

# Categories of Goals, Attempts and Ratios in the 2018 World Cup

## Introduction

In a bid to make sense of the randomness of scoring goals in Open Play I created three categories of goals. Here I provide a brief description but a full account of the operational definitions has been provided to members of my [website](#).

The first category was from scoring after a pass behind the last line of defence or to a player who was level with the last defender but could take the ball forwards. I referred to those goals as 'Ball Behind and Strike' (BB&S). If another pass was made that lead to a strike at goal I referred to those goals as 'Ball Behind Pass and Strike' (BBP&S). When I combined the two sets of goals I referred to them as BBSP&S.

The second category was for goals scored when a defender or defenders were in a position to defend or were goal-side of the ball. I referred to these goals as 'Other Methods', which included goals from dribbling past the last line of defence.

The third category was from 'Crosses' but from a designated area on each side of the penalty area. In my research a 'Cross' could not originate in the middle of the field or from inside the penalty area due to my operational definitions. Figure 1 shows the five areas on the field where a pass could be made behind the last line of defence and the areas for crossing the ball.

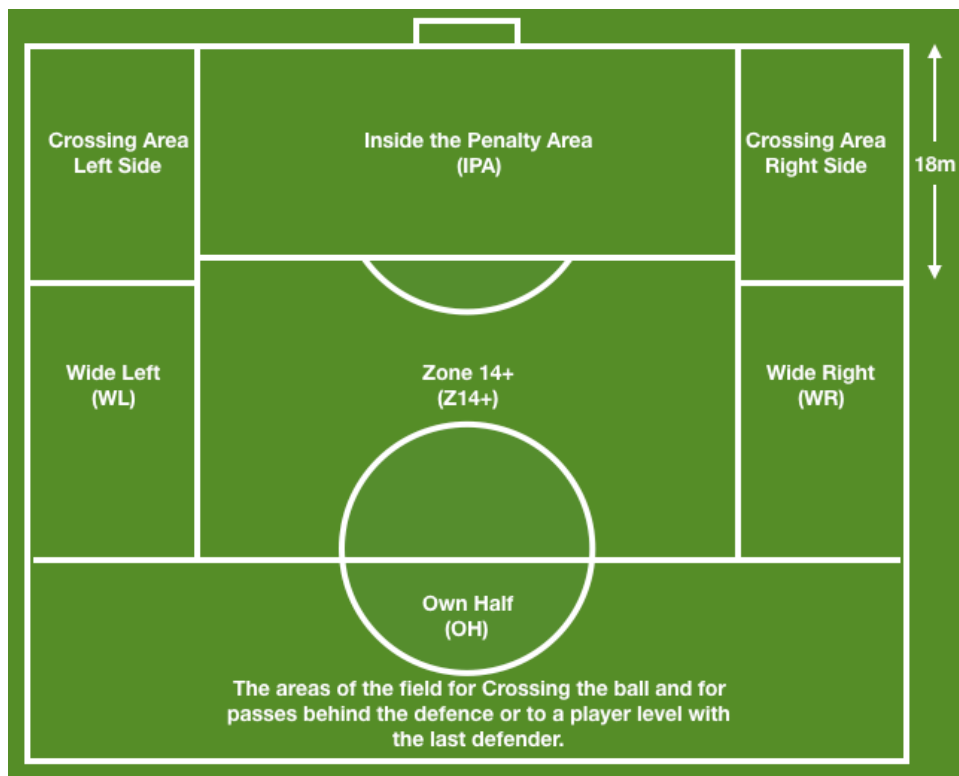


Figure 1. The areas on the field for crossing and passing the ball behind the last line of defence

## Scoring Trends

In three of the last four World Cups more goals were scored by playing the ball behind the last line of defence, or to a player almost level with the last defender, than from 'Crossing the ball' or from any 'Other Methods'. Figure 2 shows the analysis for the goals in Open Play since 2006.

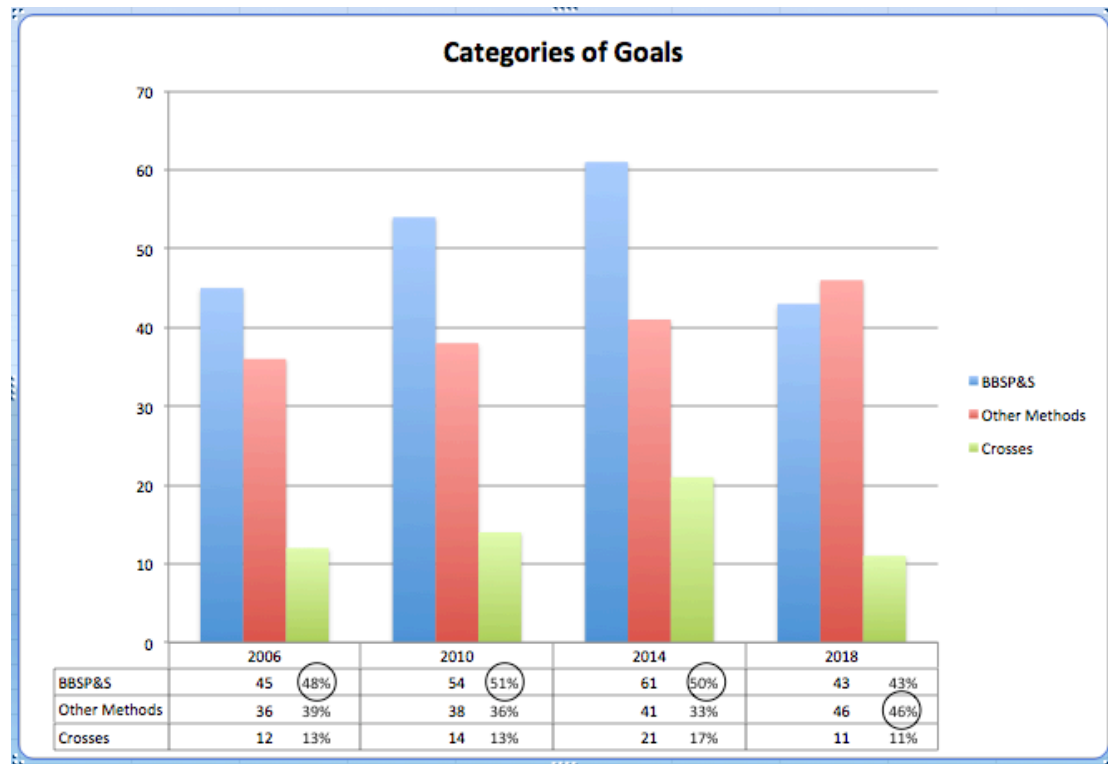


Figure 2. Categories of Goals in Open Play in the last four World Cups

Goals from 'Crossing the ball' were the lowest in all World Cups ranging from 11% in 2018 to 17% in 2014. The highest number of goals came from passing the ball behind the defence between 2006 and 2014 with a range of 48% to 51%. However in 2018 there was a change in this trend and the majority of goals were scored from 'Other Methods' as shown with 46%, compared with 43% from passing behind the defence. One obvious reason why fewer goals were scored from passing behind the last line of defence is that defenders may have been quicker to get behind the ball in numbers and/or defended better than in previous World Cup campaigns; there may be more reasons.

## Goals scored Inside the Penalty Area

We know from previous research that approximately 80% of goals in Open Play are scored from inside the penalty area (Figure 3) so knowing how attempts at goal are created is very important and has strategic implications for coaches.

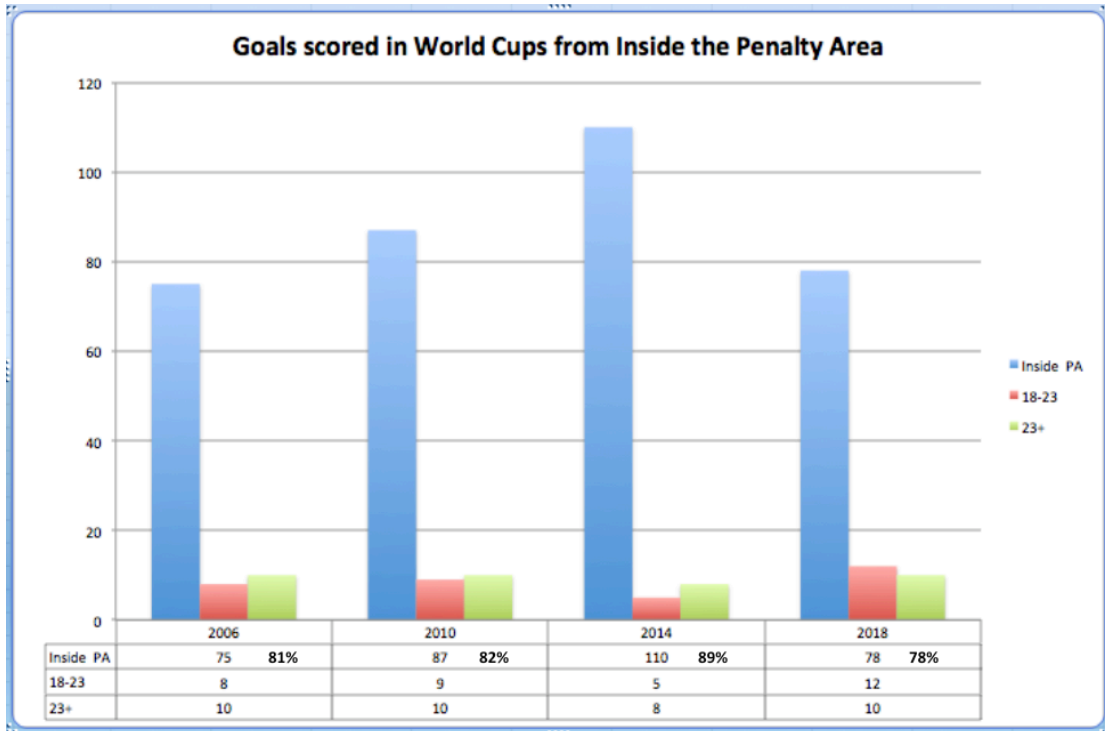


Figure 3. Goals scored inside and outside the penalty area

### Ratio of Attempts and Goals

The final piece of evidence (Figure 4) is the ratio of attempts to goals scored in each of the three categories.

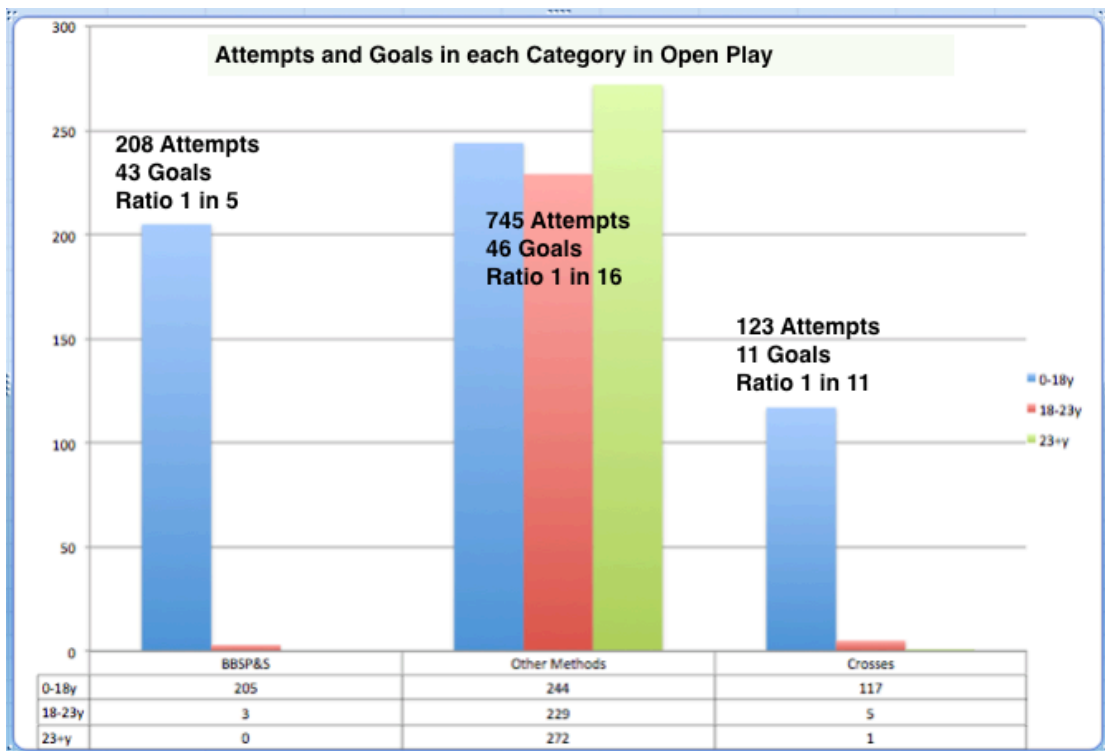


Figure 4. The ratio of Attempts to Goals in each Category in Open Play

The ratio of attempts to goals (1:5) was the lowest in the 'Ball Behind' category (BBSP&S) followed by Crossing (1:11) with goals from Other Methods (1:16) the highest or least productive.

### **Implications for Coaches**

The messages I take from this evidence are as follows:

- ✓ The importance of making forward runs cannot be underestimated.
- ✓ Players should look to pass the ball behind defenders as a priority when they can pass forwards.
- ✓ Players who are tempted to shoot from outside the penalty area ought to consider passing to a player inside the penalty area when possible.
- ✓ The ratio of 1:5 for goals scored after passing behind the defence or to a player level with the last defender is the most effective of three categories of scoring goals in Open Play.
- ✓ Think about how you design practices to encourage and provide opportunities for your players to make forward runs and passes behind the defence. I designed 'The Box Practice' so those activities would occur without even mentioning them.

In my next article I will show the data for passing the ball behind the defence from the five areas on the pitch.

For members of my [website](#) I have made a movie of this presentation, which can be found in the 'Match Analysis' folder.