

## 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.

### Methods

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).

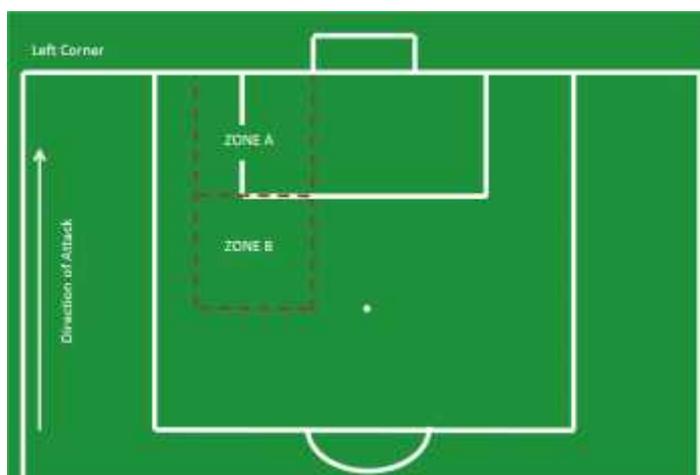


Figure 1. Zones for near post guards.

### Results

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 no significant association between the type of near post guard defensive set-up and the number of attempts at goal ( $\chi^2_4 = 1.645$ ,  $p = 0.801$ ). However, when teams positioned one guard in zone A and one guard in zone B the defensive team only conceded one goal from 148 corner kick deliveries (0.7%). When there was one guard in zone A but no guards in zone B the defensive team conceded eight goals from 159 deliveries (5.0%).

There was a significant association between the type of near post guard defensive set-up and the number of clearances performed by the guards ( $\chi^2_4 = 30.445$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). When the defensive team placed one guard in zone A and no guards in zone B, the guard cleared 16.4% of the corner kick deliveries. When the defensive team had two guards in zone A and two guards in zone B, the guards were able to clear 51.1% of the deliveries.

## **Discussion & Conclusion**

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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