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# Short corners may be widely despised, but they are helping teams score more



Short corners are usually greeted with a groan from the fans in England CREDIT: REX FEATURES

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By **Alistair Tweedale**  
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During Sky Sports' coverage of Liverpool's 6-1 win over Watford on Sunday (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/football/2016/11/06/liverpool-vs-watford-premier-league-live-score/>), there was a moment that told a story about the widely-held view of corner kicks in this country.

Just as a back-pass is seen as an inherently negative manoeuvre, corners which are not crossed directly into the penalty area are almost always met with a collective groan from supporters.



Mane heads home after Coutinho's short corner CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES

Andy Hinchcliffe, who was on co-commentary at Anfield, was telling the story of Sadio Mane (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/football/2016/11/08/why-sadio-mane-is-proving-to-be-the-premier-leagues-bargain-of-t/>)'s opening goal – a header scored after Philippe Coutinho had decided to take a corner short to James Milner.

“They took a short corner, and I thought they weren’t going to score from there,” Hinchcliffe exclaimed alongside the goal's third replay, as if Liverpool had absolutely taken the wrong decision by going short.

And this is a viewpoint held by so many people in this country: that by opting against putting the ball into THE DANGERZONE you instantly forego a greater opportunity to score.

While that is unquestionably true at Sunday League level, where a ball into the box inevitably causes chaos, Premier League teams are so well-drilled at set-pieces that corner kicks barely ever result in goals. (They are often cleared at the first time of asking, so one could argue that putting a cross into the box just allows for a greater chance of a counter-attack.)



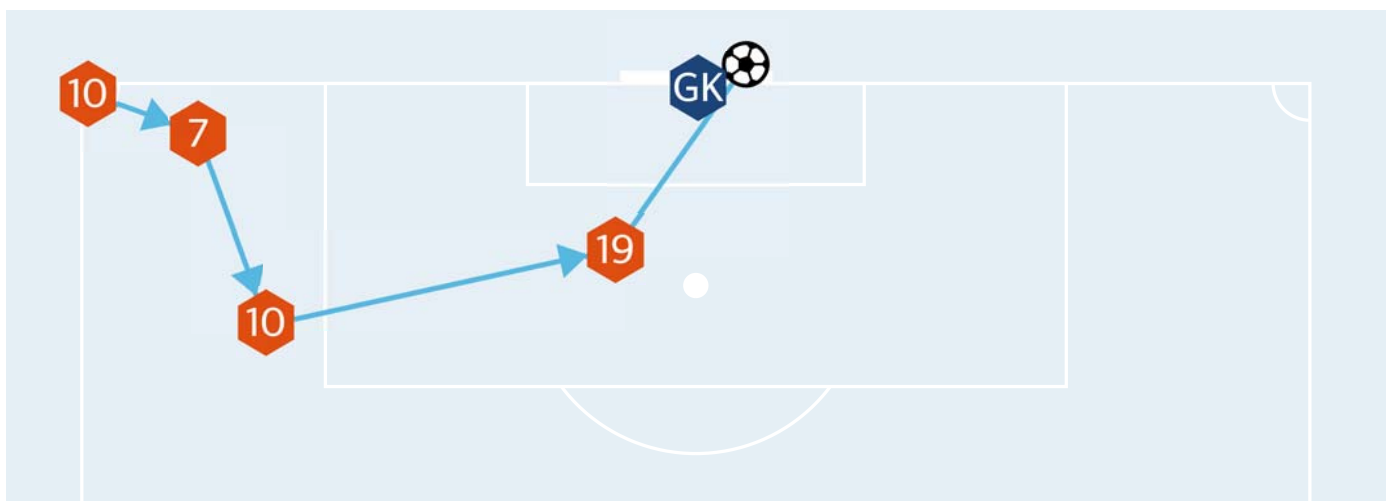


In fact, only around three per cent of corners actually lead to goals. Given that teams have had, on average, around five corners per game this season, the odds of scoring from a corner really aren't very good at all.

So when a team takes a short corner it may, in fact, be a wise decision in terms of its innovation.

Taking a short corner by no means gives up an opportunity, but instead creates a new and different one. As we saw for Mane's first goal on Sunday, a quick one-two between Coutinho and Milner created an angle from which the Brazilian could cross the ball, and Mane used that angle and the pace on the ball to simply glance his header past a helpless Heurelho Gomes. This isn't a tactic too complicated for any side at that level.

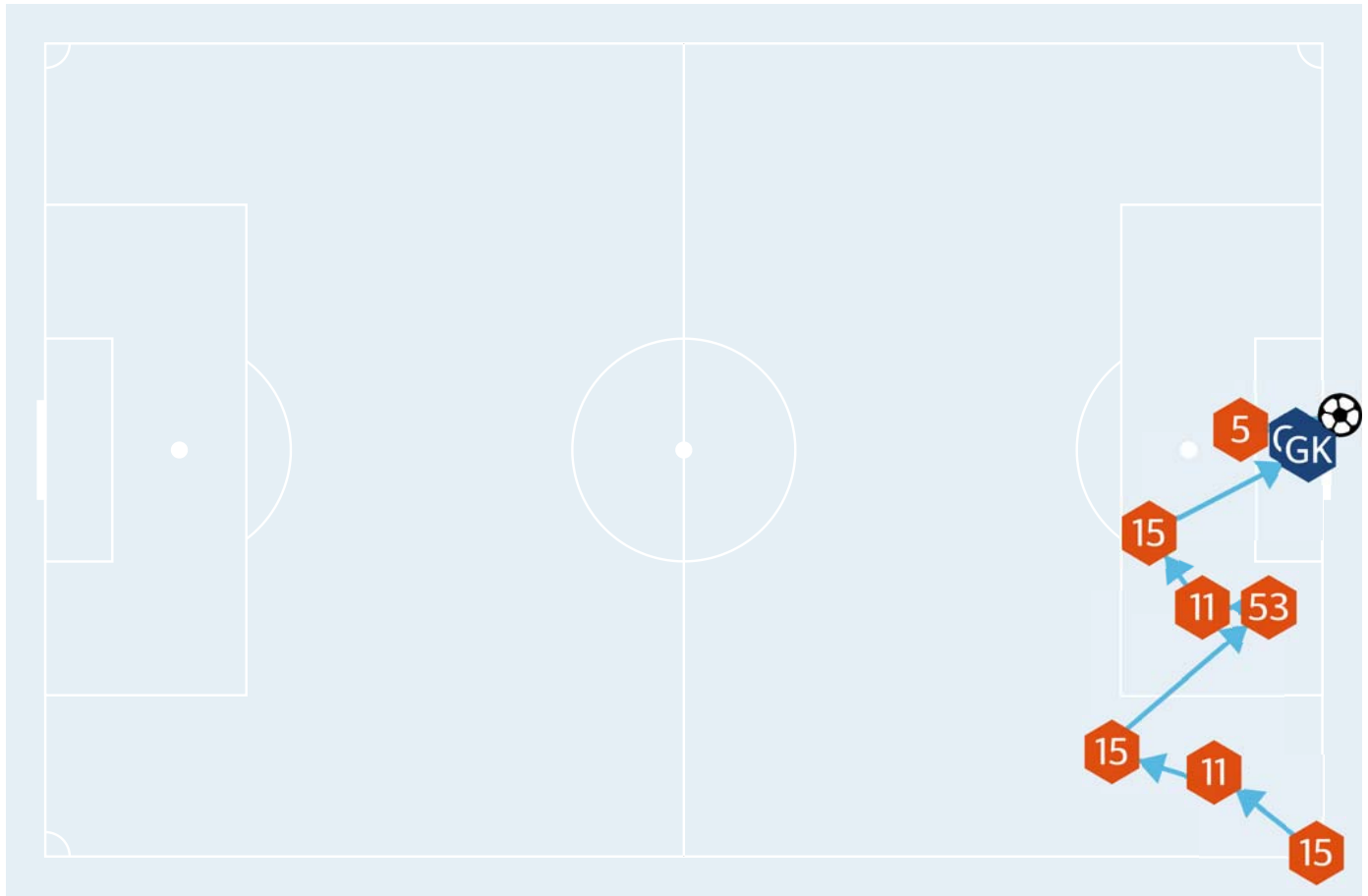
Liverpool 1 - 0 Watford (Sadio Mané, 27 min)



Philippe Coutinho Sadio Mané

Then take a look at Liverpool's final goal on Sunday. Daniel Sturridge took a quick short corner with Watford unprepared to defend it, and Liverpool passed their way through the box before Georginio Wijnaldum followed up to tap in a rebound. Liverpool scored with two of their six corners in that match – or 33 per cent – after having taken both of them short.

## Liverpool 6 - 1 Watford (Georginio Wijnaldum, 90 + 1 min)

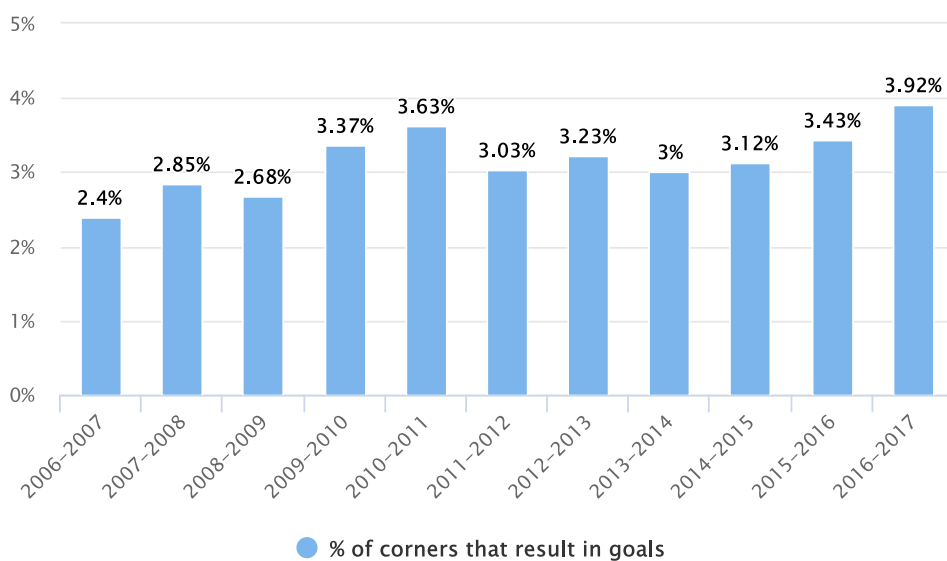


Interestingly, the proportion of corners that have led to goals is at its highest level in the last 11 Premier League seasons. Just 2.4 per cent were scored in 2006/07, from which point it seems teams cottoned on to the inefficiency of not only the conventional corner, but crossing altogether.

### % of corners that result in goals



Premier League by season

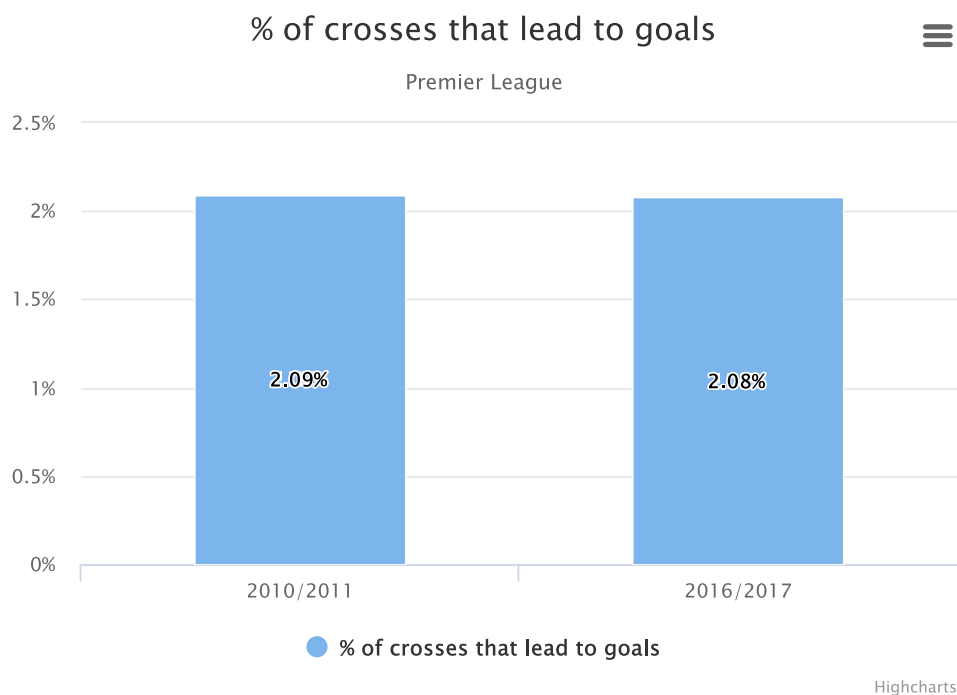
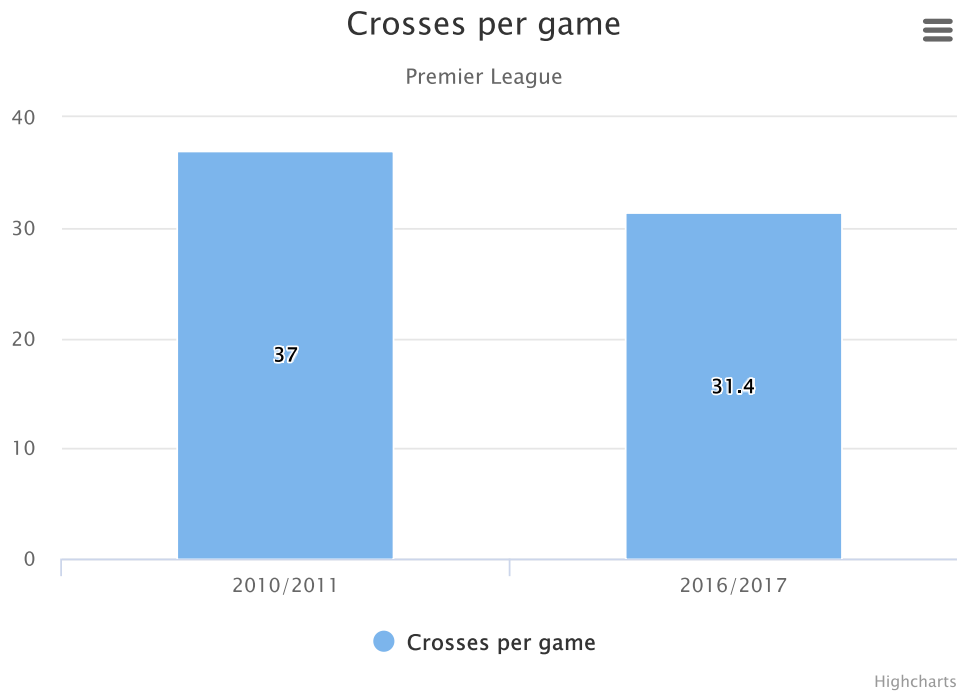


Highcharts

With short corners more common, crosses are less frequent in Premier League

(<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/premier-league/>) games, too. In the last seven seasons, there has been a steady drop in the number of crosses teams are attempting: in total there has been a 15.2 per cent fall since

the 2010/11 season. Meanwhile, the percentage of crosses that result in goals has remained roughly constant.



But what do these numbers mean?

Well, first of all, they suggest that defences are becoming better at dealing with crosses, so there has been a change of tack. The old school, traditional winger is no longer quite so popular, with inside forwards who play on the 'opposite' flank to their natural side and roaming playmakers that drift in-field now more common. Think Eden Hazard, Anthony Martial, Alex Iwobi, Christian Eriksen and Philippe Coutinho, to name five. These are players that come off their touchline rather than charge for the byline.

Teams are putting less emphasis on crossing - which may have something to do with centre-forwards becoming more skilled, mobile athletes rather than big brutes - and ultimately, players are



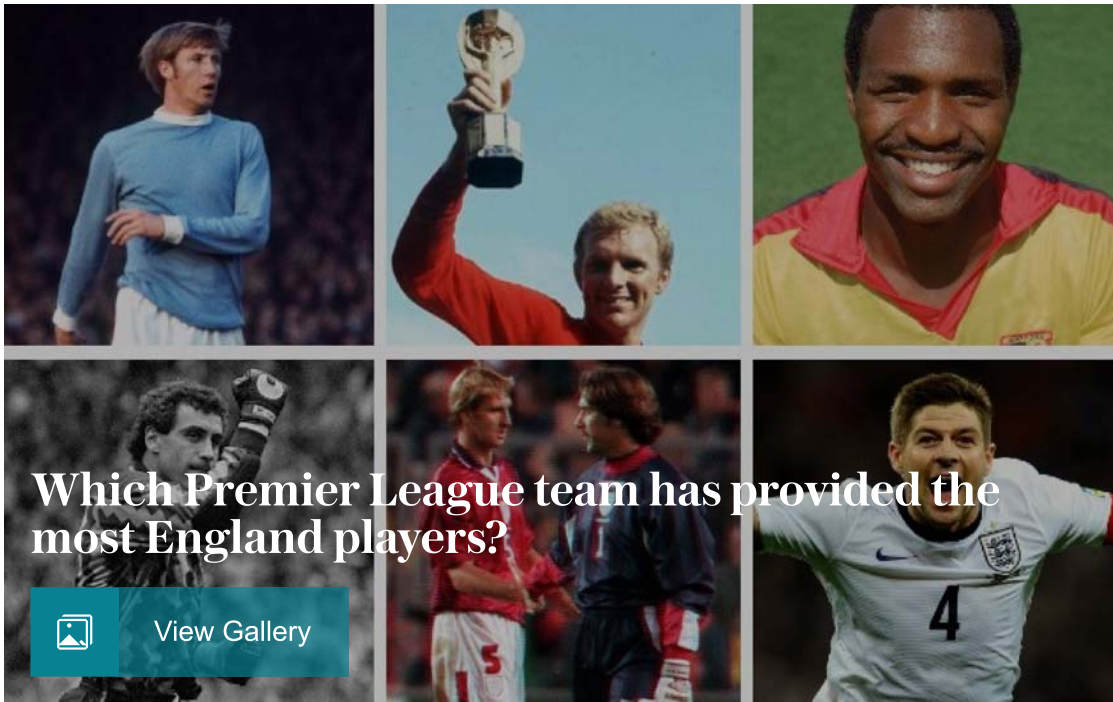
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Of course, corners and crosses do give some chance of a goal, and it would be ridiculous to suggest they should be written off completely, but it is interesting nonetheless that teams have decided to innovate the conventional corner kick. Next time your team decides to take one short, perhaps think twice before throwing your arms up in exasperation.





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