

Module 2. Defensive SPs Analysis

Based on the relevance of set pieces (SPs) in the game, in the result and, ultimately, in the performance of the teams, and with the general SPs analysis parameters already established, we focus on the defensive SPs analysis.

To do this, and in order to approach the content in a practical way, we will exemplify the defensive SPs analysis process through a specific action: defensive corners. Therefore, we will delve, through corner kicks, into the defensive organisation possibilities, the functional roles of defensive SPs and, ultimately, into the variables to evaluate in defensive SPs. Besides, a proposal of variables will also be presented with their respective implementation of the analysis of indirect defensive free kicks, specifically, lateral free kicks.

Just as module 1 focused on the introduction to SPs analysis and was characterised by being theoretical, the following modules will be presented in a much more practical way, continuously using the example, the proposal and trying to provide the student with resources useful for optimising the analysis of set pieces.

Unit 2.1 Introduction to defensive SPs

It is evident that the objective of the team will not be the same in the defensive phase of the SP as in the offensive. Moreover, as we already know, different SPs, defensive or offensive, can and usually do not share an objective or performance indicator.

We could all agree if we define as the main objective in defensive SPs to make impossible or difficult the rival's success in a certain SP. This opens up a wide range of goals to be achieved, from avoiding the rival goal in a certain set piece, which is undoubtedly the most relevant one, to stealing the ball in a rival throw-in by preventing the opponent from obtaining a corner or an attacking throw-in from a far free kick shot directly into the box. These are just some examples of objectives that we can set ourselves against a rival SP or, in other words, what we want to happen when the opponent is executing it.

To all this, we must add the great variety of game resumes and, hence, SPs, that we find in this sport. Each of them with a different internal nature and with completely different possibilities of action for both teams. We believe that it is not necessary to review the conceptualisation of each set piece in particular since, apart from being tedious and not very significant for the course, as we discussed in the first module, everyone knows what a corner kick or a lateral free kick is. Thus, once the analyst and the coach have defined the criteria to limit these actions and consider their possibilities of finishing, we must focus on the analysis.

Due to the variety of objectives in the different SPs and the diverse nature of each one of them, we believe it is vitally important to address each action separately in order to delve into its specificity and its most relevant aspects in detail. In this way, we will consider that each set piece must have different analysis variables, although it is true that actions such as corner kicks and indirect free kicks, or penalties and direct free kicks, due to certain similarities, can share many of these variables.

It should be noted that we will focus on the defensive analysis of corner kicks and a proposal of variables will also be presented for the analysis of "indirect" free kicks, not referring to indirect free kicks according to the regulations, but to those in which the direct hit is not sought. Actions such as the kick-off, the throw-in, the direct free kick, or the penalty kick will be analysed as an example in the next module, focusing on the offensive facet of these actions. On the other hand, due to the density of analysis of said action, goal kicks will be addressed in another specific course of this certificate.

As we have commented, in this module, we will focus on the analysis of defensive set pieces and, therefore, the variables to analyse and the different possibilities of action that we have will be focused on avoiding rival success in said action. Hence, it is clear that the

performance and the consequent improvement of the team in defensive SP will be inversely proportional to the success or performance that the rival has in the SP in question.

It is time to remember that, given the obvious relevance of SPs in football, it is as important to score an SP goal as it is to prevent the rival from scoring it.

Unit 2.2 The defensive SPs analysis process through corner kicks

Is a corner half a goal?

Without the slightest doubt, the corner kick is the most studied and analysed set piece, which favours the fact that we have a lot of relevant information on its incidence and effectiveness in the game.

As we discussed in module 1, there is usually an average of 10 corners per game; therefore, it is common to have between 4 and 6 corner kicks in each game. According to the main research, between 22% and 30% of corner kicks are attempted (Borrás and Sainz de Baranda, 2005; Silva Puig, 2011; Sainz de Baranda and López-Riquelme, 2012; Maneiro, 2014). Likewise, and evaluating the quality of these attempts, between 8% and 10% of corner kicks end with an attempt on goal (Borrás and Sainz de Baranda, 2005; Silva Puig, 2011; Sainz de Baranda and López-Riquelme, 2012). There is also a great consensus in the specialised bibliography regarding the goal frequency: values between 1.3% and 2.6% of goal scoring are determined in a corner kick (Perez and Vicente, 1996; Gréhaigne, 2001; Borrás and Sainz de Baranda, 2005; Taylor, James and Mellalieu, 2005; Silva Puig, 2011; Sainz de Baranda and López-Riquelme, 2012).

A study conducted by the FC Barcelona Analysis Department, in which 378 corner kicks were analysed referring to 72 games in the Liga Santander 2018-2019, confirmed these efficiency indices and, even in some values, the results were lower than expected. It was demonstrated that 4 corner kicks are necessary to attempt—20 to attempt on goal and 75 to score a goal.

We can determine that, contradicting certain currents of opinion, corner kicks are actions of a relatively low efficiency. Despite this, Maneiro et al. (2017), in a descriptive and comparative analysis of the corner kicks in UEFA Euro 2012, state that 76% of the goals scored in this type of actions have turned out to be transcendental in the final result and have allowed the scoring team to gain points.

It is clear that the objective that the team will set itself, or at least the highest priority objective, will be to prevent the opposing team from attempting and, consequently, to avoid the possibility of scoring a goal.

Organisation possibilities in defensive corner kicks

First of all, to carry out the analysis of defensive corner kicks, we must focus on determining the type of defence the team is putting up. Thus, the team—and, ultimately, the coach—will have to make a decision on how they think it is most effective to defend these actions. This will depend, among other aspects, on the point of view of the coaching staff, the analyst's vision, the capabilities and characteristics of the players, the context of the league and the club and the weekend's game plan.

As analysts, we must first differentiate among 3 types of defences related to the type of marking that is produced. Thus, we distinguish the zone defence, the combined defence, and the man-to-man defence.

- **Zone defence:**

There is no man-to-man marking, and each player is responsible for a certain zone. It is a type of organisation that will prioritise the control of spaces, its main advantage being the occupation of all zones of the box. Other advantage of this defence would be the fact of choosing which player will be in each position—depending on their characteristics—and the rival's difficulty of performing blocking movements against the defenders.

On the other hand, it is a type of defensive organisation that needs a high level of aggressiveness and dynamism prior to kicking since, by its very nature, we are facing a relatively static type of defence which will lead to a disadvantage against the rival run. In order to reduce this factor, it is important to have some players with the function of cutting or hindering the sprints of the main finishers.

There are many possibilities offered by this type of defence at the level of organisation and positioning of the players. Among the most observed structures, we can find the following examples:

- 1-4-3-2

Figure 1: Structure 1-4-3-2



Source: Own elaboration based on [Untitled image on Structure 1-4-3-2], n.d., FC Barcelona Analysis Department (WYSCOUT).

- 1-5-2-2

Figure 2: Structure 1-5-2-2



Source: Own elaboration based on [Untitled image on Structure 1-5-2-2], n.d., FC Barcelona Analysis Department (WYSCOUT).

- 1-5-3-1

Figure 3: Structure 1-5-3-1



Source: Own elaboration based on [Untitled image on Structure 1-5-3-1], n.d., FC Barcelona Analysis Department (WYSCOUT).

- **Combined defence:**

This defensive organisation, as its name suggests, combines zone marking and man-to-man marking. That is, there will be players performing the role of markers and others in charge of defending a certain zone.

Along with zone defence, they are the two most common defensive organisations nowadays. Moreover, in leagues like the Spanish one, this method clearly predominates as the most used organisation. It allows us to prioritise a certain area with players responsible for that space and, at the same time, to make it difficult for the attackers to enter and attempt on goal with man-to-man markings.

Among its weak points we can highlight the vulnerability to blockages or drag moves and, depending on the structure used, the existence of empty areas, which can be exploited by the rival.

Some of the most observed structures in current football may be the following:

- Near post and small area front (2 in zone).

Figure 6: Near post, small area front and both posts (4 in zone)



Source: Own elaboration based on [Untitled image on near post, small area front and both posts (4 in zone)], n.d., FC Barcelona Analysis Department (WYSCOUT).

- ***Man-to-man defence:***

Organisation based exclusively on man-to-man marking, where players are at no time responsible for a specific area, but only for their mark. Due to its vulnerability to rival dragging or blocking and the exposure of key areas, it is rarely used nowadays.

The structure chosen will be key in the very performance of the action. Considering teams as complex systems that are continually self-organising, the inclusion of a player, or not, in a certain area will vary the behaviour of the group and can have a great impact on the defence of that set piece. We consider the process of establishing the structure in defending corners as a key process, and we emphasise that it must be a process of deep reflection in which, without a doubt, a multitude of factors will be involved, from the point of view of the coaching staff to the context of the league and the background of the team, all of which, of course, through the—in this case, defensive—characteristics of the players.

Table 1: Comparison between zone defence and combined defence in corner kicks

ZONE DEFENCE	COMBINED DEFENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All zones rationally occupied. • Possibility of choosing which player will occupy each zone. • We avoid the performance of rival blocking, or we make it difficult. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All rivals have individual markings and, hence, will not make clean sprints. • Possibility of prioritising key spaces by placing player/s in the zone. • More particular responsibilities. Each one is responsible for their mark.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Static organisation with a disadvantage against the rival sprint. • <i>A priori</i>, there is no constant contact with the opponent and many times they will be able to make a clean sprint. • There may be gaps between zones where it is not clear whose responsibility it is. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vulnerability to blocking or drag moves. • Certain important zones can be uncovered.

Source: Own elaboration.

Identification of functional roles in defensive corners

It will be key and essential for the detailed analysis of a specific defensive SP to define the functional roles that the players will have.

Functional role in SP is understood to be that conduct or behaviour that the coach has defined and established for the player, who must develop it for the collective benefit by continuously adapting to emerging needs and behaviours in the same play.

In the specific defensive SP of the corner kick, we can distinguish the following functional roles:



- **Player in zone:** Their responsibilities will vary depending on whether the team defends putting up a zone or combined defence. In the case of the latter, the responsibility of attacking the ball to try to clear it falls on them and the other supposed player in the zone.

These players would have as key characteristics—in this case, qualities—good aerial game (above all, if we put up a combined defence), courage to attack the ball, zone responsibility, and communicative ability to order teammates together with the goalkeeper.

- **Goalkeeper:** Together with the coach and the goalkeeper coach, their possible intervention must be specified. One role might be to take care of the far post zone, especially on outswinging balls.

It is essential that the goalkeeper knows the roles of each of the players and acts accordingly, ordering and adjusting positions.

- **Man-to-man marker:** Player with the clear responsibility for avoiding their assigned player's attempt. To do this, they must maintain a proper body shape, always placing their body between the goal and the rival. It is essential that they keep contact, if possible, to avoid the attacker's clean sprint.

Depending on the characteristics of the marker and the opponent, the marker must adapt the distance with them, trying to find the correct balance for a position that makes the rival sprint impossible.

Man-to-man markers must have a certain intensity and defensive discipline, not shy away from physical contact and, above all, avoid actions such as grabbing, which will end in penalties.

- **Player at short distance:** Player in charge of defending the rival short kick. The coach may decide that they are directly located at short distance (9.15 line or close) or that they begin by developing another functional role and, due to the performance of the rival team, end up going to the defence of the short kick.

Generally, offensive players will take this role in which it will be of vital importance that, always adapting to the situation and the team's objective when the opponent has kicked short, they avoid making sudden interventions and unnecessary fouls.

- **Clearing player:** Player who will adapt their position to the space of the front of the area with the clear premise of picking up the clearance and with the option, or not, of starting the counterattack.

It is ideal that the players who perform this role have a point of cleverness to foresee where that clearance may fall. In turn, if the team intends to start the counterattack quickly, they must make an important physical deployment, offering themselves as the first or second option to reach the rival playing field.

Another of its possible functions may be to perform man-to-man marking in case the rival enters with another finisher; therefore, they must be aware of this situation.

- **Player in offensive position:** “Off the hook” player who is located in a zone near the midfield, with the intention of being an option for the next action (counterattack) or, simply, engaging rivals and getting the rival team to enter with fewer players to attempt.

Generally, this role will be filled by the fastest and most offensive players in the team and, while it may seem like their only role should be to prepare for the counterattack, they can be very helpful to the team by anticipating when there is a long clearance. If that happens, qualities like playing with the back to the rival goal can become key for the team to come out.

- Although it is not so common, we must also know **other functional roles** such as the following:
 - **Run cutter:** Players further away from a zone defence may have the role of preventing the most dangerous finishers on the opposing team from running alone.
 - **Player in near post or far post:** Although it is used less and less, nowadays there are teams that give one or two players the responsibility of being located just under the posts, blocking possible attempts on goal.

Although we have reviewed and defined the functions that players can have in a corner kick, to analyse the performance of a team we must be clear that, in most of the actions displayed, these will not be closed behaviours. Just like the very nature of living beings and football, small changes in a certain role can completely modify the performance of the players and, hence, the general behaviour of the team in that SP.

If we are analysing a team that starts with a combined defence with 2 players in the zone, 5 in man-to-man marking, 1 in clearance and 2 defending the short ball, we cannot stick with that analysis of roles since it is far from a real analysis of the team behaviour. We must go further and analyse the progression of the play, try to understand if that team has placed those 2 players to the short ball because they play against an opponent who kicks a lot of short balls and wants to avoid it, or if they have simply left a single player in clearance because the rival leaves a player in that zone. Observing those players who are to the short ball can be key. Where do they come from? Were they in zone, marking or clearing? What has been the stimulus that has caused them to modify their role? Are the two players of the zone the two players with the greatest aerial capacity?

The constant question and understanding the “why” of functional roles when we analyse a team will be fundamental to substantiate a meaningful analysis, which dissects in the most real and probable way the possible actions that the opposing team can take in that specific SP. This process of deduction of functional roles will be especially important in the rival analysis since being able to draw conclusions in this aspect will give us the advantage of knowing how they will be organised in that particular SP, and we will be able to act before it with some precaution.

Although it will depend on the demand of the coaching staff, we consider it essential to delve into the players who perform each of the roles since the detection of their main characteristics when marking or defending a zone will contribute a quality point to our analysis and they will be those small details that can end up making a difference. On the other hand, with the analysis of the own team, this facet of the process will not be so relevant since, although we have to check that each player occupies and develops their functional role, the whole team must be clear about the roles to be fulfilled and the functions to perform.

Proposal of variables for the analysis of defensive corner kicks

Once the possibilities of defensive organisation and functional roles have been introduced—both determining factors, especially in the analysis of the rival team—it will be key to set the variables to be analysed, in this case, in a defending corner kick. These will be understood as those key aspects or most important points to observe of the performance of the corner kick—own or rival.

As we discussed in the previous module, it is very important to define what aspects or behaviours we will consider since, although the SPs analysis process is flexible and adaptable to the need of the moment, it is about establishing the parameters that the analyst and coach believe are most relevant to define the SP performance of the rival team and the own team.

Some of variables that we can focus on for the analysis of the defensive corners can be the following:

- **Defensive organisation:** What type of defence does the team put up?
 - Combined
 - Zone
- **Static defensive organisation structure:** It can only be detected with an image prior to the corner kick.
 - How many players are there and how are they located in zone?
 - How many players perform man-to-man marking?
 - What is the number of players in clearance?
 - Is there a player positioned to defend the short ball kick (at short distance)?
 - Do they leave any player in offensive position?
- **Dynamic defensive organisation structure:** It refers to those behaviours that emerge in relation to the structure of the defensive organisation once the offensive players begin performing the movements, without necessarily the ball having entered play.
 - How does the team behave when there is a short ball kick? Who is the first player to defend the short ball kick? And the second one?
 - How does the clearance player behave if the opponent enters with another finisher?

As we have commented, it is key that we personalise and identify the players who carry out each behaviour in order to obtain a detailed analysis of the performance of said action.

To answer these questions and try to identify a specific organisation, it is important to visualise a large number of actions in order to find regularities. In addition, we must be clear that the team that is the object of our analysis at that time will not execute this SP defence as if it were a machine programmed to automatically repeat the same behaviours. They will try to adapt their organisation to the situation presented by the team they are facing. In conclusion, we must observe the structure that this team has in different situations. How do you change your structure when an opponent enters with 6 finishers instead of 5? What changes do you make when the opponent leaves 3 players in clearance? Do they continue to keep a player in an offensive position when they are winning?

The more in detail we know how the analysed team adapts its structure to the different situations posed by the rival and the game itself, such as adverse score and numerical inferiority, the closer we will be to determining a regularity in the organisation of the rival in said SP.

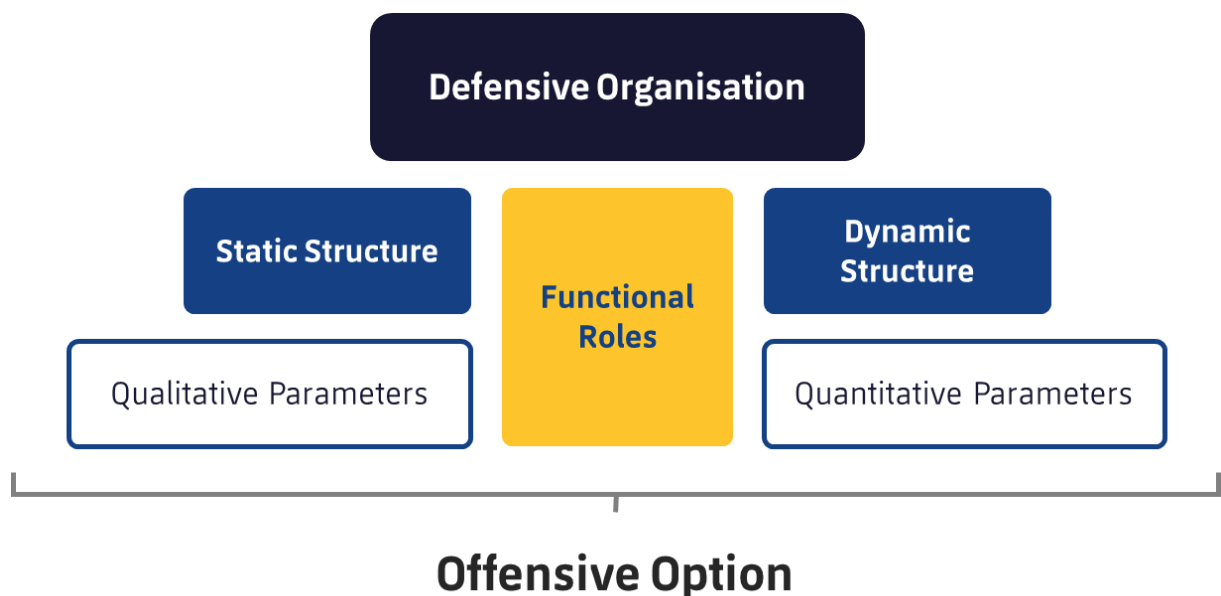
- **Qualitative parameters:** Attitudes or trends that we consider key to the performance of the analysed action. We can deal with relevant individual or collective aspects. It will depend on our subjective point of view on the team's behaviour in that set piece. Some examples:
 - *Assessment of the occupation of key zones:* What zones are prioritised to defend the corner kick? And, therefore, which area can they neglect the most?
 - *Overall performance assessment:* In which zones has the most danger been created to them? By what type of shot have they received the most attempts?
 - *Evaluation of 2nd balls:* Do they give option to 2nd balls?
 - *Assessment of man-to-man markings:* Are they aggressive? Are markings lost easily? Which players have the greatest difficulty in this marking?
 - *Assessment of the goalkeeper's participation:* Do they perform well in overhead balls crossed to the far post? Do they stay halfway out?
 - *Assessment of the behaviour of the players in zone:* Does the player have a tendency to move up field (steps forward at the time of the kick)? Do they have the same ability to attack the ball from both sides? From which side do they have the most difficulty?
 - *Individual performance approach:* Which player is the most decisive when it comes to clearing aerial balls? Is the short distance player aggressive when defending the short ball kick?
- **Quantitative parameters:** Those significant and relevant data to describe the team's performance in that specific SP. Platforms such as Mediacoach allow us to access very detailed information about the performance of a certain team in an SP, based on its finishing. We can highlight the following points:
 - How many corner kicks do they neutralise? That is, they prevent the rival team from attempting.
 - How many corner kicks do they concede? Percentage of attempts that have been received.
 - How many goals has the rival team scored from a corner kick?
 - Have they committed penalties?

It is totally advisable to relate the data extracted with the qualitative parameters, that is, we must corroborate the information with our real perception of the defence of that corner kick. For example, it may be that, based on the quantitative parameters of SP, we determine that a team concedes very few attempts, but by visualising the actions we notice that these attempts carry a terrible danger, i.e., they were very clear attempts. The relationship that exists between the qualitative and the quantitative parameters will mark the importance of that aspect in question, in this case, the attempt.

At this point, we will have analysed all the variables and revealed those that allow us to better dissect the performance of the team in question in the defending corner kick. Thus, we have valuable information which, always according to the general SPs analysis parameters established with the coaching staff, can be used to propose an **offensive option** in the face of the competition. Of course, this must be in relation to the information presented and always supported by it.

Depending on the role or function of the SP analyst within the team, this proposed option will be more or less extensive and detailed. Even so, it will always be a specific option for that game in accordance with those observed weaknesses of the opposing team, which we can exploit through our strengths in a corner kick.

Figure 7: Analysis variables in a defensive corner



Source: Own elaboration.

It should be remembered that, to define regularities in the performance of a team in a given SP, a broad visualisation of actions will be of vital importance, which must be varied

and in which we must focus on how the analysed team is organised from the beginning and on how it reorganises itself in the face of certain specific behaviours of the rival or, in turn, different game contexts.

On the other hand, another great characteristic that the SPs analysis should contain is, as we have already commented, individualisation. By analysing in detail, the behaviour of the players, we will obtain a differential point with respect to the rival. Besides, surely, knowing the characteristics of the rivals in defensive SP, we will understand much better the reason for the collective behaviour in the defending corner kick.

The proposal of variables presented (Figure 8) allows us to limit our defensive corner analysis process starting from the static defensive structure and, by detecting functional roles, moving towards its dynamic structure or, in other words, towards the modifications that they will perform in certain situations. From there, we have a qualitative and a quantitative perspective in order to carry out an effective dissection and assessment of the performance of said team in a given SP, in this case, in the defensive corner kick. All this gives us the ability to propose an offensive option that will be based on taking advantage of weak points, which is based on the analysis.

Exemplification of the analysis of a defensive corner

Next, trying to put the exposed contents into practice, an example of defensive corner analysis is presented for each type of report. Remembering the general parameters presented in module 1, these reports will be the following: rival team reports—**SP pre-game report** and **SP *in situ* report** (game)—and own team reports—**post-game report** and **cumulative report**.

- **SP pre-game report (defending corner).**

In the pre-game report (Figure 9) we will try to highlight those relevant aspects of the rival, in this case defensive, on the SP in question. We will stick to the commented variables starting from the rival defensive organisation and the static structure towards the dynamic. In the “to highlight” section, we will highlight those qualitative and quantitative parameters that we consider most relevant to define the rival team’s performance in said action.

We attach our report proposal with the iBook’s Author programme since it allows us to enter the information in a clear way and take advantage of the resources of the video and 2D images—both can be watched in full screen.

- *Video*: Set of representative actions that allow a better understanding of written information (Figure 10). It should not be very extensive and from its visualisation we must be able to extract the main regularities, as well as, above all, those situations that create danger (Rival team report) or create it for us (Own team report). The clips must maintain a logical order, which must be agreed by the analyst with the coaching staff. For example, chronological order, order according to the danger of the action, order according to the mode of execution.

It is important to discard clips that can lead to confusion, such as those in which a team that is outnumbered or with a crushing defeat, in which the team does not act as it would in a normal situation.

We can include audio-visual resources, although it is true that we must avoid overloading the video and remember that the most important thing is to clearly highlight those plays that we believe define the tendency of that team, in this case, in the defending corner kick.

- *2D images*: This is one more resource that can help us to transmit knowledge about the organisation, in this case defensive, of the team in question. Done using the Keynote programme, the aim is to expose in a simple and visual way the usual position of each player in that SP, as well as relevant aspects such as name, number, dominant leg, and height. In the specific case of the corner kick, it is important to display two images—one referring to their organisation in direct corner kick and another referring to how they are placed in short corner kick (Figures 11 and 12).

Figure 8: SP pre-game report (defending corner)

DEFENDING CORNER

COMBINED MARKING

- **2 players in zone:** PLAY2 in the near post and PLAY3 in small area.
- 5 man-to-man marks: PLAY4, PLAY5, PLAY6, PLAY7 and PLAY8. If we entered 6 players, a clearance player (PLAY9) goes to man-to-man marking).
- **2 clearance players:** PLAY9 and PLAY10, which are sometimes within the box.
- **1 player in offensive position:** PLAY11 tends to go down next to the corner kick.

Short kick: if two players are going to kick, a player from the clearance is placed at short distance (generally PLAY10 + the advanced player, leaving one player in clearance). If there is a quick kick, the player in offensive position does not go and we start from an initial 2x1.

To highlight:

- Difficulties in following marks. Especially, PLAY6 and PLAY8 **marking losses**, which often turn their backs on their mark.
- Clear scoring chances with crosses to **the zone between the penalty spot and the far post**. On the contrary, they are strong in the zone of the near post and small area where PLAY3 stands out clearing balls (tendency to advance before the kick).
- Superiority has been **very easily established before them in short ball kicks**.
- They have scored 4 goals from a direct corner kick—2 between the penalty spot and 2 on the post—and 2 goals after a 2nd ball.

Option:
Play fast 2x1 or 3x2 in order to try to get a good shooting or crossing position.



Source: [Untitled image on SP pre-game report (defending corner)], n.d., FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

Figure 9: 2D rendering (pre-game) structure in defending corner



Source: [Untitled image on 2D rendering (pre-game) structure in defending corner], n.d., FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

Figure 10: 2D rendering (pre-game) structure in short defending corner



Source: [Untitled image on 2D rendering (pre-game) structure in short defending corner], n.d., FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

- ***In situ* SP game report (defending corner).**

It consists of reflecting that structure (in this case defensive) that we believe the rival team will adopt depending on the players who start the game. Therefore, it is a matter of applying, in the most precise way possible, the knowledge we have about the structure that this team can adopt in a given SP and, ultimately, bringing the pre-game analysis closer to its reality.

The key to this report is the individualisation since, knowing the usual roles of rival players, we can intuit how they will be arranged in the SP in question and specify in those details such as errors in marking or in zone defence. It should be noted that, in many cases, depending on the players that coincide in the line-up, a team will establish one type of structure or another. This occurs, above all, in offensive SP, although we can also see it in certain defensive SP situations.

For instance, in the case of a defending corner kick, the presence of certain offensive players may determine the coach's decision to leave one player, or even two, in offensive position, instead of leaving none.

Figure 11: *In situ* SP game report (defending corner)



Source: [Untitled image on *in situ* SP game report (defending corner)], n.d., FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

Figure 12: *In situ* SP game report (short defending corner)



Source: [Untitled image on *in situ* SP game report (short defending corner)], n.d., FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

- SP post-game report (defending corner)


In the post-game report, we carry out an assessment of the performance of the own team in the SP in question. Thus, in the first place, relevant data will be presented in terms of incidence, attempts or goals of the SP and, then, the strengths and weaknesses that the group has presented will be discussed. It is essential to include the video of the commented actions to facilitate the understanding of the report.

Figure 13: Post-game report (defending corner)

Defending corner

9 defending corners. 3 attempts (1 direct attempt and 2 after 2nd ball).

- **PIQUÉ** and **SUÁREZ** cleared most of the crosses. **GRIEZMANN** also contributed clearing 2 balls.
- Strong in the defence of the direct cross.
- The only direct corner kick shot was made by PLAY9 after an open shot to the penalty spot.
- The rival has collected most of the clearances and has created a lot of danger in the 2nd ball (2 clear occasions).
- Marking losses on the advance up field after the clearance.



Source: [Untitled image on Post-game report (defending corner)], n.d., FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

- **Cumulative SP report (defending corner)**

The objective of the cumulative report is to get to detect, from a greater perspective, how the performance of the team in a certain SP is; in this case, in defence of corner kicks. In this report we try to highlight the defensive structure of the team, as well as those strengths and weaknesses found on a regular basis in the games analysed. Besides, it is also important to expose data regarding the performance that we obtain in said action; in this case, relating it to attempts and goals conceded.

The need and urgency of the moment will determine how often these reports should be made and, hence, how many games they will include, which will lead us to reflect on the team's behaviour in the analysed SP.

Figure 14: Cumulative report (defending corner)

Defending corner

Combined marking with 2 players in zone (generally, SUÁREZ near post and PIQUÉ in small area front), 5 marking, 1 at short distance, 1 to clear and 1 MESSI in offensive position).

Aspects to improve:

- On occasions, we take time to organise ourselves and the rival can surprise us by kicking a quick corner.
- The intensity of the markings can be improved. Especially after a 2nd ball or a short kick, where it is difficult to detect the references and the finishers can end up winning the back.
- Increase the attention of the player/s of the clearance at the time of taking responsibility for the man-to-man mark in which the opponent enters with 6.

Positive aspects:

- Very strong in the defence of the first cross. Notable participation of PIQUÉ and TER STEGEN.
- 2nd team in the League to neutralise the most corners.
- No goal conceded.



Source: [Untitled image on Cumulative report (defending corner)], n.d., FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

Unit 2.3 Proposal of variables and example of analysis of indirect defensive free kicks

First of all, it should be clear that the following proposal, already discussed throughout the module, will not be based on indirect free kicks by regulation, but on those where the shooter does not intend to shoot towards the goal. This, without a doubt, is one of the criteria discussed in the establishment of general SP parameters, which must have been consolidated between the analyst and the coaching staff.

Unlike corner kicks, indirect free kicks can be taken from anywhere on the pitch. That is why, within these actions, it is essential that the analyst and coaching staff structure a classification of indirect free kicks based on the zone in which they have occurred and determine the importance of analysis that each one will have.

As part of the flexible and adaptable process, the need for SPs analysis may depend on the demand of the competition because—speaking of rival analysis—depending on the coach's intention, when we shoot a long free kick, we will consider whether to analyse, or not, how that team defends long free kicks. That is why the rival analysis of indirect defensive free kicks will depend on the intention of the own team when performing said action.

That is to say, if we are a team that kicks all short free kicks up to the last third of the pitch and seeks to start the game quickly, *a priori* we will not be interested in analysing the defensive structure of the rival team in far free kicks. On the other hand, if we are a more direct team in that sense, determined to cross the free kicks from the midfield looking for an extension within the area, the need arises to know how the rival behaves in the defence of those far free kicks.

Bearing in mind the aforementioned, it is true that within the analysis of indirect free kicks we must give priority to those that involve the greatest importance and, normally, those that have a greater impact on the game. We are talking about lateral free kicks and close lateral free kicks.

Proposal of variables for the analysis of indirect defensive free kicks (lateral free kicks)

Some of the variables that we can focus on for the analysis of defensive lateral free kicks may be the following:

- **Defensive organisation:** What type of defence does the team put up?



- Combined
- Zone
- **Static defensive organisation structure:** It can only be detected with an image prior to the indirect free kick.
 - How many players are there and how are they located in zone?
 - How high do they defend? High, medium, or low?
 - If it is a combined defence, which player is responsible for marking high balls?
 - If it is a zone defence, does the line always have the same order? Or is it modified based on the side of the shot?
 - How many players perform man-to-man marking?
 - What is the number of players in clearance?
 - Is there a player positioned to defend the short ball kick (at short distance)?
 - How many players are in the wall?
 - Do they leave any player in offensive position?
- **Dynamic defensive organisation structure:** Those behaviours that emerge in relation to the structure of the team's defensive organisation, in the indirect free kick, once the ball is in play.
 - Does the defensive line sink or hold when there is a short kick?
 - Do the clearance players accompany the defensive line sprint?
 - How does the clearance player behave if the opponent enters with another finisher?
 - Does the wall player or player in short position themselves in clearance once the free kick has been shot?
- **Qualitative parameters:** Some examples are given.
 - *Assessment of the beginning of the backward sprint.* At what point do they start the backward sprint? Do they hold until they hit or do, they protect themselves and enter before the shooter's last step?
It is essential to detect this aspect since, relating it to the height of the defensive line, it can give us indications about the space that may exist between the defensive line and the goalkeeper.
 - *Assessment of the coordination of the backward sprint.* Do they all run at the same time or does a player start first? How are the gaps between the players on the line?

- *Assessment of the aggressiveness of the line or marks.* Do they contact the close opponent when running backwards?
- *Overall performance assessment.* In which zones has the most danger been created to them? By what type of shot have they received the most attempts?
- *Assessment of 2nd balls.* Do they give option to 2nd balls?
- *Assessment of the goalkeeper's participation.* Do they come out well overhead and forward on balls between defensive line and their position? Do they stay halfway out?
- *Individual performance focus.* Which player is the most decisive when it comes to clearing aerial balls?

- **Quantitative parameters:** We can highlight:
 - How many lateral free kicks do they neutralise? How many lateral free kicks do they concede?
 - How many goals have they conceded from a lateral free kick?
 - Have they committed penalties?

* We must leave a record of the behaviour of the analysed team in the face of near lateral free kicks. Does it modify its defensive organisation on near lateral free kicks? From what reference do they modify their structure?

Exemplification of the analysis of a defensive lateral free kick

- **SP pre-game report (defending lateral free kick)**

Figure 15: SP pre-game report (defending lateral free kick)

DEFENDING FREE KICK

ZONE MARKING

Line at **mid-low height of 7 players** (PLAY2 - PLAY4 - PLAY9 - PLAY5 - PLAY6 – PLAY8 – PLAY3). The order does not vary depending on the side..

Depending on whether we are going to kick with 1 or 2:

- **1-2 players for clearing:** PLAY7 and PLAY10
- **1-2 players to the wall:** PLAY11

COMBINED MARKING in near lateral free kicks (from the box line) with 2 zones, 5 man-to-man marks, 2 clearances and 1 in offensive position.

To highlight.

- **Coordinated defensive line at the start of the sprint**, no player usually advances.
- Occasionally, **excessive space between gaps of central line players** (for example, goal conceded in the previous game)
- They have conceded **2 goals from a lateral free kick and 1 from a near lateral free kick.**

OPTION:
Cross looking for far post (preferably inswinging) with prior blocking of the last player on the line.



Source: [Untitled image on SP pre-game report (defending lateral free kick)], n.d., FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

Figure 16: 2D rendering (pre-game) structure in defending lateral free kick



Source: [Untitled image on 2D rendering (pre-game) structure in defending lateral free kick], n.d., FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

Figure 17: 2D rendering (pre-game) structure in near defending lateral free kick



Source: [Untitled image on 2D rendering (pre-game) structure in near defending lateral free kick], n.d., FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

- *In situ* SP game report (defending lateral free kick)

Figure 18: *In situ* SP game report (defending lateral free kick)



Source: [Untitled image on *In situ* SP game report (defending lateral free kick)], n.d., FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

- SP post-game report (defending lateral free kick)

Figure 19: Post-game report (defending lateral free kick)

DEFENDING FREE KICK

7 defending indirect free kicks. We received 2 attempts (1 direct and another through a 2nd ball).

- In general, we have been **aggressive in defending these situations**, using contact, and cutting runs.
- **Optimal distances between** the defensive line gaps.
- **We have made a counterattack** taking advantage of the recovery in one of these actions.
- The last lateral free kick of the game (minute 93) was well defended.



Source: [Untitled image on SP post-game report (defending lateral free kick)], n.d., FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

- **Cumulative SP report (defending lateral free kick)**

Figure 20: Cumulative report (defending lateral free kick)

DEFENDING FREE KICK

Zone marking with a high line of 7-8 players, 1-2 in clearance and 1-2 in short or wall. On some occasions, MESSI in offensive position.

Aspects to improve:

- Lack a little more **contact with the opponents and prevent them from winning the position**. When this happens, the opponents have a very clean sprint and would attempt in an optimal situation in case the ball reaches them.
- They attempt above the Liga average in these actions and we have **conceded 3 goals**.

Positive aspects:

- The **line maintains height and runs coordinated backwards**. There are usually no imbalances in the sprint.
- There has been an **improvement in the management of the 2nd ball** as we now pick up many more clearances.
- Although it is not an indicator of success in the defence of this action, we are the **2nd team that concedes the fewest lateral free kicks**.



Source: [Untitled image on Cumulative report (defending lateral free kick)], n.d., FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

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Figure 1: Structure 1–4–3–2. (n.d.). FC Barcelona Analysis Department (WYSCOUT).

Figure 2: Structure 1–5–2–2. (n.d.). FC Barcelona Analysis Department (WYSCOUT).

Figure 3: Structure 1–5–3–1. (n.d.). FC Barcelona Analysis Department (WYSCOUT).

Figure 4: Near post and small area front (2 in zone). (n.d.). FC Barcelona Analysis Department (WYSCOUT).

Figure 5: Near post, small area front and far post (3 in zone). (n.d.). FC Barcelona Analysis Department (WYSCOUT).

Figure 6: Near post, small area front and both posts (4 in zone). (n.d.). FC Barcelona Analysis Department (WYSCOUT).

Figure 8: SP pre-game report (defending corner). (n.d.). FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

Figure 9: 2D rendering (pre-game) structure in defending corner. (n.d.). FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

Figure 10: 2D rendering (pre-game) structure in short defending corner. (n.d.). FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

Figure 11: *In situ* SP game report (defending corner). (n.d.). FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

Figure 12: *In situ* SP game report (short defending corner). (n.d.). FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

Figure 13: Post-game report (defending corner). (n.d.). FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

Figure 14: Cumulative report (defending corner). (n.d.). FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

Figure 15: SP pre-game report (defending lateral free kick). (n.d.). FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

Figure 16: 2D rendering (pre-game) structure in defending lateral free kick. (n.d.). FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

Figure 17: 2D rendering (pre-game) structure in defending lateral near free kick. (n.d.). FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

Figure 18: *In situ* SP game report (defending lateral free kick). (n.d.). FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

Figure 19: Post-game report (defending lateral free kick). (n.d.). FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

Figure 20: Cumulative report (defending lateral free kick). (n.d.). FC Barcelona Analysis Department.

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