

Project 1: Antoine Griezmann - Defensive Analysis

Juan Bautista

Introduction

During the Qatar 2022 World Cup many players stood out. Some of them for their offensive skills while others for their defensive contributions. From the latter, one of the players that caught the attention of fans and football commentators was Antoine Griezmann and the way he, playing as a center attacking midfielder (CAM), would drop deep to press and help his team recover the ball. But what does data say? Does it really support this? Let's find out.

Pressure and Ball Recoveries

After losing possession of the ball, one expects the whole team to work together to recover it back, including forwards or players in attacking positions. Therefore, one of the first steps in order to achieve this is definitely applying pressure to the opposition. Now, as mentioned above, when attacking players get involved and give the "extra mile" to support this process, ball recoveries can be more probable. **Figure 1** illustrates Griezmann's defensive contribution regarding pressure and ball recoveries. The blue tiles illustrate the places in the field where Griezmann applied pressure the most, where the percentage shows where each of the 114 times he applied said pressure occurred. As it can be seen, Griezmann definitely dropped low, even to zones of the first third of the field precisely to support the defense in pressuring the opposition in order to recover the ball. Nevertheless, one expects this "sacrifice" to yield some positive results for the team, e.g. recovering possession. In **Figure 1** we can also observe the places

where Griezmann recovered the ball in general (red dots) and the instances where he recovered the ball himself (green footballs) given that he was applying pressure (green dots) using an 8 second interval (ball recovered by Griezmann 8 seconds after the start of his pressure action). In total, Griezmann, playing as a CAM, recovered a total of 24 balls, some deep into the first third and many others between the first and second thirds of the field. *But what if every other CAM during the world cup did the same? Would it still be surprising?* **Table 1** shows how Griezmann compares to other CAMs that played more than 3 games during the World Cup.

Table 1. Defensive comparison between CAMs (per 90 min)

| Name | Ball recoveries | Pressure | Min. |
|-------------------|-----------------|----------|------|
| Antoine Griezmann | 3.50 | 16.62 | 617 |
| Rodrygo Goes | 3.02 | 9.95 | 208 |
| Djibril Sow | 2.88 | 9.92 | 281 |
| Mason Mount | 2.87 | 15.16 | 219 |
| Cody Gakpo | 2.01 | 4.20 | 492 |

As it can be seen, Griezmann's defensive contribution surpasses that of other players in his position in per 90 stats even though he played almost three times more than most of the others. Finally, from these players only Sow, Mount and Rodrygo recovered the ball after applying pressure themselves (using an 8 second interval too) only once, compared to the three times Griezmann did it during the tournament. In conclusion, Griezmann's defensive contribution was definitely a factor that impacted France's road to the final positively.

Location of pressure actions by Antoine Griezmann

Instances where Griezmann recovered the ball in general | Instances where Griezmann recovered the ball in an 8 sec interval after pressing

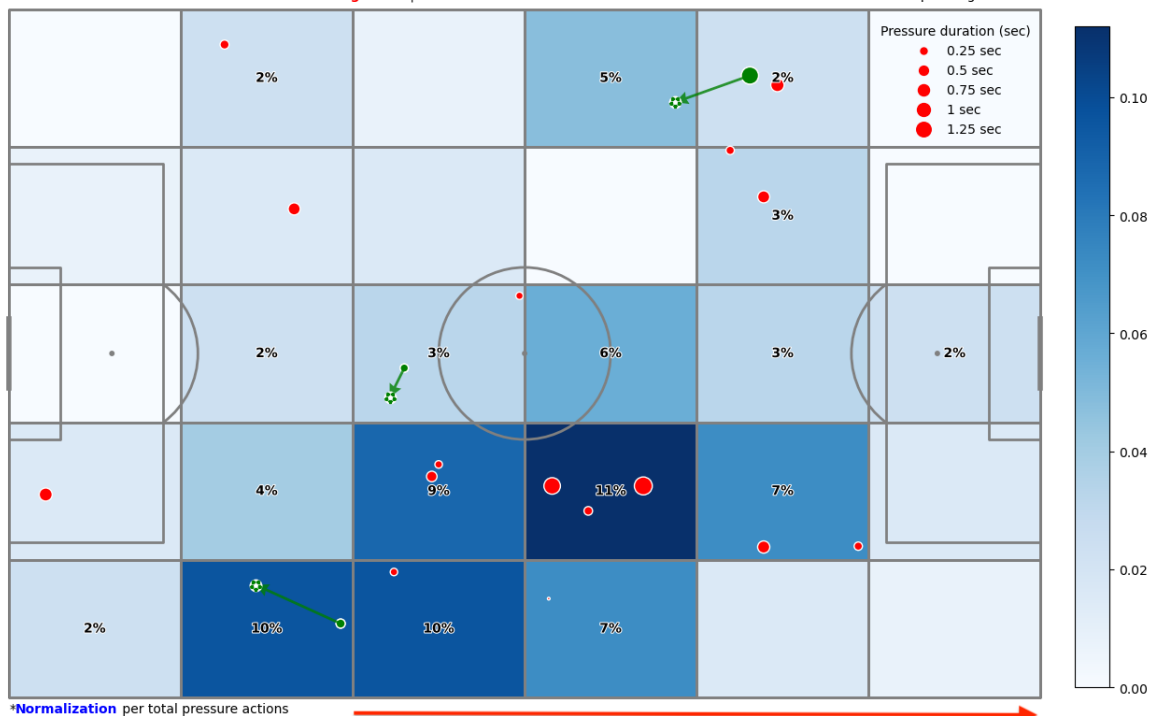


Figure 1. Location of pressure actions by Antoine Griezmann