Ekstraklasa Passing Profiles 2022-23

Poland: Data Champions

The 2022-23 season of the Polish Ekstraklasa was a very successful one for StatsBomb customers.

Raków Częstochowa claimed the first league title in their 102-year history, and they were followed home by Lech Poznan, another club who have successfully integrated our data and analysis solutions into their processes.

Poland was one of the first Central European countries in which we saw teams show a true understanding of the value that data could bring to their operations, and so it was particularly gratifying for us to see two of the clubs most committed to that approach reap the benefits.

It also gives us a convenient excuse to put our new expected pass and pass clustering models to work in order to analyse the passing profiles of Ekstraklasa teams.

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The Models

Both of these new StatsBomb models are available in each and every one of the 100+ competitions we cover around the globe.
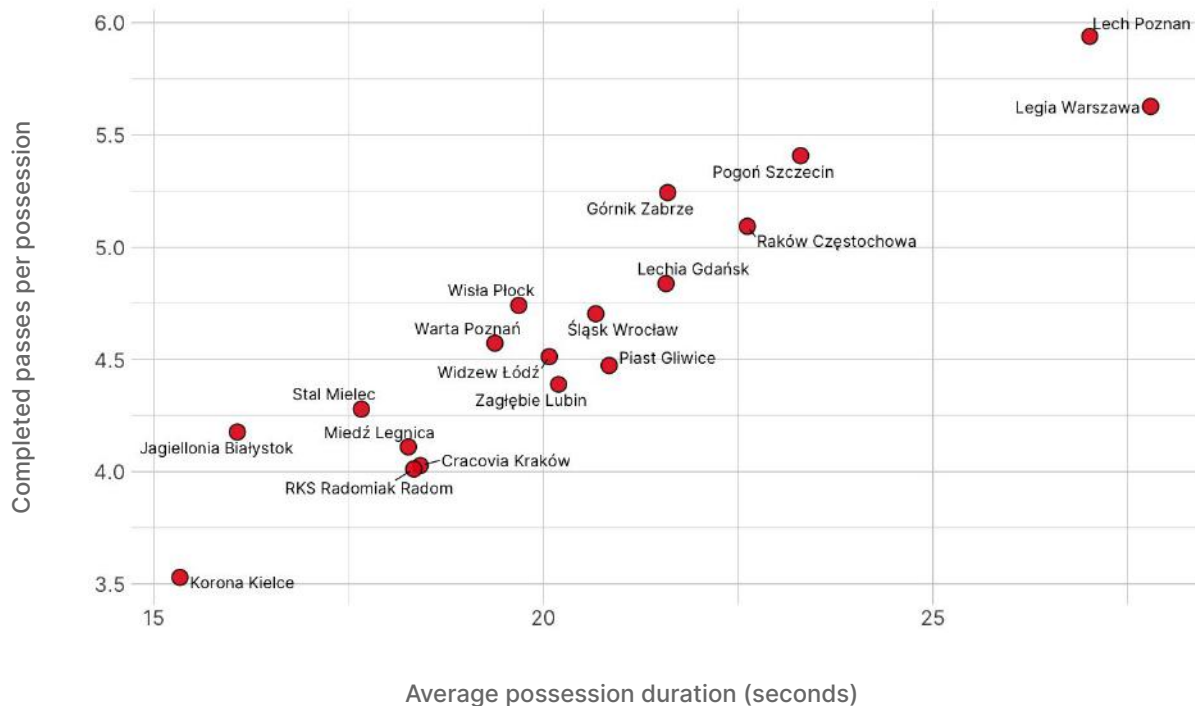
Expected Pass Model
Our expected pass model takes into account various factors, including our exclusive pressure data, to predict the likelihood of a given pass being completed. This can provide insight into both passing skill and the passing risk profiles of teams and players.

Pass Clustering Model
Our pass clustering model uses a number of variables (pitch location, pass direction, length and height) to group together passes with similar characteristics in order to simplify the task of visualising and analysing passes.

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Possession length

Completed passes per possession (y-axis)

6.0 — Lech Poznan

5.5 — Legia Warszawa

Pogoń Szczecin

5.0 — Górnik Zabrze · Raków Częstochowa

Lechia Gdańsk

Wisła Płock

Warta Poznań · Śląsk Wrocław

4.5 — Widzew Łódź · Piast Gliwice

Zagłębie Lubin

Stal Mielec

Jagiellonia Białystok · Miedź Legnica

4.0 — Cracovia Kraków

RKS Radomiak Radom

3.5 — Korona Kielce

15 ... 20 ... 25

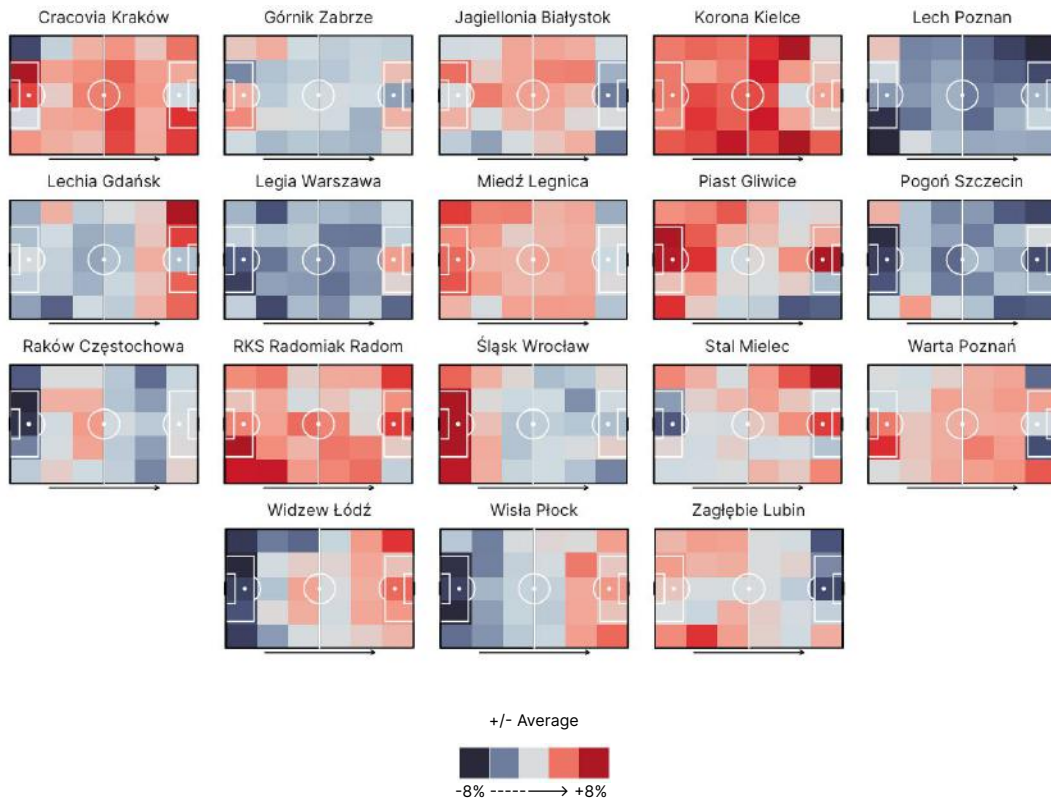Average possession duration (seconds)

To start off, a simple plot of the average possession length, in time and number of completed passes, for each of the teams in the league.

This is a useful reference point, as it includes signals of what we would expect to see when we analyse the team's passing profiles in greater detail.

Lech Poznan and Legia Warszawa stand out here as the most considered teams in possession, with much longer possessions than the rest of the league.

In the opposite corner of the plot we find Korona Kielce, who complete almost half a pass less per possession than any other team.

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Pass Difficulty by Zone vs. League Average

Cracovia Kraków — Górnik Zabrze — Jagiellonia Białystok — Korona Kielce — Lech Poznan

Lechia Gdańsk — Legia Warszawa — Miedź Legnica — Piast Gliwice — Pogoń Szczecin

Raków Częstochowa — RKS Radomiak Radom — Śląsk Wrocław — Stal Mielec — Warta Poznań

Widzew Łódź — Wisła Płock — Zagłębie Lubin

+/- Average

-8% -----⟶ +8%

Using our pass completion model, we can look at which teams attempt easier and/or more difficult passes than the league average in each zone.

Immediately, we see some of the profiles hinted at in the previous plot begin to emerge.

Korona Kielce stand out for attempting more difficult than average passes across pretty much the entire pitch; in contrast Legia Warszawa and Lech Poznan largely attempt easier than average passes.

There are other interesting strands here, too, such as the fact that Raków attempt more difficult than average passes in the centre of their own half, but then largely average or below-average passes elsewhere.
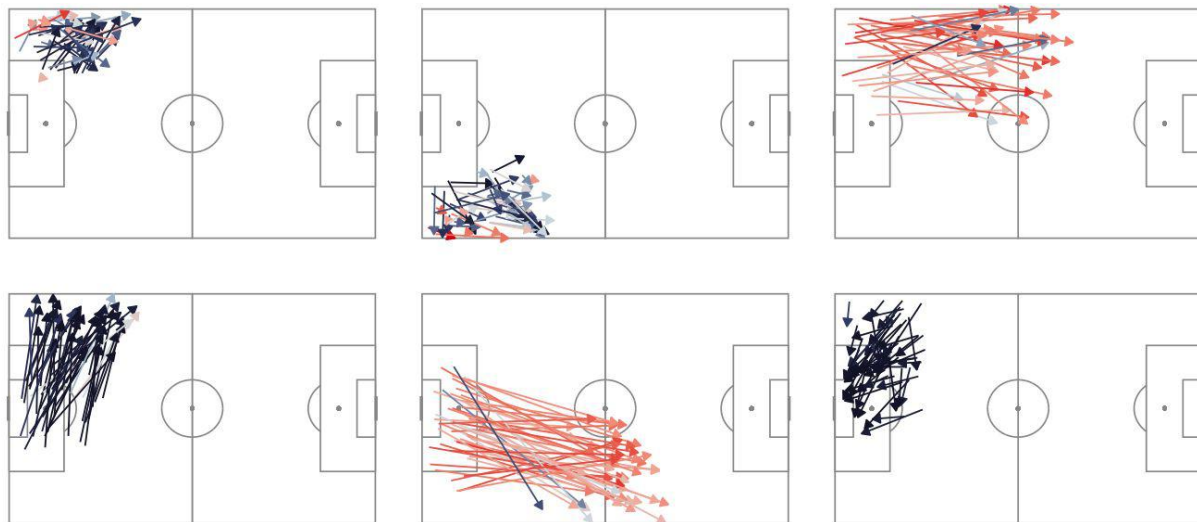
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Pass Difficulty by Third vs. League Average

	Defensive Third		Middle Third		Attacking Third	
	Team	**Difficulty % +/-**	**Team**	**Difficulty % +/-**	**Team**	**Difficulty % +/-**
1.	**Korona Kielce**	+4.60%	**Korona Kielce**	+5.52%	**Korona Kielce**	+5.00%
2.	Piast Gliwice	+4.10%	Cracovia Kraków	+3.34%	Cracovia Kraków	+3.02%
3.	Radomiak Radom	+4.10%	Radomiak Radom	+2.02%	Radomiak Radom	+2.75%
...						
16	Lech Poznan	-3.87%	Pogoń Szczecin	-3.33%	Legia Warszawa	-3.03%
17	Legia Warszawa	-4.15%	Legia Warszawa	-3.38%	Pogoń Szczecin	-4.02%
18	**Wisła Płock**	-4.15%	**Lech Poznan**	-3.80%	**Lech Poznan**	-5.24%

Before zooming in on the passes themselves, we will first zoom out slightly to identify the teams who on average attempt the easiest and the most difficult passes in each third of the pitch.
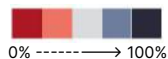
The bolded teams are those we will go on to analyse in the following slides, those who attempt the most difficult and easiest passes respectively in each third of the pitch.

There are some repeated names across the top and bottom three in each third: Lech Poznan, Legia Warszawa, Cracovia Kraków, Radomiak Radom and, of course, Korona Kielce, whose passing profile we will soon become quite intimate with.

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Defensive Third: Korona Kielce, Common Pass Clusters

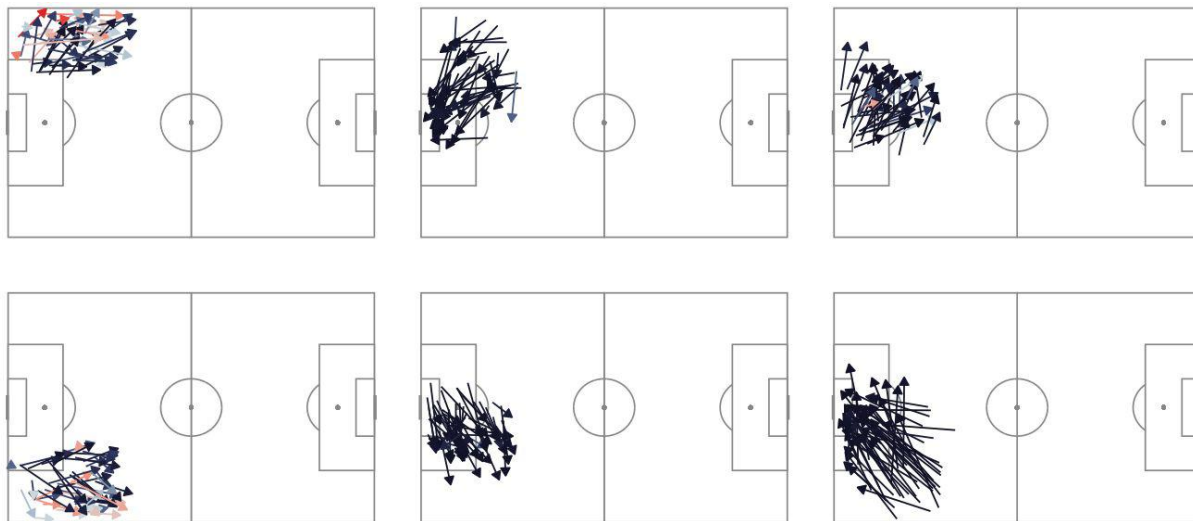Expected Pass Completion %

0% ------→ 100%

Using our pass cluster model, we can identify and visualise the six most-common types of passes that Korona Kielce attempt in the defensive third of the pitch.

There are a couple of clusters of low-difficulty passes from the centre to the left and back again, but the majority of these passes are attempts to move the ball forward towards the flanks.

The third (top right) and fifth (bottom centre) clusters represent long, high passes forward, generally played by the left-back Marius Briceag in the former case, and the goalkeeper (Marcel Zapytowski or Konrad Forenc) in the latter.

It is worth noting that in both cases, Korona Kielce complete these more difficult passes at a lower rate than the completion model would expect.

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Defensive Third: Wisła Płock, Common Pass Clusters
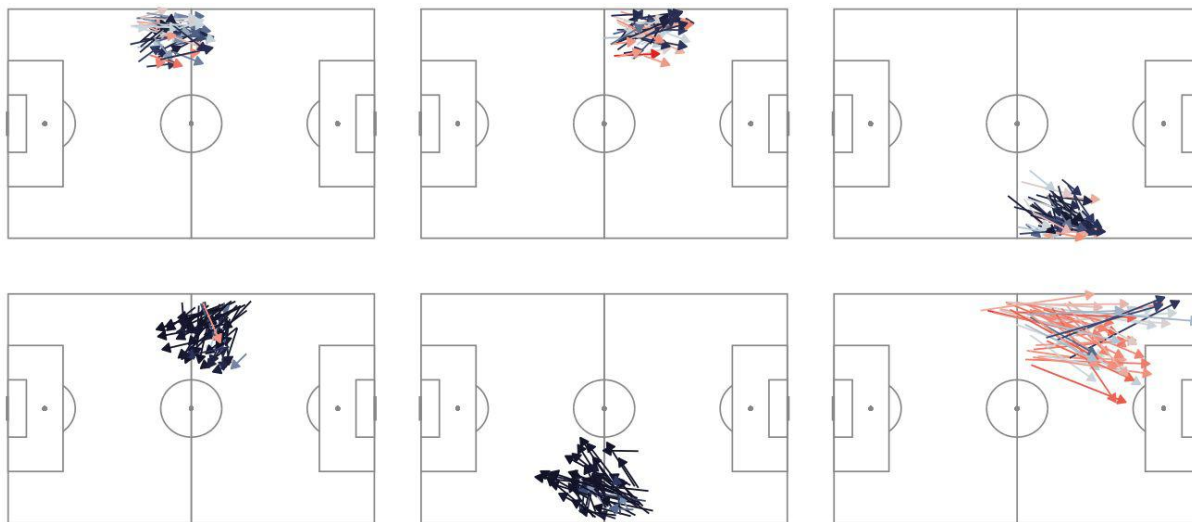

Expected Pass Completion %

0% ------> 100%

There is a clear contrast when we look at the most common passes of Wisła Płock – the team who attempted the least difficult passes of all in the defensive third.

What we see here is a lot of ball circulation: short, ground passes largely between the goalkeeper and the central defenders.

Despite both attempting a similar percentage of passes with their dominant right foot, there is a clear difference between the goalkeepers Krzysztof Kamiński and Bartłomiej Gradecki in terms of the side they like to play out short to: Kamiński favours the left; Gradecki the right.

When Wisła Płock do advance, it is short out of the full-back zones. And as we saw on slide 5, as they move upfield they become progressively more ambitious in their passing.

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Middle Third: Korona Kielce, Common Pass Clusters

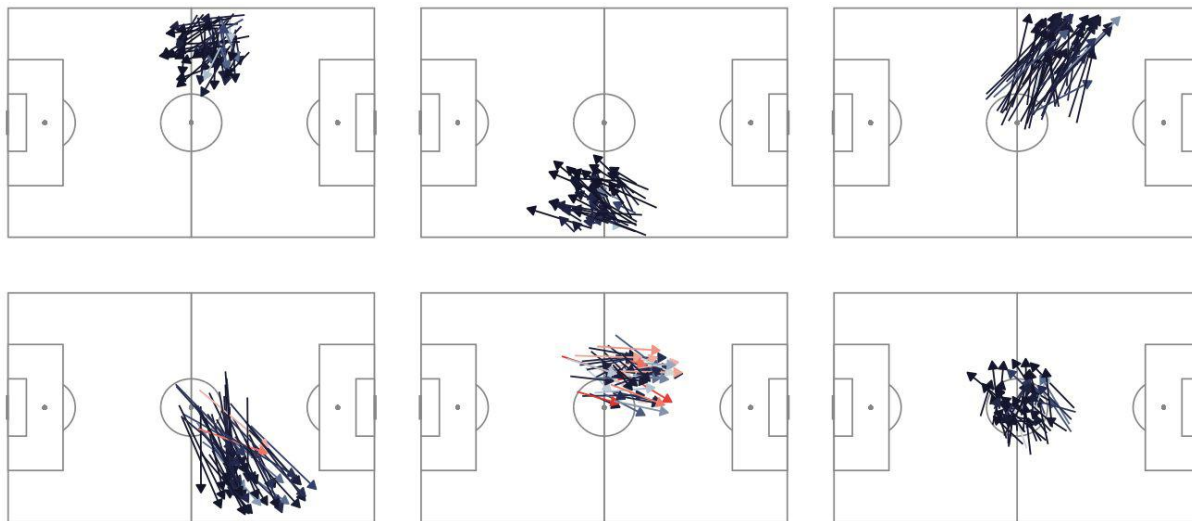Expected Pass Completion %

0% ------→ 100%

In the middle third, Korona Kielce were again the team who attempted the most difficult passes on average.

As we're analysing them in some detail it's worth noting that they weren't some grossly overmatched team, desperately trying to find a way forward. They finished 13th in the league, with both the 12th best xG and xG difference.

In the defensive third, we saw that the flanks provided their primary out ball and so it makes sense that the majority of passes they play in the middle third are from wide areas.

The left is clearly their favoured side for progression through this zone and into the final third, with the left-back Marius Briceag again the primary supplier, particularly of the difficult sixth cluster (bottom right) passes: high and forward.

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Middle Third: Lech Poznan, Common Pass Clusters
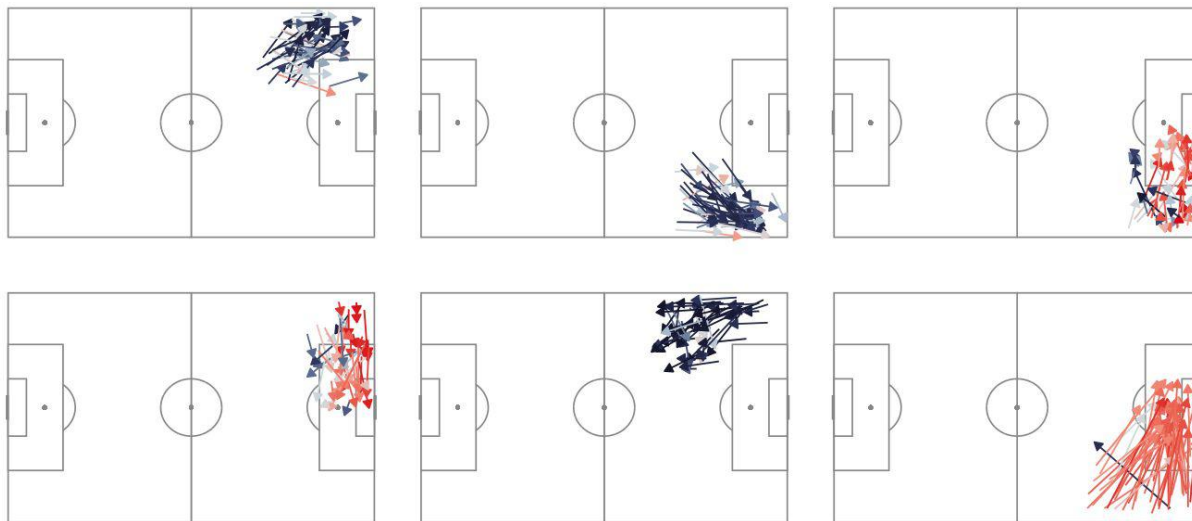

Expected Pass Completion %

0% ------> 100%

It was Lech Poznan who attempted the least difficult passes from the middle third of the pitch.

Their plot shows a team who clearly make much more use of the centre of the pitch, either to spread play out wide or to simply circulate the ball in search of opportunities to move forward.

When they do so, it is primarily from left of centre positions (cluster five, bottom middle). They complete these relatively difficult passes at the rate expected by the model, with central defender Antonio Milić, left-back Pedro Rebocho and central midfielder Jesper Karlström the primary suppliers.

It is also clear that they are not afraid to shuffle the ball back from the flanks to the centre to reset and/or shift to the other side.

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Attacking Third: Korona Kielce, Common Pass Clusters
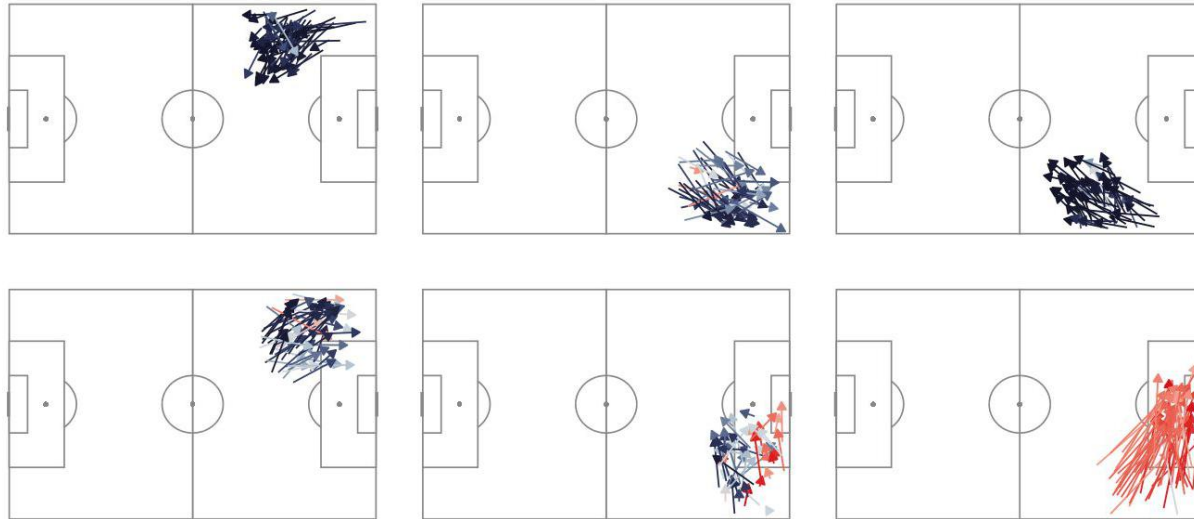

Expected Pass Completion %

0% ------→ 100%

Into the final third, and back to Korona Kielce, who again show a clear preference for the flanks.

Amongst all Ekstraklasa teams, only Widzew Łódź more often used crosses to try and move the ball into the penalty area and so it is no surprise to see three sets of passes into the box from wide areas and two sets of passes to set up those deliveries.

Interestingly, Korona Kielce were three percentage points over the expected completion rate for the cluster six (bottom right) high crosses into the area, the most difficult of the trio, supplied by any of right-back Dominick Zator, central midfielder Ronaldo Deaconu or right midfielder Jacek Podgórski, and aimed at strikers Evgeniy Shikavka and Bartosz Śpiączka.

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Attacking Third: Lech Poznan, Common Pass Clusters

Expected Pass Completion %

0% ------> 100%

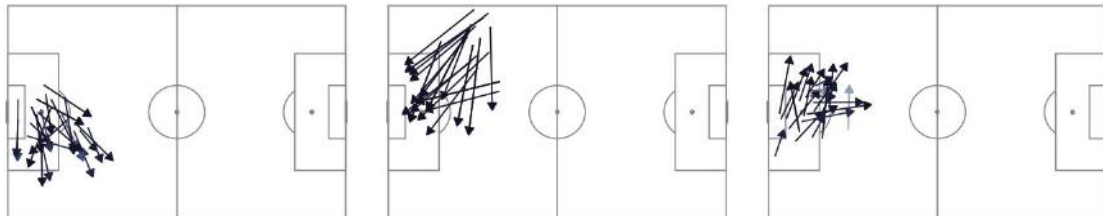**Lech Poznan return as the team who attempted the least difficult passes in the final third.**

This was the third with the largest difficulty spread, although to the eye this looks similar to Korona Kielce's plot, perhaps because attacks and box entries from wide will always likely be the volume play, regardless of the other ways teams attempt to progress the ball inside the final third.

There is a clear preference for attacking down the right, including in the only two sets of box entries.
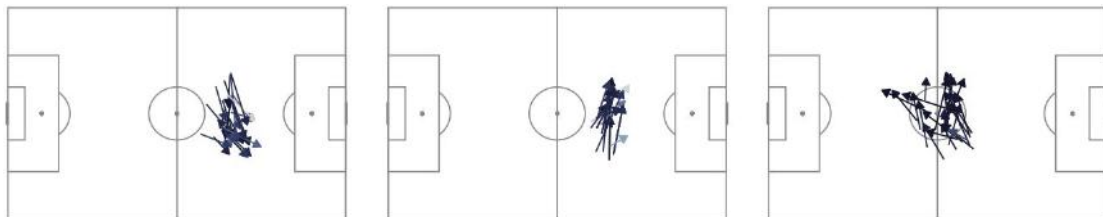
Right-back Joel Pereira, the team's primary provider of key passes, is heavily involved in the fifth (bottom middle) and sixth (bottom right) cluster box entries, while winger Michał Skóraś pops up as both a supplier and receiver, particularly of the shorter fifth cluster entries.

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Raków Częstochowa, Overrepresented Pass Clusters
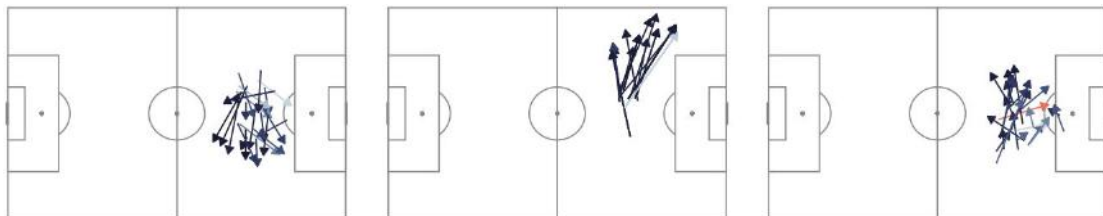
Defensive Third

Middle Third

Attacking Third

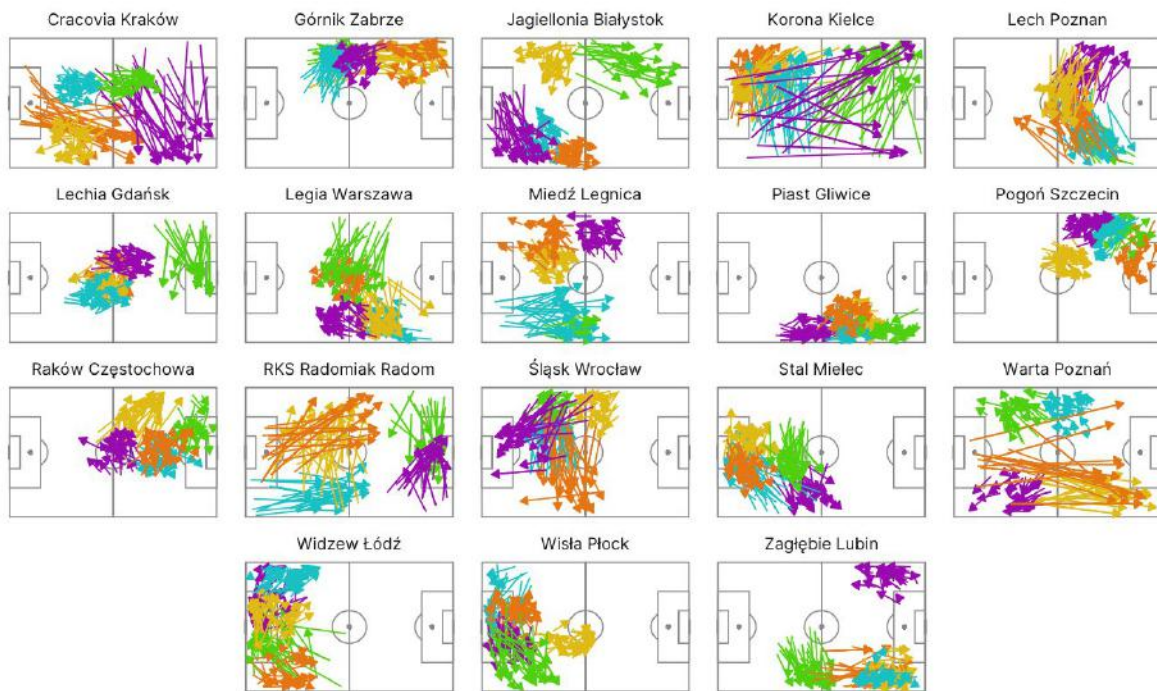**But what of the league champions, Raków Częstochowa?**

To see where they stood out, we've plotted the pass clusters they utilised in each third that were most different to the league average (z score). The clusters that were most unique to them.

In the defensive third those are primarily short passes out of and back into the penalty area.

Further forward, we see a team whose passing is focused centrally and that consistently moves the ball into the half spaces in search of routes forward.

Unsurprisingly, Raków were, behind Lech Poznan, the team who created the highest percentage of their chances from within the width of the penalty area.

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Ekstraklasa: Top Five Overrepresented Pass Clusters

Cracovia Kraków · Górnik Zabrze · Jagiellonia Białystok · Korona Kielce · Lech Poznan · Lechia Gdańsk · Legia Warszawa · Miedź Legnica · Piast Gliwice · Pogoń Szczecin · Raków Częstochowa · RKS Radomiak Radom · Śląsk Wrocław · Stal Mielec · Warta Poznań · Widzew Łódź · Wisła Płock · Zagłębie Lubin

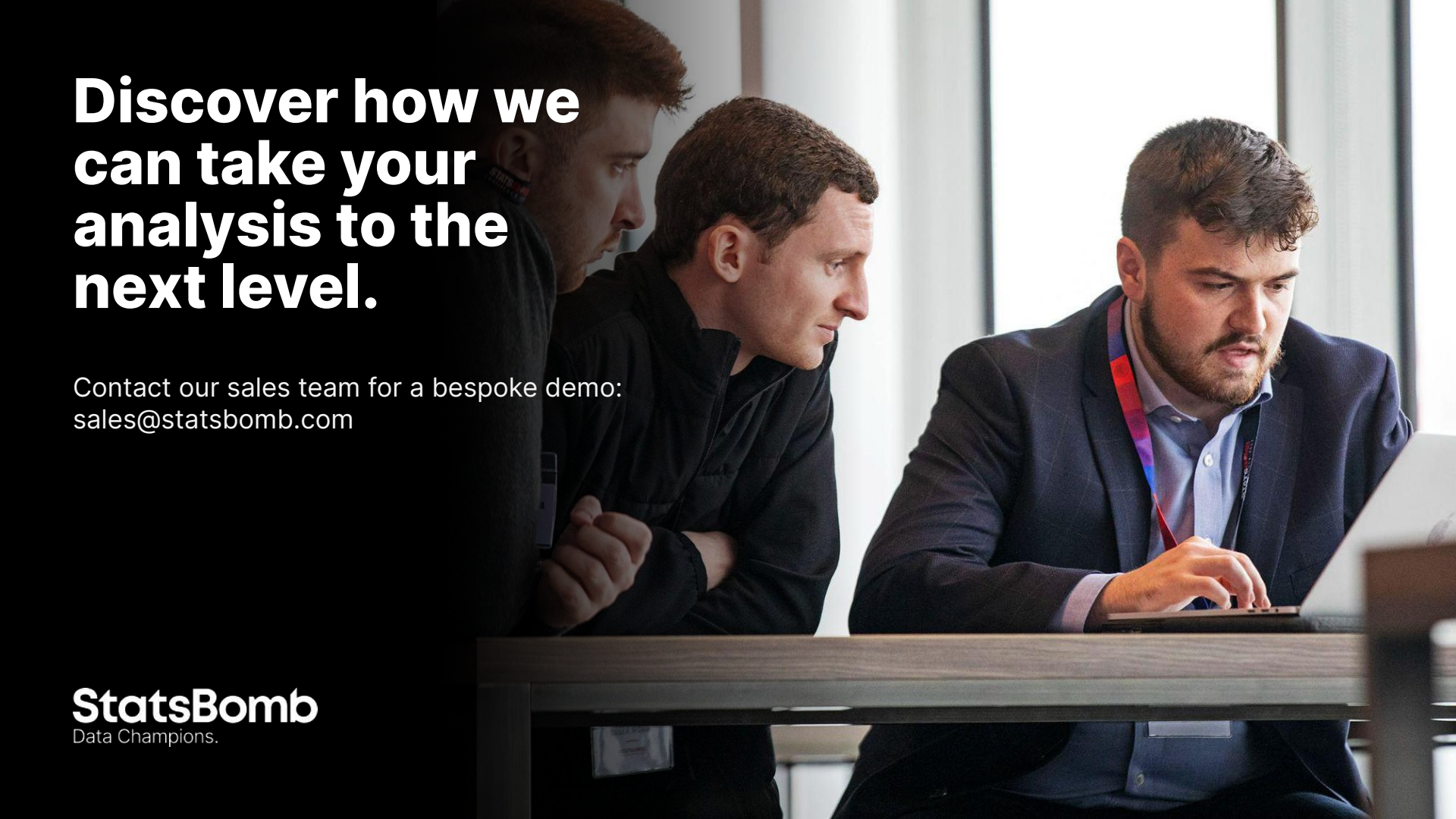→ Order - 1 → Order - 2 → Order - 3 → Order - 4 → Order - 5

Let's finally extend that approach out to the entire league, looking at the five most unique passes that each team played.

There are various points of interest.

The short-from-the-back approach of Widzew Łódź and Wisła Płock is again very evident here, as is the much more direct passing of teams such as Korona Kleice, Radomiak Radom and Warta Poznań.

Pogoń Szczecin had one of the best attacks in the league, one that was clearly a lot more left-side focused than most other teams.

As we have shown, between the output of our expected pass model and the visualisation possibilities of the pass clustering model, we can get a genuine insight into passing profiles and patterns across the league.

Discover how we can take your analysis to the next level.

Contact our sales team for a bespoke demo:
sales@statsbomb.com

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