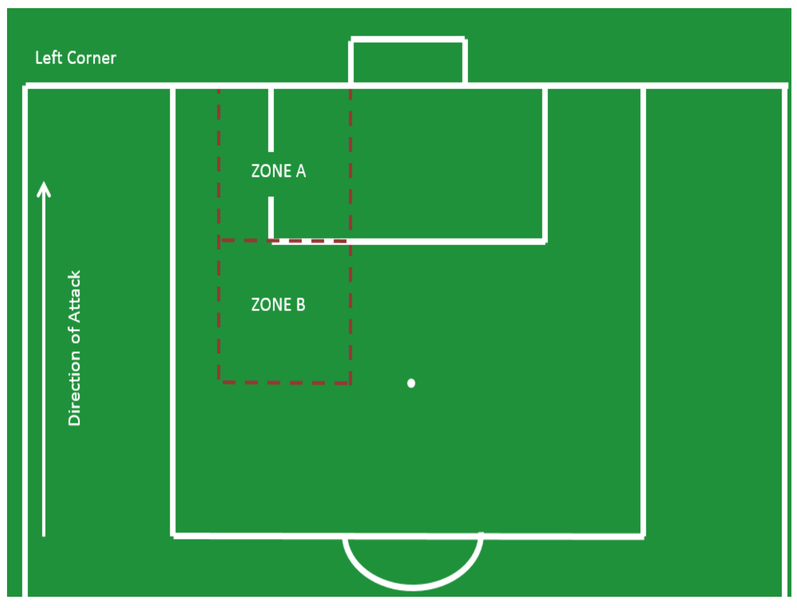


**Figure 1. Zones for near post guards.**

## RESULTS

From the 750 corner kicks analysed there were:

- 155 attempts at goal (20.7% of total corners)
- 22 goals scored (2.9% of total corners)
- 50 attempts on target that did not lead to a goal (6.7% of total corners)
- 83 attempts off target (11.1% of total corners).

There was no significant association between the type of near post guard defensive set-up and the number of attempts at goal ($\chi^2_4 = 1.645$, $p = 0.801$).

**Table 1. Near post guard set-up and attempts at goal.**

| Guards in zone A | Guards in zone B | Frequency | Goal | Attempt on target (excl' goals) | Attempt off target | Total attempts at goal |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Two** | **Zero** | 206 | 8 (3.9) | 12 (5.8) | 18 (8.7) | 38 (18.4) |
| **Two** | **One** | 168 | 5 (3.0) | 13 (7.7) | 21 (12.5) | 39 (23.2) |
| **One** | **Zero** | 159 | 8 (5.0) | 9 (5.7) | 17 (10.7) | 34 (21.4) |
| **One** | **One** | 148 | 1 (0.7) | 9 (6.1) | 18 (12.2) | 28 (18.9) |
| **Two** | **Two** | 47 | 0 (0) | 7 (14.9) | 2 (4.3) | 9 (19.2) |
| **Zero** | **One** | 9 | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 5 (55.6) | 5 (55.6) |
| **One** | **Two** | 7 | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 1 (14.3) | 1 (14.3) |
| **Zero** | **Zero** | 6 | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 1 (16.7) | 1 (16.7) |

The most common near post guard set up was to place two defenders in zone A and zero defenders in zone B (27.5% of total corners). The near post guards cleared the ball on 236 occasions (31.5% of total corners).

There was a significant association between the type of near post guard defensive set-up and the number of clearances performed by the guards ($\chi^2_4 = 30.445$, $p = 0.001$).

**Table 2. Near post guard clearances.**

| Guards in zone A | Guards in zone B | Frequency | Clearance by guard in zone A | Clearance by guard in zone B | Total clearances by guards |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Two** | **Zero** | 206 | 64 (31.1) | n/a | 64 (31.1) |
| **Two** | **One** | 168 | 47 (28.0) | 19 (11.3) | 66 (39.3) |
| **One** | **Zero** | 159 | 26 (16.4) | n/a | 26 (16.4) |
| **One** | **One** | 148 | 26 (17.6) | 25 (16.9) | 51 (34.5) |
| **Two** | **Two** | 47 | 14 (29.8) | 10 (21.3) | 24 (51.1) |
| **Zero** | **One** | 9 | n/a | 1 (11.1) | 1 (11.1) |
| **One** | **Two** | 7 | 2 (28.6) | 2 (28.6) | 4 (57.1) |

## CONCLUSIONS

It is evident that near post guards play an important role when defending corner kicks as they regularly perform defensive clearances (31.5% of total corners).

The findings enforce the need for performance analysts and soccer coaches to consider the defensive set-ups utilised in the near post area when defending corner kicks. Future research should investigate the impact of the positioning and movement of attacking players on different defensive set-ups during corner kicks.

## REFERENCES

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