



GAA GAMES INTELLIGENCE UNIT

2026 Gaelic Football Season Analysis



Football

Project overview

👥 PROJECT COORDINATORS


COORDINATOR
GAA


COORDINATOR
Analyses


COORDINATOR
Independent

🕒 GAMES ANALYSED


200

games across ten competitions

Division 1

Division 2

Division 3

Division 4

Connacht SFC

Ulster SFC

Leinster SFC

Munster SFC

Tailteann Cup

Sam Maguire Cup

📊 SCALE OF THE WORK


800
hours of analysis


100
working days of coding


28
team meetings


1
report

📄 DATA CAPTURED


182,054
coded rows of information


56
variables tracked

Games Intelligence Unit (GIU) Senior Inter-County Gaelic Football Report 2026

This report was produced by the Games Intelligence Unit (GIU) Gaelic Football Analysis Team. Project leadership was provided by Johnny Bradley, Dr Michael McKay, and Dr Peter Horgan. Johnny Bradley, Dr Michael McKay, Barry Cleary, and Dr Denise Martin led the development of insights, translating the match data into the findings presented throughout the report. Data collection was undertaken by Johnny Bradley, Katy Heron, Aoife McColgan, Abby Tarrant, Evan Gannon, Brian Costello and Dylan Wallace, whose detailed coding of match events provided the foundation for the analysis.

We acknowledge the expertise and commitment of the team in developing this evidence base for Gaelic football. Their work provides a valuable resource for understanding the game and supporting informed discussion and decision-making across the Association.

We also thank the counties, their management teams, and their analysts for their support in providing access to match video footage, which was essential to the analysis presented in this report.

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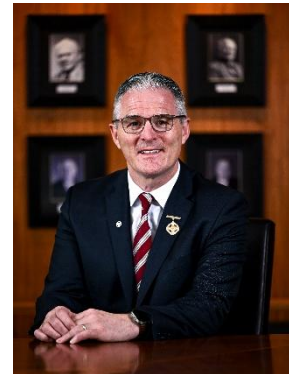
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Teachtaireacht ón Uachtarán

Cúis mhór áthais dom mar Uachtarán ar Chumann Lúthchleas Gael an tuarascáil seo ó Aonad Faisnéise na gCluichí a chur in bhur láthair. Tá áit ar leith ag an pheil Ghaelach i saol ár bpobal agus i gcroíthe mhuintir na hÉireann. Leis an chluiche ag forbairt, tá sé tábhachtach go mbeadh tuiscint chruinn againn ar na hathruithe atá ag teacht air agus ar an tionchar a imreoidh na hathruithe sin



ar an imirt. Cuireann an tuarascáil seo bonn láidir eolais ar fáil chun tacú le cinntí stuama ar mhaithe leis an chluiche agus ar mhaithe leo siúd uilig atá bainteach leis.

Tús maith, leath na hoibre. The evidenced based approach to assessing the playing and evolution of our games was emphatically road tested by the interaction between the Football Review Committee and the Games Intelligence Unit and the seismic impact the new rule enhancements have had on the game.

Upon taking office, I set a challenge for us to arrive at a version of Gaelic football that was a better game to watch and crucially a better game to play than what was previously the case. The Games Intelligence Unit has supported that process through systematic analysis, providing a consistent evidence base for discussion about the game and its future.

This report draws on 200 senior inter-county matches across all four divisions of the Allianz Football League, the Provincial Championships, the Sam Maguire Cup and the Tailteann Cup. That breadth of coverage is invaluable. An informed understanding of Gaelic football must reflect the experiences of teams across the competitive landscape.

The analysis examines scoring, shot selection, kick outs, passing, turnovers and fouls. Comparisons with 2025 help us consider how patterns of play are changing, while comparisons between competitions highlight the different contexts in which the game is played. Together, these findings allow us to look beyond individual matches and impressions when assessing developments across a season.

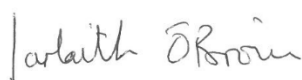
The value of this work extends to many people within the Association. Coaches and players can use it to reflect on preparation, decision-making and performance. Analysts can draw on a shared framework for examining the game. Referees and those supporting their

development can consider patterns in the situations they encounter, while administrators and those reviewing our playing rules have a stronger basis for informed discussion.

We must also interpret the findings with care. Changes between seasons can reflect several influences, including tactical choices, the teams involved and the circumstances of particular matches. Evidence from senior inter-county football does not necessarily describe the experience of club or underage players. The report is most useful when read alongside the knowledge and perspectives of those who play, coach and officiate at every level.

I wish to thank the Games Intelligence Unit team for the expertise, diligence and commitment behind this report. I also thank the counties, their management teams and their analysts for supporting access to match video footage. Their cooperation has been essential to building this shared resource. I encourage everyone with an interest in Gaelic football to engage with the findings.

Rath De ar an obair



Iarlaith Ó Broin
Uachtarán CLG

1. Executive Summary

This report provides a detailed analysis of senior inter-county Gaelic football in 2026, when teams, players and referees had become more accustomed to rule changes introduced in 2025. As data were available for both the 2025 and 2026 seasons, comparisons can be made across both observed and calculated metrics. The 2026 analyses cover 200 matches: 116 National Football League fixtures across Divisions One to Four, 29 provincial championship games, 27 Sam Maguire Cup games and 28 Tailteann Cup games. Matches were coded using a standardised framework, with defined operational criteria and quality-control procedures. The dataset contained 182,054 coded rows across 56 fields. All reported match analyses relate to normal playing time, including stoppage time, with extra time excluded.

Competitiveness varied across competitions. A competitive game was defined as a game with a final margin of six points or fewer. Games in the Sam Maguire Cup showed the highest proportion of competitive games at 74%, alongside an average winning margin of 5.6 points. Half of Tailteann Cup fixtures met the same threshold, with an average margin of 8.0 points. Games in Division 3 showed the lowest average winning margin, at 5.4 points. Average winning margins in provincial championships ranged from 9.0 to 9.5 points, with competitive-game shares ranging from 20% in Munster to 50% in Connacht.

Winning-performance profiles showed similarities alongside competition-specific differences. Winning teams during the League averaged approximately 30–32 shots and 5.7–5.9 points per ten possessions. Winning teams in the Sam Maguire Cup and Tailteann Cup competitions produced similar total-points returns, at 27.0 and 26.5 respectively, despite differences in their scoring profiles. Across the combined championship sample, winners in games decided by seven points or more recorded higher shooting efficiency, productivity, and own-kick-out retention than winners in competitive games.

The average number of shots per game in championship football increased from 60.3 in 2025, to 62.6 in 2026, while average scoring events rose only slightly, from 35.3 to 35.7. Overall conversion declined from 58.6% to 57.0%. Two-point attempts increased from an average of 11.9 to 13.6 per game, but their conversion fell from 43.8% to 39.4%. Across the 2026 competitions, placed-ball conversion consistently exceeded open-play conversion, while shot-location analysis showed substantial differences between pitch zones.

Kick outs were the origin of approximately 60% of scoring possessions, compared with 38% originating from turnovers, and just 2% from throw ups. Long kick outs remained the most common championship restart category, although their share declined from 49.8% in 2025 to 46.3% in 2026. The proportion of contested kick outs also fell, from 62.4% to 57.2%. Once possession was secured, own long kick outs produced a slightly higher attacking return than own short deliveries. Possession won from opposition short kick outs generated the highest points return per possession won but represented a much smaller group of events.

Comparing championship games from 2025 to 2026 revealed that passing activity increased, with hand passes increasing from 391.6 to 417.9 per game, and kick passes rising from 93.1 to 102.6. Passes per possession also increased from an average of 5.85 to 6.21. Hand passing remained predominant across all competitions. The median possession contained five passes, although 41.4% contained three or fewer and 10.8% contained at least 13, illustrating the range of possession sequences across games.

Turnovers declined modestly, from an average of 32.6 to 31.7 per game, with the turnover rate falling from 38.7% to 37.2% (of possessions). Frees awarded decreased from an average of 27.5 to 24.2 per game, largely accounted for by reductions in aggressive and delay infringements. Technical fouls remained unchanged in frequency, while dissent increased slightly from a low base.

The report provides an evidence base for coaching reflection, performance benchmarking, and continued monitoring of the game. Comparisons between seasons should be interpreted alongside differences in teams, fixtures, and competition composition; the observed changes cannot be attributed solely to the enhanced rules. Continued analysis will help establish which patterns persist and support informed decisions about the development of Gaelic football.

2. GIU Methodology

This report presents a descriptive analysis of senior inter-county Gaelic football during the 2026 season. It draws on detailed match-event analysis undertaken by the GIU to examine (among other things) scoring, shot selection, possession, kick outs, passing, turnovers and fouls. Comparisons across competitions and with the 2025 championship provide context for understanding patterns of play as the rule enhancements begin to embed.

Match coverage and sample

The 2026 dataset comprised 200 senior inter-county fixtures: 116 National Football League games, 29 provincial championship games, 27 Sam Maguire Cup games and 28 Tailteann Cup games. League coverage included 29 games in each of Divisions One to Four. Provincial championship coverage comprised six games in the Connacht SFC, ten in the Leinster SFC, five in the Munster SFC, and eight in the Ulster SFC.

The complete dataset contains 182,054 coded rows across 56 fields. Analyses were undertaken across the full season or within specified competition groups. Where reference is made to 'championship' this indicates 84 fixtures across the 2026 provincial championships, Sam Maguire Cup and Tailteann Cup.

Data collection and coding

Match analysis was conducted using a standardised notational analysis framework. All matches were coded using Nacsport Elite, with analysts following a detailed Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) designed to support consistency and accuracy. The SOP established operational definitions, coding sequences, and procedures for recording match events.

Analysis was conducted on an event-by-event basis, capturing possessions, kick outs, hand passes, kick passes, shots, turnovers, fouls, tackles, and Solo & Go actions. Events were linked within possession sequences, allowing individual actions to be examined alongside the circumstances in which possession was secured and its subsequent outcome. Possession was defined by a team having control of the ball; the goalkeeper holding the ball before taking a kick out was excluded.

Spatial locations were recorded using consistent pitch references. Kick out locations were recorded relative to the goals from which the restart was taken, while shot locations were recorded relative to the attacking goals. Turnovers lost were referenced to the attacking goals and foul locations to the defending goals. Where quarter-based analysis was undertaken, quarters lasted a minimum of 17 minutes and 30 seconds, ending at the next kick out.

Following coding, the dataset was subject to quality-control and validation procedures to identify inconsistencies and check adherence to the operational definitions. All reported match analyses relate to normal playing time, including stoppage time, with extra time excluded. Full operational definitions and calculated performance metrics are provided in Appendix 1.

Measures and analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to summarise match characteristics and to compare across competitions and seasons. Results are presented as counts, averages, percentages and, where indicated, standard deviations. Passing-sequence analysis also reports the median and selected percentiles. Match-level measures describe the combined activity of both teams, while team-performance measures describe the activity of an individual team. Changes between percentage measures are expressed in percentage points.

Scoring analysis distinguished between scoring events and their points value. A goal, a two-point score and a one-point score each represented one successful scoring event when calculating shooting efficiency. For total points and attacking productivity, goals were valued at three points, two-point scores at two points and one-point scores at one point. Productivity was expressed as total points scored per ten possessions.

Shooting efficiency was calculated as the percentage of attempts resulting in a score. Analyses distinguished open-play and placed-ball attempts and examined two-point attempts, goal attempts, and fisted shots separately. Shot locations were used to describe the spatial distribution of attempts and conversion rates across pitch zones. Two-point attempts could originate from either open play or placed balls; these classifications therefore describe different characteristics of an attempt and should not be treated as mutually exclusive categories.

Scoring sequences were classified according to the origin of possession, including kick outs, turnovers, and throw-ups. A score attributed to a kick out therefore refers to a possession sequence beginning with that restart, rather than necessarily a direct score from it. The share of scores arising from a particular source describes its contribution to scoring, rather than the likelihood that possession from that source produced a score.

Kick outs were classified as short, medium, or long according to their landing location relative to the team's own 45m and 65m lines. Analysis also distinguished contested and uncontested restarts, clean and break-ball outcomes, and possession awarded through frees or sidelines. Retention was calculated as the proportion of a team's own kick outs won, with opposition kick outs won examined separately.

Attacking outcomes following kick outs were analysed conditional on possession being secured. Measures included the proportion of those possessions producing a shot or score and the points scored per possession won. These measures describe the attacking return after possession was obtained; they do not, in isolation, measure the overall effectiveness of selecting a particular kick out length.

Passing analysis examined hand-pass and kick-pass frequency, their relative balance, passes per possession and the number of consecutive hand passes preceding an open-play kick. The distribution of possession lengths was also examined to distinguish typical passing sequences from longer sequences that may be less apparent in averages.

Turnovers were examined by frequency and type. Turnover rate expressed possession losses as a percentage of team possessions. Fouls were classified as aggressive, technical, delay, structure, or dissent, with selected categories also examined by match quarter. Solo & Go actions were included in the team-performance profiles.

For this report, games decided by six points or fewer were classified as competitive. Winning-performance profiles were compared across competitions and between competitive games and those decided by seven points or more. This classification is based on the final winning margin and does not capture changes in competitiveness during a match.

Interpretation and limitations

The analysis describes observed patterns and associations. It does not establish that an individual action, tactical approach, or rule change caused a particular performance or match

outcome. Differences may reflect team strength, opposition, match state, playing conditions, and competition context.

Comparisons between 2025 and 2026 should be interpreted in light of differences in the fixtures, teams and competition composition represented, alongside the consistency of coding and calculation methods. Observed changes cannot be attributed solely to the enhanced rules.

The findings relate to senior inter-county football and should not be assumed to describe club or underage play. Continued analysis across subsequent seasons will help assess whether the patterns identified are sustained and support a more detailed understanding of how the game is developing.

3. Games Played in 2026

3.1. 2026 GIU game sample

Figure 1 displays the number of games analysed in each competition. These included games from Divisions One to Four of the National Football League (n = 116), the four provincial senior football championships (SFC n = 29), and both the Tailteann Cup (n = 28) and Sam Maguire Cup (n = 27).

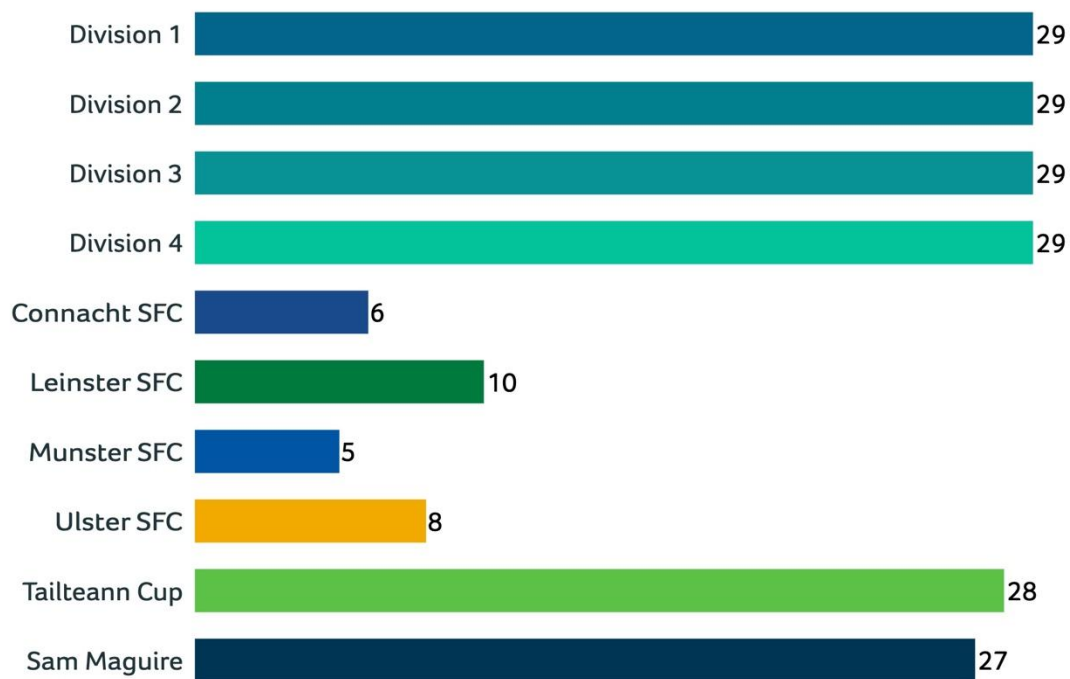


Figure 1. Number of games analysed in each competition

3.2. Winning margin and competitive games

Figure 2 and Table 1 show that the average winning margin and the proportion of competitive games provide complementary measures of competitiveness. Winning margins varied across competitions in 2026. For example, games in the Ulster SFC yielded the highest average winning margin (9.5 points), followed by games in the Connacht and Leinster SFCs (both 9.2 points), while games in Division 3 of the National Football League yielded the lowest average winning margin (5.4 points).

Games in the Sam Maguire Cup were relatively close contests, with an average winning margin of 5.6 points, compared with 8.0 points in the Tailteann Cup. Across the four divisions of the National Football League, average winning margins ranged from 5.4 points in Division 3 to 7.6 points in Division 4.

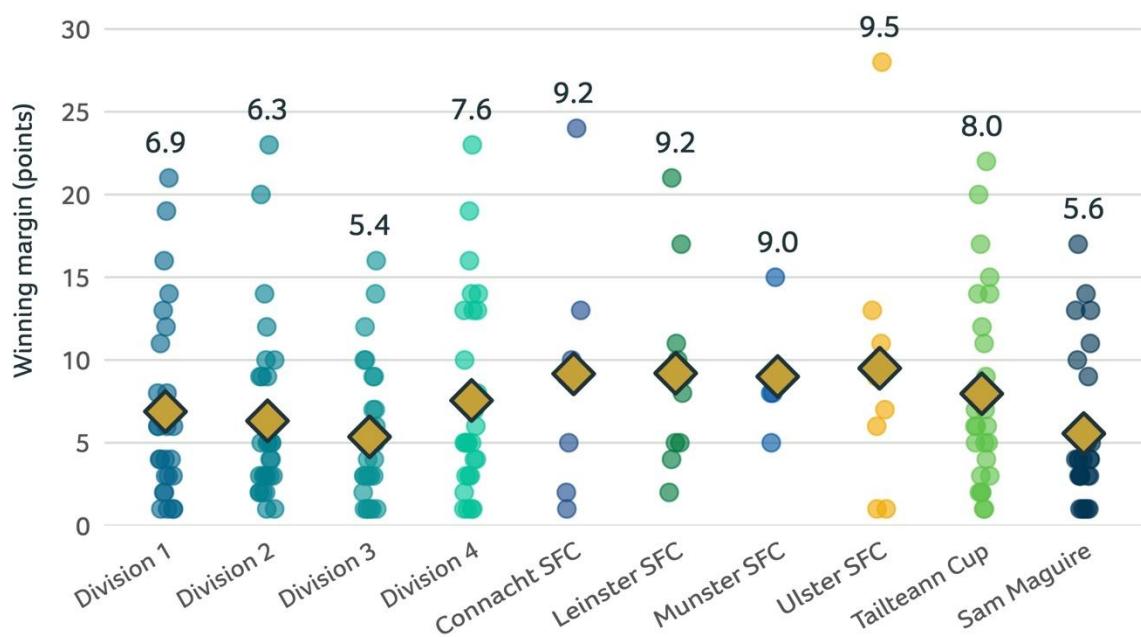


Figure 2. Average winning margin across competitions in the 2026 season.

Table 1. Number of games, average winning margin, and competitive-game share (≤ 6 points) by competition in the 2026 season.

Competition	Games	Average Winning Margin	Competitive Games
Football leagues			
Division 1	29	6.9	20 (69%)
Division 2	29	6.3	20 (69%)
Division 3	29	5.4	18 (62%)
Division 4	29	7.6	18 (62%)
Provincial championships			
Connacht Championship	6	9.2	3 (50%)
Leinster Championship	10	9.2	4 (40%)
Munster Championship	5	9.0	1 (20%)
Ulster Championship	8	9.5	3 (38%)
All-Ireland competitions			
Tailteann Cup	28	8.0	14 (50%)
Sam Maguire	27	5.6	20 (74%)

3.3. *Winning performances*

Comparing winning performances offers greater insight into the factors associated with match success across different competitions. Rather than identifying what teams typically achieve, this approach highlights key performance characteristics and how these may vary across competitions. A comparative breakdown of team performance metrics illustrates these characteristics across divisions, provincial championships, and All-Ireland competitions (Tables 2–4), providing greater context for the practical interpretation and application of the proposed benchmarks.

Winning performance profiles varied across competitions, particularly in scoring output, kick out retention and turnover rate. However, no single performance characteristic consistently distinguished winning teams across all competitions, highlighting the contextual nature of successful performance.

Table 2 shows considerable similarity in the attacking volume of winning teams across the four national league divisions. Winning teams averaged between 30.1 and 31.9 shots and between 18.0 and 19.3 scoring events per game. Productivity was also closely grouped, ranging from 5.7 to 5.9 points per ten possessions. Differences were more apparent in shooting efficiency: Winning teams in Division 1 recorded the highest open-play, placed-ball and two-point conversion rates. Two-point conversion declined progressively from 50.2% in Division 1 winning teams to 42.0% among Division 4 winning teams.

Other measures did not follow a consistent divisional pattern. Division 4 winning teams recorded the highest own-kick-out retention, at 65.7%, while Division 3 winning teams had the lowest turnover rate, at 36.8%. Solo & Go frequency increased from an average of 2.7 among Division 1 winning teams to an average of 4.1 among Division 4 winning teams, while frees won averaged between 13.8 to 17.9 per game across the divisions.

Table 2. Winning performance comparison (averages) across the four divisions of the National League ($n = 29$ per division).

Variable	Division 1	Division 2	Division 3	Division 4
Possession and Kick Outs				
Possessions	43.7 $\pm$ 6.4	44.0 $\pm$ 4.7	40.9 $\pm$ 5.4	42.1 $\pm$ 4.4
Solo & Go	2.7 $\pm$ 2.3	3.4 $\pm$ 2.1	3.9 $\pm$ 1.9	4.1 $\pm$ 3.0
Kick Outs	22.0 $\pm$ 4.2	23.2 $\pm$ 3.7	20.7 $\pm$ 4.8	20.1 $\pm$ 5.9
Kick Outs Retained (%)	63.4 $\pm$ 14.6	62.9 $\pm$ 10.1	61.9 $\pm$ 13.2	65.7 $\pm$ 12.8
Opposition Kick Outs Retained (%)	60.9 $\pm$ 11.8	57.0 $\pm$ 10.2	56.9 $\pm$ 9.7	59.4 $\pm$ 10.0
Contested Kick Outs (%)	56.1 $\pm$ 19.2	59.1 $\pm$ 17.0	58.4 $\pm$ 18.6	63.0 $\pm$ 18.6
Contested Kick Outs Retained (%)	54.5 $\pm$ 15.6	52.5 $\pm$ 13.4	55.6 $\pm$ 19.7	58.7 $\pm$ 16.4
Scoring				
Shots	30.2 $\pm$ 5.4	31.9 $\pm$ 4.8	30.4 $\pm$ 4.9	30.1 $\pm$ 4.8
Scores	19.0 $\pm$ 4.0	19.3 $\pm$ 3.9	18.2 $\pm$ 3.4	18.0 $\pm$ 3.3
Goals	1.8 $\pm$ 1.0	1.3 $\pm$ 0.9	1.4 $\pm$ 1.0	1.7 $\pm$ 1.2
Two-Point Scores	2.9 $\pm$ 1.7	3.0 $\pm$ 2.0	2.4 $\pm$ 1.9	2.7 $\pm$ 1.7
Points	14.3 $\pm$ 4.4	15.0 $\pm$ 4.4	14.5 $\pm$ 3.7	13.6 $\pm$ 3.6
Total Points	25.5 $\pm$ 5.0	24.9 $\pm$ 4.6	23.3 $\pm$ 4.6	24.1 $\pm$ 5.2
Shooting efficiency				
Shot/Score Ratio from Open Play (%)	64.4 $\pm$ 11.2	62.2 $\pm$ 10.3	60.3 $\pm$ 11.2	61.8 $\pm$ 16.0
Shot/Score Ratio from Placed Balls (%)	76.0 $\pm$ 22.2	72.3 $\pm$ 28.1	69.8 $\pm$ 26.6	68.2 $\pm$ 26.8
Shot/Score Ratio from Two-Point Shots (%)	50.2 $\pm$ 23.1	48.5 $\pm$ 26.8	46.3 $\pm$ 26.6	42.0 $\pm$ 16.0
Productivity	5.9 $\pm$ 1.2	5.7 $\pm$ 1.0	5.7 $\pm$ 1.1	5.8 $\pm$ 1.4
Turnovers				
Turnovers Lost	18.0 $\pm$ 5.3	16.6 $\pm$ 3.8	15.1 $\pm$ 3.9	17.0 $\pm$ 3.9
Turnover Rate	40.7 $\pm$ 9.8	37.8 $\pm$ 8.4	36.8 $\pm$ 7.9	40.3 $\pm$ 8.4
Discipline				
Fouls	13.8 $\pm$ 5.5	14.1 $\pm$ 4.2	14.9 $\pm$ 5.4	17.9 $\pm$ 5.4

Note. Values are presented as mean $\pm$ SD.

Productivity: Total Points per 10 possessions. (Total Points/possessions) $\times$ 10

Turnover Rate: Number of turnovers expressed as a percentage of the total number of team possessions

The comparison of games played in provincial championships (Table 3) is instructive. Winning teams in the Ulster SFC generated on average the most shots, at 38.9 per game, and the highest total-points return, at 31.6. They also recorded the lowest turnover rate, at 29.4%. Winning teams in the Connacht SFC had the highest open-play conversion, at 68.1%, and an average productivity of 6.7 points per ten possessions. Winning teams in the Munster SFC generated the fewest shots, at an average of 29.4, but recorded the highest placed-ball conversion, at 87.0%.

Table 3. Winning performance comparison (averages) across Provincial Championships (Connacht, $n = 6$; Leinster, $n = 10$; Munster, $n = 5$; Ulster, $n = 8$).

Variable	Connacht	Leinster	Munster	Ulster
Possession and Kick Outs				
Possessions	43.8 $\pm$ 5.1	47.2 $\pm$ 5.9	42.0 $\pm$ 2.5	48.9 $\pm$ 5.9
Solo & Go	2.0 $\pm$ 1.4	3.1 $\pm$ 2.8	3.4 $\pm$ 1.5	3.5 $\pm$ 1.5
Kick Outs	21.7 $\pm$ 5.1	24.2 $\pm$ 6.4	18.4 $\pm$ 4.6	26.8 $\pm$ 6.4
Kick Outs Retained (%)	72.5 $\pm$ 11.3	62.8 $\pm$ 15.4	68.0 $\pm$ 11.1	69.2 $\pm$ 11.7
Opposition Kick Outs Retained (%)	62.2 $\pm$ 9.1	58.9 $\pm$ 10.6	58.5 $\pm$ 10.9	64.9 $\pm$ 8.6
Contested Kick Outs (%)	47.1 $\pm$ 25.5	55.3 $\pm$ 20.6	50.1 $\pm$ 12.5	51.7 $\pm$ 16.8
Contested Kick Outs Retained (%)	55.2 $\pm$ 17.5	53.2 $\pm$ 14.5	56.3 $\pm$ 6.2	54.7 $\pm$ 8.9
Scoring				
Shots	33.2 $\pm$ 4.0	33.3 $\pm$ 6.6	29.4 $\pm$ 4.2	38.9 $\pm$ 3.7
Scores	21.7 $\pm$ 3.8	20.3 $\pm$ 4.7	18.8 $\pm$ 3.0	25.1 $\pm$ 5.2
Goals	2.3 $\pm$ 1.8	2.3 $\pm$ 1.4	2.2 $\pm$ 1.8	1.8 $\pm$ 1.0
Two-Point Scores	3.0 $\pm$ 2.3	2.0 $\pm$ 1.2	1.6 $\pm$ 1.1	3.0 $\pm$ 2.3
Points	16.3 $\pm$ 3.6	16.0 $\pm$ 4.3	15.0 $\pm$ 2.5	20.4 $\pm$ 5.0
Total Points	29.3 $\pm$ 5.2	26.9 $\pm$ 6.5	24.8 $\pm$ 5.8	31.6 $\pm$ 6.8
Shooting Efficiency				
Shot/Score Ratio from Open Play (%)	68.1 $\pm$ 5.9	62.3 $\pm$ 9.7	65.9 $\pm$ 4.1	62.8 $\pm$ 14.3
Shot/Score Ratio from Placed Balls (%)	76.3 $\pm$ 15.4	64.4 $\pm$ 28.4	87.0 $\pm$ 18.6	84.0 $\pm$ 10.9
Shot/Score Ratio from Two-Point Shots (%)	38.7 $\pm$ 11.5	44.2 $\pm$ 23.3	35.0 $\pm$ 22.4	51.4 $\pm$ 25.1
Productivity	6.7 $\pm$ 0.7	5.7 $\pm$ 1.4	5.9 $\pm$ 1.1	6.5 $\pm$ 1.5
Turnovers				
Turnovers Lost	15.2 $\pm$ 2.6	18.0 $\pm$ 4.8	14.2 $\pm$ 3.1	14.6 $\pm$ 4.1
Turnover Rate	34.5 $\pm$ 3.6	38.2 $\pm$ 9.5	34.0 $\pm$ 8.0	29.4 $\pm$ 6.5
Discipline				
Fouls	14.0 $\pm$ 4.3	12.8 $\pm$ 3.8	12.0 $\pm$ 3.7	12.5 $\pm$ 5.2

Note. Values are presented as mean $\pm$ SD.

Productivity: Total Points per 10 possessions. (Total Points/possessions) $\times$ 10

Turnover Rate: Number of turnovers expressed as a percentage of the total number of team possessions

Table 4 shows that winning performances in the Sam Maguire Cup and Tailteann Cup competitions produced similar total-points returns, at 27.0 and 26.5 respectively (on average). Winning teams in the Sam Maguire Cup games generated more shots and had higher own-kick-out retention and placed-ball conversion. Winning teams in the Tailteann Cup averaged more goals per game and recorded a higher two-point conversion rate. Turnover rates were almost identical, at 34.0% and 33.9%.

Table 4. Winning performance comparison (averages) between National Championships (Sam Maguire, $n = 27$; Tailteann, $n = 28$).

Variable	Sam Maguire	Tailteann
Possession and Kick Outs		
Possessions	43.6 $\pm$ 6.2	42.0 $\pm$ 5.2
Solo & Go	2.4 $\pm$ 2.0	2.8 $\pm$ 1.7
Kick Outs	24.7 $\pm$ 3.7	22.2 $\pm$ 5.4
Kick Outs Retained (%)	68.7 $\pm$ 12.5	65.2 $\pm$ 10.4
Opposition Kick Outs Retained (%)	62.0 $\pm$ 8.0	63.4 $\pm$ 13.3
Contested Kick Outs (%)	53.6 $\pm$ 12.6	56.9 $\pm$ 16.8
Contested Kick Outs Retained (%)	56.4 $\pm$ 14.1	54.5 $\pm$ 14.3
Scoring		
Shots	33.0 $\pm$ 5.1	31.4 $\pm$ 5.4
Scores	20.6 $\pm$ 3.5	19.7 $\pm$ 3.7
Goals	1.6 $\pm$ 1.3	2.0 $\pm$ 1.5
Two-Point Scores	3.3 $\pm$ 1.5	2.9 $\pm$ 1.4
Points	15.8 $\pm$ 4.1	14.8 $\pm$ 4.0
Total Points	27.0 $\pm$ 4.1	26.5 $\pm$ 4.7
Shooting Efficiency		
Shot/Score Ratio from Open Play (%)	65.2 $\pm$ 10.2	64.1 $\pm$ 10.6
Shot/Score Ratio from Placed Balls (%)	77.9 $\pm$ 22.2	69.9 $\pm$ 22.6
Shot/Score Ratio from Two-Point Shots (%)	46.0 $\pm$ 20.8	53.3 $\pm$ 23.2
Productivity	6.2 $\pm$ 0.9	6.4 $\pm$ 1.3
Turnovers		
Turnovers Lost	14.9 $\pm$ 3.7	14.4 $\pm$ 4.5
Turnover Rate	34.0 $\pm$ 6.4	33.9 $\pm$ 8.7
Discipline		
Fouls	10.3 $\pm$ 4.6	12.8 $\pm$ 4.7

Note. Values are presented as mean $\pm$ SD.

Productivity: Total Points per 10 possessions. (Total Points/possessions) $\times$ 10

Turnover Rate: Number of turnovers expressed as a percentage of the total number of team possessions

Table 5 indicates that winning teams in games decided by seven points or more (deemed uncompetitive) achieved higher scoring returns despite relatively small differences in possession and shot volume. They averaged 28.9 total points per game, compared with 25.6 among winning teams in competitive games, alongside higher conversion rates and productivity. Their own-kick-out retention was also higher, at 70.0% compared with 64.0%, while a smaller proportion of kick outs were contested. Turnovers lost were almost identical and fouls averaged 12.0 in both groups.

Table 5. Key differences between a winning performance in competitive (winning margin ≤ 6 points) and uncompetitive games in the combined provincial, Tailteann Cup and Sam Maguire Cup competitions.

Variable	Competitive Games	Uncompetitive Games
Possession and Kick Outs		
Possessions	43.6 $\pm$ 5.9	44.2 $\pm$ 5.9
Solo & Go	2.7 $\pm$ 1.9	2.8 $\pm$ 2.0
Kick Outs	25.8 $\pm$ 5.1	21.3 $\pm$ 4.6
Kick Outs Retained (%)	64.0 $\pm$ 11.0	70.0 $\pm$ 12.1
Opposition Kick Outs Retained (%)	63.0 $\pm$ 9.9	61.5 $\pm$ 11.1
Contested Kick Outs (%)	59.6 $\pm$ 13.0	49.0 $\pm$ 17.5
Contested Kick Outs Retained (%)	53.9 $\pm$ 12.4	56.2 $\pm$ 14.3
Scoring		
Shots	32.4 $\pm$ 5.2	33.3 $\pm$ 5.8
Scores	19.5 $\pm$ 3.6	21.7 $\pm$ 4.3
Goals	1.5 $\pm$ 1.3	2.2 $\pm$ 1.4
Two-Point Scores	3.0 $\pm$ 1.7	2.7 $\pm$ 1.5
Points	15.0 $\pm$ 3.9	16.8 $\pm$ 4.4
Total Points	25.6 $\pm$ 4.8	28.9 $\pm$ 5.1
Shooting Efficiency		
Shot/Score Ratio from Open Play (%)	62.7 $\pm$ 10.5	66.1 $\pm$ 9.5
Shot/Score Ratio from Placed Balls (%)	72.2 $\pm$ 23.0	76.8 $\pm$ 21.3
Shot/Score Ratio from Two-Point Shots (%)	44.0 $\pm$ 18.4	50.7 $\pm$ 24.7
Productivity	5.9 $\pm$ 1.0	6.6 $\pm$ 1.2
Turnovers		
Turnovers Lost	15.1 $\pm$ 3.5	15.0 $\pm$ 4.6
Turnover Rate	34.6 $\pm$ 6.0	33.6 $\pm$ 9.0
Discipline		
Fouls	12.0 $\pm$ 5.1	12.0 $\pm$ 4.1

4. Scoring

4.1. Competition scoring profiles

Table 6 presents scoring data from every senior inter-county fixture played in 2026 across 10 competitions. Results are presented in descending order of maximum winning margin. Findings indicate that scoring profiles varied across competitions. Total average points per game ranged from an average of 40.6 in Division 4 and the Munster SFC, to 53.8 in the Ulster SFC. Maximum winning margins ranged from 15 points in the Munster SFC to 28 points in the Ulster SFC, highlighting variation in both scoring output and competitiveness across competitions.

Games in the Sam Maguire Cup produced a higher average scoring return than games in the Tailteann Cup, at 48.4 compared with 45.0 points per game, while also showing a lower maximum winning margin of 17 points compared with 22.

Table 6. Scoring profile by competition, including goals, points, total points, total points per game, minimum and maximum winning margin for all competitions in 2026.

Competition	Games	Goals	Points	TP	TP/G	MinWM	MaxWM
Ulster SFC	8	23	361	430	53.8	1	28
Connacht SFC	6	22	231	297	49.5	1	24
Division 2	29	60	1,081	1,261	43.5	1	23
Division 4	29	76	950	1,178	40.6	1	23
Tailteann Cup	28	89	994	1,261	45	1	22
Division 1	29	77	1,052	1,283	44.2	1	21
Leinster SFC	10	29	359	446	44.6	2	21
Sam Maguire	27	69	1,101	1,308	48.4	1	17
Division 3	29	64	988	1,180	40.7	1	16
Munster SFC	5	16	155	203	40.6	5	15

SFC = Senior Football Championship | TP = Total Points | TP/G = Total Points per Game | MinWM = Minimum Winning Margin | MaxWM = Maximum Winning Margin

4.2. Shooting

Table 7 shows that the increase in shooting volume between the 2025 and 2026 championships was accompanied by a relatively smaller increase in scoring events. Shot volume (average shots per game) increased in 2026 compared with 2025, with increases in average total shots (+2.3), open play shots (+2.1), and two-point shots (+1.7) per game.

Despite the increased shot volume, overall average scoring efficiency declined by 1.6 percentage points, alongside reductions in placed-ball (–2.4 pp) and two-point efficiency (–4.4 pp), while open-play efficiency increased by 1.1 pp, on average.

Two-point attempts increased from an average of 11.9 to 13.6 per game, while their conversion rate fell from 43.8% to 39.4%. Placed-ball attempts and conversion also declined. The reported open-play conversion rate moved in the opposite direction, rising from 58.6% to 59.6%. The changes therefore differed by shot category rather than showing a uniform improvement or decline.

Table 7. Comparison (average) of shot volume and scoring efficiency between the 2025 and 2026 championships (Provincial championships, Tailteann Cup and Sam Maguire Cup).

Metric	2025	2026	Change
Shot volume			
Shots per game	60.3	62.6	▲ +2.3
Open play shots per game	41.0	43.1	▲ +2.1
Placed ball shots per game	10.5	8.9	▼ -1.7
Two-point shots per game	11.9	13.6	▲ +1.7
Total scores per game	35.3	35.7	▲ +0.4
Scoring efficiency			
Overall efficiency	58.6%	57.0%	▼ -1.6 pp
Open play efficiency	58.6%	59.6%	▲ +1.1 pp
Placed ball efficiency	72.5%	70.1%	▼ -2.4 pp
Two-point efficiency	43.8%	39.4%	▼ -4.4 pp

Note. pp = percentage points.

Figure 3 shows that efficiency also varied across competitions and shot types. For example, placed-ball conversion exceeded open-play conversion in every competition, while two-point conversion was lower than both. It is noteworthy that the average overall efficiency across different levels and competitions varied relatively little ($54\% \leq \text{overall efficiency} \leq 60\%$). The range was both lower and wider for two-point attempts, from 33% in games played in the Leinster SFC to 44% in games played in the Ulster SFC. Games in the Connacht SFC showed the highest open-play and placed-ball conversion rates but did not have the highest two-point conversion.

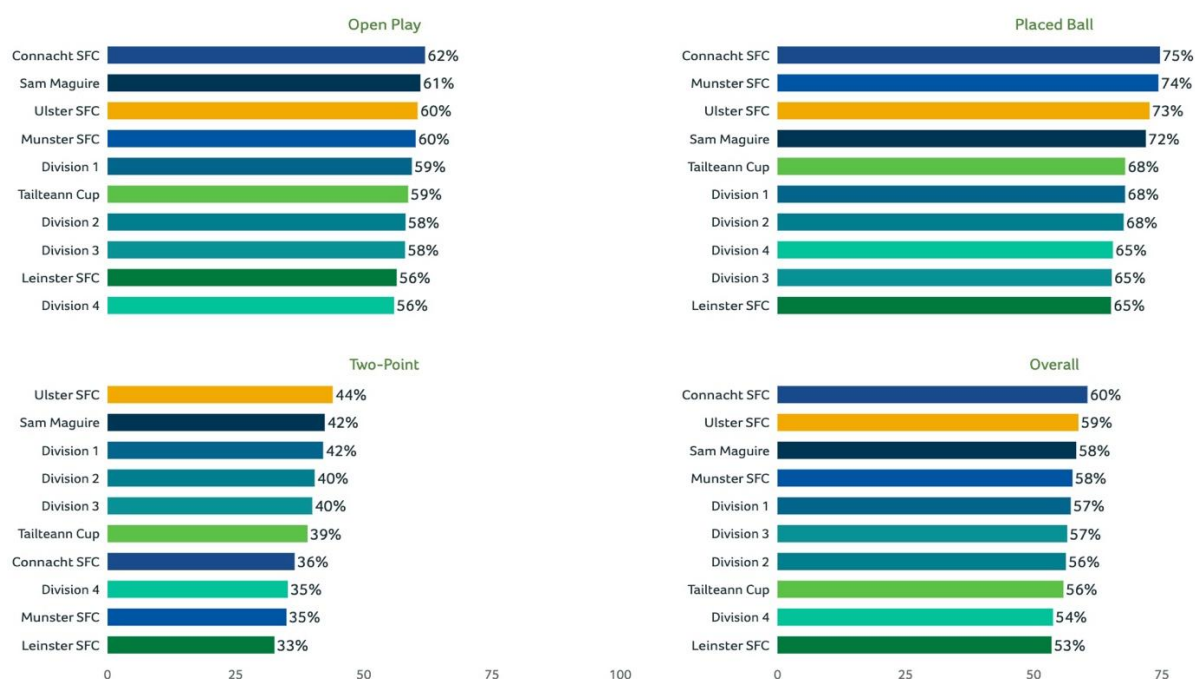


Figure 3. Shot efficiency by scoring type across the 2026 senior inter-county Gaelic football competitions.

4.3. Fisted points

Table 8 shows that fisted attempts remained relatively small (in terms of proportion of attempts at a score) but frequently converted component of open-play shooting. Their frequency was similar between seasons, averaging 2.5 in 2025 to 2.4 in 2026. While the overall number of fisted shots has reduced, this is largely due to the reduction in the number of games (2012 down to 200). Fisted attempts accounted for 6.0% of open-play shots in 2026 and 5.5%, while conversion increased from 82.8% to 84.5%. Overall, the contribution of fisted point attempts remained stable between seasons.

Table 8. Comparison of fisted shooting between the 2025 and 2026 championships.

	2025 Championship	2026 Championship	Change
Fisted shots	244	200	▼ -44
Fisted shots per game	2.5	2.4	▼ -0.1
Share of open-play shots	6.0%	5.5%	▼ -0.5 pp
Scoring efficiency	82.8%	84.5%	▲ +1.7 pp

The broader shooting breakdown in Table 9 shows that shots from open play accounted for 86% of all attempts (2,490 of the 3,002 scoring events). Placed balls produced fewer attempts and scores but had higher conversion, at 69% compared with 55% from open play.

Table 9 distinguishes two-point attempts from all other attempts, with goal attempts included within the breakdown rather than presented as a separate category. Two-point attempts accounted for 20% of open-play shots and 34% of placed-ball shots; all other attempts accounted for 80% and 66%, respectively. Conversion of two-point attempts was higher from placed balls (48%) than from open play (37%). Across all shot categories, placed-ball attempts also had a higher conversion rate, with 69% resulting in a score compared with 55% of open-play attempts.

Table 9. Breakdown of shot types and scoring efficiency in the 2026 championship (Provincial championships, Tailteann Cup and Sam Maguire Cup) excluding extra time.

Shot Type	Shots	Share	Goals	Two-Point scores	1-Point scores	Total scores	Efficiency
All shots	5256	100%	248	447	2307	3002	57%
Open play	4512	86%	238	327	1925	2490	55%
1-point shot	3621	80%	236	0	1925	2161	60%
Two-point shot	891	20%	2	327	0	329	37%
Placed ball	744	14%	10	120	382	512	69%
1-point shot	494	66%	10	0	382	392	79%
Two-point shot	250	34%	0	120	0	120	48%

Note. "Other attempts" comprises attempts not classified as two-point attempts, including goal attempts. The goals, two-point scores and one-point scores columns describe the resulting scoring outcomes. Efficiency represents the percentage of attempts resulting in any score, irrespective of its points value.

4.4. Goal shots

Figure 4 shows that goal attempts increased from an average of 6.1 per game in 2025, to 6.6 in 2026, while goals scored increased on average from 2.1 to 2.8 per game, reflecting both an increase in goal-scoring opportunities and scoring return from those attempts. Games in the Connacht SFC produced fewer attempts, at an average of 6.0 per game, while also producing the highest goal return, at an average of 3.7 per game.

Games in the Ulster SFC and the Sam Maguire Cup both averaged 6.6 goal attempts, returning 2.9 and 2.4 goals respectively. Similarly, games in Divisions 2 and 3 each averaged 5.2 attempts, while their goal returns were 1.7 and 2.0. Figure 4 displays differences in both the frequency of attempts and the scoring return achieved from them.

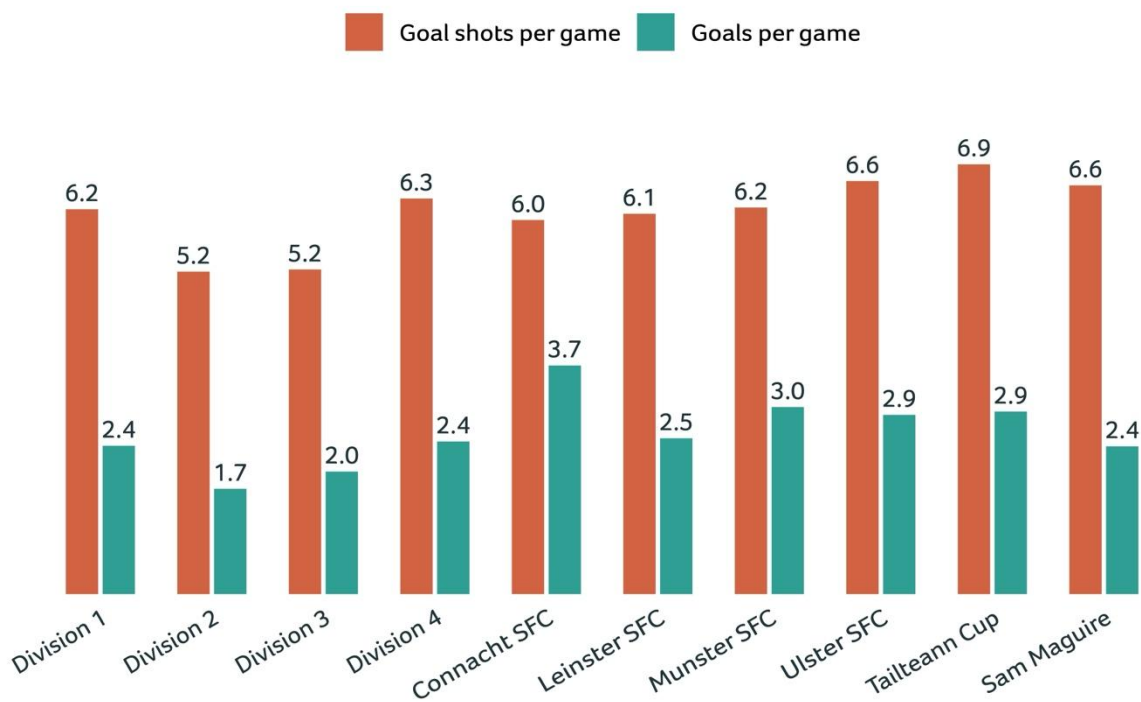


Figure 4. Number of goal shots and goals per game in 2026 competitions.

4.5. Source of scores

Table 10 shows that, across the 2026 games, 60% of scores originated from possessions beginning with a kick out, compared with 38% from turnovers and 2% from throw-ups. Across the various competitions, possessions from kick outs contributed to the majority of scoring events in every competition, ranging from 56% in Division 4 to 64% in the Connacht SFC. Possessions gained from turnovers accounted for between 34% and 41% of scores, with throw-ups contributing the remaining share.

Table 10. Source of scores by competition in the 2026 senior inter-county season.

Competition	Kick outs	Turnovers
All competitions	60%	38%
Football leagues		
Division 1	57%	41%
Division 2	62%	36%
Division 3	59%	38%
Division 4	56%	41%
Provincial championships		
Connacht SFC	64%	35%
Leinster SFC	57%	41%
Munster SFC	57%	40%
Ulster SFC	62%	34%
All-Ireland competitions		
Tailteann Cup	61%	36%
Sam Maguire	62%	36%

Note. Percentages represent the share of scores originating from each possession source. Remaining scores originated from throw-ups.

Figure 5 separates kick out contributions into possessions originating from a team's own restart and those secured from opposition restarts. Own kick outs generated the larger share in every competition. Their contribution ranged from 32% in Division 1 to 41% in the Sam Maguire Cup, while opposition kick outs contributed between 21% and 27%.

The relative contribution of these sources of scores differed across competitions. In the Sam Maguire Cup, possessions gained from own kick outs accounted for 41% of scores and possessions from opposition kick outs for 21%; in Division 2, the corresponding shares were 35% and 27%.

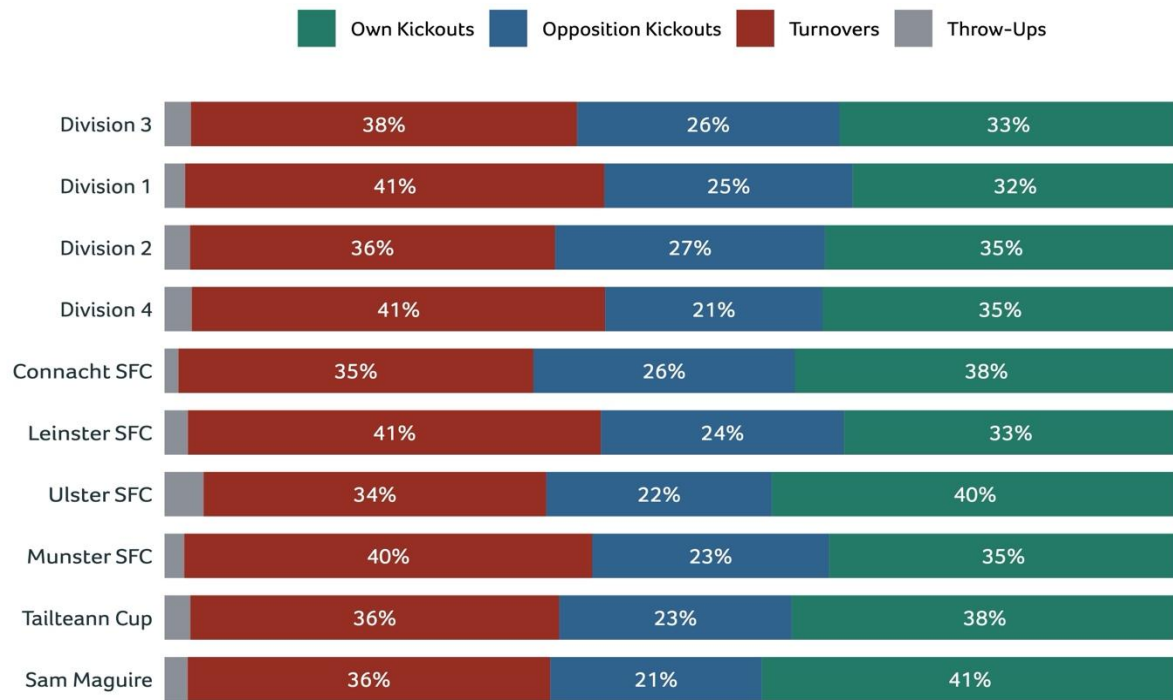


Figure 5. Source of scores by possession origin and competition.

4.6. Shot locations

Figure 6 shows a consistent pattern across the National Football Leagues, with high conversion in the central area between the 20m line and the 40m arc. Conversion in this zone ranged from 70% in Division 1 to 74% in Divisions 3 and 4. The corresponding zones to either side recorded lower rates, generally between 52% and 54%.

Conversion was generally lower in more distant zones, although the pattern was not uniform. In the central zone around the 50m line, the displayed conversion rates ranged from 40% in Division 4 to 47% in Division 1. More distant and wider areas showed greater variation across divisions.

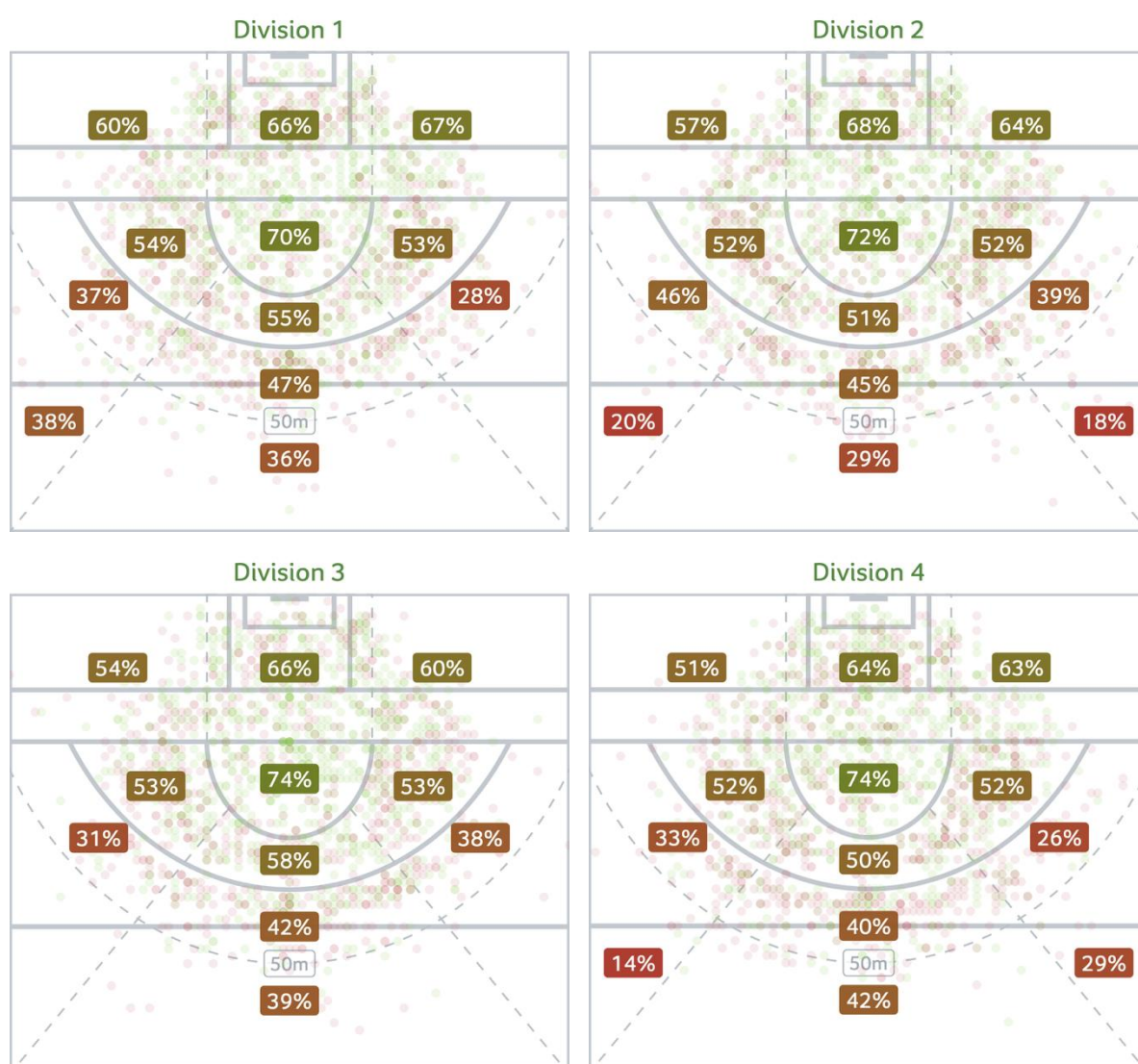


Figure 6. Distribution and efficiency of shots by pitch zone across the National League competitions.

Figure 7 displays conversion rates by pitch zone across the championship competitions. Conversion in the central zone between the 20m line and the arc was 81% in the Sam Maguire Cup and 70% in the Tailteann Cup. Values for provincial competitions in this zone ranged from 61% in the Leinster SFC, to 86% in the Munster SFC. There were also differences between the left and right channels within individual competitions. The maps demonstrate that overall competition averages encompass substantial spatial variation.

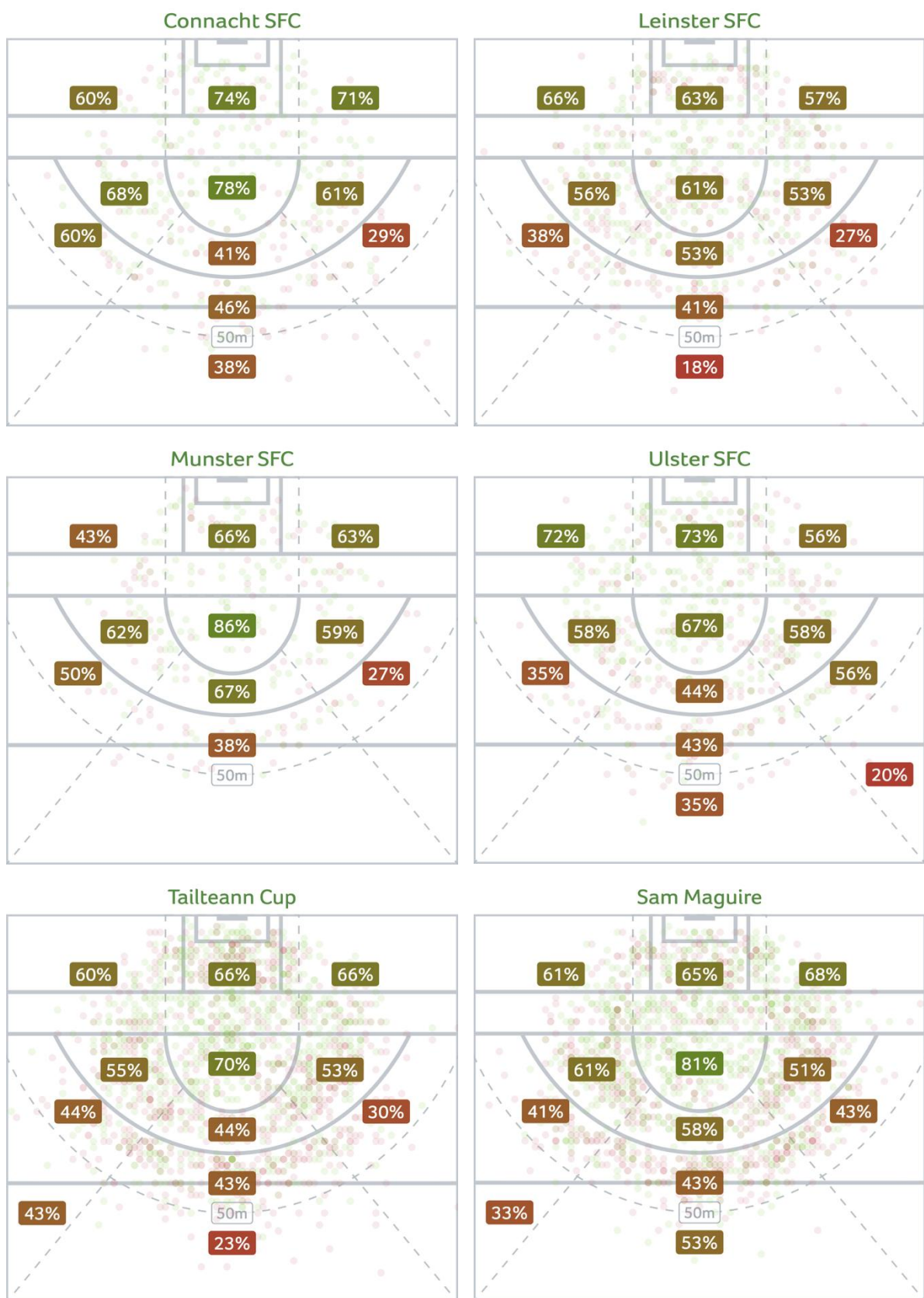


Figure 7. Distribution and efficiency of shots by pitch zone across the Provincial and All-Ireland competitions.

5. Kick outs

Table 11 shows that kick out frequency varied more widely than overall retention. Matches averaged between 44.1 kick outs in Division 4 to 59.4 in the Ulster SFC, while retention ranged from 60% to 67%. Games in the Ulster SFC showed the highest number of kick outs with a retention rate at the upper end of the observed range.

Average kick out time ranged from an average of 20.2 seconds in the Sam Maguire Cup to 23.5 seconds in Division 4. The Sam Maguire Cup and Tailteann Cup competitions showed similar retention rates, at 65% and 64%, although Sam Maguire Cup games contained more kick outs on average.

Table 11. Average kick outs, retention rates, and kick out times per game across competitions in the 2026 season.

2026 competition	Average kick outs	Average kick out retention	Kick out time (seconds)
Football leagues			
Division 1	46.6	61%	21.6
Division 2	49.6	60%	20.3
Division 3	45.0	60%	21.7
Division 4	44.1	63%	23.5
Provincial championships			
Ulster SFC	59.4	67%	21.6
Leinster SFC	51.8	61%	21.8
Munster SFC	45.0	63%	20.3
Connacht SFC	49.0	67%	20.6
All-Ireland competitions			
Sam Maguire	52.1	65%	20.2
Tailteann Cup	48.5	64%	20.7

5.1. Kick out length

Kick outs were classified by their landing location relative to the team's own pitch markings. Kick outs must pass the 40m arc. Kick outs were classified as short if they landed inside the team's own 45m line; medium if they landed between the 45m and 65m line; and long if they landed beyond the 65m line.

Table 12 shows a shift in the championship kick out profile between 2025 and 2026 so that while long deliveries still accounted for the largest proportion of kick outs, their share declined from 49.8% to 46.3%. Short and medium deliveries both increased, reaching 24.6% and 29.1%, respectively.

Kick outs were also classified as contested where possession was won while the ball was in dispute, or uncontested where possession was gained under no physical pressure. The proportion of contested kick outs declined from 62.4% in 2025, to 57.2% in 2026. Retention within the contested and uncontested categories changed relatively little: contested retention remained close to 51–52%, while uncontested retention remained close to 78–79%. The larger change was therefore in the proportion of restarts contested, rather than in retention within either category.

Table 12. *Championship kick out profile by length and contest.*

Metric	2025	2026	Change
Kick outs / Game	49.0	50.9	▲ +1.9
Short (SKO) %	22.7%	24.6%	▲ +1.9 pp
Medium (MKO) %	27.4%	29.1%	▲ +1.7 pp
Long (LKO) %	49.8%	46.3%	▼ -3.5 pp
Contested Kick outs			
Contested %	62.4%	57.2%	▼ -5.2 pp
Uncontested %	37.6%	42.8%	▲ +5.2 pp
Contested Retained %	51.1%	51.6%	▲ +0.5 pp
Uncontested Retained %	77.7%	78.9%	▲ +1.3 pp

5.2. Location

Figures 8–10 show concentrations of kick out deliveries around midfield, with additional clusters in the shorter wide channels. The balance between central and wide delivery varied across competitions rather than following a single uniform distribution.

In Division 1, the two prominent wide zones around midfield showed 212 and 244 deliveries, compared with 139 in the corresponding central zone. Games in Division 3 showed a similar pattern, with 209 and 240 in the wide zones and 115 centrally. Games in Division 4 differed, with 210 deliveries in the central zone compared with 175 and 172 to either side.

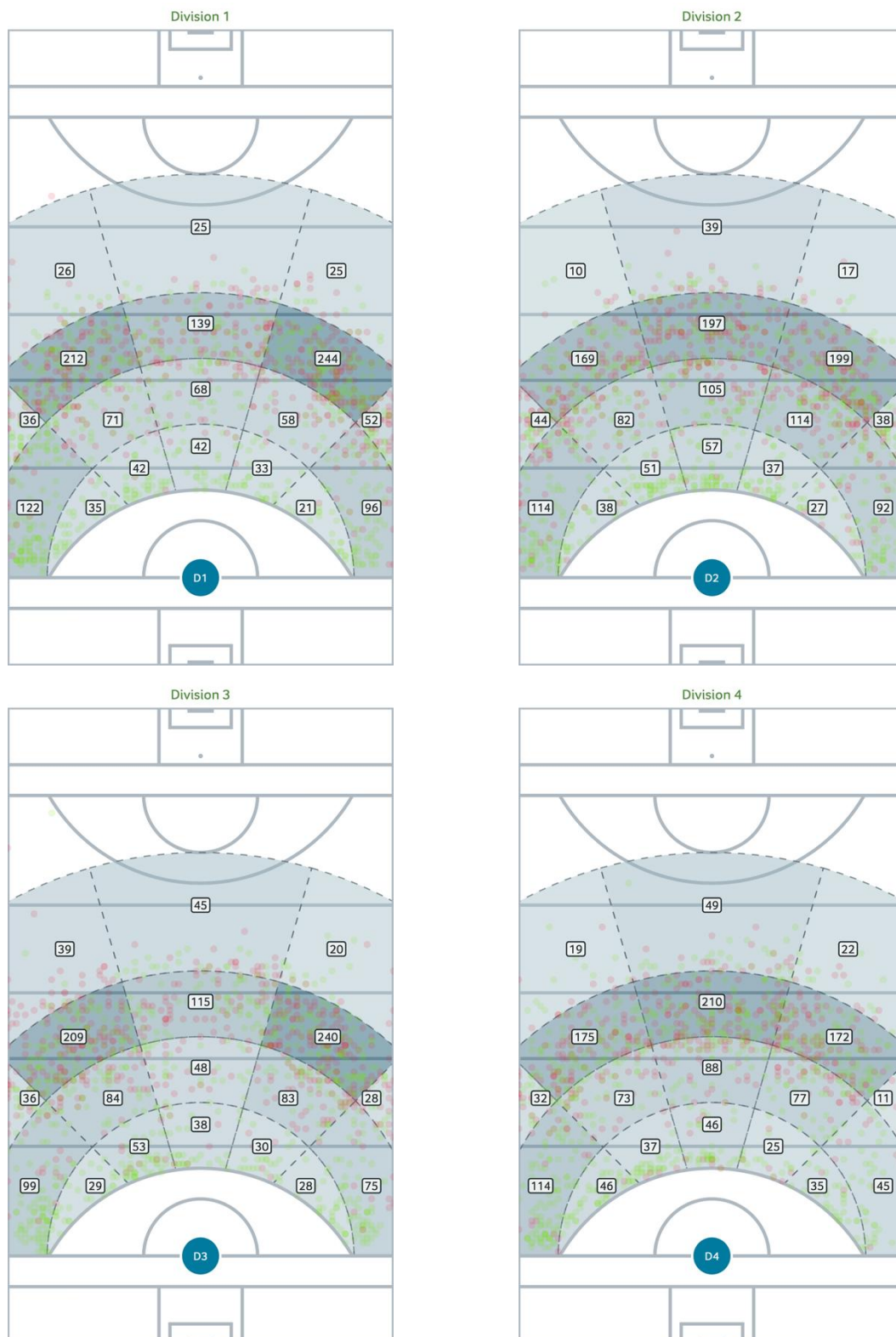
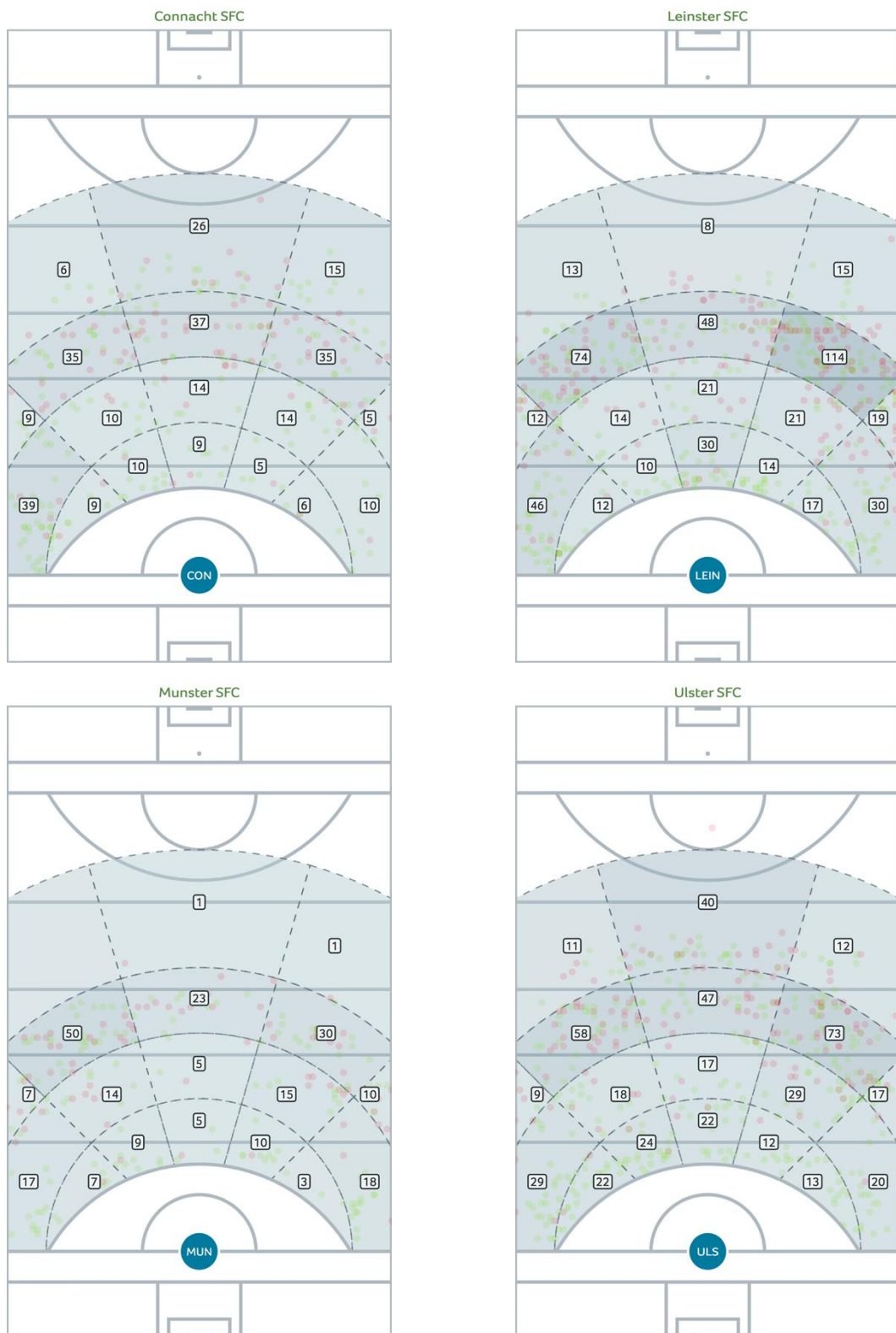


Figure 8. Distribution and volume of kick outs across the National Leagues.

Figure 9 shows differences in the location of kick out deliveries across the provincial championships. Games played in the Leinster SFC and Ulster SFC showed more deliveries into the right-hand midfield channel as displayed, with 114 and 73 respectively, compared with 74 and 58 in the corresponding left-hand channel. Games in the Munster SFC showed the opposite pattern, with 50 deliveries into the left-hand channel and 30 into the right. Games in the Connacht SFC showed an even distribution across these two wide midfield zones, with 35 deliveries in each, alongside 37 in the central zone.

Results also show differences in pitch zones (sides) targeted for shorter kick outs. In the wide zones closest to the goalkeeper, games in the Connacht SFC showed 39 deliveries on the left side of the pitch, and ten on the right, while games in the Leinster SFC showed 46 and 30, respectively. Games in the Munster SFC showed a more even balance in these zones, at 17 and 18. These counts describe the distribution within each provincial sample; differences in the number of fixtures mean that raw totals should not be interpreted as directly comparable delivery rates across provinces.



The All-Ireland competition maps also show contrasting distributions. Games in the Tailteann Cup showed similar counts in the two prominent wide midfield zones, at 196 and 190. Games in the Sam Maguire Cup showed a greater difference between the same zones, at 161 and 256. These maps describe the location and volume of deliveries; they do not indicate which locations produced better retention or attacking outcomes.

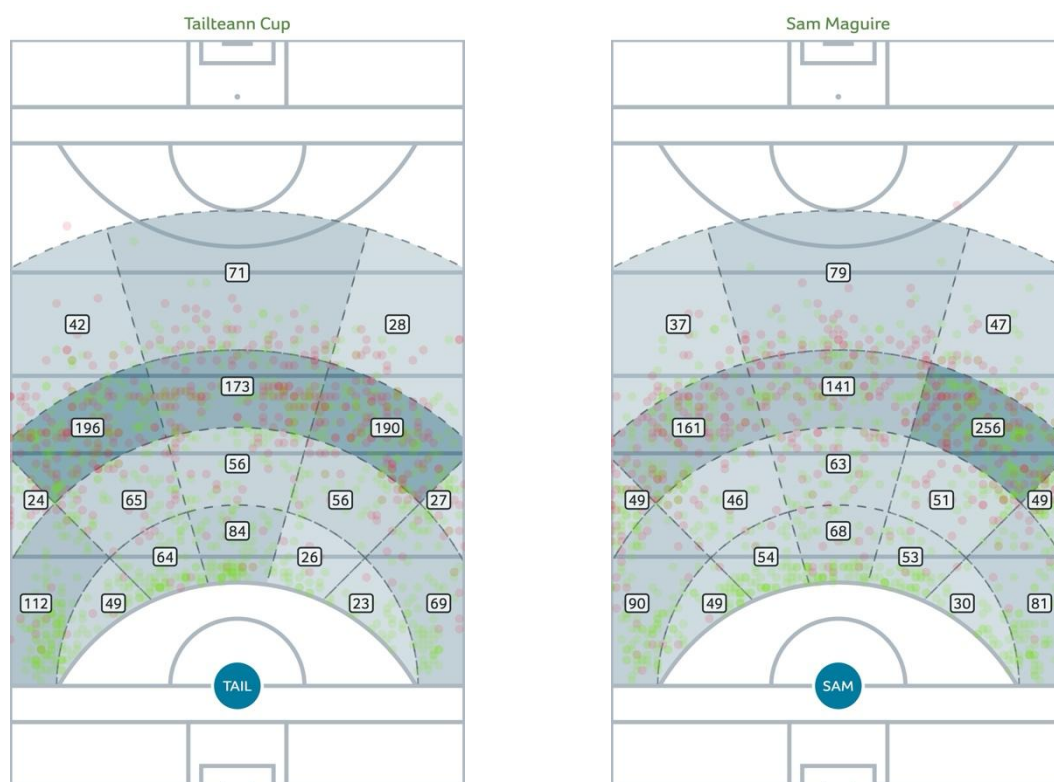


Figure 10. Distribution and volume of kick outs across the Tailteann and Sam Maguire competitions.

5.3. Distribution

Figure 11 shows that long kick outs were the most common category in every competition, although the balance was almost even between long and short deliveries in Division 2. Long kick outs ranged from 39% in Division 2, to 50% in the Connacht SFC.

In games in the National Football League, the displayed share of long deliveries varied from a low of 39% in Division 2 to 44% in Division 3 and a high of 47% in Division 4, while the short share declined from 38% to 35% and 31%. Medium deliveries varied little across the divisions, at 21–22%.

The profile of kick outs in games played in the Sam Maguire Cup and Tailteann Cup were similar, with both recording 46% long and 29% short deliveries. Among the provincial championships, games played in Munster had the highest share of short kick outs at 32%,

while games in the Connacht SFC had the lowest, at 25%. Medium deliveries showed the narrowest range across all competitions, at 21–26%.

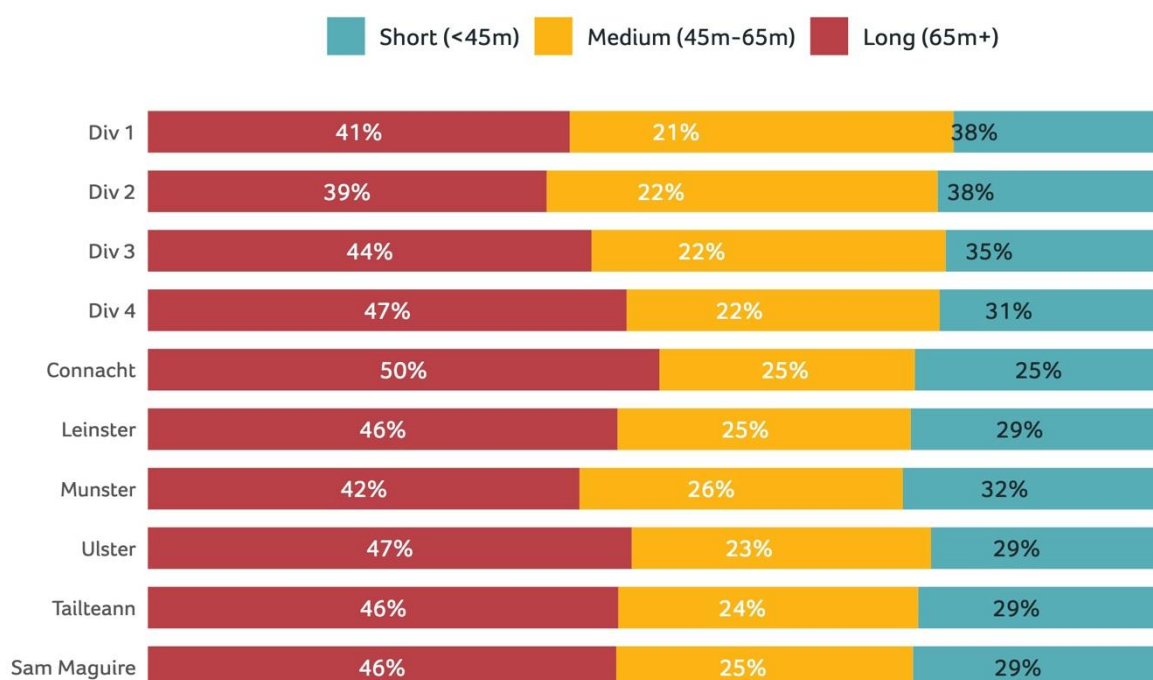


Figure 11. Kick out length distribution by competition.

5.4. Outcome of kick out possessions

Table 13 shows a modest increase in attacking return as the length of a team’s retained own kick out increased. Shots followed 65.5% of possessions secured from short deliveries, 70.6% from medium deliveries and 72.0% from long deliveries. The proportion producing a score increased from 40.2% to 43.9% (short to long), while points per possession won rose from 0.51 to 0.57 (short to long).

The pattern was reversed for opposition kick outs won. Possession secured from an opposition short kick out produced a shot in 88.9% of cases and a score in 63.2%, returning 0.95 points per possession. The equivalent points return was 0.62 for opposition medium kick outs won, and 0.54 for opposition long kick outs won.

Opposition short kick outs won were also the smallest category, comprising 117 possessions, compared with 450 medium and 967 long possessions. The high return therefore relates to a relatively small group of events. All these comparisons begin after possession was secured and do not incorporate the probability of winning the initial kick out.

Table 13. Short, medium, and long kick out possession outcomes.

Length	Possessions	Shot %	Shots	Score %	Scores	PPPW
Own SKO	935	65.5%	612	40.2%	376 (24-57-295)	0.51
Own MKO	793	70.6%	560	42.1%	334 (24-54-256)	0.55
Own LKO	1015	72.0%	731	43.9%	446 (35-61-350)	0.57
Opp SKO	117	88.9%	104	63.2%	74 (15-7-52)	0.95
Opp MKO	450	75.6%	340	44.9%	202 (22-33-147)	0.62
Opp LKO	967	72.1%	697	41.4%	400 (36-47-317)	0.54

PPPW = points per possession following a kick out won.

5.5. Outcome and retention

Figure 12 shows that clean and break-ball outcomes accounted for most kick outs, at 46% and 41% respectively. Frees and sidelines each accounted for approximately 6% (values rounded). Overall, the team taking the kick out retained possession on 62% of occasions.

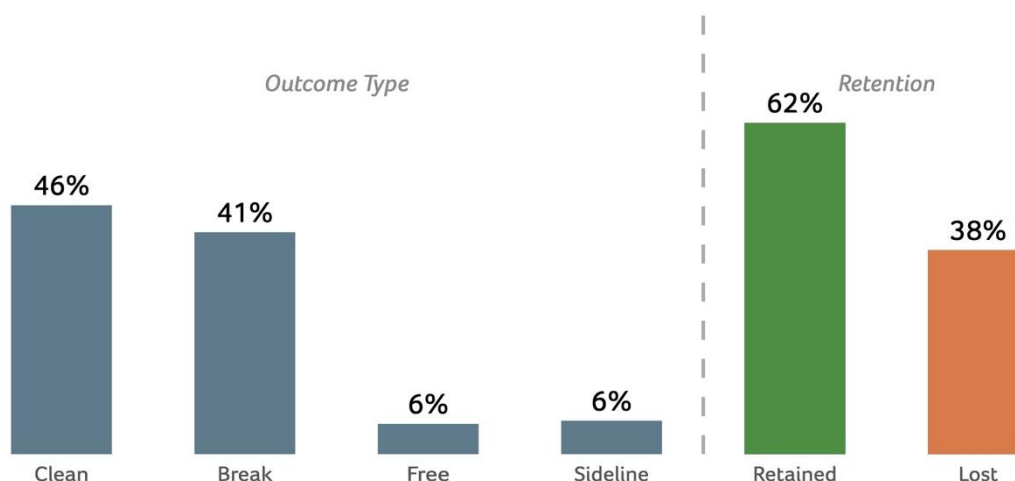


Figure 12. Kick out outcomes and retention.

Figure 13 shows that the outcome of kick outs varied considerably by length. Clean outcomes accounted for approximately 86% of short kick outs but only 27% of long deliveries. Break-ball outcomes followed the opposite pattern, increasing from approximately 7% to 62%. Medium kick outs occupied an intermediate position, with 46% clean and 38% break-ball outcomes.

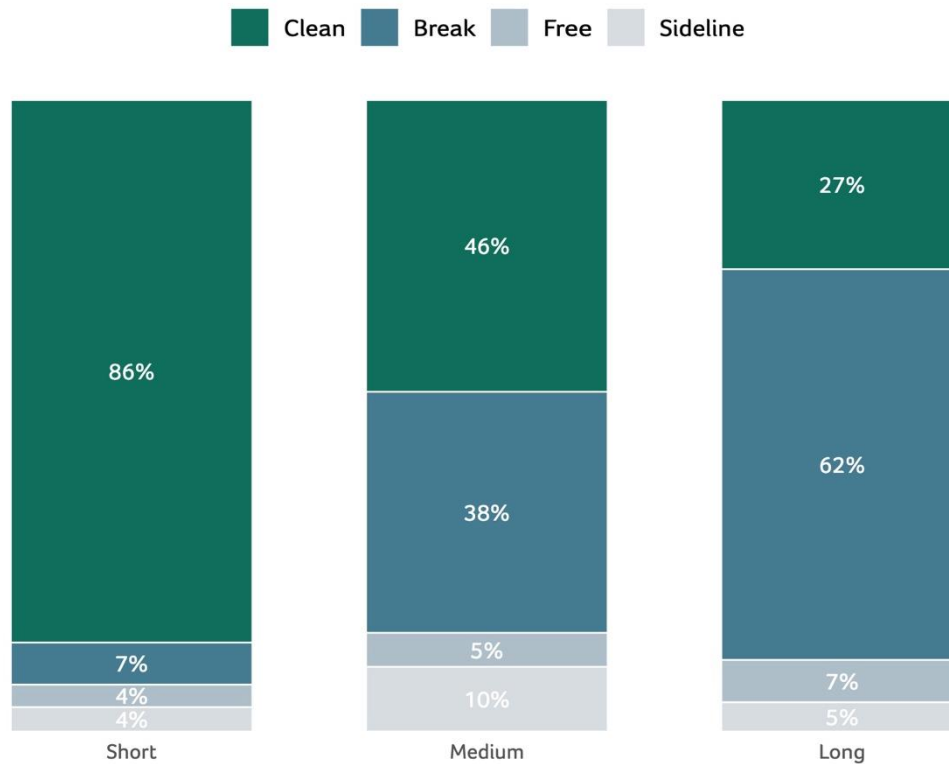


Figure 13. Kick out outcome types by length.

Table 14 shows a corresponding increase in contest with kick out distance: 13% of short kick outs were contested, compared with 60% of medium and 84% of long deliveries. Clean possession and retention should nevertheless be distinguished: a clean outcome describes how the ball was secured, while retention identifies whether it was secured by the team taking the restart.

Table 14. Contested kick outs by kick out length.

Kick out length	Contested	Uncontested
Short (<45m)	13%	87%
Medium (45m-65m)	60%	40%
Long (65m+)	84%	16%

6. Passing

Table 15 shows that both hand-pass and kick-pass frequency increased between the 2025 and 2026 championships. The average number of hand passes per game rose from 391.6 in 2025, to 417.9 per game in 2026, while the average number of kick passes increased from 93.1 to 102.6. The reported hand-pass-to-kick-pass ratio nevertheless declined from 4.42 to 4.23, indicating a relative shift towards kick passing alongside an increase in the absolute frequency of both methods.

Passes per possession also increased, from an average of 5.85 in 2025, to 6.21 in 2026. Games played in the 2026 championship yielded higher numbers of hand passes, kick passes and passes per possession than games played in the 2026 National League. These measures describe both the volume of passing and the number of passes within possession sequences.

Table 15. *Passing per game type.*

Metric	2025 championship	2026 National League	2026 championship
Hand passes / game	391.6	396.6	417.9
Kick passes / game	93.1	92.6	102.6
HP:KP ratio	4.42	4.44	4.23
Passes / possession	5.85	5.99	6.21

6.1. *Hand pass to kick pass ratio*

Figure 14 shows that hand passing predominated in every competition, with ratios ranging from 3.8 hand passes per kick pass in the Munster SFC and the Leinster SFC, to 5.3 in the Ulster SFC. Games played in Division 1 also showed a relatively high ratio, at 4.9:1.

Games played in Divisions 2 to 4, games in the Connacht SFC, and games played in the Sam Maguire Cup each yielded a ratio of approximately 4.3:1, while games in the Tailteann Cup yielded a ratio of 4.1:1. Games played in the Ulster SFC and Division 1 showed the greatest relative use of hand passing. The ratio describes the balance between passing methods rather than the number of passes made or the effectiveness of the resulting possessions.

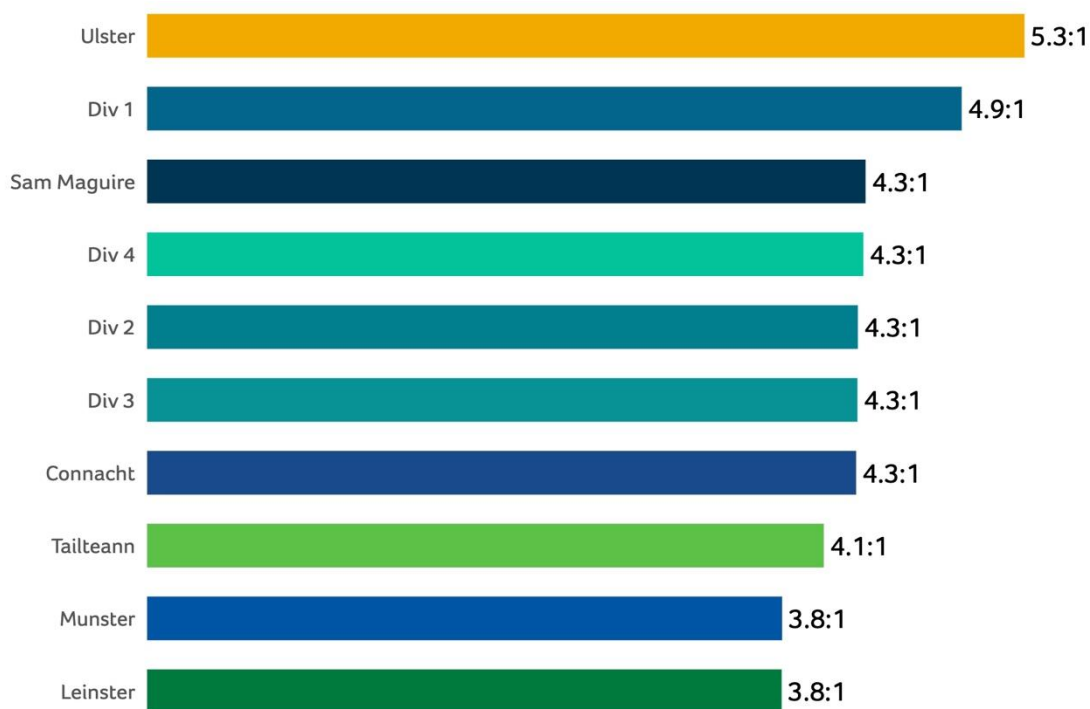


Figure 14. Hand-pass to kick-pass ratio by competitions.

6.2. Passing sequences

Figure 15 shows a broadly similar distribution of consecutive hand-passes prior to an open-play kick, across competitions. Between 28% and 32% of kicks had no immediately preceding hand pass, while approximately one-fifth followed a single hand pass. A sequence of four or more hand passes was seen in between 20 to 24% of cases.

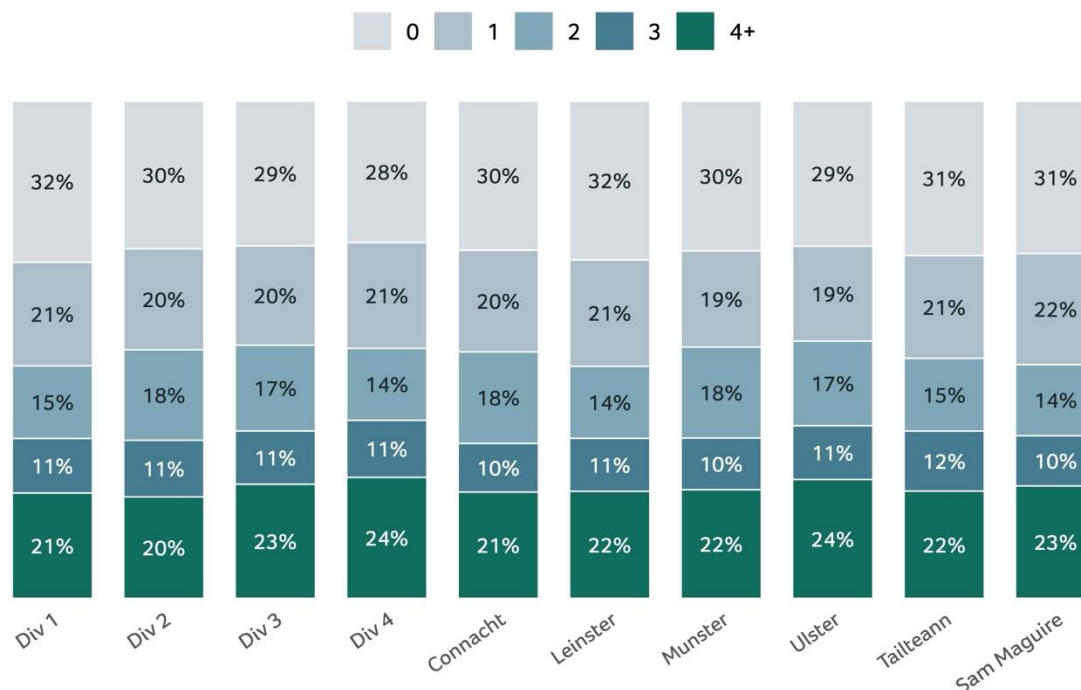


Figure 15. Hand-pass sequences before an open-play kick by competition.

Table 16 provides a separate view of complete possession sequences. The median was five passes, with 41.4% of possessions containing three or fewer. Longer sequences accounted for a substantial part of the distribution: 24.2% contained nine or more passes and 10.8% contained at least 13.

Table 16. Distribution of passes per possession. 2026 championship possession sample ($n = 7,127$ possessions)

Passes per possession	n	%
0–1	1,415	19.9%
2–3	1,533	21.5%
4–5	1,175	16.5%
6–8	1,276	17.9%
9–12	955	13.4%
13+	773	10.8%

Median: 5 passes / 75th percentile: 8 passes / 90th percentile: 13 passes

Together, the figure and table show variation within possessions as well as between them. A run of hand passes immediately before a kick describes one part of a sequence, whereas passes per possession captures its total passing activity. Neither measure, on its own, indicates the duration or outcome of the possession.

7. Turnovers

Table 17 shows a modest reduction in turnovers between 2025 and 2026, with a decrease in game average from 32.6 per game in 2025, to 31.7 per game in 2026., with a corresponding fall in turnover rate from 38.7% to 37.2% of possessions. Hand-pass and kick-pass losses remained the most frequent recorded turnover types.

Table 17. Turnovers per game.

Metric	2025	2026	Delta
Turnovers / game	32.6	31.7	▼ -0.9
Turnover rate (% of Possessions)	38.7%	37.2%	▼ -1.5 pp

Figure 16 identifies hand-pass losses as the most frequent of the eight possible turnover types, at approximately six per game, followed by kick-pass losses at five. Tackle turnovers, short shots and fouled balls each averaged approximately four. Cluster tackles, pressure-related losses and sideline balls each averaged approximately two.

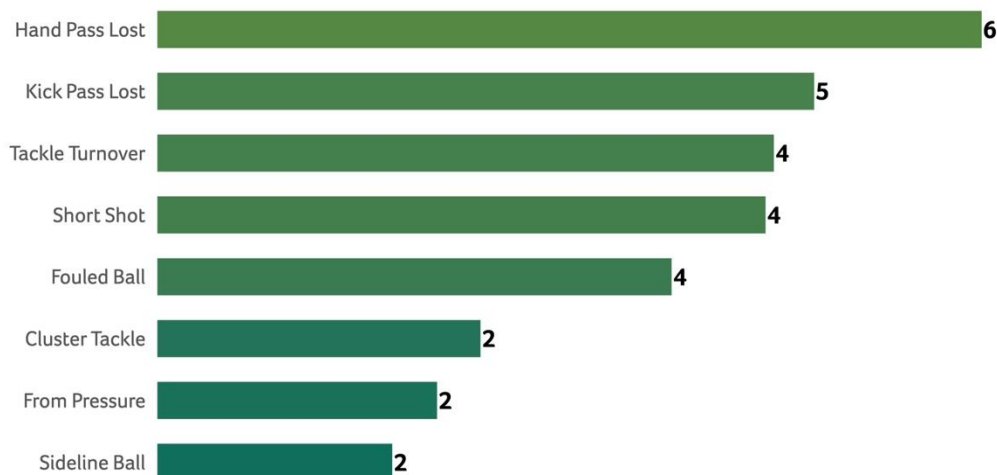


Figure 16. Average frequency of turnover types per game.

8. Frees awarded

Table 18 shows that frees awarded declined from an average of 27.5 per game in 2025 championship games, to 24.2 per game in 2026 championship games. This was largely accounted for by a reduction in the average number of aggressive fouls, falling from 21.5 to 19.2 per game. Delay fouls also declined substantially, from an average of 1.44 to 0.62, while structure fouls fell from an average of 0.75 to 0.55.

Table 18. Comparison of fouls per game and foul-type distribution between the 2025 and 2026 Championships (shown are averages).

Metric	2025	2026	Change
Fouls / game	27.5	24.2	▼ -3.3
Aggressive / game	21.5	19.2	▼ -2.3
Technical / game	3.7	3.7	-
Delay / game	1.44	0.62	▼ -0.82
Structure / game	0.75	0.55	▼ -0.20
Dissent / game	0.14	0.24	▲ +0.10
% Share			
Aggressive %	78.2%	78.9%	▲ +0.7 pp
Technical %	13.4%	15.3%	▲ +1.9 pp
Delay %	5.1%	2.5%	▼ -2.6 pp
Structure %	2.8%	2.3%	▼ -0.5 pp
Dissent %	0.5%	0.9%	▲ +0.4 pp

Frees given for technical infractions remained at an average of 3.7 per game, but their share increased from 13.4% in 2025 to 15.3% in 2026 because the overall number of fouls declined. Dissent-related frees increased from an average of 0.14 in 2025 to 0.24 per game in 2026, although it remained the least frequent category. Figure 17 shows that frees awarded for aggressive and technical infractions together accounted for approximately 94% of the foul distribution.

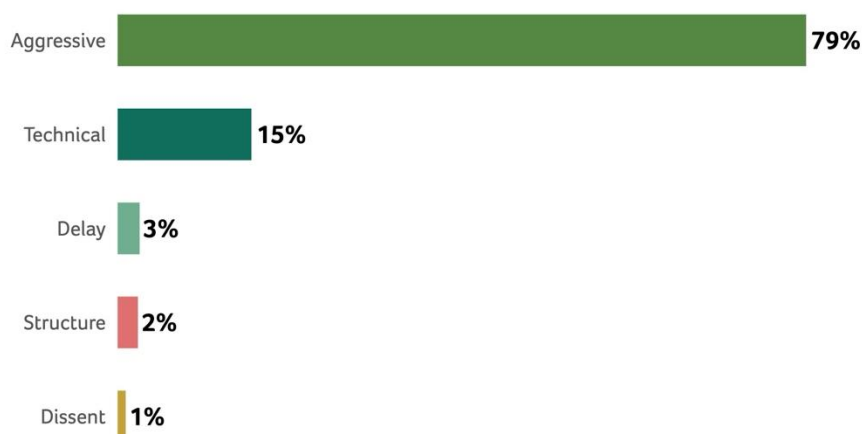


Figure 17. Foul distribution.

Figure 18 shows the pattern of frees awarded across match quarters in 2026. The average number of delay-related fouls increased progressively from the first to the fourth quarter, while frees awarded for dissent-related infractions peaked in the final quarter, with none observed in the first quarter. Structure-related fouls also peaked in the fourth quarter, with lower and equal counts in the second and third quarters. These are distributions of recorded events; they do not establish the reasons for the later-match concentration.

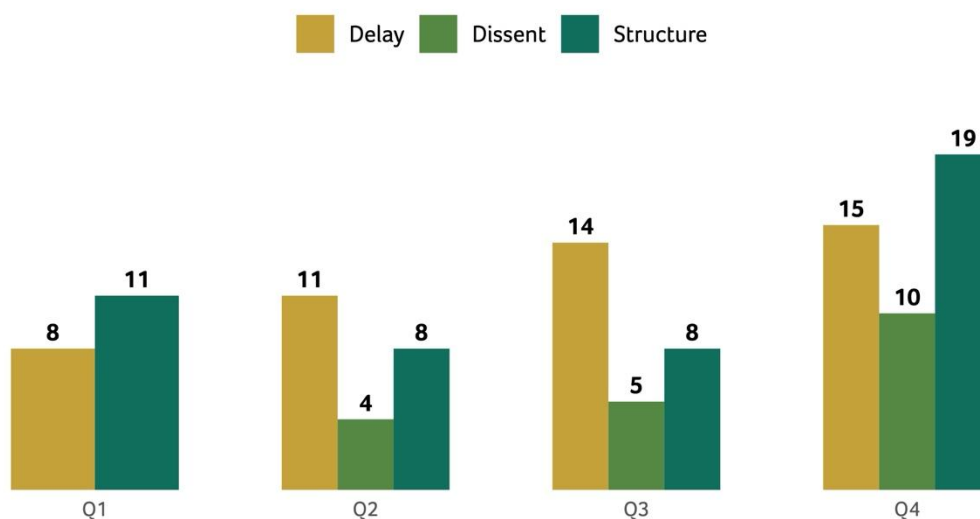


Figure 18. Timing of delay, structure and dissent fouls.

Appendix 1: GIU Gaelic Football Operational Definitions

The following operational definitions and coding criteria were used by the Games Intelligence Unit (GIU) for the analysis of inter-county Gaelic football match play. These definitions provide the framework for the variables and calculated performance metrics reported throughout this report.

1. When and Where Variables

1st Half: The first 35 minutes of the match plus stoppage time before half time.

2nd Half: The second 35 minutes of the match plus stoppage time before full time.

1st Half ET: The first 15 minutes of extra time plus stoppage time before half time of extra time.

2nd Half ET: The second 15 minutes of extra time plus stoppage time before full time of extra time.

Quarter (Q1-Q6): A possession that takes place during the specified quarter of the game, as indicated by the game clock. Each quarter lasts a minimum of 17 minutes and 30 seconds, with the quarter ending at the next kick out.

Defensive Third (Defence): Between a team's end line and the nearest 45 m line.

Middle Third (Midfield): Between the two 45 m lines.

Attacking Third (Attack): Between the opponents' end line and the nearest 45 m line.

Spatial Coding: Kick out locations are recorded in relation to the goals from which the kick out is taken. Shot locations are recorded in relation to the attacking goals. Turnovers lost are recorded in relation to the attacking goals, while foul locations are recorded in relation to the defending goals.

2. Match Play Variables

Throw In: The referee, facing the players, starts the game and restarts it after half time by throwing the ball between one player from each team, positioned on their respective defensive sides of the halfway line.

Throw Up: The referee throws the ball between one player from each team, 13 metres from the sideline or designated area of the pitch. All other players must remain at least 13 metres away until the ball has been thrown in.

Possession: Each time a team is in control of the ball, with the ball held in hand. A possession continues until the team loses control of the ball. The goalkeeper holding the ball for a kick out is not included. Multiple plays can occur within a single possession.

Play: Any period in which the ball is active. This excludes periods when the ball is outside the boundaries of the playing field and the period from the award of a free kick until the free kick is taken.

Turnover: When a player in possession loses the ball to the opposition due to physical contact, an unsuccessful shot or pass, or by committing a foul.

Attack: An attack occurs when a team plays the ball over the 45 m line into its attacking third or when a shot is attempted from outside the 45 m line.

Kick out: A placed kick taken by the goalkeeper from the ground after the ball crosses the end line, having been touched last by a player on the opposing team or following a score.

Shot: An action that sends the ball directly towards the opposing team's goal in an attempt to score a point or goal.

Open-Play Wide: When the ball crosses the end line because of a misplaced pass or any action other than a shot.

Hand Pass: An attempt by a player to transfer possession of the ball to a teammate using the hand or fist.

Kick Pass: An attempt by a player to transfer possession of the ball to a teammate using the foot, including passes from free kicks and sideline balls.

Sideline: A sideline kick is awarded to the team that did not last touch the ball before it crossed the sideline.

45 Kick: A 45 kick is awarded when the ball crosses the end line having last been touched by a player from the defending team.

Solo & Go: If a player is fouled, they may immediately execute a Solo & Go to continue play, provided it is in a forward direction.

3. Kick out Outcomes

Won: The team taking the kick out gains possession of the ball. A foul committed by the opposition during the kick out constitutes a kick out won.

Lost: The team taking the kick out does not gain possession of the ball. A foul committed by the team taking the kick out, or a kick out that goes directly out of play, constitutes a kick out lost.

Short: The kick out lands inside the team's own 45 m line.

Medium: The kick out lands outside the team's own 45 m line and before the 65 m line.

Long: The kick out lands outside the team's own 65 m line.

Contested: The kick out is won while the ball is in dispute.

Uncontested: The kick out is gained while under no physical pressure.

Clean: The kick out is caught directly from the goalkeeper's kick without the ball having been touched by another player.

Break: The kick out is caught or controlled indirectly after the ball has been touched by another player.

Sideline: A team is awarded a sideline kick after the ball crosses the sideline from a kick out.

Free: A team is awarded a free kick due to an infringement occurring during the kick out.

4. Shot Outcomes

From Play: An attempt to score a point or goal from open play.

From Free: An attempt to score a point or goal from a free.

From 45: An attempt to score a point or goal from a 45.

From Penalty: An attempt to score a point or goal from a penalty.

From Mark: An attempt to score a point or goal from an attacking mark.

From Sideline: An attempt to score a point or goal from a sideline.

Point: One point is scored when the ball is played over the crossbar and between the posts from inside the 40 m arc or inside the 20 m line.

Two Points: Two points are scored when the ball is kicked over the crossbar and between the posts by a player who has at least one foot on or outside the 40 m arc, provided no other player from that player's team subsequently touches the ball. A score directly from a 45 is awarded one point.

Goal: The ball passes below the crossbar and between the posts.

Score: A point or goal is achieved.

Short: The ball falls short of the opposing goal when attempting to score a point or goal.

Save: The goalkeeper or defender prevents a goal chance from going between the posts.

Post: The ball strikes the post or crossbar and returns to play.

Block: An opposition player other than the goalkeeper blocks the shot from reaching its intended target.

Out for 45: A shot crosses the end line following a defensive touch, resulting in a 45 for the attacking team.

For Goal: The player's intention when taking the shot is to score a goal.

For Point: The player's intention when taking the shot is to score a point.

From Hands: The shot is executed from the hands.

From the Ground: The shot is executed from the ground.

Left Foot: The shot is executed with the left foot.

Right Foot: The shot is executed with the right foot.

Fisted: The player executes a shot by striking the ball with a closed fist from the hands.

Palmed: The player executes a shot by palming the ball with the hand.

Low Pressure: At the instant the shot is taken, there is no opponent within 3 metres between the player and the target.

Medium Pressure: At the instant the shot is taken, an opponent is within 3 metres between the player and the target.

High Pressure: At the instant the shot is taken, an opponent is making physical contact with the player.

5. Turnover Outcomes

Kick Pass Lost: Possession is given to the opposition by a poor kick pass.

Hand Pass Lost: Possession is given to the opposition by a poor hand pass.

Unforced Error: A mistake made without direct pressure or interference from an opponent that results in the opposition gaining possession.

Tackle Turnover: The player in possession is dispossessed by an opposing player through an action specifically intended to take the ball.

Cluster Tackle: The player in possession is dispossessed by multiple opposing players through actions specifically intended to take the ball.

Fouled Ball: The player in possession commits a technical foul, resulting in possession being awarded to the opposition.

Block: An opponent prevents a kick pass or shot from reaching its intended destination by blocking the ball using the outstretched hands.

Shot Short: The ball falls short from a shot, and the opposing team subsequently gains possession.

50-50 Pass: A pass where the likelihood of possession being won by either team is considered equal.

Shot Saved: The goalkeeper or defender prevents a goal chance, and the opposing team subsequently gains possession.

Off the Post: The ball strikes the post or crossbar and the opposition gains possession.

Foul Off the Ball: A player commits a foul on an opponent away from the ball and a free kick is awarded to the opposition.

From Pressure: The player loses possession due to pressure from an opponent without the loss resulting directly from a tackle.

6. Foul Outcomes

Technical Foul: A foul resulting from a violation of the rules, such as overcarrying, picking the ball off the ground, or holding the ball for too long.

Aggressive Foul: A foul committed through a physical action involving direct or excessive contact with an opponent.

Structure Foul: A structure foul occurs when a team does not have at least four players, including the goalkeeper, in its own half and at least three outfield players in the opposition half. A structure foul also occurs when a player passes the ball to their goalkeeper within their own half of the pitch.

Dissent Foul: Dissent shown towards the referee's decision to award a free to the opposing team.

Delay Foul: A foul committed when a player delays the restart of play by preventing an opponent from taking a free, sideline kick, kick out or mark; failing to return the ball in full; or failing to release the ball to the opposition.

Card: When a player receives a card from the referee.

7. Calculated Metrics

Points per possession following a kick out won (PPKW): Total points ((total goals x 3) + total points) divided by total possessions retained from kick outs.

Overall kick out retention (%): (Kick outs won / Total kick outs) x 100.

Overall contested kick out retention (%): (Contested kick outs won / Total contested kick outs) x 100.

Own kick out retention (%): (Own kick outs won / Total own kick outs) x 100.

Own contested kick out retention (%): (Own contested kick outs won / Total own contested kick outs) x 100.

Opposition kick out retention (%): (Opposition kick outs won / Total opposition kick outs) x 100.

Possession share (%): Ball-in-play time for one team divided by total ball-in-play time in the game, expressed as a percentage.

Shot-to-score ratio (%): (Total scores / Total shots) x 100.

Shot-to-score ratio from play (%): (Total scores from play / Total shots from play) x 100.

Shot-to-score ratio from placed balls (%): $(\text{Total scores from placed balls} / \text{Total shots from placed balls}) \times 100$.

Possession-to-shot (%): $(\text{Total shots} / \text{Total possessions}) \times 100$.

Possession-to-score (%): $(\text{Total scores} / \text{Total possessions}) \times 100$.

Shots in the scoring zone (%): $(\text{Total shots in the scoring zone} / \text{Total shots}) \times 100$.

Total Points: Combined total points from goals and points: $(\text{total goals} \times 3) + \text{total points}$.

Productivity: Total points per 10 possessions: $(\text{Total points} / \text{Possessions}) \times 10$.

Turnover rate (%): Number of turnovers expressed as a percentage of total team possessions.

