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Analysis of Goals Scored in UEFA Champions League Finals Between 2000 and 2025 According to Various Variables

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The aim of this study is to analyze a total of 68 goals scored in 26 UEFA Champions League final matches played between 2000 and 2025 in terms of various variables. In the study, 68 goals scored in 26 final matches were examined.

Method: All final matches were watched by two different coaches, and notes were taken regarding the predetermined parameters. Additionally, data published on UEFA's official and publicly accessible website specifically prepared for Champions League matches were utilized. The goals were analyzed in eight different categories: the half in which the goal was scored, the time interval when the goal was scored, the number of passes made before the goal, the type of goal, the position of the goal scorer, the form of the goal, the goal-scoring area, and the impact of the first goal on the match result.

Results: For data analysis, descriptive statistics, including frequency and percentage distributions, were calculated. The results revealed that 57.36% of the goals were scored in the second half, and 22.06% were scored between the 76th and 90th minutes. Furthermore, 27.94% of the goals were scored following an attacking sequence consisting of at least five passes, 77.94% occurred during open play, 45.59% were scored by midfield players, 50% were scored with the right foot, 91.18% were scored from inside the penalty area, and teams that scored the first goal won 80% of the matches.

Conclusion: An analysis of the temporal distribution of goals scored in UEFA Champions League finals and the organizational characteristic of the game suggests that attacking organizations based on many passes and open play, especially in the later stages of the second half, are effective in goal production. Furthermore, the higher probability of winning the match for teams scoring the first goal suggests a association between the first goal and the final match result. Therefore, it is recommended that training and match planning prioritize improving performance consistency in the second half and at the end of the match, developing organized attacking variations, strengthening finishing inside the penalty area, and implementing tactical strategies aimed at protecting the first goal.

Keywords: Champions League, Goal Analysis, Match Analysis, UEFA

ÖZET

2000-2025 UEFA Şampiyonlar Ligi Finallerinde Atılan Gollerin Çeşitli Değişkenler Açısından Analizi

Amaç: Bu araştırmanın amacı, 2000-2025 yılları arasında UEFA Şampiyonlar Ligi'nde oynanan 26 final müsabakasında kaydedilen toplam 68 golün çeşitli değişkenler açısından analiz edilerek incelenmesidir.

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Yöntem: Araştırmada, oynanan 26 final müsabakasında atılan 68 gol incelenmiştir. Oynanan tüm final müsabakaları iki farklı antrenör tarafından izlenerek belirlenen parametreler hakkında notlar alınmış ve ayrıca UEFA'nın Şampiyonlar Ligi müsabakaları için özel olarak hazırlamış olduğu, erişimi herkese açık olan resmî web sitesinde yer alan veriler kullanılmıştır. Goller 8 farklı kategoride (golün atıldığı devre, golün atıldığı zaman dilimi, gol öncesi yapılan pas sayısı, golün oluş şekli, gol atanın mevkisi, gol vuruşunun şekli, gol atılan bölge ve ilk golün müsabaka sonucuna etkisi) analiz edilmiştir.
Bulgular: Verilerin analizinde, tanımlayıcı istatistiklerden frekans ve yüzde dağılımları hesaplanmıştır. Bu çalışma sonucunda; gollerin %57,36'sının ikinci yarıda, %22,06'sının 76-90. dakikalar arasında kaydedildiği, gollerin %27,94'ünün gol öncesinde en az beş paslık bir hücum organizasyonu sonucunda atıldığı, %77,94'ünün akan oyunda gerçekleştiği, %45,59'unun orta saha oyuncuları tarafından kaydedildiği, %50'sinin sağ ayakla atıldığı, %91,18'inin ceza sahası içinden atıldığı ve ilk golü atan takımların %80'inin müsabakayı kazandığı ortaya koyulmuştur.
Sonuç: UEFA Şampiyonlar Ligi finallerinde atılan gollerin zamansal dağılımı ve oyun içi organizasyon özellikleri değerlendirildiğinde, özellikle ikinci yarının son bölümlerinde ortaya çıkan çok paslı ve akan oyuna dayalı hücum organizasyonlarının gol üretiminde etkili olduğu düşünülmektedir. Bununla birlikte, ilk golü atan takımların müsabakayı kazanma oranlarının daha yüksek olması, ilk gol ile maç sonucu arasında bir ilişki olduğunu düşündürmektedir. Bu doğrultuda, antrenman ve müsabaka planlamalarında ikinci yarı ve maç sonu performans sürekliliğinin artırılmasına, organize hücum varyasyonlarının geliştirilmesine, ceza sahası içi bitiriciliğin güçlendirilmesine ve ilk golün korunmasına yönelik taktik stratejilere öncelik verilmesi önerilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gol Analizi, Müsabaka Analizi, Şampiyonlar Ligi, UEFA

INTRODUCTION

Soccer is a dynamic sport that captivates millions of people worldwide, with both individual and team performance taking center stage (Sarmento et al., 2018). In modern soccer, success is closely linked not only to physical fitness or individual talent but also to tactical organization, technical skill, mental resilience, and the effective implementation of in-game strategies (Barthelemy et al., 2024; Fernandez-Navarro et al., 2019; Gonzalez-Rodenas et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2011). In this context, the ability to score goals is recognized as one of the most fundamental and decisive performance indicators in soccer. Especially in high-level international competitions, goals scored stand out as critical moments that determine the outcome of the match.

The UEFA Champions League is not only the premier competition in European club football but is also recognized as one of the most prestigious tournaments in the world. The final of this tournament offers a wealth of data not only in terms of the battle for the championship but also regarding tactical diversity, player profiles, and in-game dynamics. These matches played at the final stage are special encounters featuring top-tier teams and

players, making them ideal for observing the purest examples of the sport (Union of European Football Associations [UEFA], 2025).

Although there are numerous studies in the literature analyzing soccer matches, systematic examinations of goal-scoring moments and the variables influencing them have been quite limited, particularly in high-level competitions. Variables such as the half in which the goal was scored, the time interval during which the goal was scored, the number of passes made before the goal, the manner in which the goal was scored, the position of the scorer, the form of goal, goal-scoring area, and the impact of the first goal on the match result are important factors influencing the formation of a goal (Stafylidis et al., 2022; Papadopoulos et al., 2021; Wang and Qin, 2020; Michailidis et al., 2018). A detailed examination of these variables can provide important strategic insights for coaches and performance analysts (Pearson et al., 2025).

The analysis of goal-scoring moments in soccer matches is typically conducted using league-level matches or full-season data, while data specific to high-pressure matches such as finals are often insufficiently examined. However, final matches represent the pinnacle of the strategies teams have developed throughout the season, where player behavior is shaped by maximum focus and responsibility, and thus tactical decisions can be observed most clearly. In this regard, identifying the structural characteristics of goals scored in final matches can contribute to understanding in-game decision-making mechanisms.

The aim of this study is to systematically examine how, when, and under what conditions goals are scored in top-level soccer matches by analyzing the goals scored in UEFA Champions League finals played between 2000 and 2025 in terms of various variables. Thus, this research aims to fill a significant knowledge gap regarding goal-scoring at the elite level by examining the moments leading to goals in UEFA Champions League finals from a multidimensional perspective. Furthermore, it is believed that the Champions League finals held in the first quarter of the 21st century are significant for evaluating changes in football over time, as they offer the opportunity to compare them with past and future finals. The findings are intended to contribute to a better understanding of the technical and tactical aspects of football and to serve as a guide for practitioners.

METHODS

Study Design

The data were collected and analyzed by two researchers holding UEFA A level coaching licenses, who observed and recorded 26 Champions League final matches. Additionally, data from UEFA's official website which is publicly accessible and specifically designed for Champions League matches was utilized. The research was conducted with the approval of the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Iğdır University, dated May 21, 2025, and numbered 2025/15.

Data Collection Methods and Tools

The sample consisted of 68 goals scored in the 26 UEFA Champions League finals played between 2000 and 2025. All goals were included in the study and analyzed across 8 different categories. The analysis criteria were established by examining the goals scored in the Champions League finals over the past 26 years. The analysis criteria are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Categories Analyzed in the Study

Categories	Headings
The Half in Which the Goal Was Scored	First Half, Second Half, Extra Time
Time Interval When the Goal Was Scored	1–15, 16–30, 31–45+, 45–60, 61–75, 76–90, Extra Time
Number of Passes Made Before the Goal	No Pass, 1 Pass, 2 Pass, 3 Pass, 4 Pass, 5+ Pass
Type of Goal	Open Play, Set Piece, Penalty.
The Scorer's Position	Forward, Midfielder, Defender
The Form of the Goal	Right Foot, Left Foot, Head, Other
Goal-Scoring Area	Inside the Penalty Area, Outside the Penalty Area
The Impact of the First Goal on the Match Result	Did the team that scored the first goal win the match? Or did they not?

Data Analysis

SPSS software (version 27.0, IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA) was used to analyze the data. The analysis utilized descriptive statistics, specifically frequency and percentage distributions. The graphs were created using GraphPad Prism (version 10.6.1). Inter-observer reliability was assessed using Cohen's Kappa coefficient. Kappa values ranged from 0.98 to 1.00, indicating almost perfect agreement between the observers across all variables.

RESULTS

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the total 68 goals scored in UEFA Champions League finals by half. The vast majority of goals were scored in the second half, with 39 goals

(57.36%) recorded during this period. In the first half, 26 goals (38.23%) were scored. Only 3 goals (4.41%) were scored during extra time.

When examining the distribution of goals by time interval in Figure 2, the highest number of goals 15 (22.06%) were scored between the 76th and 90th minutes. This is followed by the 61-75 minute range with 13 goals (19.12%). Both the 31-45+ minute range and the 45-60 minute range recorded 11 goals (16.18%). Ten goals (14.70%) were scored between the 1st and 15th minutes, five goals (7.35%) between the 16th and 30th minutes, and three goals (4.41%) in extra time. In total, 100% of the 68 goals were distributed across these seven time intervals.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of goals based on the number of passes made before the goal. The highest number of goals occurred in attacks involving 5 or more passes, with 19 goals (27.94%) recorded in this category. This is followed by 18 goals (26.47%) scored with no pass, i.e., through individual efforts. Attacks involving 1 pass resulted in 11 goals (16.18%), while attacks involving 2 and 4 passes each resulted in 7 goals (10.29%), and attacks resulting in 3 passes resulted in 6 goals (8.82%). In total, 100% of the 68 goals were distributed across these six categories.

Figure 4 shows the distribution of goals by type of play. It was found that 53 goals (77.94%) were scored from open play, 10 goals (14.71%) from set pieces, and 5 goals (7.35%) from penalties.

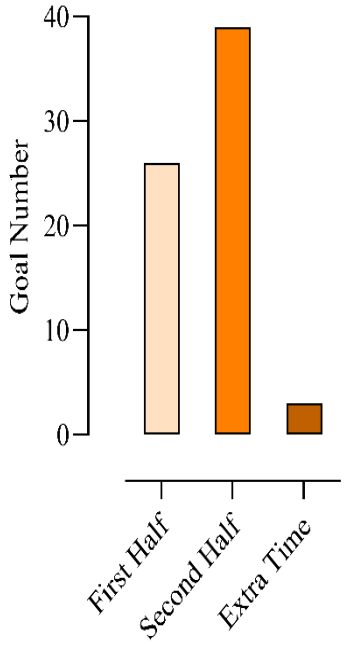
Figure 5 shows the distribution of goals by the position of the scorer. It was found that 31 goals (45.59%) were scored by midfielders, 27 goals (39.71%) by forwards, and 10 goals (14.70%) by defenders.

Figure 6 shows the distribution of goals by the form of goal. It was determined that 34 goals (50.00%) were scored with the right foot, 20 goals (29.41%) with the left foot, 13 goals (19.12%) with the head, and 1 goal (1.47%) with another part of the body.

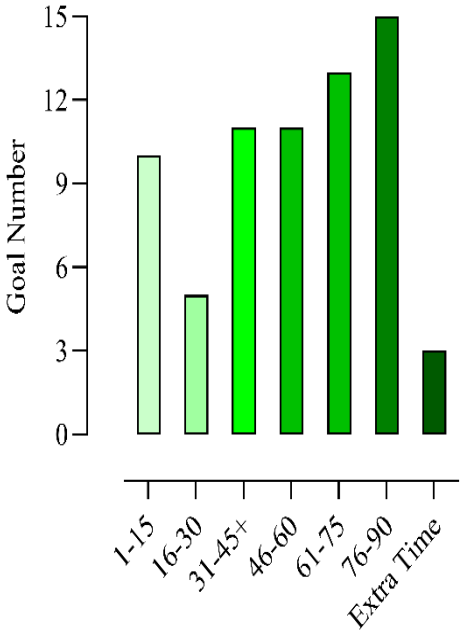
Figure 7 shows the distribution of goals by the area where they were scored. It was found that 62 goals (91.18%) were scored from inside the penalty area and 6 goals (8.82%) from outside the penalty area.

Figure 8 shows the distribution of the first goal scored in UEFA Champions League finals based on its impact on the match outcome. Excluding the scoreless final, the team scoring the first goal won the match in 20 of the 25 finals analyzed (80%). In contrast, the team scoring the first goal lost the match in 5 finals (20%). One final ended without a goal.

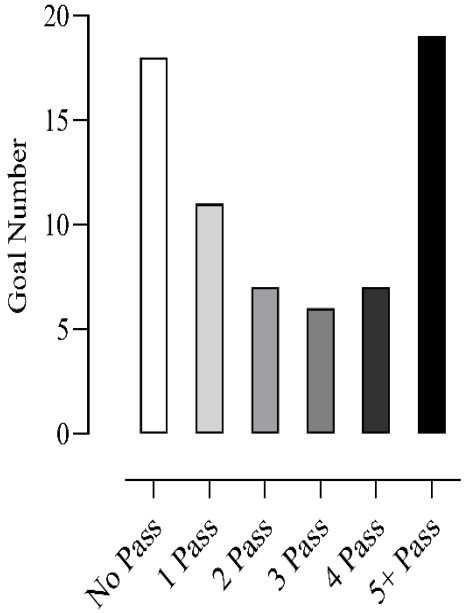
1 The Half in Which the Goal Was Scored



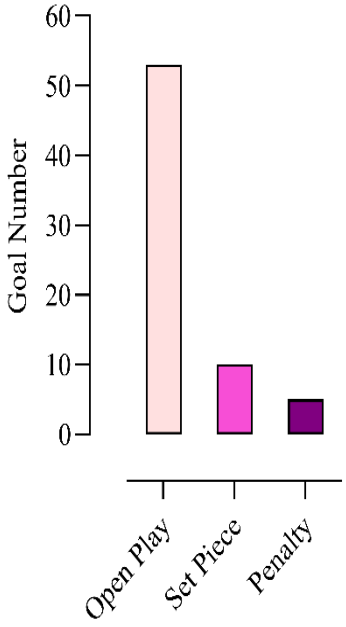
2 Time Interval When the Goal Was Scored



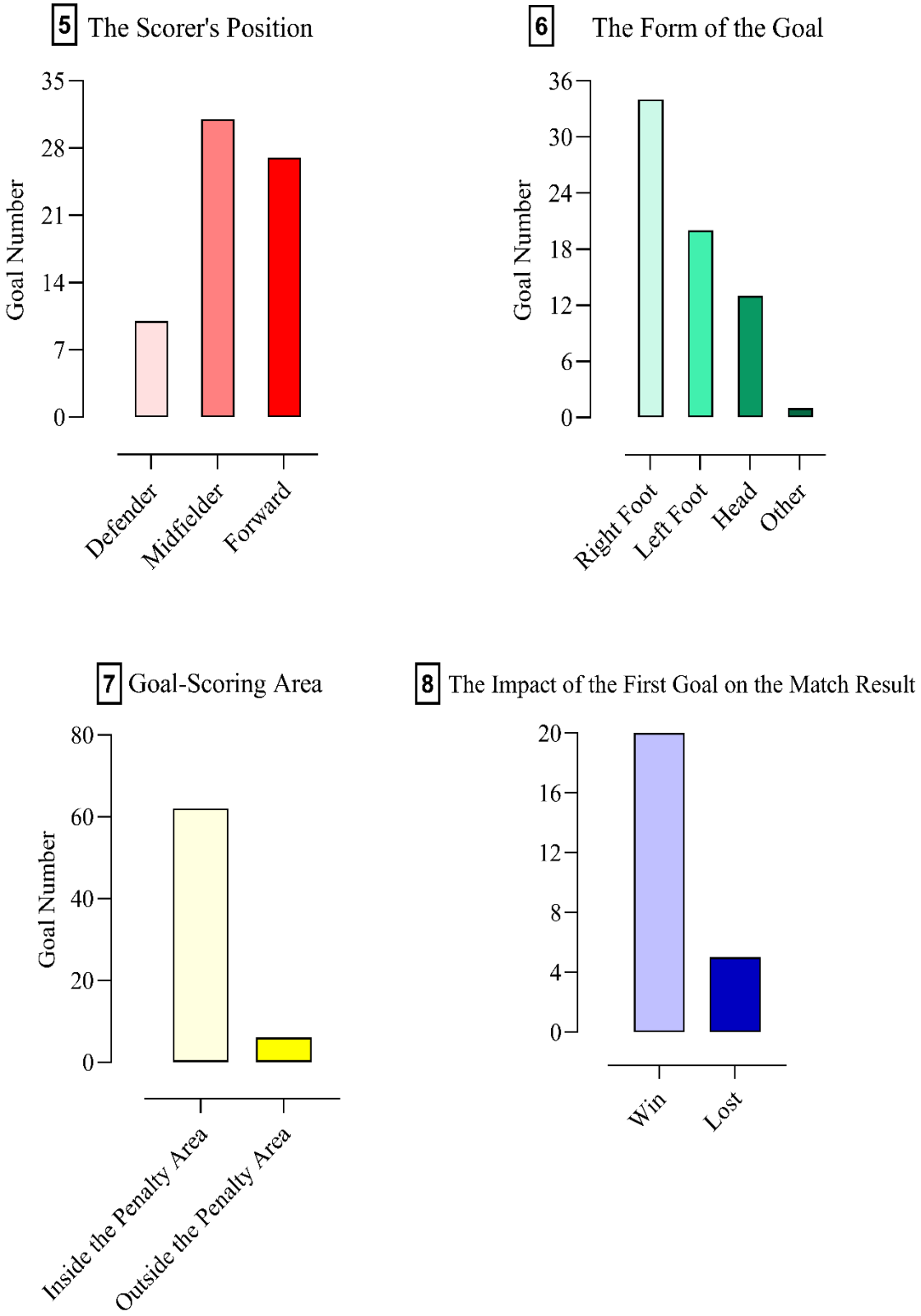
3 Number of Passes Made Before the Goal



4 Type of Goal



Figures 1-4. The Half in Which the Goal Was Scored, Time Interval When the Goal Was Scored, Number of Passes Made Before the Goal, Type of Goal.



Figures 5-8. The Scorer's Position, The Form of the Goal, Goal-Scoring Area, The Impact of the First Goal on the Match Result.

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

This study, conducted to analyze goals scored in UEFA Champions League finals between 2000 and 2025, found that 57.36% of the goals (39 goals) were scored in the second half, 22.06% (15 goals) were scored between the 76th and 90th minutes, 27.94% of the goals (19 goals) were scored following an attacking sequence involving at least five passes, 77.94% (53 goals) occurred during open play, 45.59% (31 goals) were scored by midfielders, 50% (34 goals) were scored with the right foot, 91.18% (62 goals) were scored from inside the penalty area, and 80% of the teams that scored the first goal went on to win the match.

Findings in the literature regarding the half distribution of goals scored in soccer matches indicate that goals are predominantly scored in the second half. In a study by Bilgin and Bozyılan (2024) on the 2014, 2018, and 2022 FIFA World Cup matches, it was found that 57.2% of the goals (293 goals) were scored in the second half. In a study by Njororai (2014) examined the timing of goals scored in European and South American leagues as well as FIFA and UEFA tournaments, reporting that 56.2% of the total 8,620 goals were scored in the second half. Additionally, an analysis conducted by Alberti et al. (2013) on matches played across four major European leagues over three seasons revealed that 55.1% of the total 10,885 goals were scored in the second half. These findings indicate that a significant proportion of goals in soccer matches are scored in the second half, and this trend is consistently observed across different leagues and tournaments.

The literature on the time distribution of goals in soccer matches consistently demonstrates a marked increase in goals, particularly in the final stages of matches (minutes 76–90). Erdoğan and Kerkez (2021) reported that a significant portion of the goals scored by teams ranked in the top three of their leagues in Europe's leading leagues (England, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the Turkish Super League) between 2015 and 2018 were scored in the final 15-minute segment of matches. Li and Zhao (2021) demonstrated that the majority of goals scored in the top leagues of Germany, France, England, Spain, and Italy between 2009 and 2019 occurred between the 76th and 90th minutes.

Findings at the tournament level also support this trend. In a study by Çobanoğlu and Terekli (2018), it was found that 61.2% of the goals scored in the 2016 European Football Championship (66 goals) were scored in the second half of matches, with 18 of those goals scored between the 76th and 90th minutes. In a study conducted by Göral and Saygın (2012) on a first-division soccer team, it was found that 55.3% of the goals were scored in the second

half of matches, while 25.5% were recorded between the 76th and 90th minutes. Similarly, Durlik and Bieniek (2014) reported that of the 942 goals scored in the 380 matches played during the 2008–2009 season of the English Premier League, the highest proportion occurred between the 76th and 90th minutes. When these studies are evaluated together, it is thought that the increased goal rates in the final stages of matches may be related to accumulated physical and mental fatigue among players, structural breakdowns in defensive organization, teams taking more risks depending on the score, and the game opening up tactically. Consequently, the 76-90 minute interval emerges as a critical timeframe that determines the outcome of matches in modern soccer.

Findings regarding the number of passes made before to a goal indicate that a significant proportion of goals were scored as a result of multi-pass attacking sequences. In a study examining goals scored in the Norwegian First Division, Tenga et al. (2010) found that goals were most frequently recorded following attacking sequences involving five or more passes. When these findings are evaluated together, it is evident that organized, multi-pass attacks play a significant role in goal production, and that possession time and passing continuity are decisive factors in breaking down defensive blocks.

The literature on the type of goal indicates that the vast majority of goals scored in various tournaments and competitions result from attacks that develop during open play. In a study by Wang and Qin (2020) analyzing goals scored at the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup in France, it was determined that 65.9% of the goals were scored from open play, while 34.1% were scored from set pieces. Njororai (2013) reported that 75.86% of the 145 goals scored at the 2010 South Africa World Cup came from open play, while 24.14% resulted from set pieces. Mitrotasios and Armatas (2014) revealed that 72.4% of the goals scored in Euro 2012 came from open play, while 27.6% were scored from set pieces. When these findings are evaluated together, it is evident that open play is the primary determinant of goal production in modern soccer; however, set pieces, despite having a lower overall goal percentage, retain their importance as a critical source of scoring, particularly in balanced and tightly contested matches. Consequently, the ability of successful teams to maintain consistency in their open-play organization while also effectively utilizing set-piece opportunities is considered a complementary factor in determining the outcome of a match.

Findings regarding the positions of goal-scoring players indicate that goal contributions in modern soccer are not limited to forwards alone; rather, midfielders, in particular, are playing an increasingly decisive role in goal-scoring. In the current study, it

was determined that 45.59% of the total 68 goals scored in final matches were recorded by midfielders, 39.71% by forwards, and 14.70% by defenders. These results differ somewhat from many studies in the literature that emphasize the dominance of forwards' goal contributions. While Çobanoğlu (2019) reported that the largest portion of goals was scored by forwards (32.5%); Mitrotasios and Armatas (2014) found that forwards accounted for 41.3% of total goals, and İmamoğlu et al. (2011) determined this proportion reached 57.9%. However, some studies indicate that offensive contributions are distributed across a broader range of positions. While Mitrotasios and Armatas (2014) noted that the highest goal contribution after forwards belonged to wingers at 29.3%, Gürsakal et al. (2017) emphasized that players in the winger position play a key role in offensive effectiveness. Similarly, Başkaya (2023) reported that in the 2022 Women's European Football Championship, the group that scored the most goals after forwards was the wingers. In the present study, the high goal contribution of midfielders can be explained by the increased involvement of midfielders in the penalty area through late runs in modern soccer, the blurring of the lines between playmaking and finishing roles, and the evolution of attacking variations toward a more collective structure.

Findings regarding the form of goal indicate that foot shots are clearly dominant in goal production during soccer matches. In the current study, it was determined that of the total 68 goals scored in final matches, 50% were scored with the right foot, 29.41% with the left foot, 19.12% with the head, and 1.47% with other parts of the body. These results are largely consistent with the literature. In their analysis covering 14 FIFA World Cups from 1966 to 2018, Mićović et al. (2023) determined that 79.6% of goals were scored with foot shots, while 17.8% were scored with headers. Similarly, Çobanoğlu (2019) found that approximately half of the goals scored in the 2018 FIFA World Cup were scored with the right foot (49.68%), while a significant portion were scored with the left foot (29.29%). Mitrotasios and Armatas (2014) reported that 82% of the goals scored at Euro 2012 were scored with the foot, while 17% were scored with headers. A similar distribution is also observed in studies conducted at the national league level. Yolgörmez (2018) found that 86.6% of the goals scored in the 2016–2017 season of the Turkish Super League were scored with the foot, while 13.4% were scored with headers. Durlik and Bieniek (2014) found that 79.51% of the goals scored in the 2008–2009 English Premier League season were scored with the foot, while 20.49% were scored with a header.

When these findings are considered together, it can be concluded that shots on goal with the foot are a key determinant in modern soccer in terms of both technical variety and the pace of the game, while headers play a complementary role, particularly in wing play and set-piece attacks. Consequently, the distribution of goal-scoring methods is considered a key performance indicator shaped by teams' attacking preferences, playing style, and the context of the match.

Findings regarding the area where goals are scored indicate that goal-scoring in soccer matches occurs largely within the penalty area. In the present study, it was determined that 91.18% of the total 68 goals scored in final matches were recorded from within the penalty area, while 8.82% were scored from outside the penalty area. These ratios show a high degree of similarity with previous studies conducted on different leagues and tournaments. In their analysis covering soccer matches played in various European leagues, Yavuz and Saygın (2021) found that 85.3% of goals were scored from within the penalty area, while 14.7% were scored from outside the penalty area. Similarly, in a study by Kubayi and Toriola (2019) on FIFA World Cup matches from 1990 to 2018, it was determined that 77% of goals were scored inside the penalty area, while 23% were scored outside the penalty area. Research conducted at the national league level also supports this trend. Yolgörmez (2018) noted that 86.2% of the goals scored in the 2016–2017 season of the Turkish Super League were scored inside the penalty area. Akgül (2017) found that 83% of the goals in the Spor Toto Super League Süleyman Seba season were scored inside the penalty area. Durlik and Bieniek (2014) found that 85.1% of the 942 goals scored in the English Premier League were scored from inside the penalty area, while 14.9% were scored from outside the penalty area. Based on these findings, this may indicate that the penalty area is a critical zone in terms of goal-scoring, and that high goal rates are associated with scoring opportunities created in this area despite the defensive intensity.

Findings regarding the impact of the first goal on the match outcome indicate that the first goal is a critical determinant in terms of securing a scoring advantage in soccer matches. In the current study, it was determined that 80% of the first goals scored in UEFA Champions League final matches (20 goals) were scored by the winning teams, whereas only 20% (5 matches) involved teams that scored the first goal but lost the match. This finding is consistent with results obtained in various leagues and tournaments. Yolgörmez and Tütüncü (2023) determined that in the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, the probability of teams that scored the first goal winning the match was 71.43%, while the probability of losing was 4.2%.

Similarly, Hadi and Göral (2022) reported that 71.43% of teams that scored the first goal in the UEFA Euro 2020 European Football Championship emerged victorious from their matches. Studies at the league level also support this trend. Liu et al. (2021) found that 66.31% of teams that scored the first goal in the Chinese Super League won the match. Pratas et al. (2016) found that in approximately 70% of matches played in the Portuguese Premier League, the team that scored the first goal went on to win. Çobanoğlu (2019) found that the first goal had a 71.42% impact on winning in the 2018 FIFA World Cup. Michailidis (2014) notes that this rate reached 75.4% in the 2014 World Cup, while Leite (2013) reports that 75% of the teams that scored the first goal went on to win their matches at Euro 2012. These findings suggest that factors such as the psychological advantage the first goal provides to teams, increased tactical flexibility due to the score advantage, and forcing the opposing team to take greater risks significantly influence the match outcome. It can be argued that the decisive role of the first goal becomes even more pronounced in high-stakes final matches and serves as a key performance indicator that shapes the dynamics of the game.

In conclusion, when considering the temporal distribution of goals scored in UEFA Champions League finals and the characteristics of in-game organization, it appears that collective attacking structures based on multi-pass sequences and open-play situations, particularly during the final stages of the second half, play an important role in determining match outcomes. Furthermore, scoring the first goal appears to be associated with the final result. In this context, considering the strategic importance of scoring advantage and collective attacking structures in modern football, it is recommended that training and match planning prioritize enhancing performance continuity during the second half and the closing stages of matches, developing organized attacking variations, improving finishing ability within the penalty area, and implementing tactical strategies aimed at preserving the advantage gained after scoring the first goal. Future studies should compare goal-scoring patterns observed in UEFA Champions League finals with those of other elite-level competitions, such as the FIFA World Cup, UEFA European Championship, Copa América, and domestic league finals, to determine whether the identified patterns are specific to UEFA Champions League finals or represent broader trends in elite football.

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