

# Analyzing Opponent Goalkicks



A framework to turn their build-up patterns into a winning pressing plan.



# Use goal kicks to shape your pressing plan



The opponent goal kicks are one of the most underrated moments to gain control of a game. It's a repeatable starting point: same location, similar structure, and a limited set of solutions.

But most preparation still starts and ends with analyzing short vs long. This is limiting because all short goal kicks are not all the same, and long goal kicks are not all the same either.

The advantage comes from breaking them down into clear behaviors that tell you where, how, and when to press, and what the opponent is trying to achieve.

A good press is not aggressive by default. It's prepared, informed, targeted, and repeatable. This is the process we use to build a pressing plan.

- 1 Setup
- 2 Pattern
- 3 Progression
- 4 Goalkeeper profile
- 5 Press plan

# Read their goal-kick setup



Before you label anything as short or long, identify how the opponent wants to start. Their structure tells you whether they want to invite pressure, avoid it, or manipulate your first line.

We start by looking at three things: the build-out numbers behind the ball, the positioning of the support outlets, and the first pass behavior. This gives immediate clues about whether they want to build through pressure, bypass it, or use circulation to set a trap for your press.



Common goal-kick shapes and first-pass solutions

## Build-out numbers

Do they build with GK+2, GK+3, or GK+4? That one choice changes the distances, angles, and which player becomes the “free man”.

## Support outlets

Are the fullbacks high and wide, or low and close? Are midfielders showing early to attract your midfielders, or staying higher to pin them? Are wingers wide as escape outlets, or inside to connect centrally? These are often the first indicators of their preferred exit route.

## First pass behavior

Is the first pass typically GK to CB, or CB back to GK? Which side does it start from? Patterns here matter because they often reveal what the opponent is comfortable repeating under pressure.

# Classify their goal kicks into behaviors



Once you know how they set up, the next step is to split their goal kicks into a few repeat patterns. That's how you stop basing a press on 2—3 clips you remember, and start preparing for what they actually do most often.

Instead of one “goal kick” bucket we build a structure goal kicks into behaviors and outcomes like: short, short with no progression, short into the final third, long, long into the final third, and short then long.

TRACKER	RANKING	FORM	AVG./90'
All Goal Kicks			6,64
Goal Kicks - Short	Top 5%		4,95
Goalkicks - Short No Progression	Top 5%		3,11
Goalkicks - Short Into Final Third	Top 1%		2,62
Goal Kicks - Long	Bottom 5%		1,69
Goalkicks - Long Into Final Third	Bottom 10%		0,45
Goal Kick - Short Then Long	Top 10%		2,51

And it's not just what they do, but how often they do it, and whether it's changing over recent games. When you can see volume and trends per category, and compare it across opponents with a similar pressing approach to yours, it becomes much easier to separate a one-off from a real habit.

# Translate patterns into pressing decisions



Each goal kick behavior suggests a different pressing problem, and a different solution, and building a structure is only useful if it helps you make better decisions.

A team that goes short and progresses is not the same as a team that goes short and stalls. A team that goes long directly is not the same as a team that shows short and then goes long. These details tell you whether to jump, delay, lock central, show wide, or set up to win second balls.

Type	What it suggests	Press implication
Short	They want controlled circulation to find an exit.	Close central options first, then jump on the played ball when the outlet is committed.
Short no progression	The build-up stalls, either by design or because it is fragile under pressure.	Identify where it stalls, then force them into that area repeatedly.
Short into final third	They can connect short build-up to progression consistently.	Find the lane they prefer, then decide whether to lock that lane or trap it.
Long	Direct play to avoid pressure or win territory (to target player)	Decide early if you compete for first ball or set up to win the second ball.
Long into final third	They land long kicks in advanced areas with intent.	Prioritize second-ball structure and the next action after the duel.
Short then long	They want to bait your jump, split you, then bypass.	Delay the trigger, protect the bypass, and be ready to win the next duel.

# Identify their preferred progression route

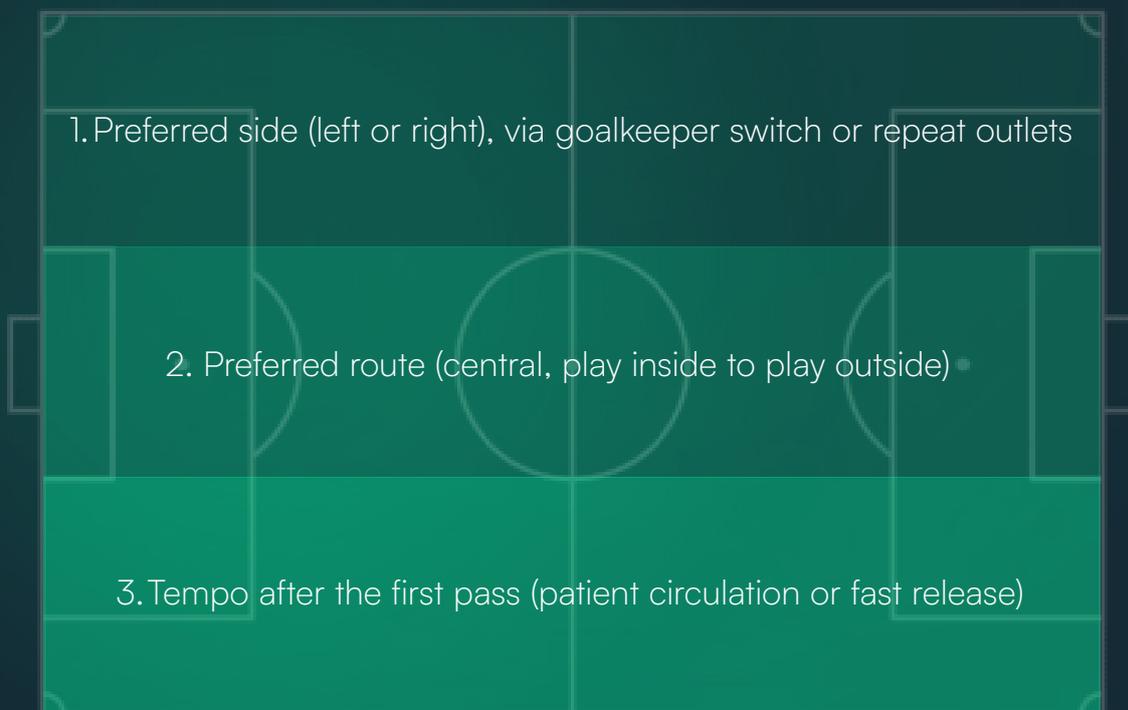


Two teams can both go short and still be completely different pressing problems. One team progresses through fullbacks. Another uses central midfield as the hub. Another builds to attract pressure and then switches through the goalkeeper.

So we focus on progression targets. Where are they trying to get the ball, and through which outlet do they like to do it?

If their progression is mostly wide, you might side press with an inside lock. If it's central, you may need to close the middle and delay before you jump. If they rely on goalkeeper switches, you can show one side and take away the switch.

## What we map



Then we sanity-check it against the patterns. Do they go short to progress, or short to attract and manipulate? Do they go long as a default, or after a short setup?

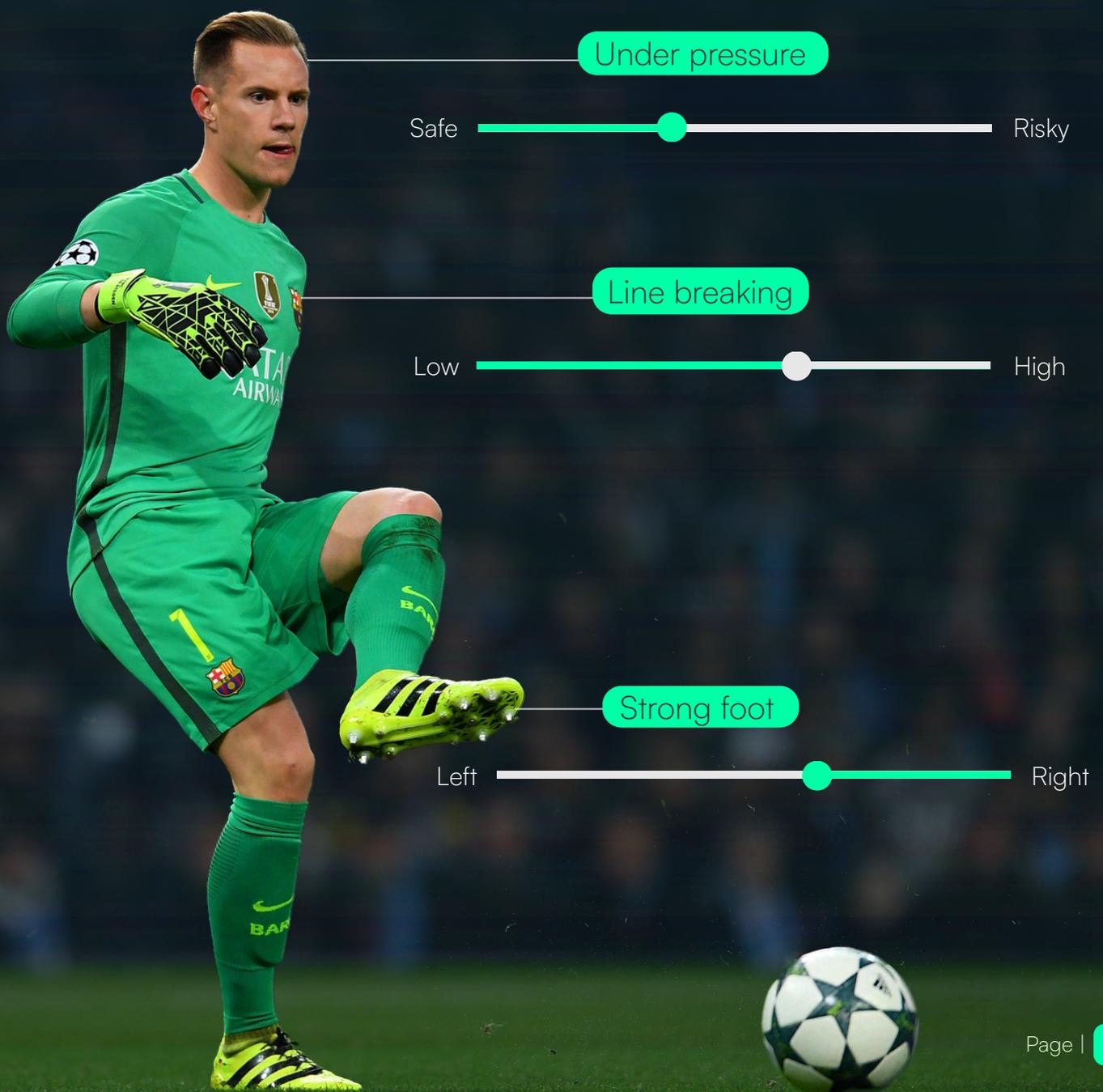
# Use the goalkeeper profile to set triggers



The goalkeeper often defines your pressing triggers.

So we build a simple goalkeeper profile that answers three questions. Which foot do they prefer? Under pressure do they play safe or take risks? And are they willing to break lines consistently?

Once you know this, you can choose better pressing angles, decide which side to offer, and identify the moments where the goalkeeper is most likely to make the decision you want.



# Build a press that forces predictable outcomes



Once you combine their setup, patterns, progression targets, and the goalkeeper profile, your press becomes easier to plan. You stop pressing out of habit and start forcing the opponent into their least preferred solution, and into the situation where you are most likely to win the ball.

Coaches and players don't need all the information, and this framework makes your plan easier to communicate.

It gives them the simple picture:

- What they want from the goal kick
- What we want to force
- The trigger for our response

## Side trigger press

Close inside, press the played ball wide.

## Central lock, then jump

Stay compact, wait for the pass, then press.

## Protect the bypass (short then long)

Delay the trigger, cover the long option, win the next duel.

## Second-ball and play away

Win the second ball, then play away quickly.

# Want the tagged XML for your next opponent?



Fill this form we'll send you the XML files for your next opponent's last 3 games, tagged with the goal-kick structure covered in this framework.

\*Only available for competitions where we have data coverage.

