

The impact of 'clean' possession continuity in elite hurling

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Introduction

Despite being one of the oldest field sports in the world, little research has been conducted on the demands of match play in hurling. Clear (2016), established that total shot count was a key indicator of success at elite level and examined the construct of possessions, finding that 86% of possessions consist of sequences less than two passes. While this is valuable information, the quality of the passing sequence was not considered, thus it is not known if superior technical skill contributes to success. In hurling, high levels of technical skill are demonstrated through 'clean' possessions, defined as when the team in possession retain complete control of the ball (sliotar) at all times. This study investigates if 'clean' continuity in possession impacts the outcome of possessions and indeed match outcomes.

Methods

4260 in-play possessions were coded from 28 games in the 2015 All-Ireland senior intercounty hurling championship using NAC Sport Scout Plus (Analysis Pro Ltd., Wales) software. "Clean" possessions were coded as defined above, all other possessions were coded as being "broken." Possessions resulting in a shot were deemed to be successful. An intra-operator study demonstrated strong reliability for the system (percentage errors <5%). The data were analysed using chi squared tests and odds ratios.

Results

Results indicate that clean continuity in possession is statistically associated with successful possession outcome ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 1477.06, p < .001$). The odds ratio of achieving a shot between a clean and broken possession is 25.8 (95% CI 21.8 to 30.8). While winning and losing teams have very similar amounts of broken possession, winning teams had significantly more clean possessions ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 8.908, p = .002, \phi_c = .047, p = .003$). 44 goals and 527 points were scored from clean possessions ($n = 1525$), compared to 29 goals and 160 points scored from broken possessions ($n = 2735$). Shot efficiency was not affected by the type of possession continuity.

Discussion & Conclusion

This research establishes the role of 'clean' continuity in possession as a key indicator of success in hurling. It shows that teams demonstrating higher skill levels with clean sequences are likely to create more shots and ultimately win more games.

Keywords: Hurling, Possession, Passing

Reference

Clear, C. (2016). Attacking profiles in elite hurling. MSc Thesis. Institute of Technology, Carlow.