

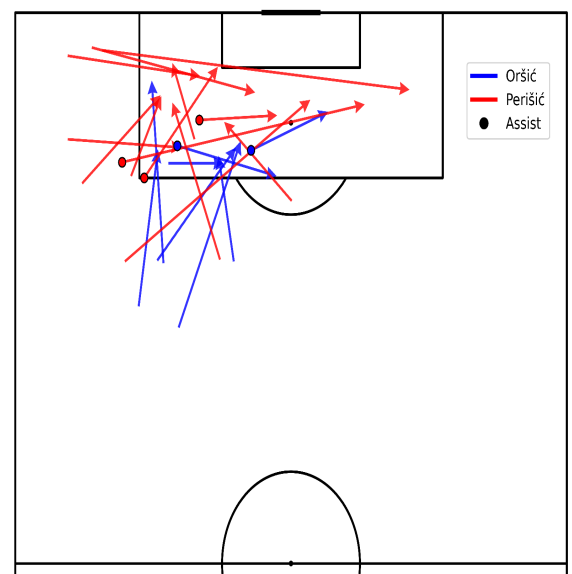
Player analysis - Mislav Oršić

At 29, Mislav Oršić was a standout left-winger for Dinamo Zagreb, during one of the club's most successful periods between the two World Cups. Dinamo dominated the Croatian league, winning every season and regularly qualifying for the Champions League and Europa League. Oršić made his mark on the European stage in 2019, scoring a hat-trick in a 4-0 victory over Atalanta in the Champions League group stage. The following season, Dinamo advanced to the Europa League knockout stages, where they faced Tottenham. After losing 2-0 in the first leg in London, Oršić delivered a stunning hat-trick in the return leg, knocking Mourinho's Tottenham out. Dinamo ultimately lost to Villarreal in the next round. Finally, just before the 2022 World Cup, Oršić continued his form by scoring the only goal in a 1-0 victory over Chelsea, a result that led to Tuchel's departure.

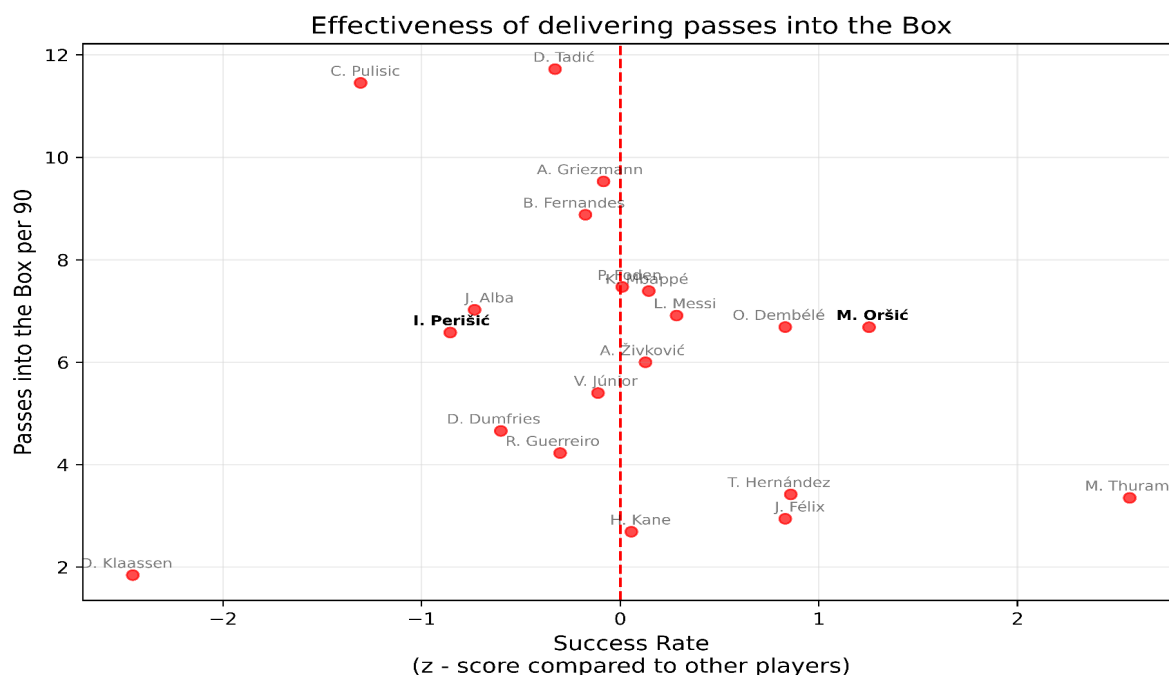
These and similar performances from players within the Croatian national league caught the attention of Zlatko Dalić, who called up six players from the league for the World Cup squad. Among them was Mislav Oršić. While it was expected that some of them would feature, their starting positions were not guaranteed. The only starter was Dinamo Zagreb's Dominik Livaković, who had been Croatia's first-choice goalkeeper since the last Euros. In this analysis, Mislav Oršić will be compared to Ivan Perišić, who had been Croatia's regular starter at left wing in the previous two World Cups. As Croatia's third-highest goalscorer and in solid form at Tottenham, Perišić's place in the lineup was more than guaranteed. In reality, both Oršić and Perišić were crucial to Croatia's World Cup run, contributing a combined two goals and five assists, with most of those contributions being decisive. Perišić's header equalized against Japan in the knockout stages, leading to a penalty shootout victory thanks to Livaković's "hattrick of saves". Against Brazil, Oršić assisted Petković in extra time to force another shootout, which Croatia won. Although Croatia lost to Argentina in the semifinals, they secured third place with a 2-1 win over Morocco. Perišić assisted the first goal, and Oršić scored the second. Both had standout tournaments, but how do their playing styles differ, and how do they compare to other players at the World Cup?

The figure on the right highlights a key distinction in the playing styles of Perišić and Oršić based on their passes into the box. Perišić, a traditional left winger, tends to operate along the touchline, advancing down the left flank and keeping distance from the opposing right-back and defenders. He waits for the right moment to cross the ball into the box or deliver a low pass. In contrast, Oršić is more direct, attacking the penalty area vertically, cutting in more frequently, aiming to break defensive lines and create opportunities more quickly. Despite these differing approaches, both players were highly effective, contributing a total of five assists, as indicated by the dark circles. Though Oršić only played 160 minutes compared to Perišić's 672 minutes, it's clear that coach Dalić made the right choice in deploying both wingers.

Successful passes into the box by Oršić and Perišić at the WC 2022



Despite their contributions to Croatia's success, how do Oršić and Perišić stand up against other players in the World Cup? The following figure analyzes passes into the box per 90 and their success based on 20 players at the WC 2022 who had 2 or more assists. Z-score was calculated for the success rate (the dotted line presents the average success rate of a pass into the box for the 20 analysed players). The figure shows that the more passes into the box are attempted per 90 their success rate falls off. The data shows that Oršić and Perišić had a similar number of attempted passes into the box per 90 but Oršić was more successful in them reaching the designated target. He also outperforms the z-score while maintaining a solid number of passes into the box per 90. It is a small source of data to make any conclusion other than that Oršić impressed in the small time frame he had and Dalić's decision to use him paid off. His impact can be seen through the 3 goal involvements but also his willingness to succeed and get that dangerous pass into the box.



Mislav Oršić's performance at the World Cup and his previous seasons with Dinamo Zagreb led to his immediate transfer to Southampton. Unfortunately, due to limited playing time and injuries, he struggled to replicate success in the Premier League and subsequently moved to Trabzonspor in Turkey where he is playing now. As a result of his time at Southampton not going as planned, Oršić lost his place in the national team. However, with his return to the squad for the upcoming international break after a long absence, it will be interesting to see how he can enhance the wing positions. Given the success of introducing players from the domestic league into the national team, it will be crucial for coach Zlatko Dalić to continue scouting local talent as preparations begin for the 2026 World Cup in North America. Recent tournaments have already seen promising players like Dinamo Zagreb's Baturina and Rijeka's Pašalić get minutes. In the next year and a half, new names could emerge, such as Hajduk Split's Bruno Durdov, Dinamo Zagreb's rising star Petar Sučić, and other promising youngsters, further strengthening the squad.