

Level 4 Paper – Kick with Purpose - Northern Hemisphere vs Southern Hemisphere

Kick Strategy, Skill Acquisition (kicking) and time spend by the coaches, players on developing their kicking game (kick for purpose).

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to create discussion and questions around the current themes/trends from northern and southern hemisphere teams specifically around kick strategy, kicking sessions (including session content) by exploring and analyzing the differences in kicking strategies, statistics employed by competitions from both the northern and southern hemispheres. Specifically, it focuses on kick completions and relevant kicking statistics over the past season. By examining these statistics and themes, I hope to gain insights into and create discussion about the contrasting approaches and tactics utilized by teams from different regions. The observations made during this study I hope will contribute to a better understanding of the game and potentially provide valuable insights for coaches and players of the importance of an effective kicking game/strategy and the importance of players who can train and execute both in a game and training environment while under pressure through play with purpose sessions.

1. Introduction :

Rugby union is a sport that requires a multifaceted approach, and kicking plays a crucial role in both attack and defense. The northern and southern hemisphere teams have developed distinct styles and strategies over the years. This paper aims to analyze the differences in kicking strategies between these two regions and evaluate their impact on kick completions and relevant statistics. While playing rugby in Europe for over 10 years (playing in various competitions such as 6 Nations, Heineken Cup, LVE Cup in the UK, France and Italy) my kicking schedule / regime was a minimum 45min to 1.5 hours a day, either post morning session or post afternoon training sessions. During the sessions my focus shifted between kicking out of hand (general play) restarts, penalties, and goal kicks. In my experience, the time I spent on field crafting and refining my skills as a player became my point of difference and the effect I could have on a game's outcome. This was also the view of the coaches who had also previously played high level rugby in Franco Smith and Marius Goosen who provided and gave direction on the style of sessions completed outside of the team-based units. Our focus during these sessions was to have players make and execute accurately the types of kicks/strategy needed in a game but while on the training field so we can develop best practice, improve Rugby IQ to enable better decisions during games. From my experience with this training schedule and focus I was able to have a direct impact on mine and the teams on field performances and results.

After observations from games and conversations with coaches from all around Queensland & Australia it has become evident that there is not the same focus in Australia on this aspect of the game compared to Europe, hence the time spent and session focus is different.

Recently I have held discussions around the current state / standard of Rugby players in Australia and their ability to identify and execute the required kick / kick strategy while in the game environment. Recent discussions have been with current Reds and Wallaby James O'Connor,

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current Saitama Panasonic Wild Knights Coach Robbie Deans, Current Qld Reds Head Coach Les Kiss, Wallaroo Coaches Sione Fukofuka, Jay Tregonning and Scott Fava.

As part of our discussions, I asked all coaches the following question - What is the current time spent on your kick strategy and the skills of the players to execute effectively in a game environment?

My current interactions and sessions with the Wallaroo squad and coaches as a Kicking Coach has highlighted (especially in the female game currently) the need to have a greater focus on their skill development and IQ around when and what kick / option to take when presented in a game environment. The sessions I implemented with the squad over the past 12 months have seen a big improvement in not only the skill of kicking, (the process) but also the ability to identify when and what type of kick to execute in the right situation. This was achieved by starting with a technical focus (process driven installation) to ensure that what is being practiced is best practice, with the objective to being to enable the player to ID and self-correct in game. I then introduce very early on game scenarios that asked players to execute the type of kick required related to the game situation they are faced with, by running Kicking Loops (exercise /drill). The objective of these kicking loops is to create a game like experience where the players can train having to make the same decisions they would if playing a game and under pressure, but in a safe environment to allow failure and learning experiences. Examples of these Kicking Loops are in Appendix 10. The focus and message delivered was that every kick during the session must have a purpose and is identified (by our naming convention 1, 2 or 3) pre kick to create accountability and recognition of understanding. (Kicking with Purpose)

2. Methodology:

To conduct this analysis, we collected data on kick completions and relevant kicking statistics from both northern and southern hemisphere rugby union competitions. We utilized a comprehensive database of match statistics and employed statistical analysis techniques to identify patterns and trends.

Competitions analysis included.

Northern Hemisphere

- ❖ **Men's Competitions**
 - - Gallagher Premiership
 - - 6 Nations
 - - Top14
- ❖ **Women's Competitions**
 - - Allianz Premiership
 - - 6 Nations Women
- ❖ **Global Competitions**
 - - Women's Rugby World Cup

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Southern Hemisphere

- ❖ **Men's**
 - - Super Rugby Pacific
 - - The Rugby Championship
- ❖ **Women's**
 - - Super Rugby W

Appendix 1 – 9 is the data collected and analyzed from
Reference - Rugby Australia - Tableau Trends Analysis 2023/2024 Dashboards



3. Differences in Kicking Strategies:

3.1 Tactical Approach:

Northern hemisphere teams often prioritize territorial gain through tactical kicking. They frequently employ box kicks, grubber kicks, and high kicks to put pressure on the opposition and gain field position. In contrast, southern hemisphere teams tend to focus more on attacking kicks, utilizing cross-field kicks, chip kicks, and the up-and-under to exploit gaps in the defense and create scoring opportunities.

From the data gathered and analyzed from the 2023 season the average percentage of all kicks during a game were split into the 4 field zones

- D Zone - opponents try line to 22m
- C Zone – opponents 22m to 50m
- B Zone - 50m to own 22m
- A Zone - 22m to own try line.

From the stats approximately 80% to 85% of all kicks are executed in the D and C zones and approximately 15 % to 17% in the B zone, with approximately 2.5% to 5% in the A Zone.

The exception in the South was the Reds Women's Super W with 9.2% and in the North was the England Women's 6 Nations team with 11.1%. (Just a note that I have been working with the Reds Super W kickers for the last 12 months, so this higher percentage is no surprise 5 of the 9 kicks leading to tries.)

I recently caught up with James O'Connor. Both James and I have had the opportunity to play at an international level against northern and southern hemisphere teams, with James also spending many seasons in both hemispheres. When talking to James he referenced that the biggest difference is that players in the Northern hemisphere would all kick twice a week for at least 45mins per session (all backs in UK & France) plus ball players Wednesday/day off goal kicking session and 15 mins after every training session. In comparison to super rugby where it may be 20 mins once a week as a whole group and then after training 15mins max twice a week.

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The big difference in Australia from my experience is that the sessions are predominantly technique or closed drills. The sessions in the UK were more game-based and had pressure on the kick selection for good outcomes in the drills or games. Reasons for this are that 30% of the game is played/sourced from kicks or kick returns in the north and in southern hemisphere 10% of time is spend on this aspect at most, when really, it's one of the hard skills to master and execute when under pressure in a game environment.

When speaking to Robbie Deans recently while on tour in Australia with the Saitama Panasonic Wild Knights, I asked Robbie the same question.

What is the current time spent on your kick strategy and the skills of the players to execute effectively in a game environment?

Robbie said that when he first came to Australia to coach the Wallabies, he was surprised with the skill level of the Australian kickers especially coming from a country with AFL and NRL as national competitions and the amount of sports exposure for players.

Robbie commented on the major role coaches play when developing players and kicking, it is that bad habits can very easily be practiced and that specialist feedback and coaching is essential when setting the technical aspect of the various types of kicks (Rugby IQ decisions on when to and what type) so that when needing to be executed in a game, having a set process will allow a higher success rate when forced to execute the skill under pressure.

3.2 Kick Completions:

Analysis of kick completions reveals that northern hemisphere teams tend to have higher completion rates. This can be attributed to their emphasis on tactical kicking, which often results in well-executed kicks that are easier to control and contest. Southern hemisphere teams, on the other hand, have slightly lower completion rates due to their more adventurous and risk-taking approach.

3.3 Kicking Statistics:

When examining kicking statistics (Appendix 1-9), we observe that northern hemisphere teams tend to have a higher number of kicks per game. This is consistent with their tactical approach, as they aim to control territory and maintain pressure on the opposition. Southern hemisphere teams, while having a slightly lower number of kicks, tend to have a higher number of successful attacking kicks, resulting in more line breaks and scoring opportunities.

4. Implications and Future Considerations:

Understanding the differences in kicking strategies between northern and southern hemisphere teams can provide valuable insights for coaches and players. Coaches can adapt their game plans and training methods to incorporate successful elements from both regions. Players can also benefit from studying and learning different kicking techniques to enhance their overall skill set. Knowing your players and competition are also of major benefit as your game model or strategy needs to suit the players and competition you compete in.

5. Summary / Conclusion:

In conclusion, this paper has highlighted the contrasting kicking strategies employed by northern and southern hemisphere rugby union teams. The tactical approach, kick completions, and kicking statistics all demonstrate notable differences between the two regions. I put this down to the time I spent on and session type(content) and the greater scenario-based / game like training I participated in while playing in the Northern Hemisphere allowed for better decision making and execution of a kick type or strategy due to the way I trained and focus on this skill. The question I pose to you now is - how do you currently coach this aspect of your team and how much time (play with purpose style sessions) do you currently include in your kicking sessions?

Appendix 1 – 9 is the data collected and analyzed from

Reference - Rugby Australia - Tableau Trends Analysis 2023/2024 Dashboards

Appendix 1 Southern Hemisphere - Super Rugby Pacific

Appendix 2 Northern Hemisphere - Gallagher Premiership, Men's

Appendix 3 Northern Hemisphere – Top 14 France, Men's

Appendix 4 Northern Hemisphere – 6 Nations - Europe, Men's

Appendix 5 Southern Hemisphere – The Rugby Championship, Men's

Appendix 6 Southern Hemisphere – Super W, Women's

Appendix 7 Northern Hemisphere – 6 Nations, Women's

Appendix 8 Northern Hemisphere – Women's Premiership Allianz, Women's

Appendix 9 Global – Rugby World Cup, Women's

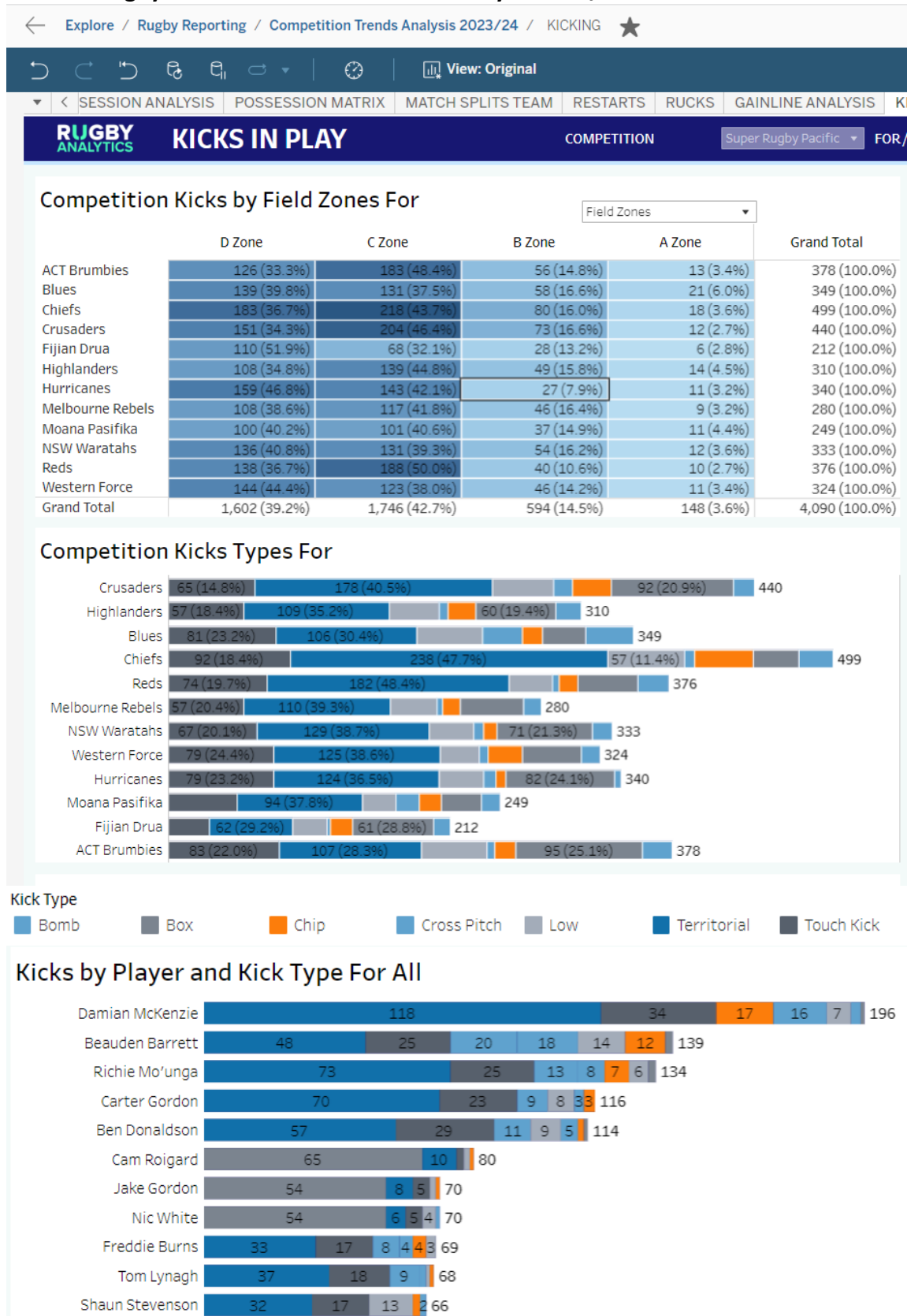
Appendix 10 Kicking Loop examples from Wallaroo Kicking Sessions 2023

KICK WITH PURPOSE - NORTHERN HEMISPHERE VS SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

Appendix 1

Southern Hemisphere - Super Rugby Pacific

Source - Rugby Australia - Tableau Trends Analysis 2023/2024

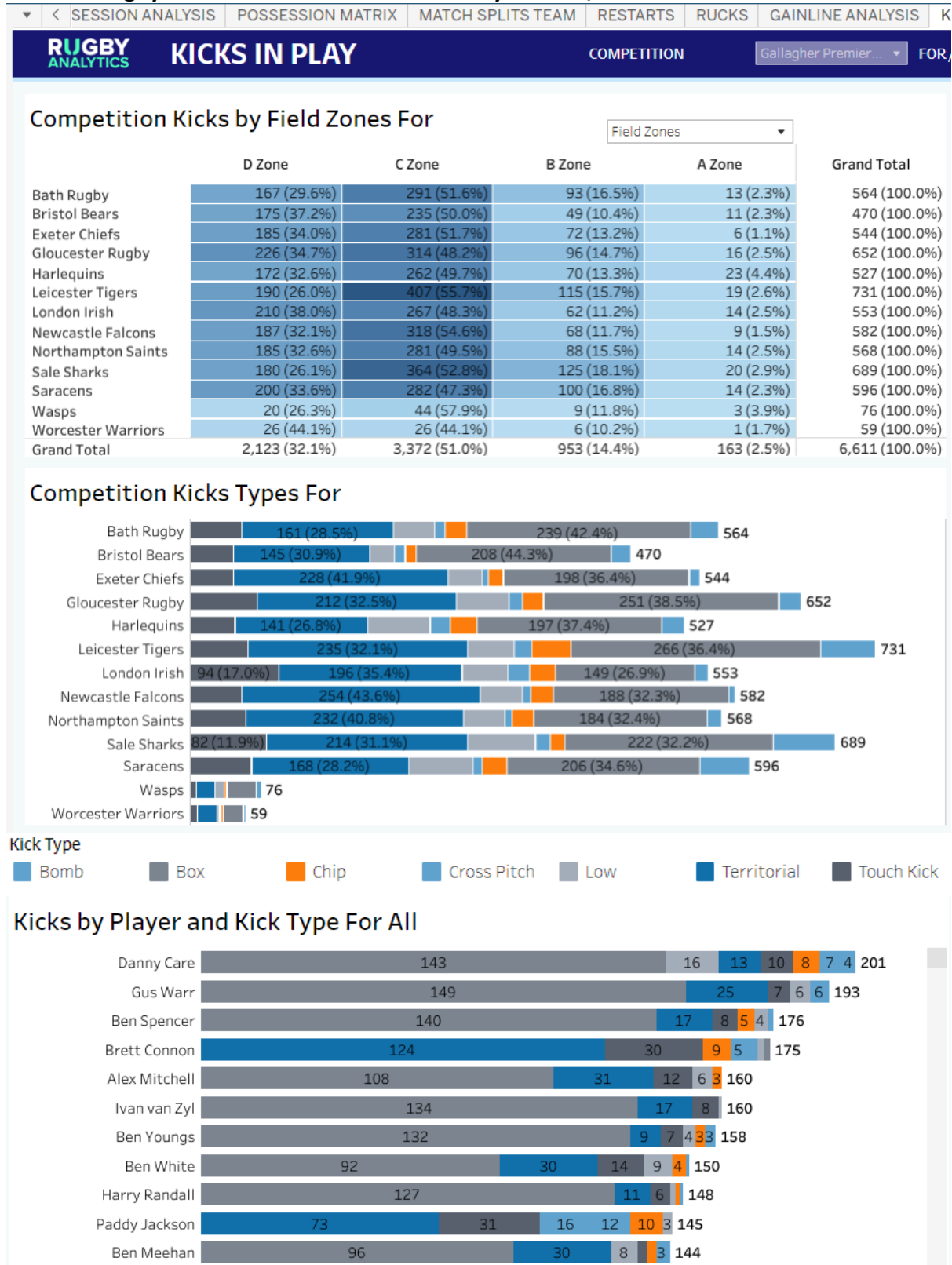


KICK WITH PURPOSE - NORTHERN HEMISPHERE VS SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

Appendix 2

Northern Hemisphere - Gallagher Premiership, Men's

Source - Rugby Australia - Tableau Trends Analysis 2023/2024

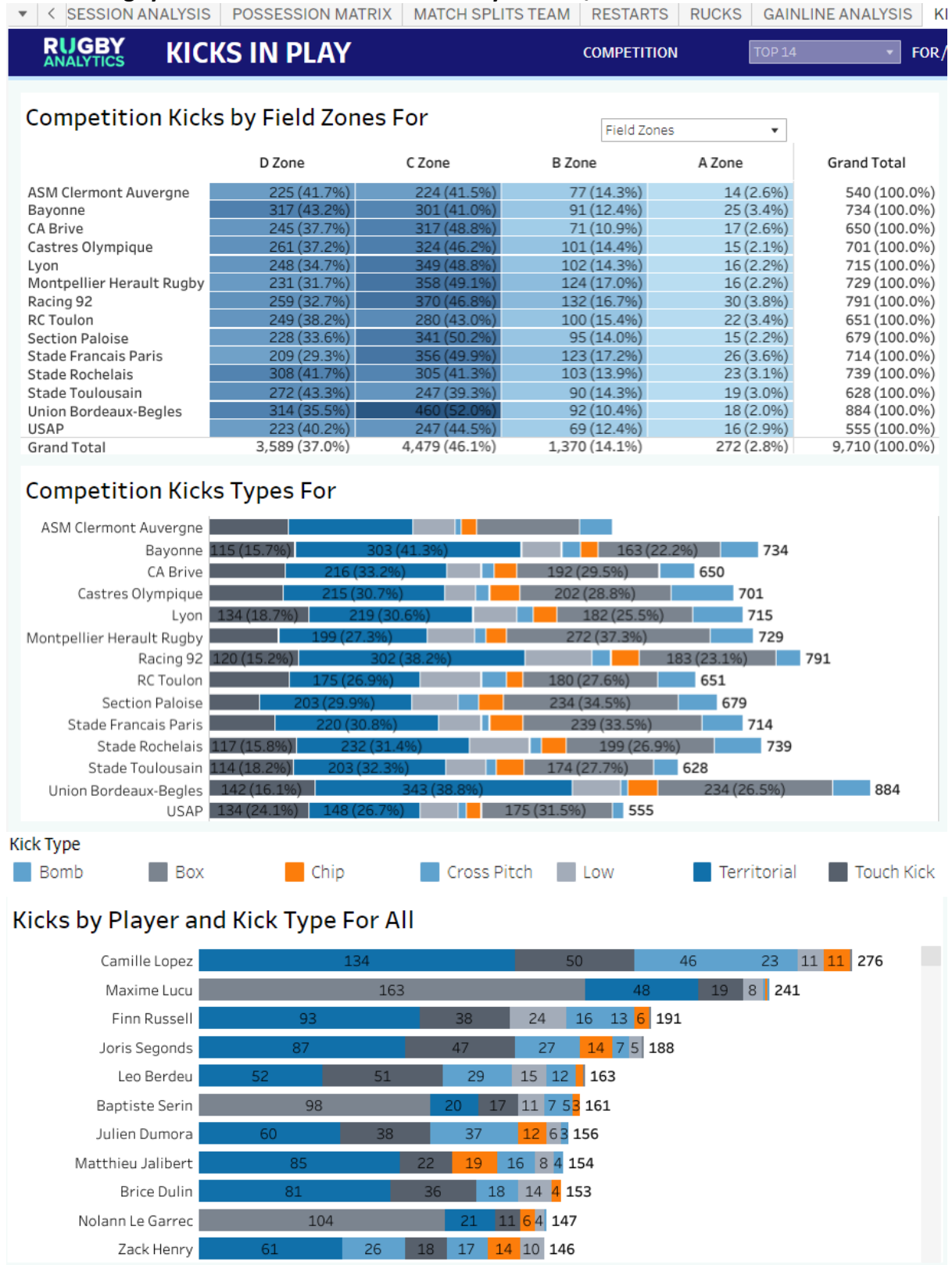


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Appendix 3

Northern Hemisphere – Top 14 France, Men’s

Source - Rugby Australia - Tableau Trends Analysis 2023/2024

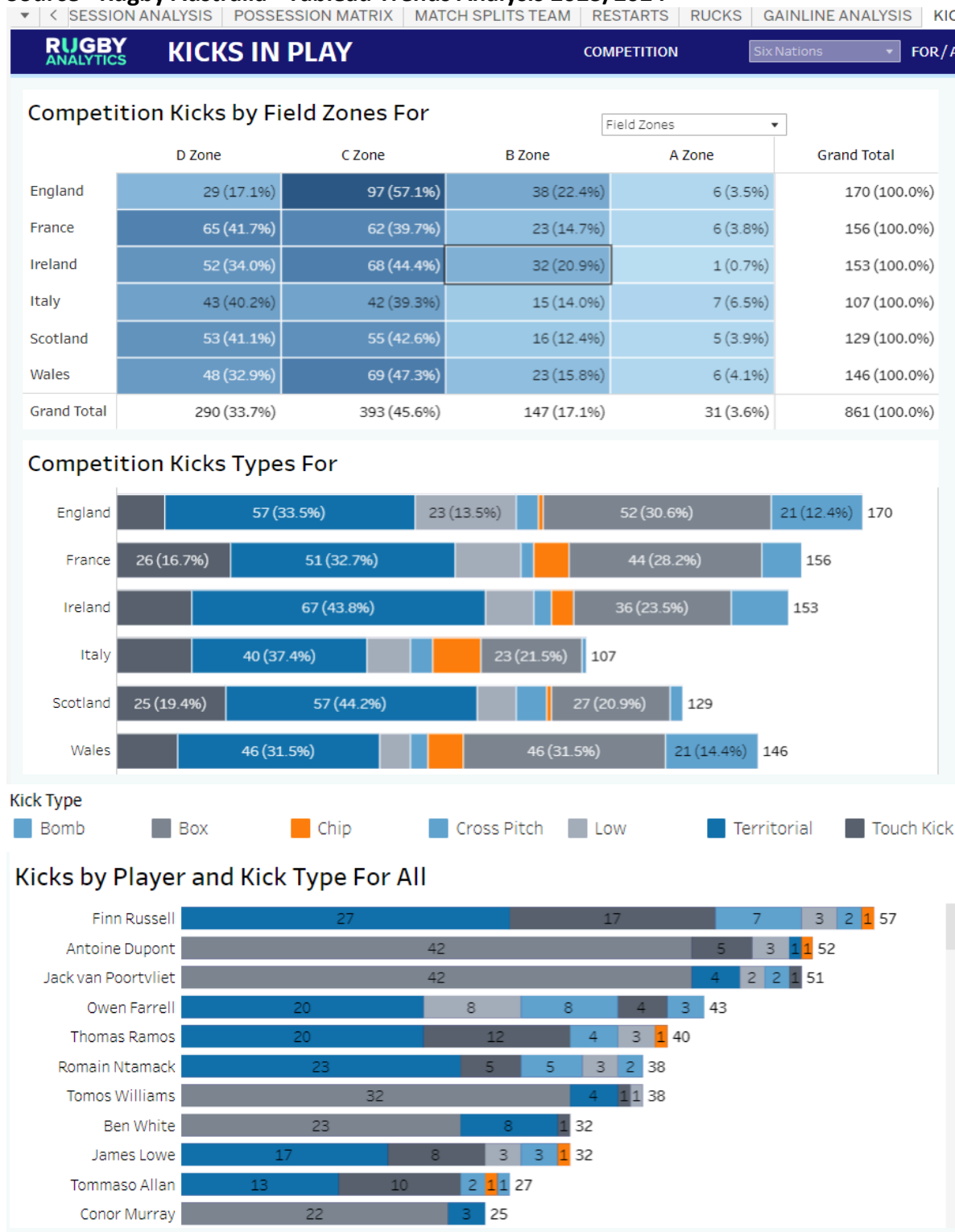


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Appendix 4

Northern Hemisphere – 6 Nations - Europe, Men’s

Source - Rugby Australia - Tableau Trends Analysis 2023/2024

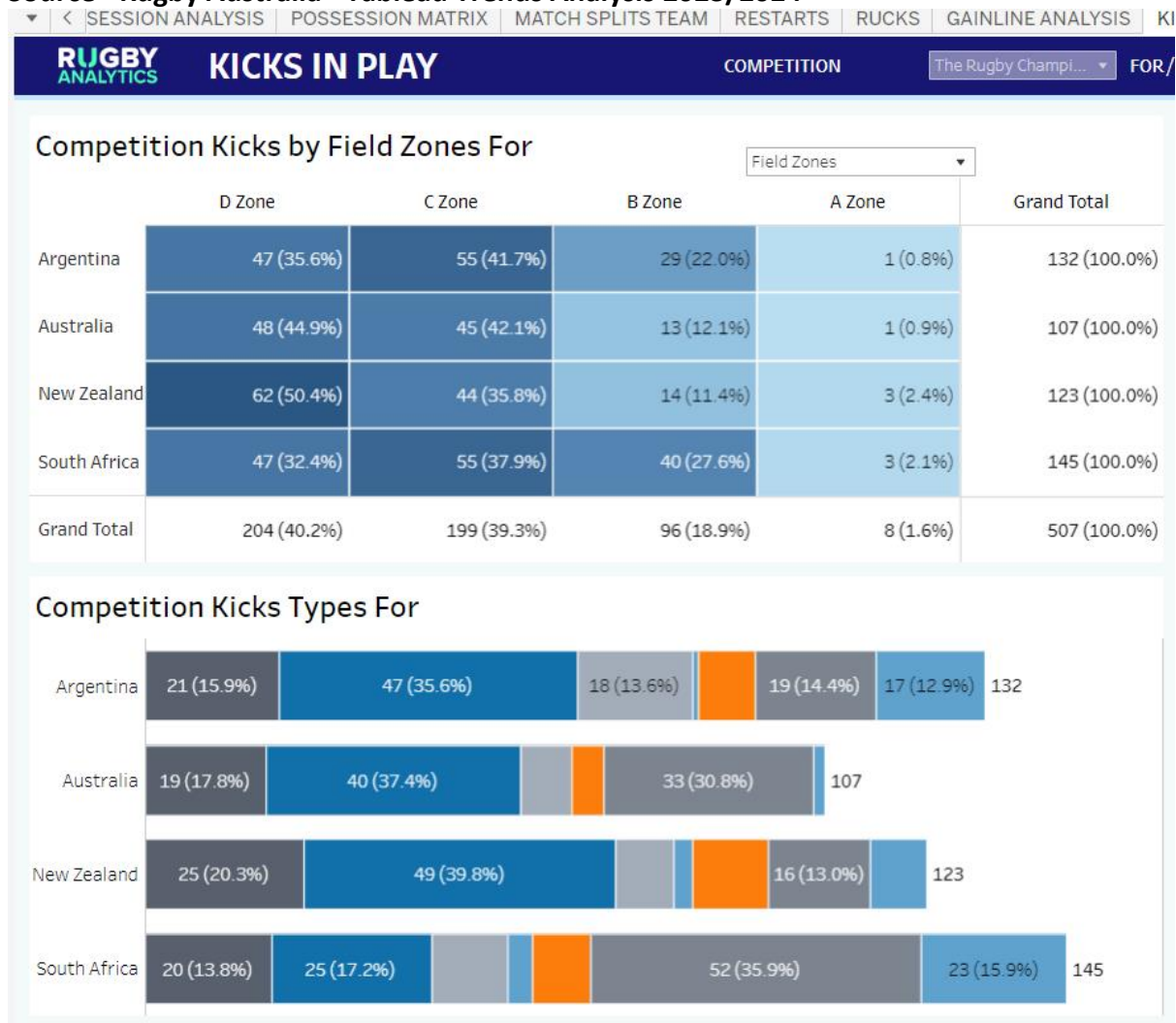


KICK WITH PURPOSE - NORTHERN HEMISPHERE VS SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

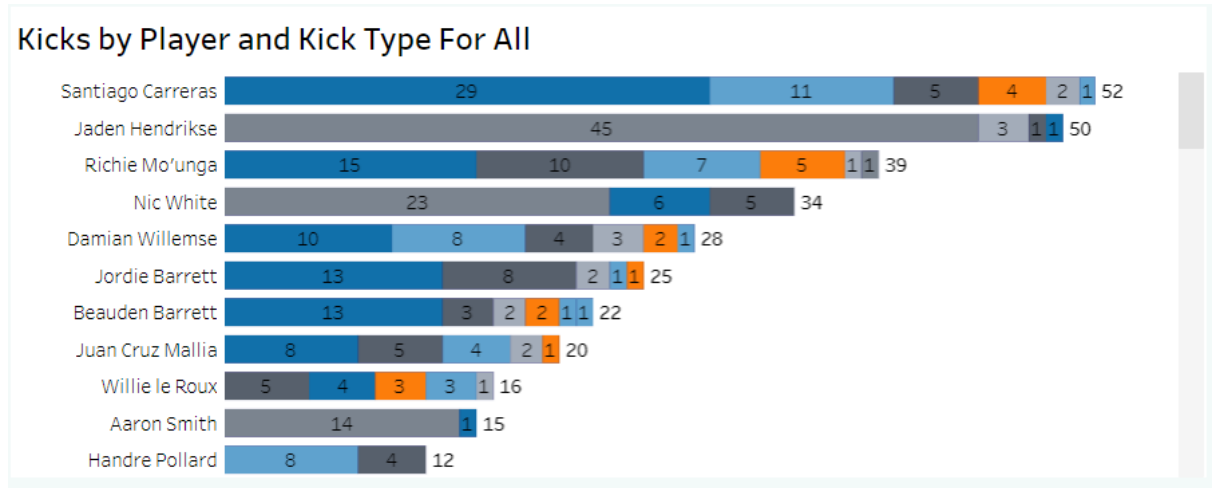
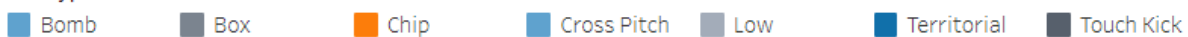
Appendix 5

Southern Hemisphere – The Rugby Championship, Men’s

Source - Rugby Australia - Tableau Trends Analysis 2023/2024



Kick Type

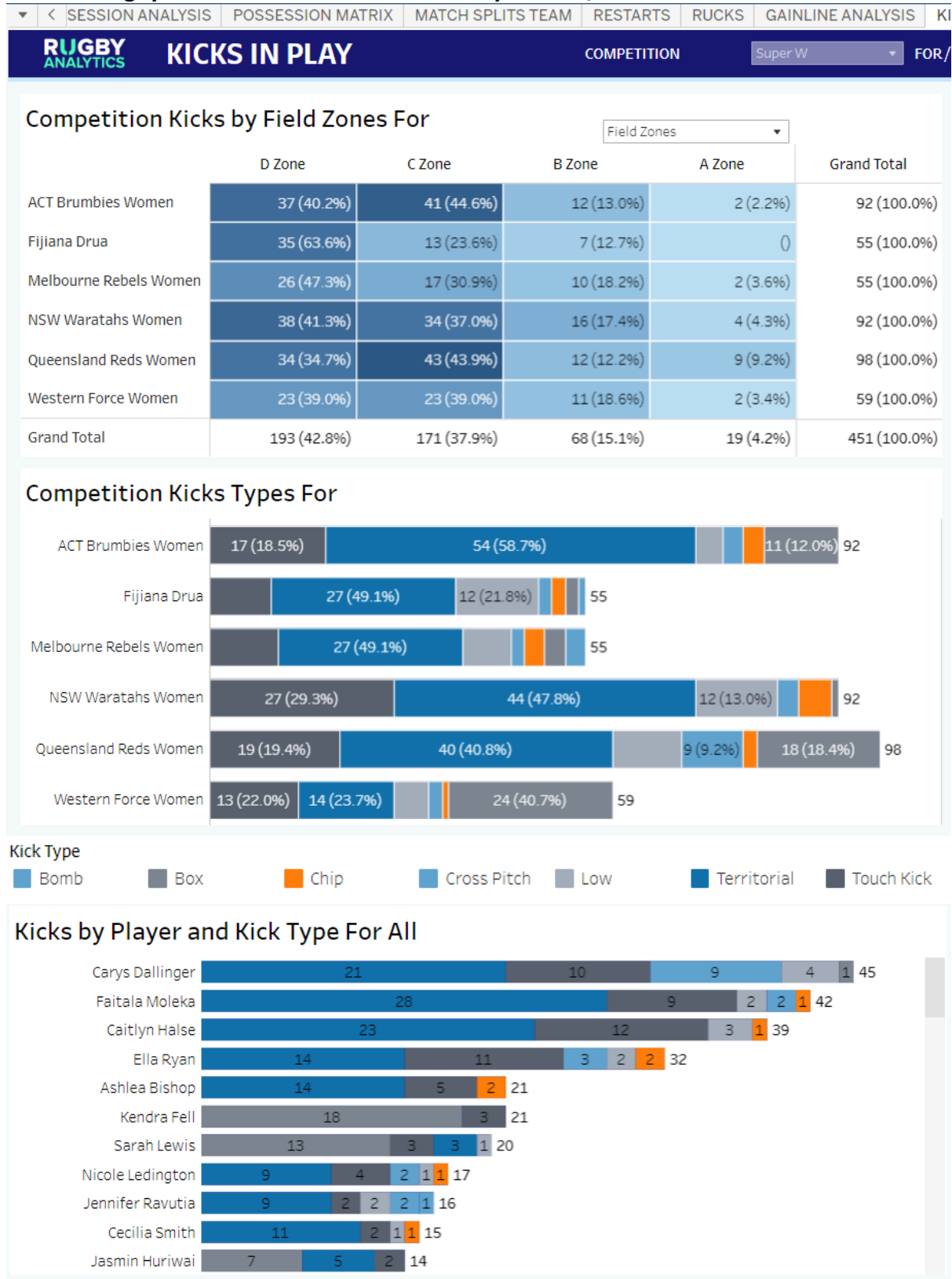


KICK WITH PURPOSE - NORTHERN HEMISPHERE VS SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

Appendix 6

Southern Hemisphere – Super W, Women’s

Source - Rugby Australia - Tableau Trends Analysis 2023/2024

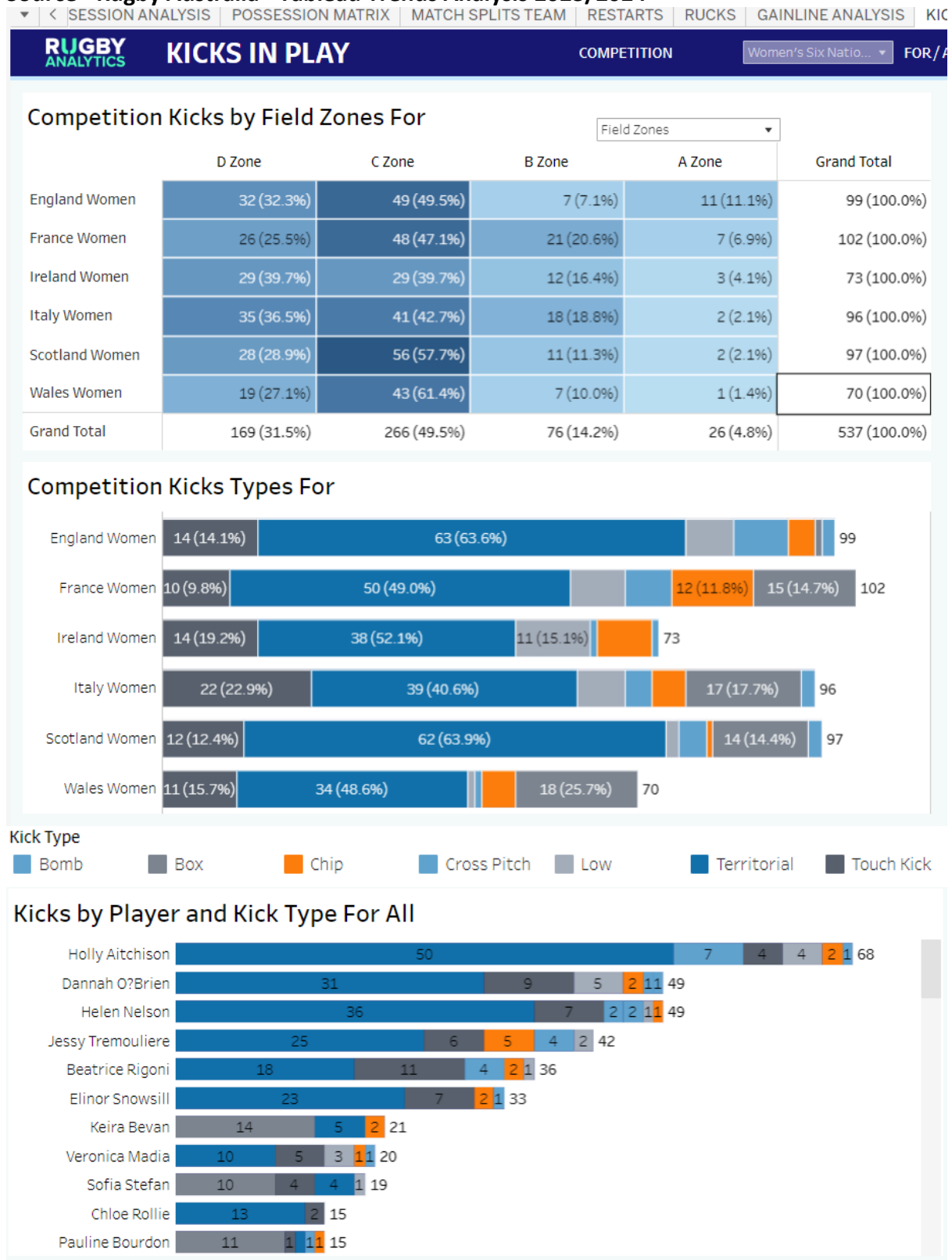


KICK WITH PURPOSE - NORTHERN HEMISPHERE VS SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

Appendix 7

Northern Hemisphere – 6 Nations, Women’s

Source - Rugby Australia - Tableau Trends Analysis 2023/2024

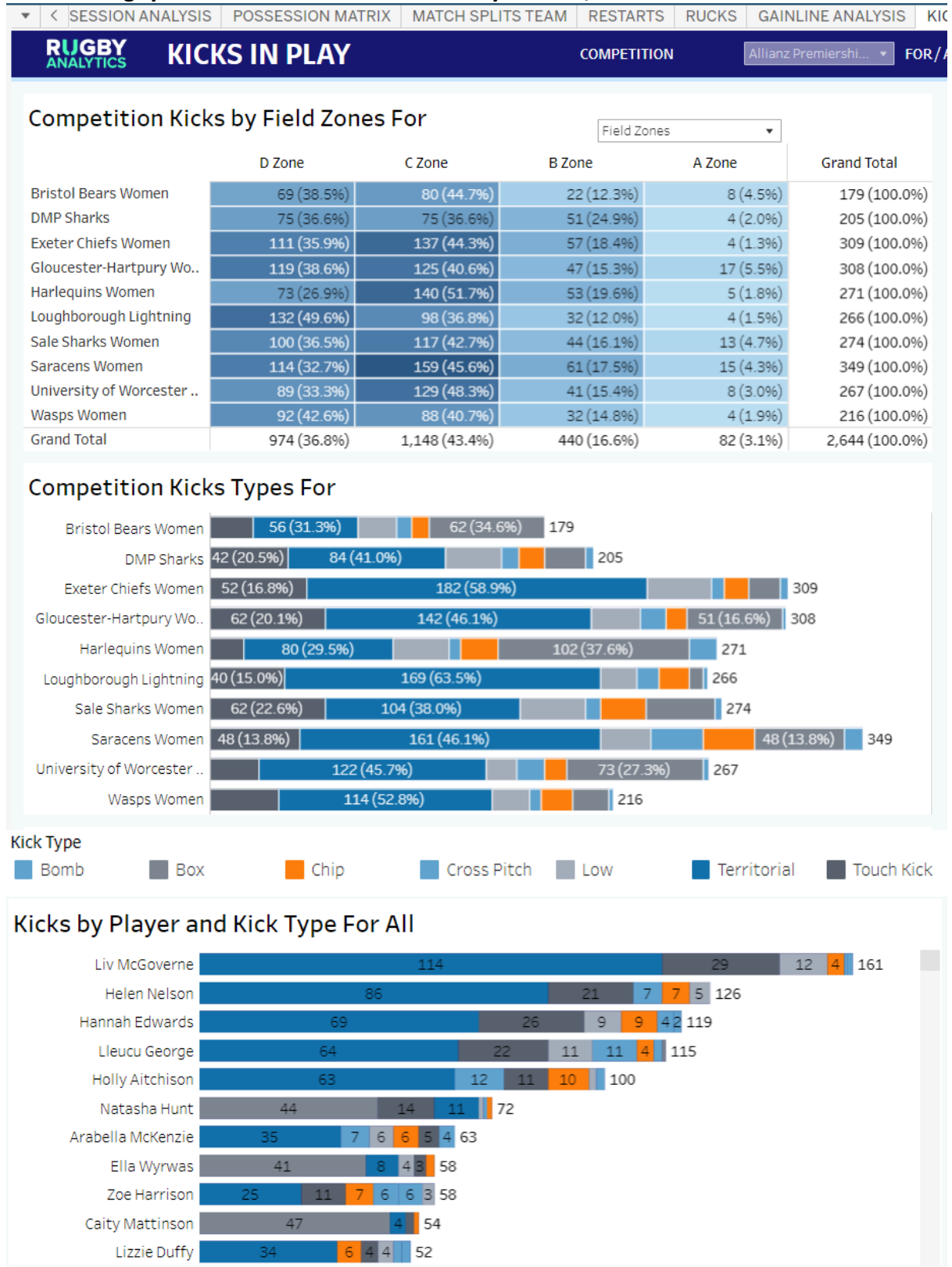


KICK WITH PURPOSE - NORTHERN HEMISPHERE VS SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

Appendix 8

Northern Hemisphere – Women’s Premiership Allianz, Women’s

Source - Rugby Australia - Tableau Trends Analysis 2023/2024



KICK WITH PURPOSE - NORTHERN HEMISPHERE VS SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

Appendix 9

Global – Rugby World Cup, Women’s

Source - Rugby Australia - Tableau Trends Analysis 2023/2024

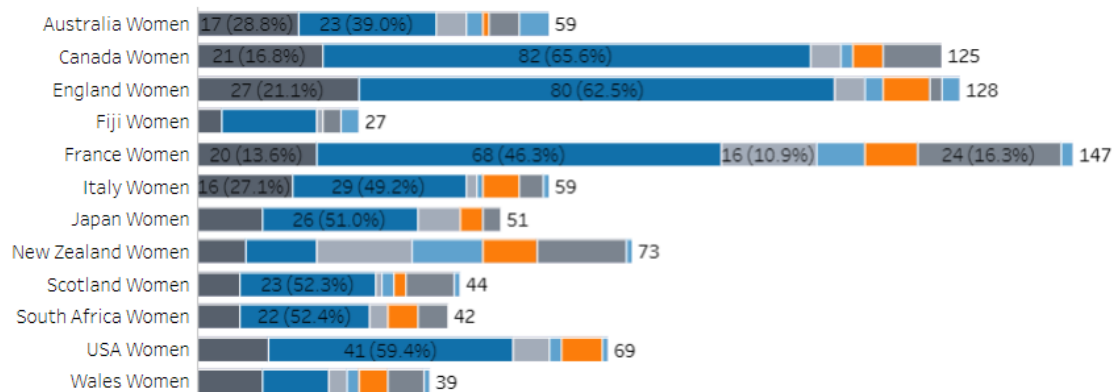
SESSION ANALYSIS |
 POSSESSION MATRIX |
 MATCH SPLITS TEAM |
 RESTARTS |
 RUCKS |
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RUGBY ANALYTICS |
 KICKS IN PLAY |
 COMPETITION: Women’s Rugby W... |
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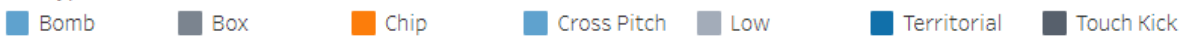
Competition Kicks by Field Zones For

	D Zone	C Zone	B Zone	A Zone	Grand Total
Australia Women	20 (33.9%)	30 (50.8%)	8 (13.6%)	1 (1.7%)	59 (100.0%)
Canada Women	51 (40.8%)	57 (45.6%)	14 (11.2%)	3 (2.4%)	125 (100.0%)
England Women	38 (29.7%)	62 (48.4%)	22 (17.2%)	6 (4.7%)	128 (100.0%)
Fiji Women	13 (48.1%)	12 (44.4%)	2 (7.4%)	()	27 (100.0%)
France Women	31 (21.1%)	74 (50.3%)	33 (22.4%)	9 (6.1%)	147 (100.0%)
Italy Women	28 (47.5%)	21 (35.6%)	10 (16.9%)	()	59 (100.0%)
Japan Women	17 (33.3%)	26 (51.0%)	6 (11.8%)	2 (3.9%)	51 (100.0%)
New Zealand Women	10 (13.7%)	39 (53.4%)	20 (27.4%)	4 (5.5%)	73 (100.0%)
Scotland Women	18 (40.9%)	15 (34.1%)	7 (15.9%)	4 (9.1%)	44 (100.0%)
South Africa Women	17 (40.5%)	22 (52.4%)	3 (7.1%)	()	42 (100.0%)
USA Women	21 (30.4%)	36 (52.2%)	10 (14.5%)	2 (2.9%)	69 (100.0%)
Wales Women	10 (25.6%)	21 (53.8%)	7 (17.9%)	1 (2.6%)	39 (100.0%)
Grand Total	274 (31.7%)	415 (48.1%)	142 (16.5%)	32 (3.7%)	863 (100.0%)

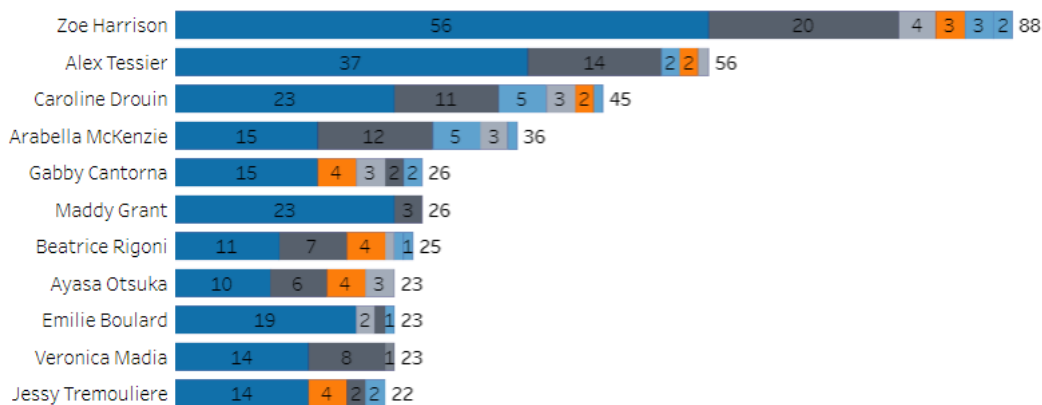
Competition Kicks Types For



Kick Type



Kicks by Player and Kick Type For All



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Appendix 10

Kicking Loop examples from Wallaroo Kicking Sessions

Restart to Exit Loop



Kicking Practice – Restarts Loop
Focus - Short - 1S-3S-5S

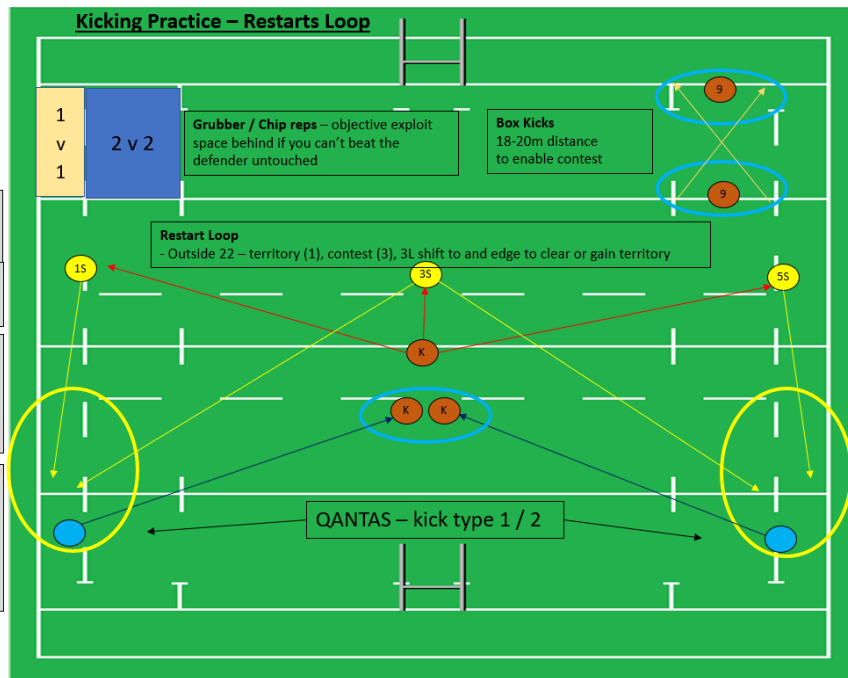
Exit kick to gain territory on ground or in the air

Restart kick- targets **1S - 3S - 5S**

Cross field Kick Pass – QANTAS back to player in the middle

Key Points

- Ball drop – Hand Position
- Contact Point - (1, 2, 3)
- Follow through – Nose over toes



Restarts Loop



Kicking Practice – Restarts Loop with Box Option

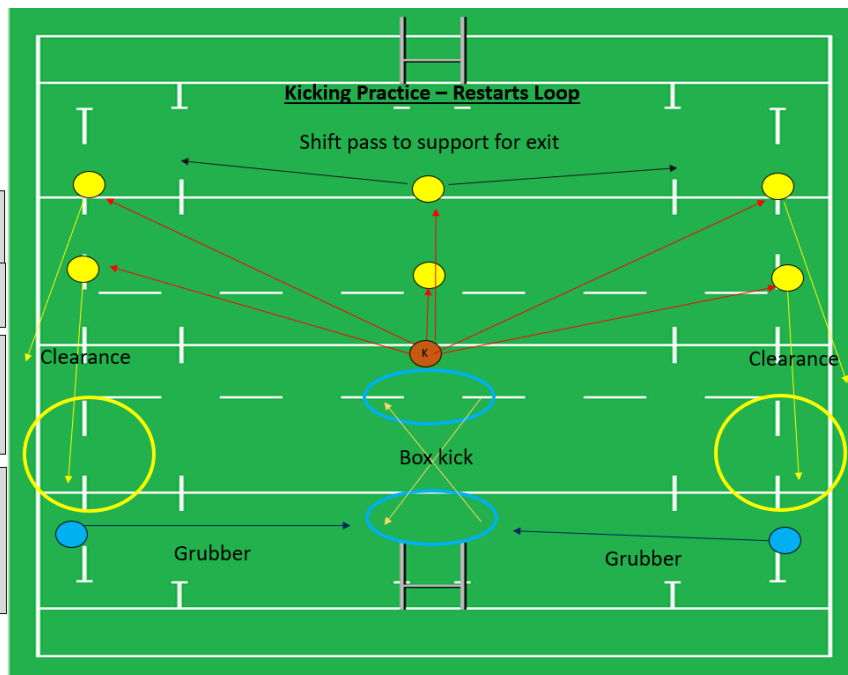
Exit kick to gain territory on ground or in the air

Restart kick- targets

Cross field Kick Pass – QANTAS back to player in the middle

Key Points

- Ball drop – Hand Position
- Contact Point - (1, 2, 3)
- Follow through – Nose over toes



Qantas Loop – Attacking Cross Field Kick

QANTAS – 3 per group
Passer, Kicker, Catcher

Key Points

- Ball drop – Hand Position
- Contact Point - (1, 2, 3)
- Follow through – Nose over toes

