



Analysis of goals scored in the Turkish Football Super League 2021-2022 season according to attack transitions and attack start zones

Hüseyin ÇAYIR¹, Seydi Ahmet AĞAOĞLU²

¹Ministry of National Education, Samsun, Türkiye

²Freelance Researcher, Samsun, Türkiye

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to identify and analyze the goals scored from offensive transitions in 380 matches played by 20 teams competing in the Super League in the 2021-2022 season. Unlike previous studies that predominantly focus on the type and number of goals scored, this research addresses a significant gap in the literature by examining the tactical processes underlying these goals. The goals were analyzed by watching the goals through the broadcasting organization and instatscout platform and a comparison was made with the support of instatscout data. In the 2021-2022 season, 234 of the 1067 goals scored in 380 matches played in the Turkish Super League were scored in offensive transitions. The analysis revealed that of the 234 goals scored in transition, 108 were scored with balls won in the 1st zone, 92 in the 2nd zone, and 34 in the 3rd zone. These findings indicate that while transition attacks starting from zone 1 resulted in the highest number of goals, zone 3 was the most productive in terms of transition attacks leading to goals. This suggests that winning the ball in advanced areas of the field (zone 3) is more efficient for scoring goals, even though such opportunities are less frequent. Based on these results, strategies to enhance ball recovery in zone 3 could significantly improve goal-scoring efficiency. When implementing the tactical training of a match strategy planned on transitions, the training can be designed by utilizing the resulting data. While planning the match strategy, tactical plan changes can be made according to the opponent by considering the regions where transition goals occur intensively during the match.

Keywords: Football, goal, tactics, transition

Türkiye Futbol Süper Ligi 2021–2022 sezonunda atılan gollerin hücum geçişleri ve atak başlangıç bölgelerine göre analizi

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, 2021-2022 sezonunda Süper Lig’de mücadele eden 20 takımın oynadığı 380 maçta hücum geçişlerinden atılan golleri belirlemek ve analiz etmektir. Ağırlıklı olarak atılan gollerin türü ve sayısına odaklanan önceki çalışmaların aksine bu araştırma, bu gollerin altında yatan taktiksel süreçleri inceleyerek literatürdeki önemli bir boşluğu gidermektedir. Goller yayıncı kuruluş ve instatscout platformu üzerinden izlenerek analiz edilmiş ve instatscout verileri desteğiyle karşılaştırma yapılmıştır. 2021-2022 sezonunda Türkiye Süper Ligi’nde oynanan 380 maçta atılan 1067 golün 234’ü hücum geçişlerinde atıldı. Analiz, geçiş hücumlarında atılan 234 golün 108’inin 1. bölgede, 92’sinin 2. bölgede ve 34’ünün 3. bölgede kazanılan toplarla atıldığını ortaya koydu. Bu bulgular, 1. bölgeden başlayan geçiş atakları en fazla golle sonuçlanırken, 3. bölgenin golle sonuçlanan geçiş atakları açısından en üretken bölge olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu durum, sahanın ileri bölgelerinde (3. bölge) top kazanmanın, bu tür fırsatlar daha az sıklıkta olsa da, gol atmak için daha etkili olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu sonuçlara dayanarak, 3. bölgede top kazanımını artırmaya yönelik stratejiler gol atma verimliliğini önemli ölçüde artırabilir. Geçişler üzerine planlanan bir maç stratejisinin taktiksel antrenmanı uygulanırken, antrenman elde edilen verilerden yararlanılarak tasarlanabilir. Maç stratejisi planlanırken, maç sırasında geçiş gollerinin yoğun olarak gerçekleştiği bölgeler göz önünde bulundurularak rakibe göre taktik plan değişiklikleri yapılabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Geçiş, taktik, futbol, gol

This study is derived from PhD thesis of the second author, under the supervision of the first author.

Sorumlu Yazar/Corresponded Author: Hüseyin ÇAYIR, E-posta/ e-mail: huseyincayir_@hotmail.com

INTRODUCTION

In today's football matches, teams have very few scoring opportunities due to the development of defensive tactics. For almost every team, defending is easier than attacking. It is easier for players to know where to stand when defending, to learn the defensive position and how to work together as a team (Gonzalez-Rodenas et al., 2016; Bostancı et al., 2018; Freitas et al., 2023). Attacking requires skill above all. In today's football, the fact that defending teams play in a more compact way, that defending teams usually defend by settling in the 2nd zone or their own 1st zone, makes it difficult for attacking teams (Çobanoğlu & Terekli, 2018). The dominant teams of almost every league in Europe and in the world try to gain the ball by pressing in the 2nd zone and 3rd zone, that is, in the midfield and in the opponent's half, in order to gain superiority in the game and to attack with the balls they win. In the so-called 5 big leagues; England, Italy, Spain, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Germany, France and the Turkish Super League in the 2021-2022 season, most of the counterattacks that resulted in goals in the 2021-2022 season were realized with the balls won in the 2nd zone and 3rd zone, that is, in the midfield or in the opponent's penalty area (Dmitriy et al., 2013).

In their study on offensive transitions in elite football, it was stated that the average number of actions required to score a goal or create a goal position after winning the ball in all zones was approximately 4. Transitions starting after winning the ball in the defensive quarter were mostly carried out in 3-6 actions, while transitions starting after winning the ball in the offensive quarter were carried out in an average of 3 actions (Gonzalez-Rodenas et al., 2017; Hughes & Lovell, 2019). In another study, 1,533 transitions were analyzed in 14 matches during the quarter-finals, semi-finals and finals of UEFA Euro 2008 and UEFA Euro 2016. It was observed that there was a 6.32% increase in the number of attacking transitions in the UEFA Euro 2016 championship compared to the UEFA Euro 2008 championship. These results suggest that the dynamics of the attacking game have evolved towards shorter attacking actions in wider areas of the game. It was also observed that, compared to the Euro 2008 championship, defending closer to the opponent's goal to win the ball (Maneiro et al., 2019). When Hughes and Franks (2005) analyzed offensive transitions sequences, they found that shorter passing sequences resulted in more goals scored per sequence than longer passing sequences and that teams produced significantly more shots in shorter passing sequences. Lago-Ballesteros et al. (2012a) examined 908 possession situations in 12 matches of a Spanish first division team and found that fast attacking transitions affect the score three times more than organised attacks.

Regarding the completion time of offensive transitions, there is a general consensus between the available data and different authors. Studies conclude that offensive transitions need to be developed at high speed with a time interval ranging from 1' to 5' and $\leq 15'$ for successful completion (Vogelbein et al., 2014; Wallace & Norton, 2014; Eusebio et al., 2024; Plakias et al., 2024). Moreover, these changes in the dynamics of attacking play have probably also emerged in response to new scenarios in the environmental conditions of the game, such as the score at the moment of the competition, the type of competition or the quality of the opposing team (Lago, 2009; Rein & Memmert, 2016).

The interest of clubs and coaches in match analysis is increasing in world football (Coutts et al., 2014; Sarmiento et al., 2018). Thanks to the information obtained through match and video analyses, training programs that contribute to the development of teams are planned in the most appropriate way for competitive conditions. It can be said that the data and information revealed by match analyses are at the forefront of football research.

The 2021-2022 Super League season was selected for this study due to its distinctive features. This season witnessed a high level of competition and an increased emphasis on tactical innovations, particularly in attacking transitions, as teams adapted to the challenges of scoring in modern football. There is an idea that teams that use transitions less will have more possession. However, the last 4 teams relegated from the league this season were below the league average in both possession percentage and the number of goals scored from transitions. The outcomes of this season reflect a trend of intensified rivalries, strategic diversity, and innovative approaches to squad planning and match preparation. Based on these unique characteristics, the present study aims to analyze attacking transitions as one of the most effective attacking formats, and to provide insights for teams in areas such as squad planning, opponent analysis, training strategies, and match tactics.

What is transition?

Transitions don't last long but they are a very important part of the game. The term "transition" refers to the moment when one team loses the ball and the other team wins the ball. James (2006), defines transitions as situations where one team regains control of the ball from an opponent or loses possession. The actions in transition provide both exciting scoring opportunities and tense moments for fans and coaches. Transition phases are recognized as crucial moments for achieving tactical performance (Turner & Sayers, 2010). The time required for the players of the losing team to react as soon as possible to defend and start the transition

from offense to defense is crucial. Likewise, it is very important for the team that wins the ball to attack quickly in order to catch the opposing team off guard and prevent them from reorganizing in defense. Yiannakos and Armatas (2006) defined offensive transitions as “a process that begins with a team’s first possession of the ball and is followed by the same team shooting on goal, making a turnover, or passing the ball to the opponent after a certain number of passes”. Tenga and Sigmundstad (2011) explained attacking transitions as “positions involving a high degree of offensive activity, which tend to approach the opponent’s goal using offensive actions such as forward passes and dribbles after possession”.

METHOD

Research model

In this study, a descriptive/retrospective research model based on observation and analysis without direct human participation was applied. All goals scored in the Turkish Super League in the 2021-2022 season were monitored and goals scored from offensive transitions were identified. The goals scored from offensive transitions were separated according to the zones in which the goals were scored with the balls tackled in which zone (Figure 1). The goals, separated into zones, were analyzed one by one, and how many seconds and passes were achieved. This study was conducted using the situation analysis method. Situation analysis is a method that enables in-depth examination of events or processes occurring in a specific context. The main reason for choosing this method is to determine the variables such as seconds and number of passes of the goals scored after the balls won from the opponent on the 3 zones separated on the football field.

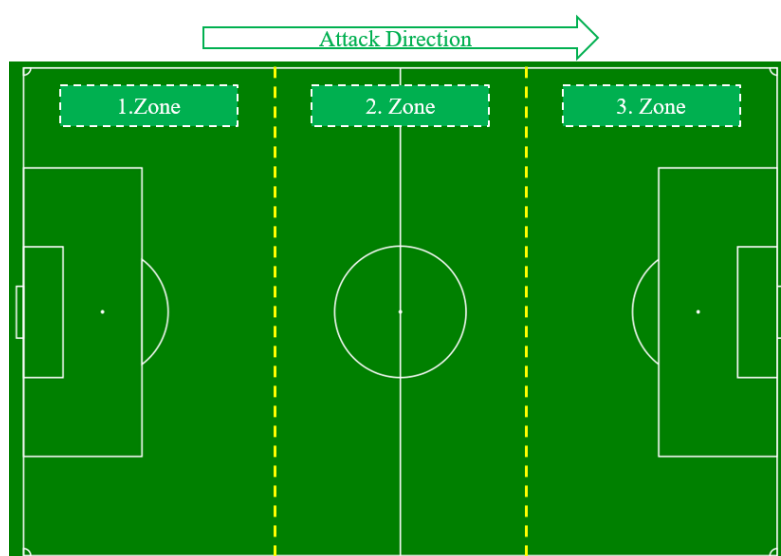


Figure 1. Zones on the football field

Research group (population-sample)

The population of the study consists of 380 matches played by 20 teams competing in the Turkish Super League in the 2021-2022 season and 1067 goals scored. 234 of the goals were scored from offensive transitions. The 234 goals scored from offensive transitions constitute the sample of the study.

Variables of the Study

Three different zones (first, second and third zones) were considered as variables of the study (Figure 1). Goals were analyzed according to the zones of tackle, the total number of offensive transition attempts and the number of offensive transitions that resulted in goals (Table 1).

Table 1. Goal analysis and analysis variables

Variable	Definition
Tackle Zone	The area where the ball is tackle from the opponent or where the ball changes hands.
Total Number of Offensive Transition Attempts	An offensive action started to attack after tackle the ball, which may or may not result in a shot.
Number of Offensive Transitions Resulting in a Goal	An attack that results in a goal without the ball changing hands after tackle the ball from the opponent.
Attack Finishing Time	The time from winning the ball until a shot is taken at the opponent's goal.
Number of Passes	Number of passes made with teammates after winning the ball until the attack is completed.
Number of Attacks Resulting in Accurate Shots in Offensive Transitions	Attack after tackle the ball from the opponent without the ball changing hands and resulting in an accurate shot.
Offensive Transition	Attack resulting in a shot after tackle the ball from the opponent.
Efficiency	The ratio of the number of attempted clearances to the number of clearances resulting in a shot on target or a goal.

Data collection/processing method

The study was conducted by obtaining the matches broadcast by the broadcaster via Instatscout. The location of the balls won by Instatscout in 3 zones of the field was detected by GPS. The matches were analyzed by an expert match and performance analysis coach. The data were analyzed using the notational analysis method. For the validity of the data, the data obtained from the Instatscout software were then compared with the analysis done by the analysis coach and the erroneous data were corrected.

Data analysis

The data prepared using the notational analysis method and collected from Instatscout software were transferred to a database created in SPSS 24.0 software (SPSS, Chicago, USA). Firstly, a descriptive analysis was performed to identify the dimensions and categories related to the teams' goal analyses as different zones (first, second and third zones), such as zones of

winning the ball, number of transition attacks resulting in shots and number of transition attacks resulting in goals. The data are presented as frequencies and percentages of each category.

FINDINGS

In the 2021-2022 season, 234 of the 1067 goals scored in 380 matches played by 20 teams in the Super League were scored through transitions. While some of the goals scored in transition turned into fast attacks, some of them resulted in organized attacks. Of the 234 goals scored in transition, 108 were scored with balls won in the 1st zone, 92 were scored with balls won in the 2nd zone and 34 were scored with balls won in the 3rd zone. In the 2021-2022 season, 46% of the goals scored in transition in Super League were scored with balls won in the 1st zone, 39% with balls won in the 2nd zone and 15% with balls won in the 3rd zone (Figure 2).

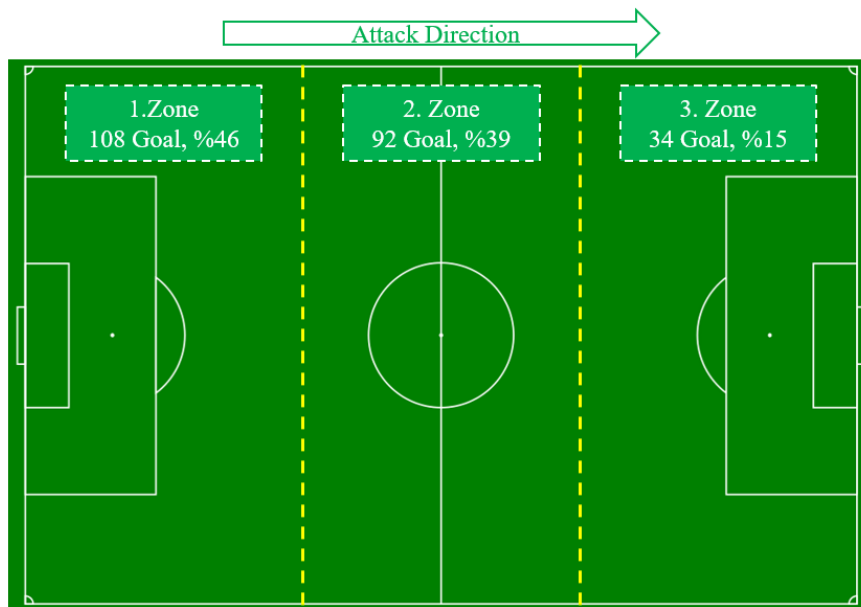


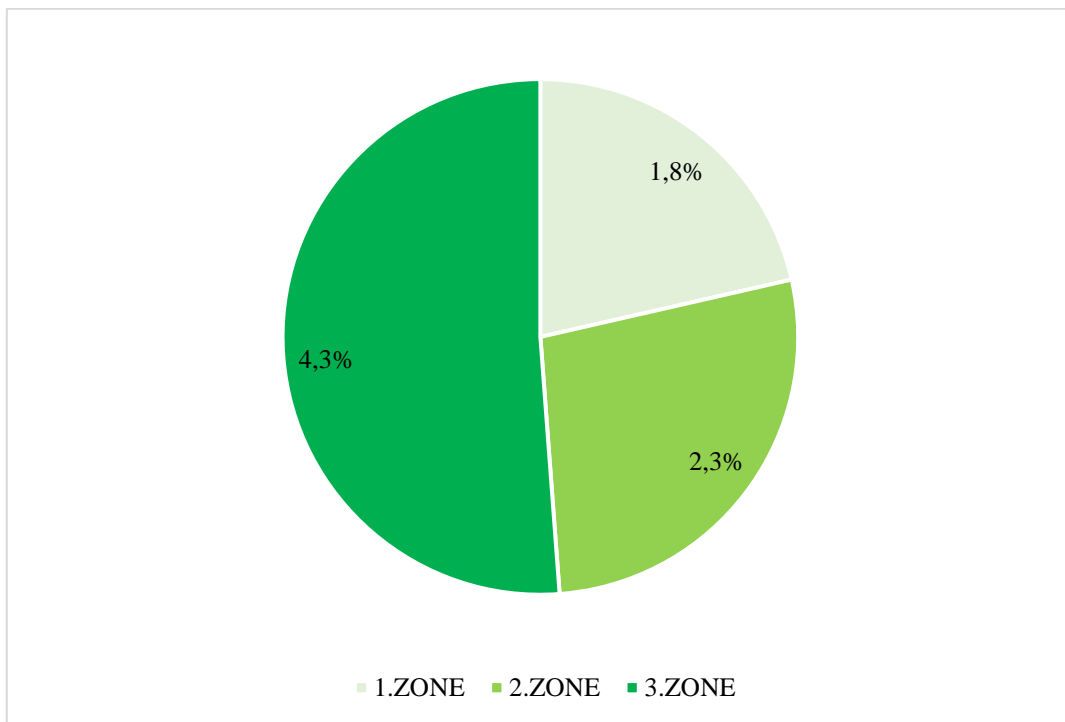
Figure 2. Zones on the football field

In the 380 matches played, there were a total of 10651 total number of transition attacks, which may or may not have resulted in a shot. Seventeen percent of these transition attacks, i.e. 1827 of them, were converted into attacks and resulted in a shot with or without a shot. Of the 1827 offensive transitions that resulted in a shot, 12.8% or 234 of them resulted in a goal (Table 3).

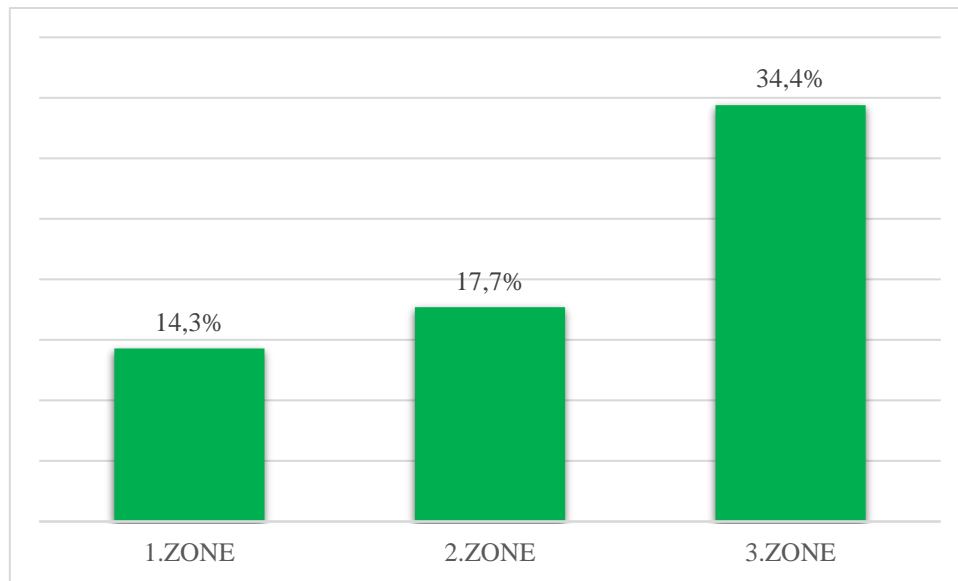
Table 3. Distribution of goals scored according to zones

Tackle and Attack Starting Zones	Total Number of Transitions	Accurate Shots	Goal
1. Zone	5862	844	108
2. Zone	3984	706	92
3. Zone	805	277	34

In terms of zones, the highest total number of transitions were made from zone 1. However, if we look at the accurate shot percentage of total transitions (14.3%) and goal percentage (1.8%) of total number of transitions, zone 1 is the most inefficient zone. Looking at zone 2, accurate shot percentage of total transitions is 17.7% and goal percentage of total number of transitions is 2.3%. Although zone 3 is the z with the lowest number of transitions, it is the most productive in terms of transition, with 34.4% accurate shot percentage of total transitions and 4.3% goal percentage of total number of transitions (Graphic 1) (Graphic 2).



Graphic 1. Goal percentage of total number of transitions



Graphic 2. Accurate shot percentage of total transitions

The percentages shown in the chart are relatively low, and this outcome should be clarified. One possible explanation for these low percentages could be the difficulty of regaining possession and launching effective offensive transitions in advanced zones (e.g., Zone 3). Defensive strategies of opposing teams might have been more effective in preventing turnovers and limiting attacking opportunities closer to the goal.

Another potential factor could be the overall style of play adopted by teams during the analyzed season, where midfield battles (Zone 2) or deep defensive recoveries (Zone 1) might have been prioritized. Additionally, Zone 3 typically provides fewer opportunities for ball recovery due to its proximity to the opponent's goal and the lower frequency of possession loss in that area (Graphic 2).

Table 4. Average duration and number of passes for goals scored in offensive transitions

Offensive Transitions Zones	1. Zone	2. Zone	3. Zone
Average Attack Time (sec)	16	11	6
Average Number of Passes	4,2	2,6	1,4

In the Super League, the average duration of goals scored in offensive transitions after balls won in zone 1 is 16 seconds and the average number of passes is 4.2; the average duration of goals scored in offensive transitions after balls won in zone 2 is 11 seconds and the average number of passes is 2.6; the average duration of goals scored in offensive transitions after balls won in zone 3 is 6 seconds and the average number of passes is 1.4 (Table 4).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Determining the pathways to winning matches or success in soccer has become more and more scientific. Scientists have wanted to identify the key factors in the pathways to success in soccer and have started to examine the basic performance parameters of soccer (Dufour et al., 2017). Every day, countless studies are being conducted on the performance indicators of soccer players or soccer teams, both physically and technically. Due to the fact that football has a different place in the world than sports and the economic share it has in the world, both scientists, coaches and club owners support such studies in order to identify and benefit from these performance indicators. Early research into how goals are scored in football may have shaped the tactics of English football. Many coaches were influenced to a greater or lesser extent by the so-called “long ball game” or “direct play”, a tactic used as a result of this research (Hughes and Franks, 2005). Studies examining attacking patterns in soccer confirm that transition offenses have a higher chance of success than other attacking patterns in terms of goals scored, shots on goal or entries into the goal area (Tenga et al., 2010a; Tenga et al., 2010b; Barreira et al., 2013; Sgrò et al., 2017; Fernandez-Navarro et al., 2018). In the UEFA Euro 2008 championship, the teams showed a balanced distribution between the two forms of attack, either as a fast break when they won the ball or as a more controlled organized attack. In the UEFA Euro 2016 championship, on the other hand, when the teams won the ball, most of their transition attacks were fast breaks. This gives us some insights into the tactical changes and thinking of the teams between the tournaments. In the UEFA Euro 2016 championship, teams were more successful in transition attacks compared to the UEFA Euro 2008 championship. The success rate in attacking transitions increased from 34.7% in the UEFA Euro 2008 championship to 41.4% in the UEFA Euro 2016 championship (Maneiro et al., 2019). In the so-called 5 big leagues; England, Italy, Spain, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Germany, France and the Turkish Super League in the 2021-2022 season, most of the offensive transitions that resulted in goals in the 2021-2022 season took place in the 2nd zone and 3rd zone, that is, with the balls caught in the midfield or in the opponent’s penalty area (Dmitriy et al., 2013).

In terms of zones, the most transition attempts were made from zone 1. However, when we look at the percentage of accurate shots (14.3%) and the percentage of goals (1.8%), it is the most inefficient zone. When we look at zone 2, the percentage of shots on target is 17.7% and the percentage of goals is 2.3%. Zone 3 was the most productive zone in terms of transition attacks, with 34.4%; 277 shots on target and 4.3%; 34 goals, despite having the least number of transition attempts (805). While searching the literature, we came across many studies that

support the results we found in our study. Many studies on the starting points of offensive transitions show that the rate of successful offensive transitions increases as the starting point of the offensive transition gets closer to the opponent's goal, as in our study (Tenga et al., 2010a; Tenga et al., 2010b; Lago-Ballesteros et al., 2012b). According to another study by Gonzalez-Rodenas et al. (2015a), a total of 3077 turnovers - wins and subsequent offensive transitions were analyzed. Of all transitions, 1.1% (34) resulted in goals and 12.64% (389) goal positions. The ball winning zone data significantly showed that when a team wins the ball in zones, it is more likely to score goals and create positions. With the balls won in the offensive zone (4th quarter), 49.45% (45) goal positions were created, 7.69% (7) resulted in goals, and it was the most productive zone for winning the ball.

Garganta et al. (1997) analyzed 104 goals scored by 5 European teams Barcelona, Milan, Porto, Paris Saint German, Bayern Munich in 44 matches. Goals scored from set-pieces were excluded from the analysis. More than 50 % of the goals were scored in less than 10 seconds, 47,7 % - 85 % were scored by 3 or less players and maximum 3 passes. When we look at these data, we can say that the goals scored were scored in as short a time as possible and most of them were scored in transition.

There are different results in different studies regarding the number of passes used in offensive transitions. In most of the studies, it is emphasised that attacking with 4 passes or less is the most effective way of attacking (Mombaerts, 2000; Acar et al., 2009; Lago-Ballesteros et al., 2012b). When the goals of 1986 World Cup matches were analyzed, 85% of the goals were scored with 5 passes or less than 5 passes, while 40% of the goals were scored with 1 pass or no pass (Hughes, 1993).

In 1990 and 1994 FIFA World Cup matches, the number of passes before the goals were analyzed. While 84% of the goals scored in the 1990 World Cup were scored with 4 passes or less, 80% of the goals scored in the 1994 World Cup were scored with 4 passes or less (Hughes & Franks, 2005).

In a recent study on MLS game tactics, it was found that only fast offensive transitions from the moment of winning the ball, when the opposition defence is caught off-balance, are more efficient than organised attacks in creating scoring opportunities (Gonzalez-Rodenas et al., 2015a). Tenga et al. (2010b) and Lago-Ballesteros et al. (2012b) state that offensive transitions are an ideal and effective way of attacking against defences that are unable to recover and organise after losing the ball.

In offensive transitions, most of the ball-winning and attack initiation occurred in the 1st zone. However, this was the least efficient zone in terms of the number of attacks resulting in goals (108) and the goal percentage (1.8%) of transition attempts. In contrast, Zone 3 emerged as the most productive zone, with the highest goal percentage (4.3%) and a notable number of attacks resulting in goals (34). These findings contribute to the field by emphasizing the importance of ball recovery in advanced areas of the field (Zone 3), highlighting its superior efficiency in transition attacks. This study sheds light on the tactical significance of targeting high-productivity zones for offensive strategies, providing actionable insights for coaches and analysts to enhance their team's attacking performance. It suggests that prioritizing strategies to recover possession in Zone 3 can substantially improve scoring opportunities, guiding future training and tactical planning in modern football. On the other hand, when we consider the consequences of turnovers by zone, there are many references for the teams that have the ball. They can decide their attacking shape by building from the back or by attacking directly.

The scope of the study includes the competition performances of the teams competing in the Turkish Super League in the 2021-2022 season and the goals scored in offensive transitions. The angles of the competition images provided by the broadcaster and Instatscout, repetition of positions or images that provide insufficient data for analysis due to advertisements constitute the limitations of the research.

Recommendations

- Transition attacks must be included in training plans.
- The coaches and players can plan and work on the plan by not waiting for the transition attacks to be improvised.
- In the light of the data obtained from the past to the present; depending on the squad and player profile, teams can try to win the ball and conclude the attack by pressing closer to the opponent's goal.
- Offensive transitions can be planned with different tactics according to the area where the ball is won.
- While planning offensive transitions, training can be done by setting time and pass limitations according to the area where the ball is won in order to simulate the match.

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KATKI ORANI CONTRIBUTION RATE	AÇIKLAMA EXPLANATION	KATKIDA BULUNANLAR CONTRIBUTORS
Fikir ve Kavramsal Örgü <i>Idea or Notion</i>	Araştırma hipotezini veya fikrini oluşturmak <i>Form the research hypothesis or idea</i>	Hüseyin ÇAYIR Seydi Ahmet AĞAOĞLU
Tasarım <i>Design</i>	Yöntem ve araştırma desenini tasarlamak <i>To design the method and research design.</i>	Hüseyin ÇAYIR Seydi Ahmet AĞAOĞLU
Literatür Tarama <i>Literature Review</i>	Çalışma için gerekli literatürü taramak <i>Review the literature required for the study</i>	Hüseyin ÇAYIR Seydi Ahmet AĞAOĞLU
Veri Toplama ve İşleme <i>Data Collecting and Processing</i>	Verileri toplamak, düzenlemek ve raporlaştırmak <i>Collecting, organizing and reporting data</i>	Hüseyin ÇAYIR Seydi Ahmet AĞAOĞLU
Tartışma ve Yorum <i>Discussion and Commentary</i>	Elde edilen bulguların değerlendirilmesi <i>Evaluation of the obtained finding</i>	Hüseyin ÇAYIR Seydi Ahmet AĞAOĞLU
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