

# Identifying opportunities created from switches of play

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## What is a switch?

A switch of play is a direct pass across the width of the pitch, defined in StatsBomb's dataset as:

- A pass that travels more than 40 yards of the width of the pitch

As a part of build up play, switches are valued for the options and opportunities that are created after their completion, namely space creation, overloads, and opportunities for progression. To assess the utility of a switch, we need to explore the options the receiver has to create opportunity *after* the switch is completed.

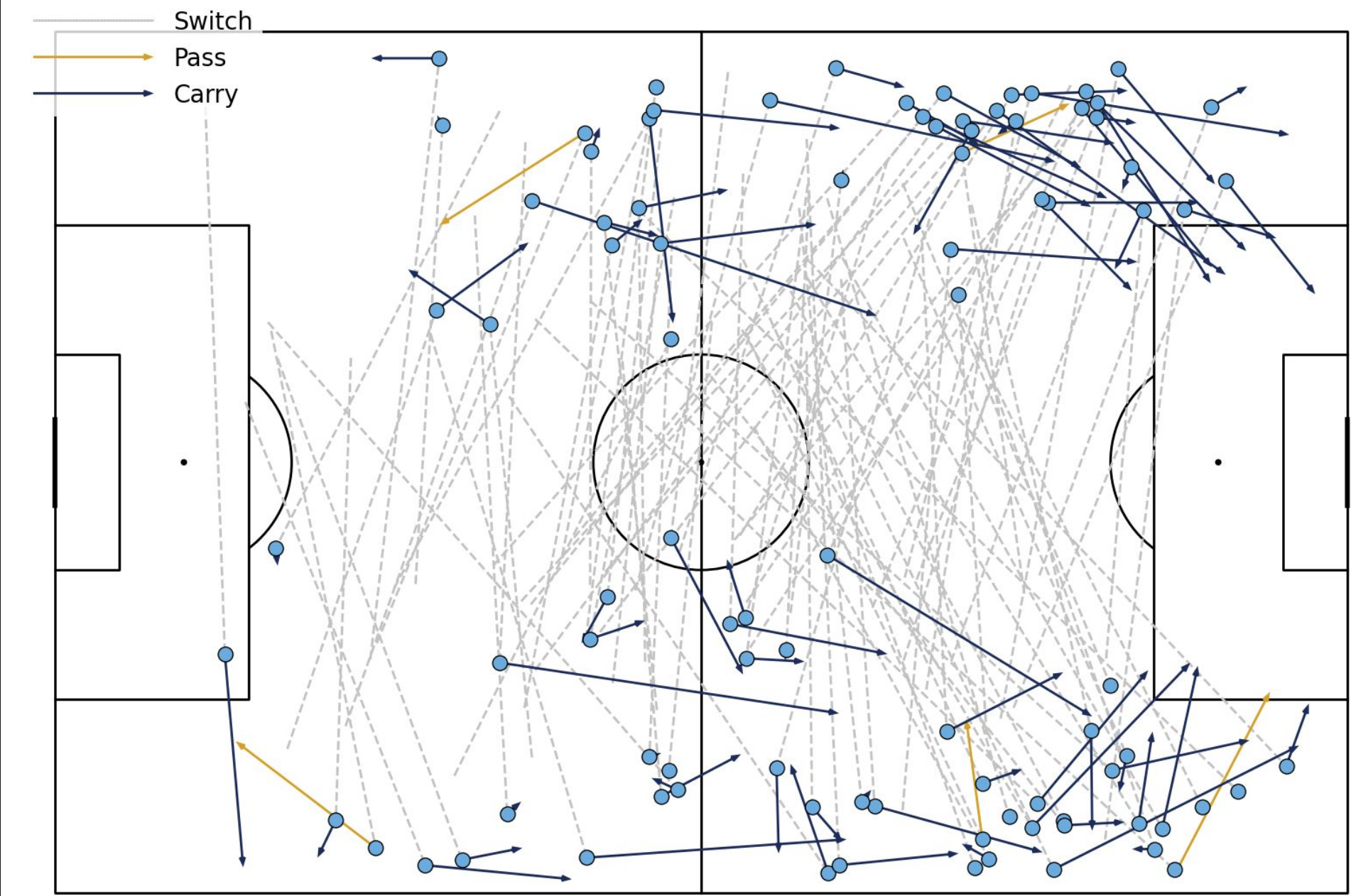
This poster explores some of the considerations for identifying the opportunities switches can provide in data. Some combination of these approaches can reveal important details about how a switch might influence the immediate passage of play.

This context could then be used to define a metric that would identify a subset of valuable switches, which could in turn be used as part of the recruitment process to identify players that provide value through switches of play.

## Switch +1

Considering the next action the receiver of the switch takes can provide some context to the value a switch can provide. In the example below, switches completed by Rodri enabled his teammates to carry the ball towards and into the box.

### Next Action After a Successful Rodri Switch



While adding useful context to Rodri's switches, there are a few issues with this approach that limits its usefulness as a measure of Rodri's switching ability. While there is a visual indication of the impact of these carries, the value added by them (creating a shot, losing possession) is not captured. Additionally, valuable actions that did not directly progress the ball are not highlighted.

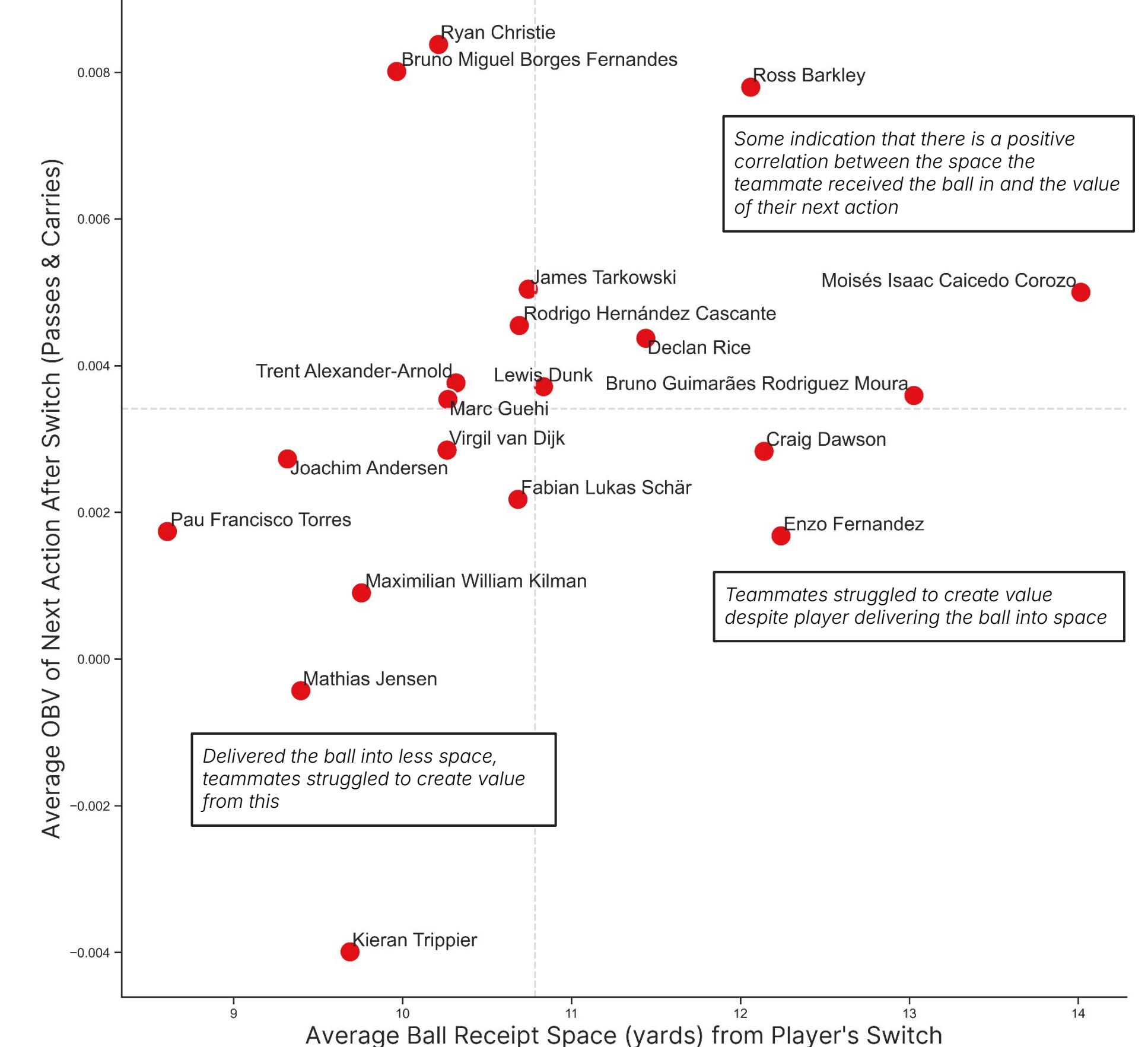
Considering a method for aggregating the value of actions after a switch is a logical next step.

*This poster uses data from Premier League 23/24 season*

## On Ball Value +1

StatsBomb's possession value model (OBV) can be used to quantify the value added by actions taken after a switch of play has successfully been completed. The 20 players that completed the most switches in the Premier League last season are featured below, highlighting the OBV generated from the first pass or carry after their switches alongside the space they played their switches into, on average.

### Value Created Immediately After Player Completed a Switch



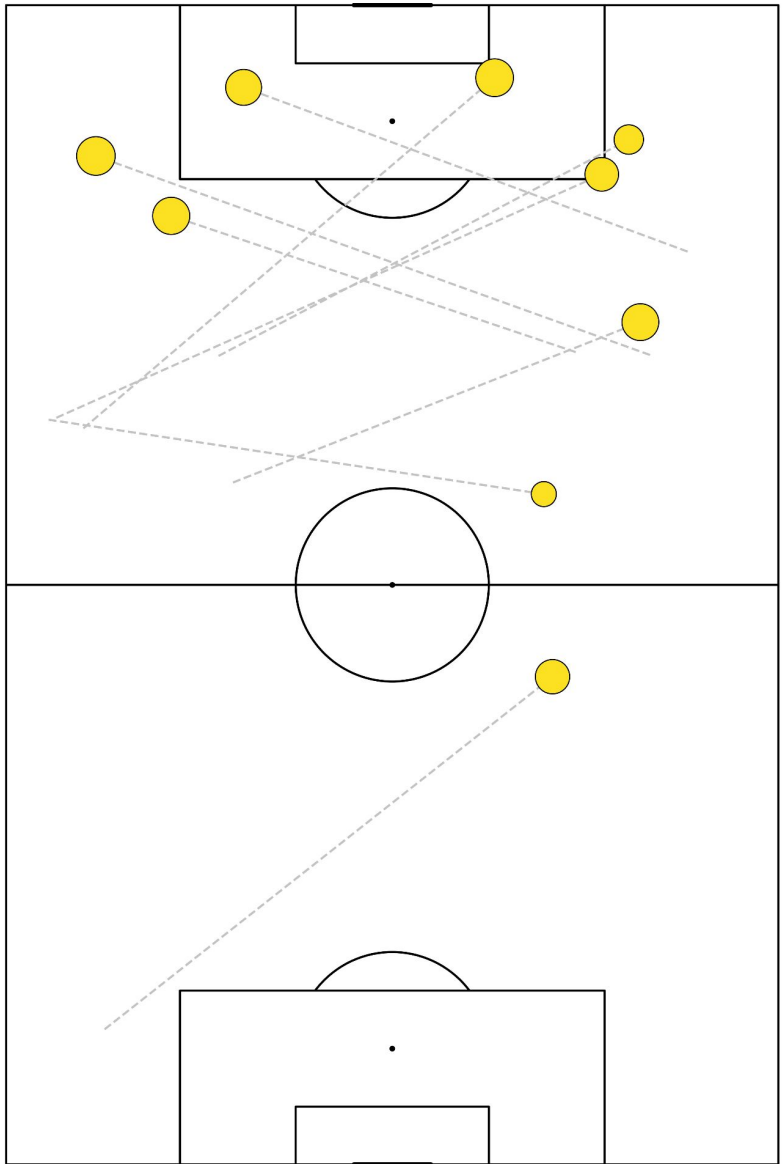
## Receipts in Space from Switches

Partial credit for these valuable passes and carries should go to the switch receiver. Players in stronger teams will have receivers that can create more with less. Considering the conditions the player received the ball in would highlight how the switch did or did not set them up for a positive outcome.

With StatsBomb's 360 data, we can identify the subset of a player's switches that were received in space. This space would give the receiver time to control the ball, as well as space to operate in.

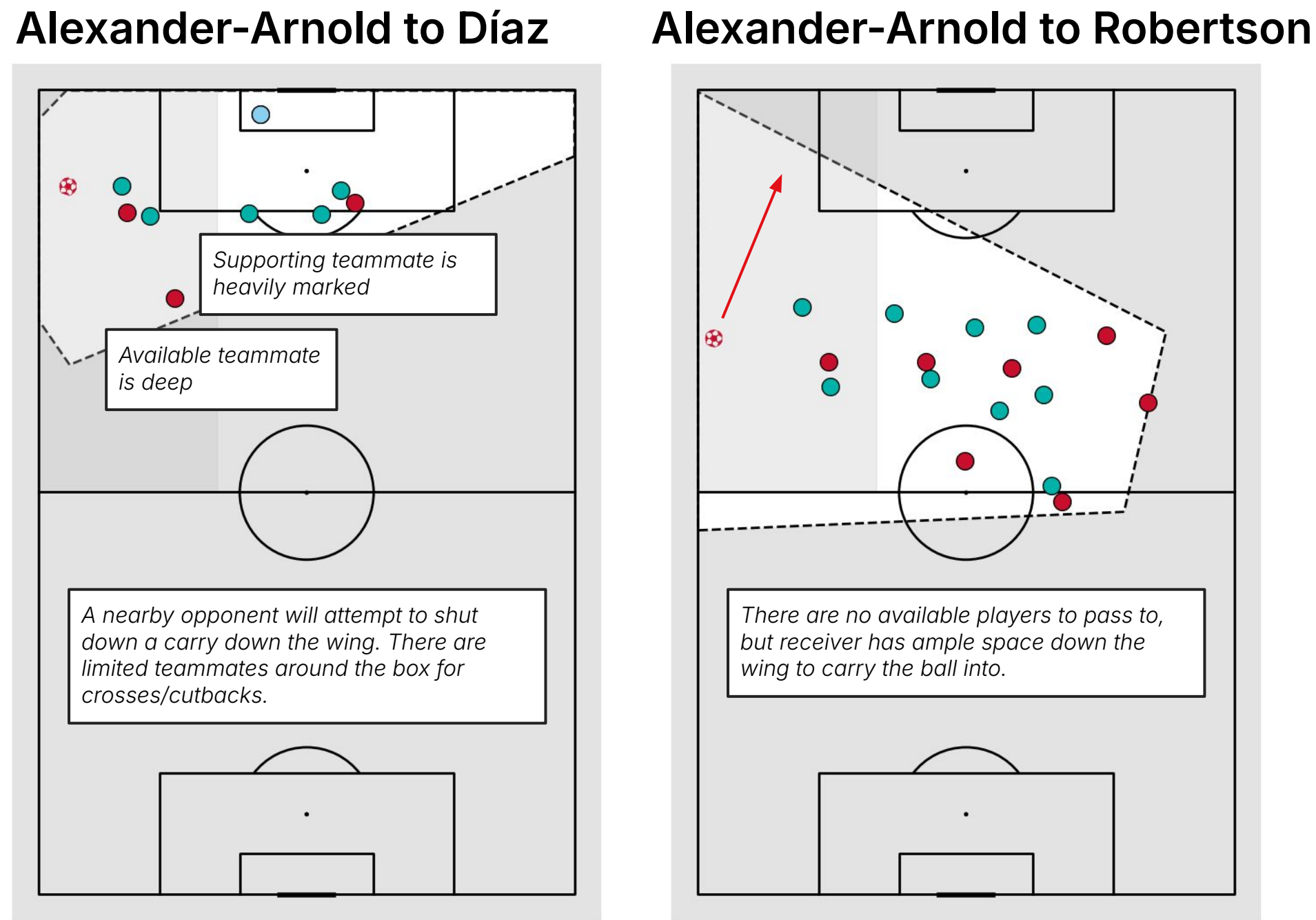
On the right, Fernandes' switches completed into >5 yards of space are visualised. It is immediately clear that Fernandes is capable of finding space in advanced, high value zones.

### Fernandes: Switches into Space



## Identifying Overloads with 360

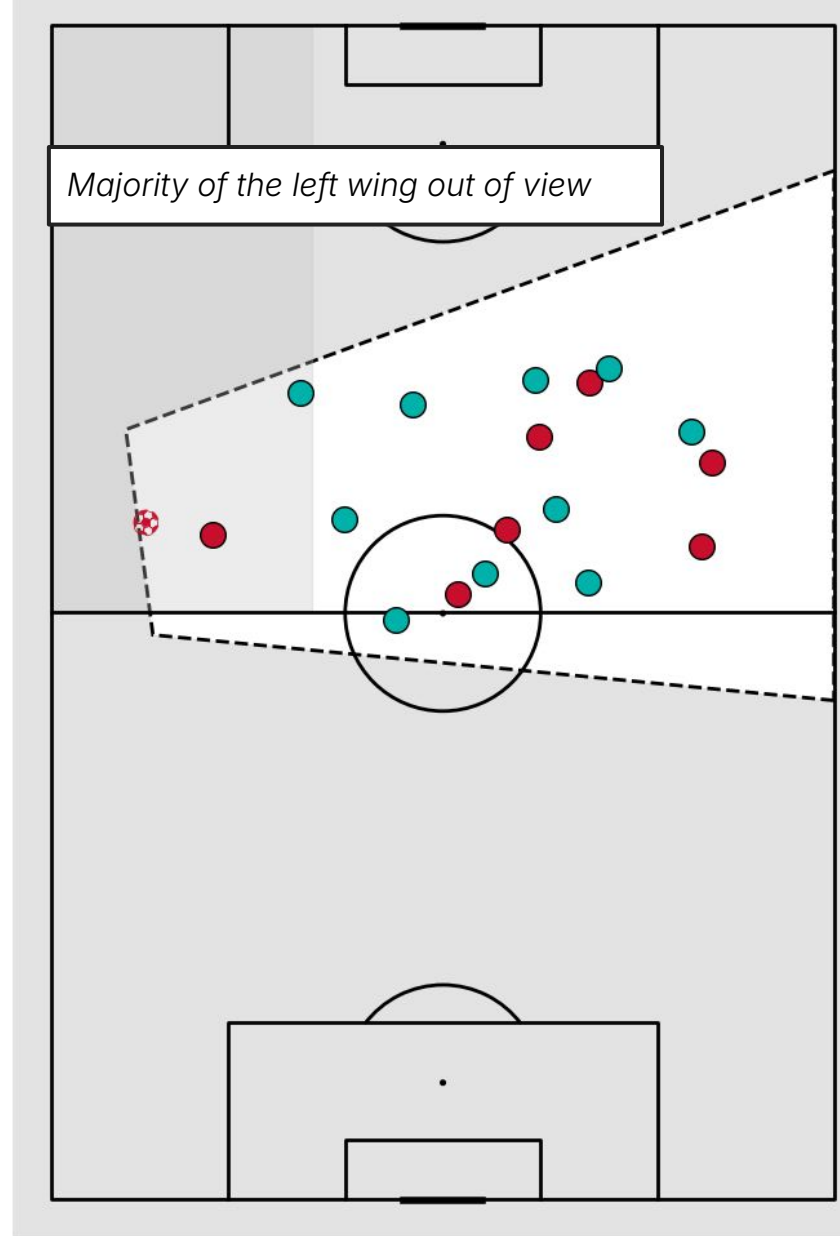
The space creation afforded by a switch is evident not only in the space the receiver finds themselves in, but in the support they have from teammates. Situations where **teammates outnumber opposition players** can be considered overloads and the creation of overloads down one wing of the pitch is a particularly positive outcome of a switch of play. For this example, the right hand third of the width of the pitch is considered relevant for this illustrative example.



According to this rule the switch receipt on the left is considered an overload (3v2), while the receipt on the right (2v2) is not; however, it is not clear that the situation on the left is significantly more advantageous than the one on the right. Defining the relative opportunity of such situations presents several challenges.

## A Partial View

### Alexander-Arnold to Tsimikas



A significant limitation of working with 360 frames is that they offer a limited view of the pitch, based on the portion of the pitch shown in broadcast footage. In the example on the left, Tsimikas appears to have received the ball with a teammate to support him and a numerical advantage going forwards. With the majority of the left wing out of the frame, however, there is a feeling that some information is missing.

For this case in particular, we can be confident that Tsimikas retains his numerical advantage. Within the frame, there are 10 opposition players. We can be sure that there are no opponents hidden beyond the frame.