



Tactics of Top Pro Teams & Players



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Edited by
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Edited by Mike Saif

Introduction

A lot can be learned from watching the game played at the highest level. Sometimes the most important lessons are not the easiest to spot. Identifying key moments and trends of a game is a skill that comes from watching hundreds of games as well as reading the analysis of others.

WORLD CLASS COACHING recently asked for coaches who would be interested in contributing tactical articles for our www.coachingadvancedplayers.com web site. We had an incredible number of replies from interested coaches and lots of articles submitted.

We didn't have room to publish all the articles on our web site and we didn't want them to go unread and wasted as they include some interesting and useful content.

We also included an article from Stevie Grieve on page 35 that is taken from his latest book, "[Winning Soccer Tactics](#)". The book breaks down every game from the Euro 2012 Championship. This article analyses the game between Germany and Portugal and focuses on Germany's ability to create attacking opportunities using width.

I'm sure you will find the content useful and take ideas from these articles that you will be able to adapt and incorporate into your own training sessions.

This journal is a compilation of those articles as they were submitted and unedited. The articles are on random topics and in random order.

Good luck on the field.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Saif". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mike Saif
President

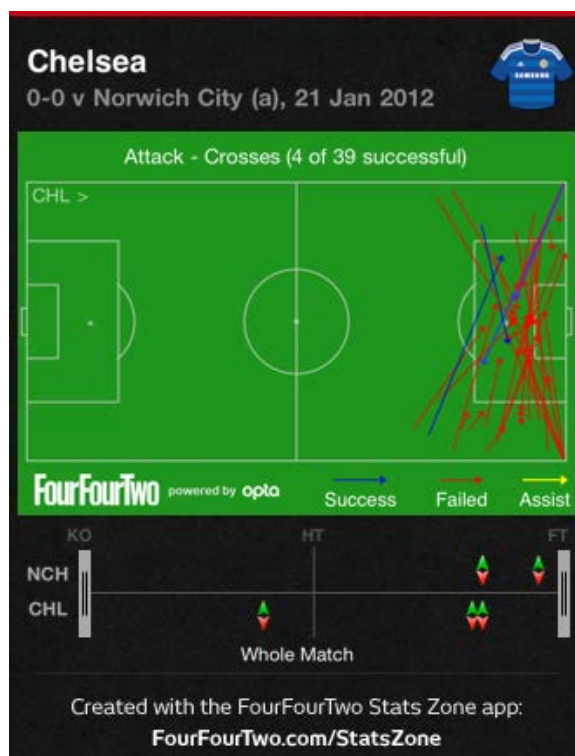
Torres & Chelsea's woe's continue.....

By Darren Spurrier, UEFA and Master Diploma holder, ex professional player at Southampton and owner of Darren Spurrier Professional Soccer Training.

Fernando Torres and Chelsea endured another miserable day on Saturday as Norwich frustrated the blues and further hit the London club's slim title hopes.

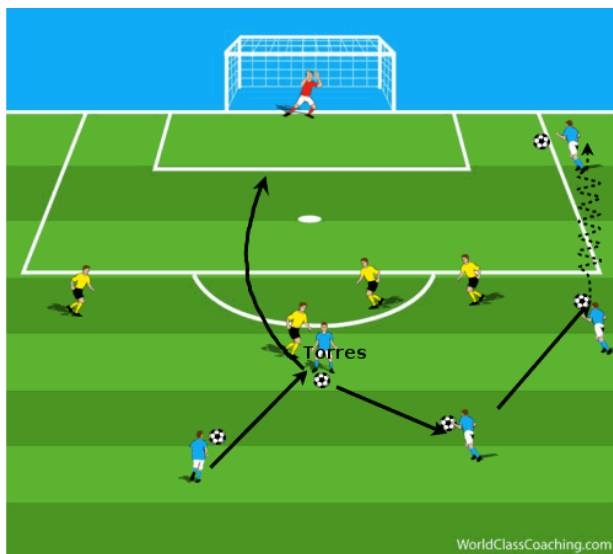
But why is it that Torres and Chelsea are struggling to hit form? On a day when Norwich had a clear game plan and played to their strengths, Chelsea once again showed that they are a team badly in need of direction. Playing a 4-3-3 that has been so successful in the past is not working for Andre Villas Boas, Watching the game it is easy to see that Chelsea has no natural width with both Mata and Sturridge more naturally suited to roles in the centre, both of whom look lost out wide and unsure of their individual roles.

The way Chelsea play at the moment with no traditional wingers does not help them. The wide role is often left up to the full backs who all too often have nobody in the middle to cross to because Torres is too frustrated and keeps dropping too deep to get involved in the play or pulling too wide and delivering crosses that himself should be attacking. As a lone centre forward Torres should be linking up the play and bringing players around him into the play whilst also being available in the box for crosses. All too often Torres showed a lack of desire to get into the penalty box and attack crosses and at the moment looks a shadow of his old self.





The diagram above shows the player influence from Norwich V Chelsea, Note that Sturridge and Mata had virtually no influence out wide and that Torres is not effective in the final 3rd.



Here I would like to see Torres holding up the play and bringing other players into play. Good hold up play followed by a desire to get into the box and attack cross. Something that I feel is missing from Chelsea's play.

Maybe a change of formation to a more balanced 4-4-2 with natural width and Juan Mata operating just behind the striker could be in order. Mata is by far Chelsea's most influential performer who oozes creativity and the ability to unlock the opposition's defense.

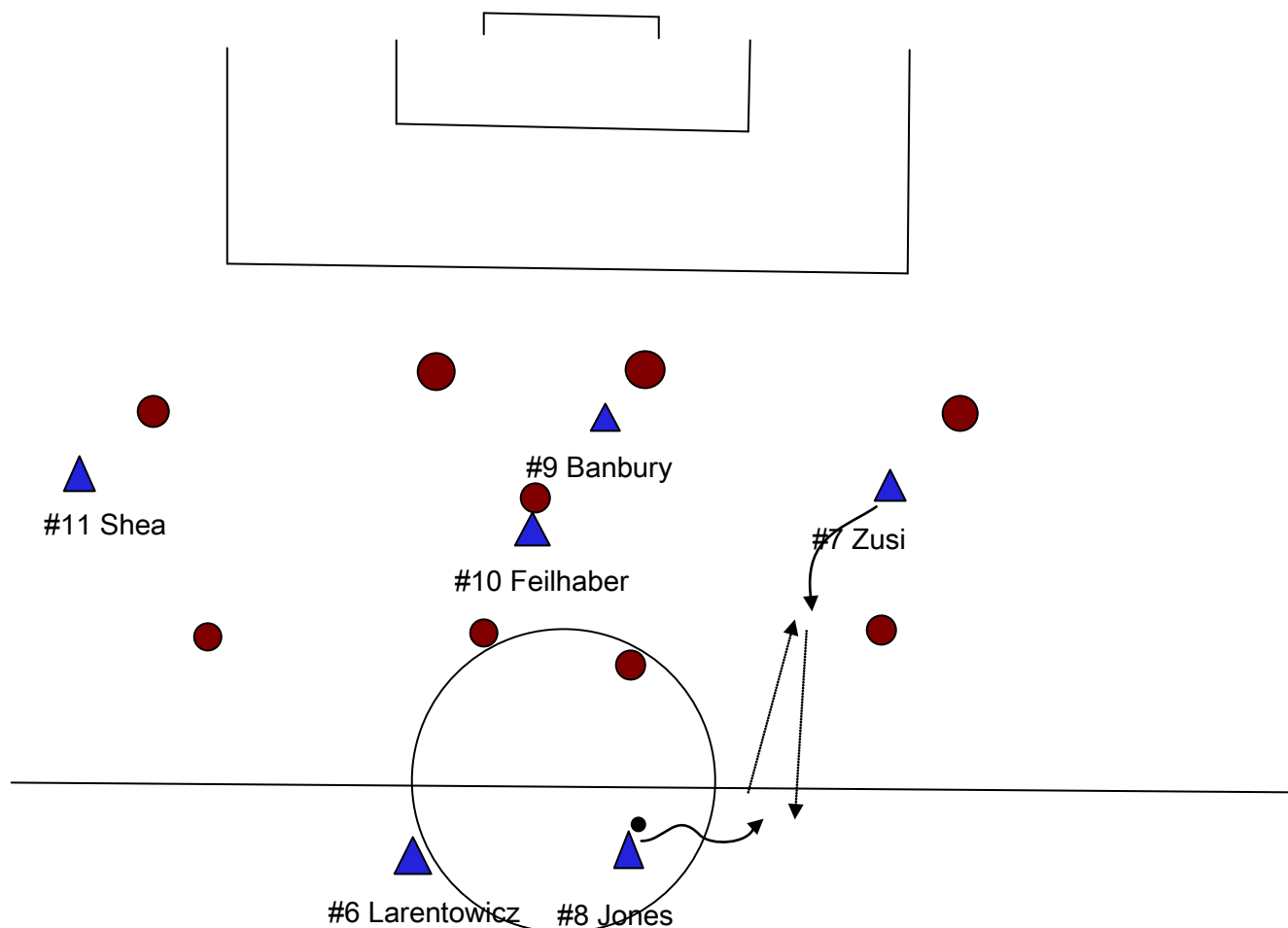
Harry Jennings – Coach at Century United, PA and PAWest ODP. Former coach for Preston North End Women’s team and University of Pittsburgh Greenburg Women’s Team.

USA grabs late winner after cagey match

2012 got off to a shaky, but positive, start for the US Men's National Team as they grabbed a late winner in stoppage time at Glendale, Arizona. As it is not a FIFA International match day, the match was effectively a B match, with neither team having their top players playing in foreign leagues available for selection. For the USA, this meant the match was something of an audition for the MLS based players to challenge for roster spots when the full squad convenes and begins CONCACAF qualification in the summer.

It's been a bit of a trope to say that the US does not have a national playing style, but the truth is we do, we just don't like it: we are linear, muscular, athletic, technically rough, tactically naïve, and enthusiastic on the counter. Klinsmann has begun to change our style slowly since taking over, beginning with playing out the back, and organized defending. The "second team" got the chance to show if they can play Klinsmann's style. And, for the most part, they have the basics, but as with the European based players, show a real dearth of creativity in the final third.

The US started in a 4-2-3-1 with Jones and Larentowicz sitting deep in the midfield and pulling the strings. Venezuela set out in a 4-1-4-1 and were content to defend deep in their half, with a line of confrontation just behind the bottom of the circle. Although the Americans had the better of the first half, they never looked like breaking the Venezuelans down. Feilhaber, playing in the number 10 role, was up near Banbury, and the formation ended up being very nearly a 4-2-4, such was the disconnect between lines. The buildup in the 31st minute was an example of the American problems, with 20 yards between lines, and the Venezuelan midfield isolating the front US front four entirely.

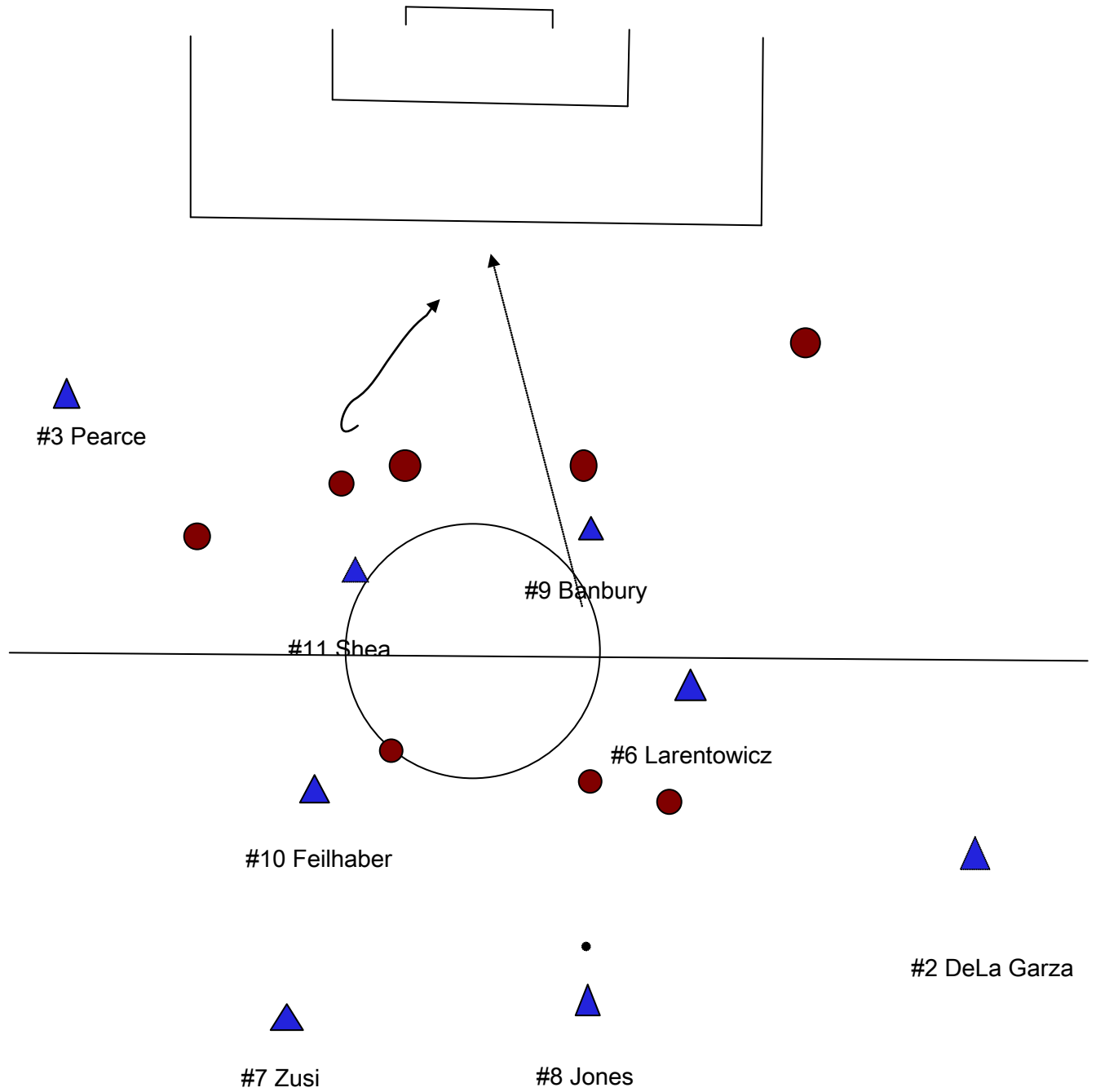


The US front four rarely interchanged positions, and there was little dynamic movement creating diagonal passing lanes. With 20 yards between the lines, the vast majority of balls forward were over the top, or in the case of the buildup in the 31st, just a simple bounce pass off of Zusi and back into the deep midfield.

When the Americans did get the ball deep, the lack of international experience and polish showed – Feilhaber, the most experienced US international rarely got on the ball (a notable exception being clever linking play forward to Shea to create a half-chance in the 21st) and Zusi and Banbury both consistently sat on the ball too long, killing any momentum the Americans carried forward.

As the game progressed, the Americans morphed into more of a 4-4-2 with Shea and Zusi dropping back further to link with the central midfield, and as the second half opened, the US was in 4-4-2 from the first whistle. Although conventional wisdom is that 4-3-3 variations such as the 4-2-3-1, will create more possession and penetration opportunities, the US showed that creative play is not necessarily dependent upon organization.

From the beginning of the second half, Pearce immediately came up and around from the left back position and the energy and movement the Americans showed across the pitch began to unsettle the thus far unflappable Venezuelan defense. In the 49th minute, Feilhaber came underneath Banbury to create an angle for an entry pass and that ended in a quality chance for Jones. The contrast of the American play from first to second half was best shown in a sequence just before the hour mark begun by Zusi coming in off the right flank into the midfield. Both fullbacks pushed on and the interchange opened passing lanes that very nearly created a breakthrough with a ball slid in on the floor between the central defenders that Shea was a yard short of converting into a goal.



With the fullbacks pushing on and the screening midfielders coming higher up the park, Klinsmann was risking being caught out on the break, but the center backs answered everything the Venezuelans asked of them. Parkhurst and Cameron never looked dominating, but always looked well organized, aware of each other, and never really threatened, with the Venezuelans never registering an official shot on goal.

It has to be a concern that the American attack never really looked entirely threatening in spite of the increasing dominance through the second half. While Brek Shea continues to grow in stature and seems to have a better understanding of the game every appearance (which speaks well for the MLS that he is developing in the domestic league) the US has yet to find a consistent, clinical finisher. Sixteen shots produced only four shots on goal, and the US was dependent upon a set piece at the death, converted by Ricardo Clark, a defensive midfielder, for the win.

But a win is a win. There are many more questions to be answered before Brazil 2014, but judging from the improving ability of the Americans to control a game, there are answers forthcoming. We must play 90 minutes with the energy and invention that was shown in the first minutes of the second half, and a striker who can get other players involved, hold up play when appropriate, and, of course, hit the back of the net. However, a solid performance from the out of season domestic-based players can be nothing but positive.

The Formation You Play is Irrelevant

I hear a lot of coaches on forums and on the pitch debating over what system of play is the best. They'll go on for hours endorsing the 4-4-2 and the 4-2-3-1 and hours more explaining why the 3-5-2 and 4-3-3 are not effective in their league or with their team. The answer to the great formation-riddle is of course, that the formation you use is irrelevant.

How can I make such bold statement? Simple really. Virtually all the formations out there have achieved both great success and great failure at all levels of competition. What happens when the mighty 4-3-3 plays another squad fielding a 4-3-3? One 4-3-3 team will win, one 4-3-3 team will lose, and occasionally they will draw. Great defensive systems have won European Championships, Champions League Titles, Copa Americas and World Cups. So have attacking systems. One of the best teams I have ever seen routinely played with only two defenders! Try explaining that one.

You are probably wondering what I would rate more important than the formation. Well, dozens of things actually but here are three for starters.

- 1.) The coaches' ability to lead. I've seen extremely talented teams using technically challenging systems get massacred by teams with "mediocre" players and tactical incompetence. How? They had coaches who knew how to lead. Coaches who can get all the players on the same page, who can inspire, and instill belief in their players will often beat teams with superior technical ability. Talent and tactical genius don't mean much if the players don't like, trust, respect or listen to the coach. More important than the formation is to be the kind of coach that your players will run through walls and die on the pitch for.
- 2.) Hard work. It may be hackneyed, but it's a universal truth. You won't always win if you outwork your opponents, but you'll rarely win if you don't. The best coaches across all sports emphasize the work ethic of their teams. They might play someone better, but they refuse to be outworked. A 4-4-2 is a lousy system if the players are soft, lazy or if they play with a sense of entitlement. Alternatively, a team full of work horses can make any system look good. Take Barcelona. One of the keys to their success lately is that they have initiated a six second rule. When they lose the ball, the entire team pinches in, and for six seconds, go hell-bent for leather to win it back. Consequently, the hard work that the entire team puts in usually results with them back in possession.
- 3.) Put the best TEAM on the pitch. Notice I didn't say put the best PLAYERS out there. Many coaches assume that by having all their best players on the field at the same time that they have their best team on the field. This is an ignorant assumption and reminiscent of the Galaticos of Real Madrid from a several years ago. With Zidane, Figo, Beckham, Ronaldo, Robert Carlos, Michael Owen, and Raul, they had a three-year stint without winning a single trophy. It's much more important to have a group that plays well off each other and that play together as a unit, than it is to have super studs for every position. Take Sergio Buscats

There you have it folks. There are three aspects to the game that are much more important than the formation you use. You'll find that if you refuse to get outworked, if you'll put the best TEAM on the field, and if you focus on your leadership ability, that the formation you use will become irrelevant.

By John Bishop, player and coach, Rochester, New York

The 6 Second Rule: Hell-Bent for Leather

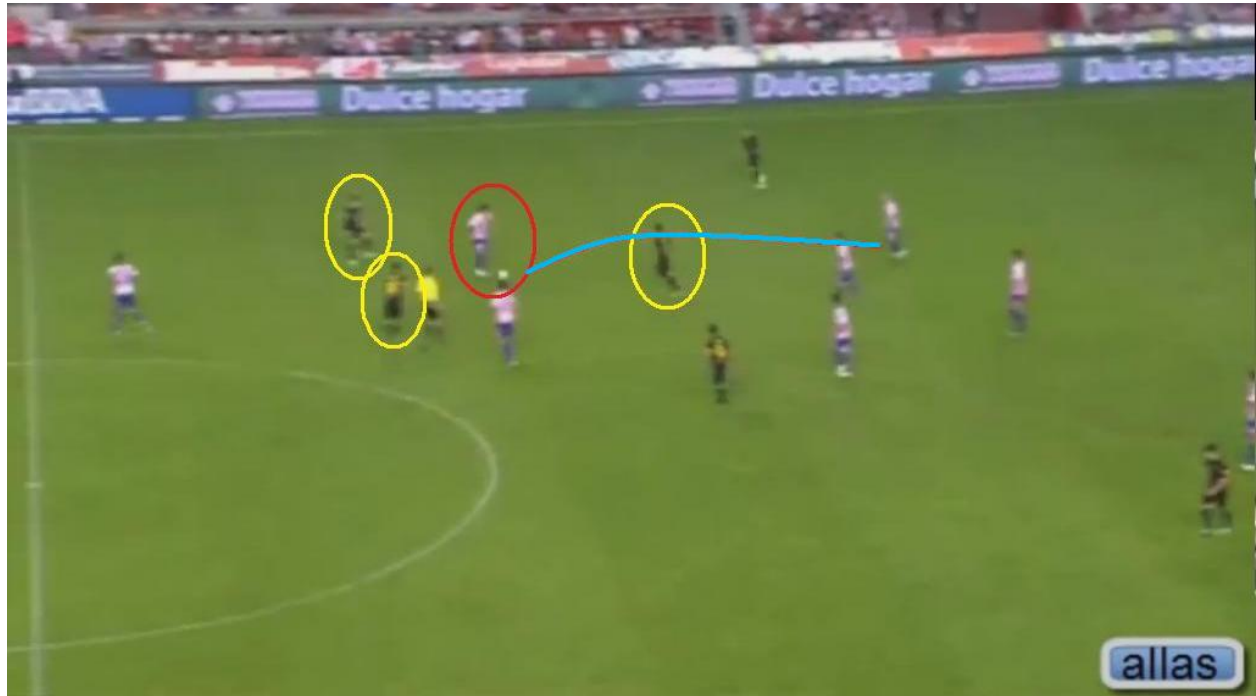
Everyone in the soccer community is aware Barcelona's passing and possession game. What gets very little notice, however, is their defensive effort to win the ball. They have a rule that if they lose possession, they press as hard as they possibly can for six seconds to win it back. They pinch in, make the field small and shut down the short pass options. If they haven't won it by the seventh second, or third pass, they pull back and resume regular defensive formation. It requires discipline, intensity and fitness, but it is also one of the main reasons why Barcelona always seems to have possession.

The video of this rule applied can be seen at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHRmXwLrpBI>



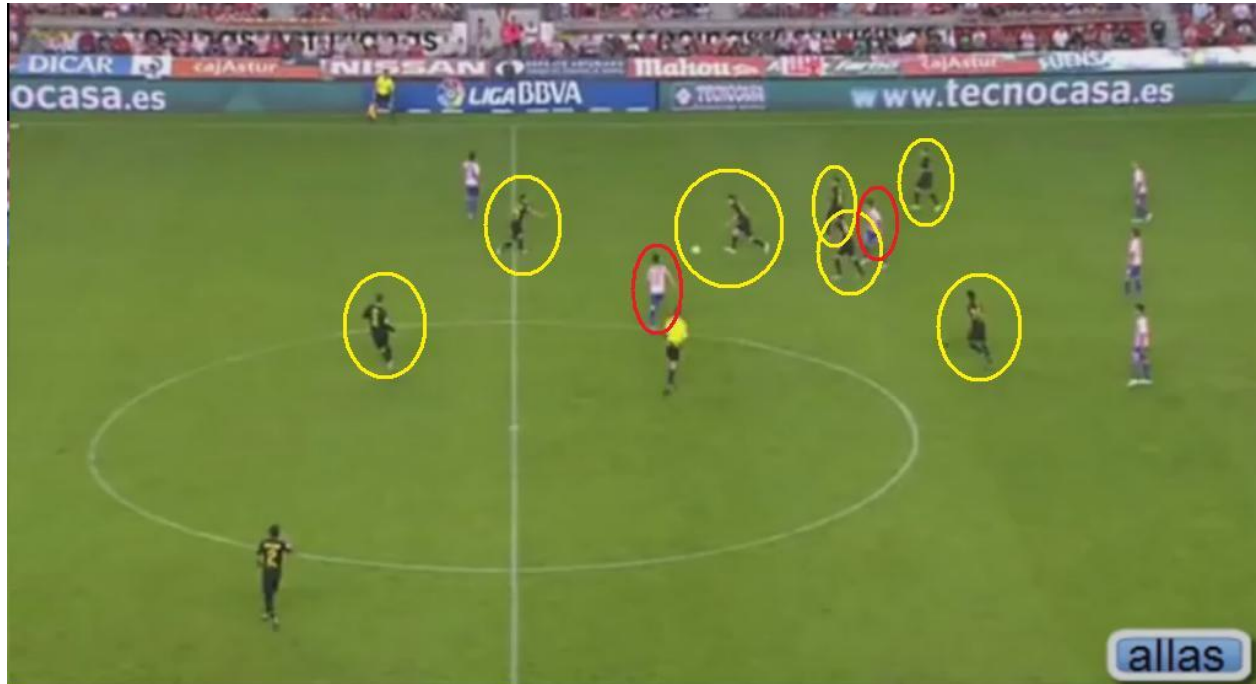
Ball gets lost while on the attack and rebounded to right back.



The right back for Atletico Madrid plays the ball to the feet of one of the midfielders. All the Barcelona players in the area begin to swarm and attack the ball.



Within three seconds, the Atletico player is surrounded by pressure and has nowhere to turn, run or hide.



As usual, Barcelona easily wins the ball back. Since they move forward and back and side to side as a unit, they almost always have a numerical advantage. They settle the ball down and play 5v2 out of trouble.

By John Bishop, player and coach, Rochester, New York

Justin Cresser - Has coached soccer at various levels both in North America and abroad (Hong Kong and Africa). His most recent position was as the Assistant Technical Director at the Soccer Club of Toronto. He has his National Diploma from the NSCAA and is also a certified strength and conditioning coach.

Woeful Defending From Liverpool

It has been a somewhat horrid season for Liverpool having drawn 7 out of 11 games at home and having arguably their best player, Luis Suarez, banned for 8 games after been found guilty of racially abusing Manchester United defender Patrice Evra. Liverpool has been lacking goals this season and this was the perfect opportunity for them to increase their tally against the leakiest defense in the Premier League. Prior to this game, Bolton had conceded 46 goals, the most any team in the league. Added to this was the fact that the Wanderers recently sold their best defender, Gary Cahill, to Chelsea in the January transfer Window.

However, it was the Liverpool defense that proved to be porous on this windy day in Bolton. The defensive unit of Glen Johnson, Daniel Agger, Martin Skrtel and Jose Enrique has been one of the most solid and consistent back lines in the league this season. Before Saturday's encounter, only 2 teams, Manchester City and Tottenham, had scored more than 1 goal against Liverpool in a league game. However, poor decision making, a lack of cover from the midfield and poor set-piece marking resulted in lowly Bolton becoming the third team on that list.

Let's take a closer look at each of Bolton's 3 goals to identify the defensive mistakes that occurred.

GOAL NUMBER 1:

The first of Bolton's goals was a great finish from Mark Davies but was largely a result of poor defensive positioning and decision making from Liverpool's back 4 as well as a lack of tracking back from the central midfielders. Ngog came inside and short to receive a pass played in from Eagles on the right wing, which he flicks into the path of Mark Davies who had made a beautiful run from midfield. Skrtel (37) follows the run of Ngog and commits but gets beaten by Ngog's flick and is caught out of position leaving a huge gap between Agger (5) and Johnson (2) in front of Reina's net which Davies did an excellent job in exploiting (Figures 1 - 4).



FIGURE 1

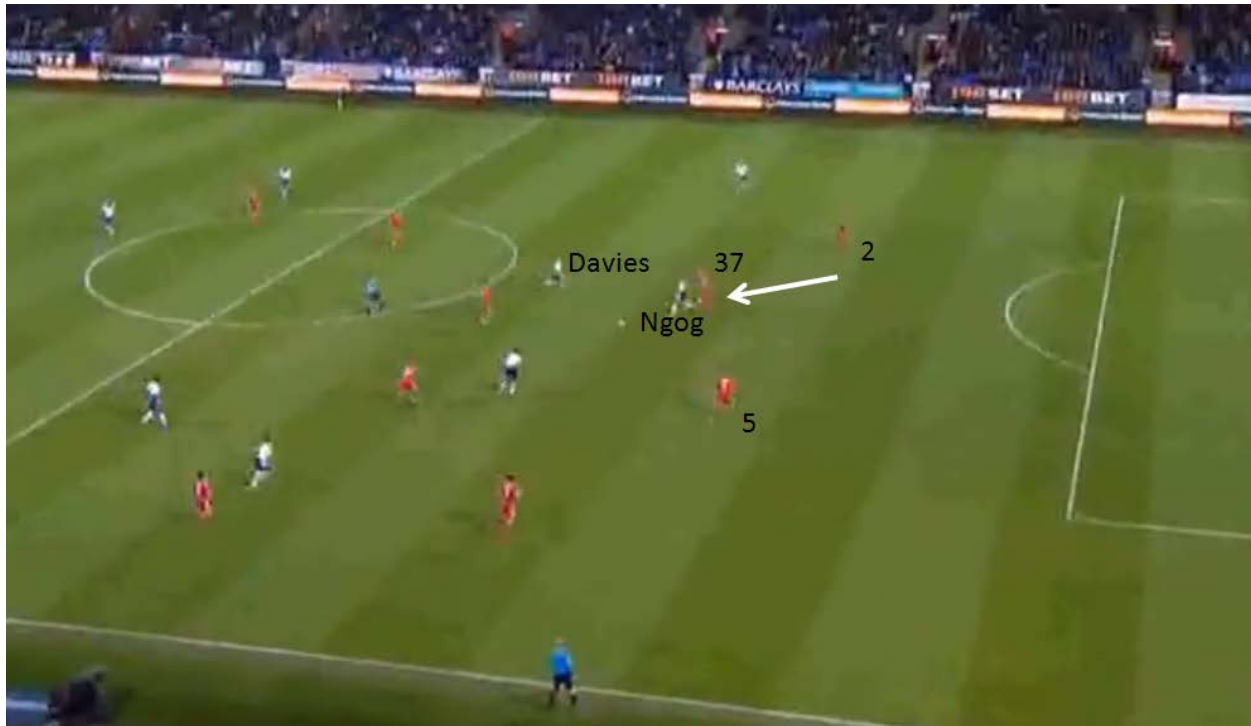


FIGURE 2

This goal occurred as a result of 3 main defensive errors:

- 1) Skrtel commits, does not intercept and gets caught out of position. This leaves a huge gap between Glen Johnson (2) and Daniel Agger (5), (Figure 2). A better option would have been for Skrtel to allow Ngog to either receive or flick the ball and then close down the run of the man with ball. This would also have allowed Agger and Johnson to get into better covering positions.
- 2) After Skrtel is caught out Glen Johnson needs to slide inside (Figure 3), where he would be in a better position to prevent Davies from getting a shot off yet still be in a position to close down the man to his right, should he receive a pass from Davies. He stays wide while retreating, however, allowing Davies too much time and space.
- 3) None of the Liverpool central midfielders follows the run of Davies (which starts in his own half) and he is allowed to attack Liverpool's goal at pace (Figure 2). One of the most important rules of zonal defending is that vertical runs from opponents must be tracked (horizontal runs can usually be passed on) but all three central midfielders were caught ball watching.



FIGURE 3

Daniel Agger (5) has the hardest role here and is not too much at fault. He needs to delay in applying pressure in order to prevent Davies from playing a pass to Ngog and Eagles who both make lovely runs to the right of Davies (Figure 4). He delays too long however, allowing Davies to get his shot off.



FIGURE 4

GOAL NUMBER 2:

Liverpool's midfield was the chief culprit in allowing Bolton's second goal. Some lovely combination play between Reo-Coker, Ngog and Eagles on the right wing allowed Eagles to

dribble at the back line and eventually play a lovely chip in behind the defense for Reo-Coker (who makes a lovely run, *completely* un marked) to finish .

As was the case with the first goal, there is too big a gap between the central and wide defenders (2 & 37). There is also too much space between the back 4 and the midfield (Shaded space). Johnson (2) could have been a yard or two more central; but for me, Jordan Henderson (14) needs to drop more to fill that space (Figure 5).

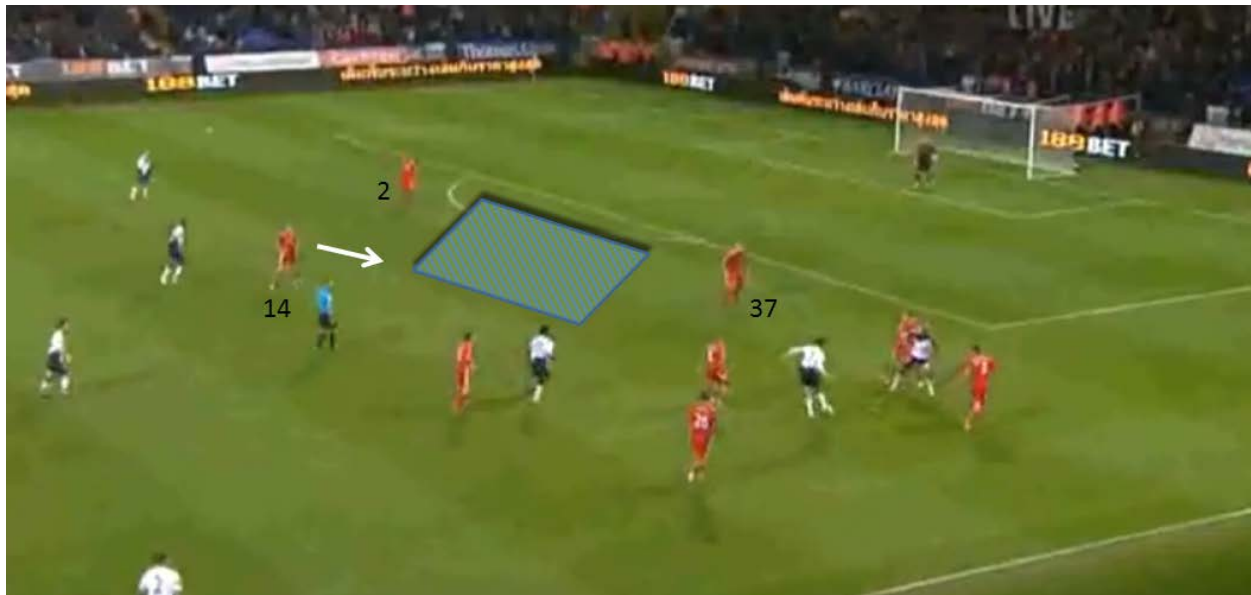


FIGURE 5

However, the major problem for Liverpool in this situation is that none of the Liverpool midfielders tracks the run of Reo-Coker. Three midfielders (8, 26 and 11) are yards away from Reo-Coker, but they all switch off after he plays Ngog (Figure 6). Failure to pick up Reo-Coker's run may have been due to poor communication from the central defenders, but was more likely a lack of awareness from the midfield players.

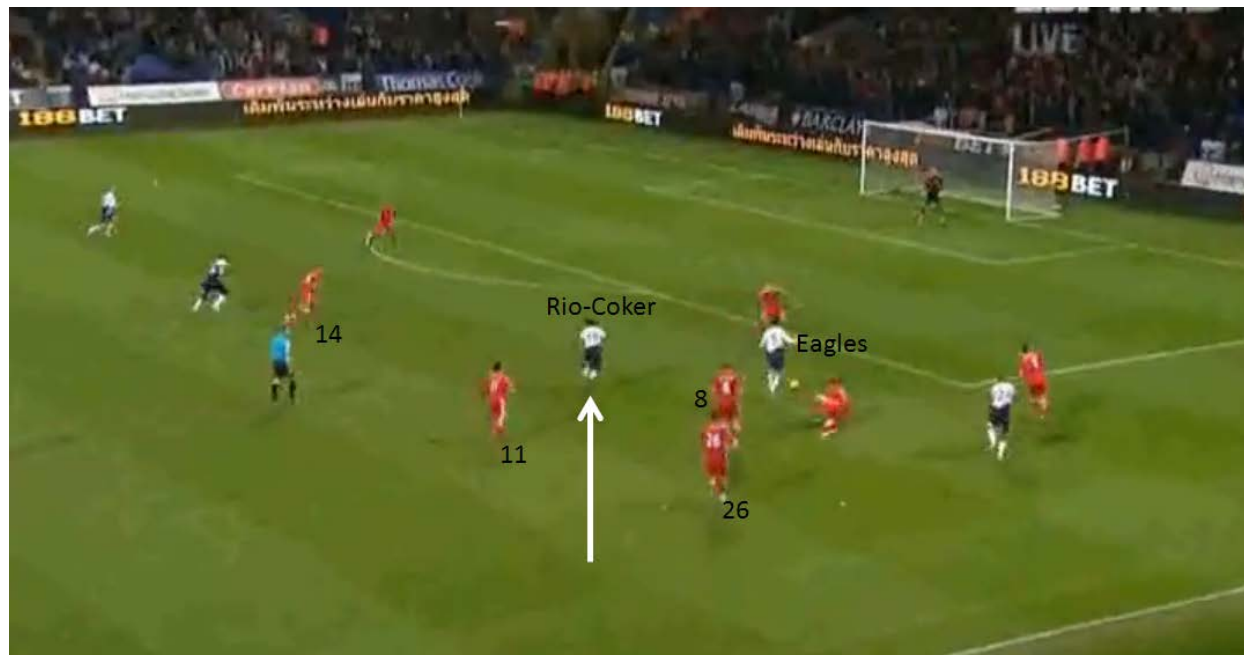


FIGURE 6

GOAL NUMBER 3:

A well-placed out-swinging corner from Martin Petrov resulted in the third Bolton goal. Wheeler won a header at the far post, which was directed back across goal for an unmarked Steinsson to slot into the back of Reina's net (Figures 7 & 8).

Defensively, the goal was mostly a result of a lack of awareness. Liverpool has had problems defending corners in the past during the managerial years of Rafa Benitez. He used a zonal system (rather than a man-to-man or a mix of zonal and man-to-man), which requires defenders to be excellent at communicating, well-disciplined and absolutely certain of their roles, which quite often is not the case.

Under Kenny Dalglish, however, Liverpool use a mix of zonal and man-to-man marking for defending corners, which in my opinion is the best of the three systems. With this system, roaming defenders placed in danger areas give support and cover to defenders marking attackers making runs inside the 18-yard box.

As shown in Figure 7, Steven Gerrard (8) is well positioned to prevent any flick-ons at the near post or picking up a runner if the ball is played short. Charlie Adam (26) and Maxi Rodriguez (11) are also well placed at the edge of the box-- close enough to provide cover to the other defenders in and around the six yard box, but close enough to their man. The other defenders occupy the far post and edge of the six yard box. The major concerns for Liverpool are Wheeler and Steinsson making runs to the near and far post. These men need to be picked up by the free defenders, and it is imperative that this is being communicated.

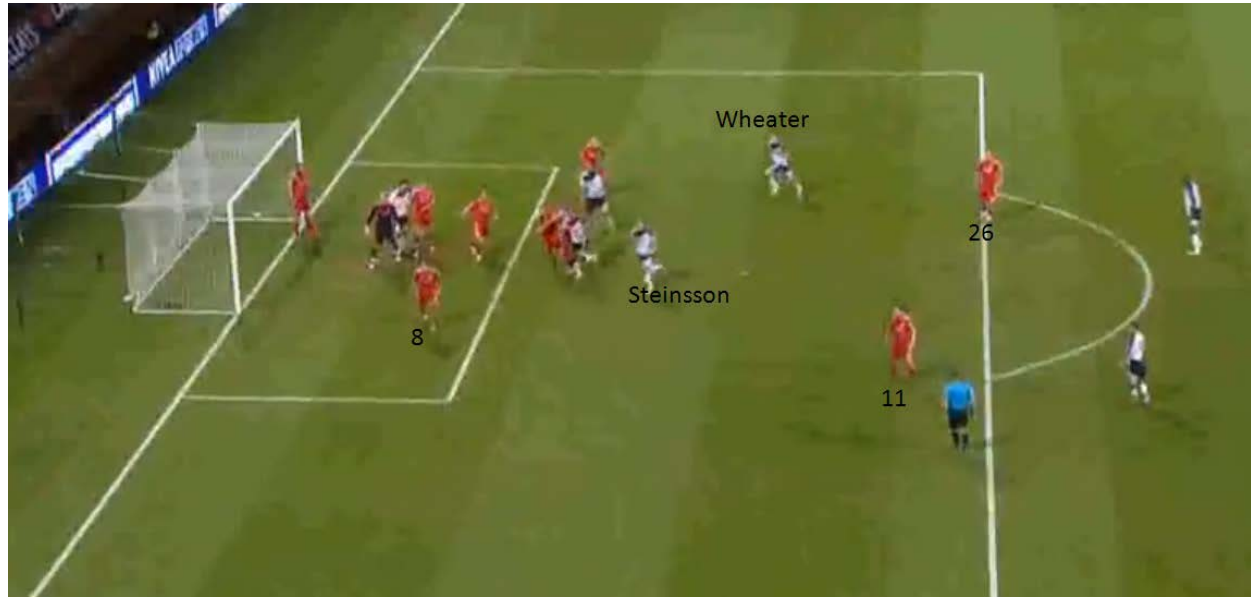


FIGURE 7

Skrテル get ups high with Wheeler, but the latter still gets a great header back into the middle of the penalty box. This is where a man-to-man system has its advantage. Had Skrtel or Carroll been marking Wheeler man-to-man, he would not have the same amount of space to attack the corner and get as high up as he did. Steven Gerrard pushes out as the ball is played to the far side, but fails to pick up Strellion unmarked at the penalty spot (Figure 8). Gerrard is likely thinking counter attack, but acts before the ball is safely cleared. End result: simple finish from the Iceland international.

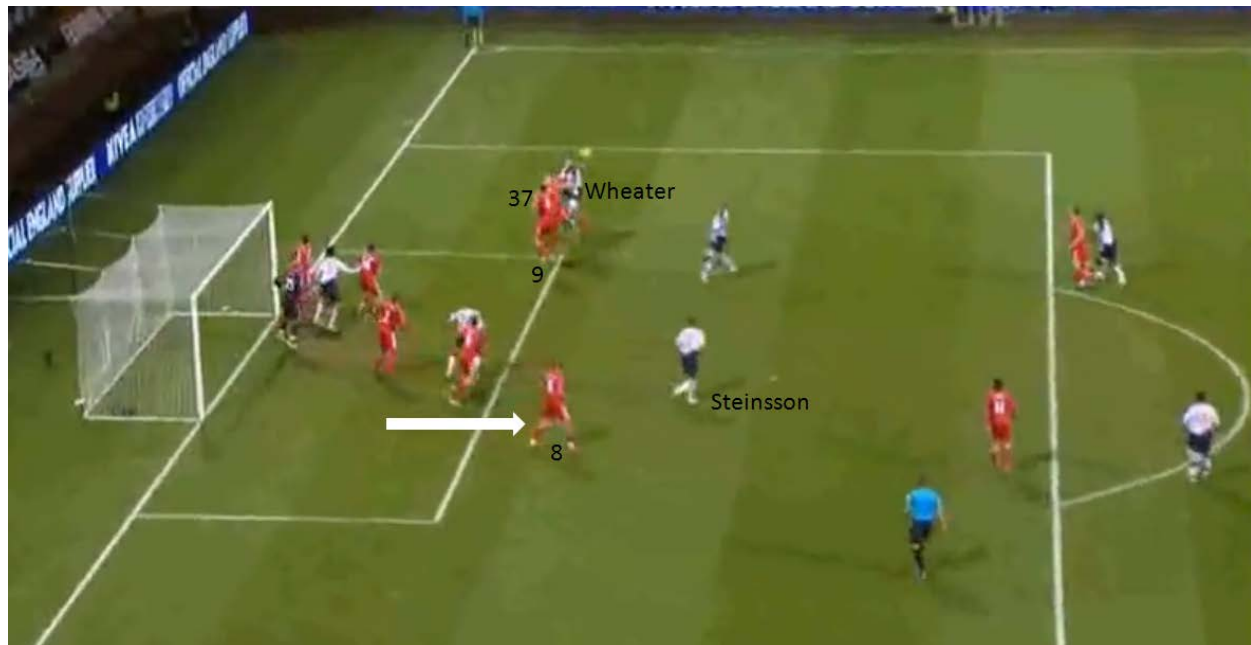


FIGURE 8

So, we have poor decision making and positioning from the back four, a lack of tracking back by the midfield players and poor set-piece marking. An overall woeful defensive performance from Liverpool. Kenny Dalglish will have plenty to say in that next chalkboard session.

TECHNICAL AND TACTICAL QUALITIES OF A GOOD DEFENSIVE MIDFIELDER

Brazil's Dunga, France's Claude Makélélé, Argentina's Xavier Mascherano and Holland's Edgar Davids. These are some of the names that come to mind when you mention 'Defensive Midfielders'. One of my favorites is former Brazil and Arsenal player, Gilberto Silva. His nick name "the Invisible Wall" should say it all.

In modern day soccer, having a player in this position tends to be a tactical advantage and so having central midfielders with equal attacking and defending responsibilities is not as common as it once was. You are more likely to encounter teams with central players who have defined attacking and defending roles. Some teams may even have 2 defensive midfielders, and this will be determined by the formation used and the style of play. With a 4-5-1, a more defensive-minded team may have 2 defensive midfielders where as a more attack-oriented team will only have one (Figure 1A & B). The more recent 4-2-3-1 uses two defensive midfielders in which a major responsibility involves play making (Figure 1C). Even the 4-4-2, one of the more common formations used in soccer today, will have a pair of central players in which one will be more attack-minded and the other will have more defensive duties, such as when Frank Lampard and Gareth Barry play together for England (Figure 1D).

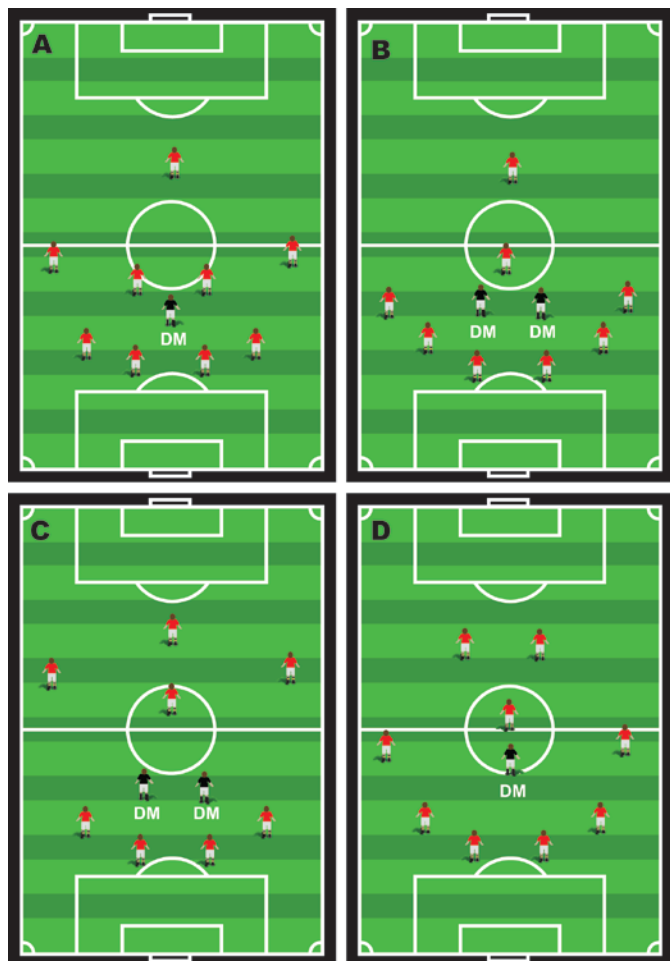


FIGURE 1

The type of stats that interest a coach when analyzing the capabilities of this particular position are interceptions made, successful tackles, passing accuracy and headers won. Therefore, good tackling skills, quick and accurate distribution and strong aerial ability would be likely attributes to succeed at this

position. However, being a good tackler and strong in the air does not necessitate that you will be a good defensive midfielder. It's knowing when to tackle, where to be and the ability to read the game that allows a player like Liverpool's Lucas Leiva to dominate in the middle of the pitch. The game is not just a 1 vs 1 battle and there are many other technical and tactical qualities required to excel at this position.

Let us first begin by identifying the more common roles of the defensive or holding mid.

COMMON ROLES OF A DEFENSIVE MIDFIELDER

You may frequently here coaches or individuals say "the job of the defensive midfielder is to sit in front and protect the back 4". But what does this mean? Protect how? Being a defensive midfielder is so much more than just sitting in front and protecting the back four.

When defending they may be required to 1) track the runs of opposing attackers, 2) prevent through balls being played into strikers or 3) man mark the opposing team's playmaker. Man-to-man marking of the 'danger man' was a major responsibility in previous years; a prime example being Lothar Matthäus marking Maradona in the 1986 World cup Final. Man-to-man marking is less common today however as most teams rely on zonal defending, although José Mourinho has asked both Pepe and Lassana Diarra to neutralize Messi (if that's ever possible) during El Clásico encounters.

In attack, defensive midfielders need to 1) provide support behind forward and wide players who are in possession of the ball and 2) cover the space left by defenders, most commonly wing backs, which make forward runs. Gilberto Silva frequently did this for Brazil in the 2010 world cup, when either Maicon or Lucio surged forward to join the attack.

Of course, these are just some general roles. The style of play and team formation also greatly determines what functions a defensive midfielder will have. When Gilberto Silva played for Brazil or when Makélélé played for Chelsea for example, they were never required to play through balls into strikers or cross field passes to wingers out wide, yet this is a major part of Xabi Alonso's game at Real Madrid. In addition, well-disciplined teams that rely strictly on zonal defending may not require a destroyer such as Nigel de Jong. Defending the space is the primary responsibility of a defensive midfielder in this type of team.

DEVELOPING TECHNICAL AND TACTICAL QUALITIES IN A DEFENSIVE MIDFIELDER

As coach, creating a defensive midfielder can be challenging. There is so much more involved than just tracking and tackling and producing a player like Makélélé involves developing certain technical and tactical qualities. As such, I have composed a list of which I believe are the most important roles of the holding midfielder along the technical tactical qualities required for each role.

1) Preventing passes from midfielders into strikers

Players like Barcelona's Xavi are so good at threading through balls into the feet of forwards making a run into space. Having a striker 1 on 1 with a center back is never ideal and so preventing these penetrating passes should be a top priority. For a defensive midfielder to accomplish this task he must be aware of the forward's position so that he can block the passing lane (Figure 2). This requires good lateral movement and a constant swivel of the head. It is difficult to know where the striker is a tall times however, so the defensive mid must also be able to follow instructions like "left shoulder!" being barked at him from his center back.

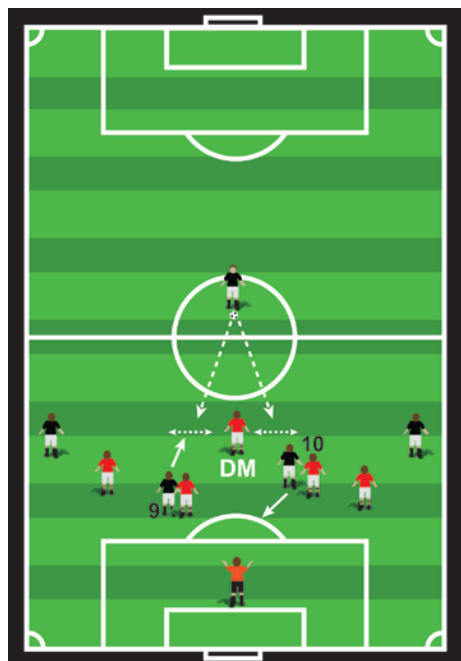


FIGURE 2

2) Filling in for defenders going forward

So often, center backs such as Chelsea's David Luiz and Inter Milan's Lúcio making surging runs up the pitch. In addition, so many attacking plays involve wing backs like Barcelona's Dani Alves making overlapping runs to receive balls in space out wide (Figure 3). If possession changes quickly in these situations however, the spaces left by these defenders must be filled. A good defensive mid will have the combined qualities of both central and wide defenders: strong aerial ability, good 1 vs 1 defending skills and the ability to read the game. Involving the defensive mid in your functional training sessions with the back 4 will develop these skills.

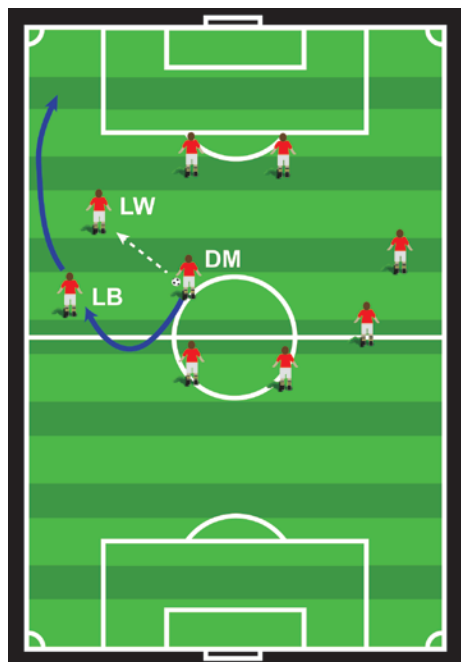


FIGURE 3

3) Defending in a numbers down situation.

Counter attacks are common in modern-day soccer and for teams like Real Madrid, capitalizing on these situations is a pivotal part of their game plan. The chances of scoring when attackers out-number defenders on the break are relatively high and so knowing how to defend in these instances are key. In most cases, you need to delay your tackle and drop as quickly as possible, at the same time moving into a position that prevents a pass to one of the supporting attackers. There are many situations however, and this may not always be the case. What is essential however is an impeccable ability to analyze the situation and to do so quickly. Including 3 vs 2 (and other variations) exercises in training will improve these skills but, they can only be mastered by playing the game.

4) Knowing when to hold and when to press

So many times you will see strikers pressing when the ball is played short from a goal kick or when possession is lost close to the opposing goal. Doing so will be pointless however, unless the midfield step

up as well, as there will be space to exploit between the two units. Attackers need to know when to press and when to hold, and this should be communicated from the back. More often than not however, attackers take it upon themselves to press, especially when they get frustrated. In these situations, the midfield has to be aware and recognize to step up as well, so that the tight space between the midfield and striking units are maintained. Having a defensive midfielder who can read the game and communicate to the players around them will help maintain a compact defense. The best way to develop this quality is by playing 11 vs 11 and small-sided games. Emphasize that your defensive midfielder is constantly communicating to the strikers and other defenders around him and address the situations when this communication breaks down.

5) Tracking and closing down strikers that play between the lines

Exploiting the space between the defensive and midfield lines, or the "the hole" as it is commonly referred to, by strikers with good ball control and passing skill is a key attacking strategy. Manchester United's Wayne Rooney is exceptionally good at this and his role shifts to play maker when he receives the ball in this area. A striker's run into the hole can be problematic for the defense, especially if center backs follow their run, as this leaves a gap that other attackers can exploit. In this situation, the space vacated by the center back should be filled by another defender but a lack of communication can often result in a defense left wide open. Maintaining a well-shaped and organized back line takes priority for me when defending and having an alert defensive mid allows center backs to stay in position when strikers like Wayne Rooney drop deep to receive the ball (Figure 4). High Endurance, good spatial awareness and strong man marking skills are required for this role, but good communication from the back is also key.



FIGURE 4

6) Quick and safe distribution

Defensive Midfielders tend to see a lot of the ball, either by making interceptions and winning tackles or because attackers will play back when there are unable to penetrate the opposing defense. It is therefore essential that they have good distribution skills that are quick and accurate when initiating counter attacks, or simple when trying to keep possession. In both cases, they should choose the safe option. Holding mids

are responsible for providing defensive support and therefore cannot afford to lose possession by attempting difficult through balls. Having a defensive midfielder like Xabi Alonso with impeccable distribution skills will certainly help, but is not a must.

TRAINING THE DEFENSIVE MIDFIELDER

Different technical exercises and small sided games exercises can be used for training the defensive midfielder, but my favorite is playing attackers against defenders in a half field game (Figure 5). Few other exercises are capable of addressing so many of the various roles required in the real game.

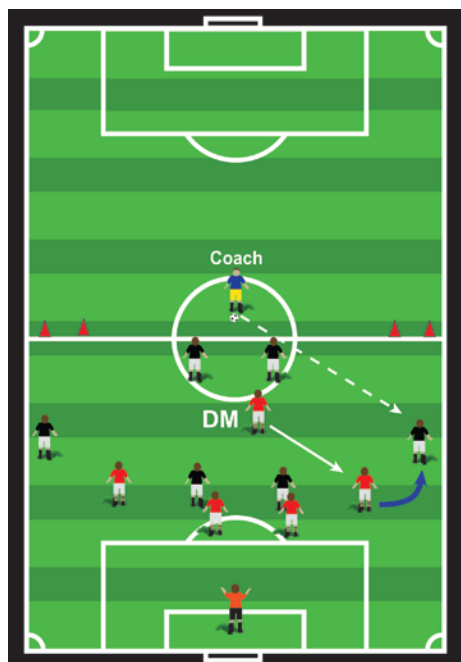


FIGURE 5

Play 6 attackers (2 center mids, 2 strikers and 2 wide players) against 5 defenders (a back 4 and a defensive midfielder) and a goalkeeper using one half of a regulation-sized field as shown. Two small goals (2 yards width) should be placed on the half-way line 2 yards in from each side line. Attackers try to score in the big net where as the defenders attempt to score in one of the two small goals. Each restart is initiated with a ball from the coach to one of the attackers or from a goal kick.

Start by limiting the 2 central midfielders of the attackers to two touches. You can then progress to unlimited touches for all. Other progression include asking one of the other defenders to start off the pitch and so out of position

The 6 roles mentioned above can all be addressed. Figure 5 addresses the movement of the defensive midfielder when the ball is played wide to the winger.

SUMMARY

The quality of your players will largely determine the type of soccer you play. Regardless of formation and style however, having a well-disciplined and spatially aware defensive midfielder plays a key part in forming a solid midfield. Whether you like to sit deep and defend then counter on the break, or use high pressure defending, there are certain technical and tactical qualities that a defensive midfielder must possess. Creating the next 'invisible will' not happen by only doing 1 vs 1 exercises and it is important that these other qualities are emphasized.

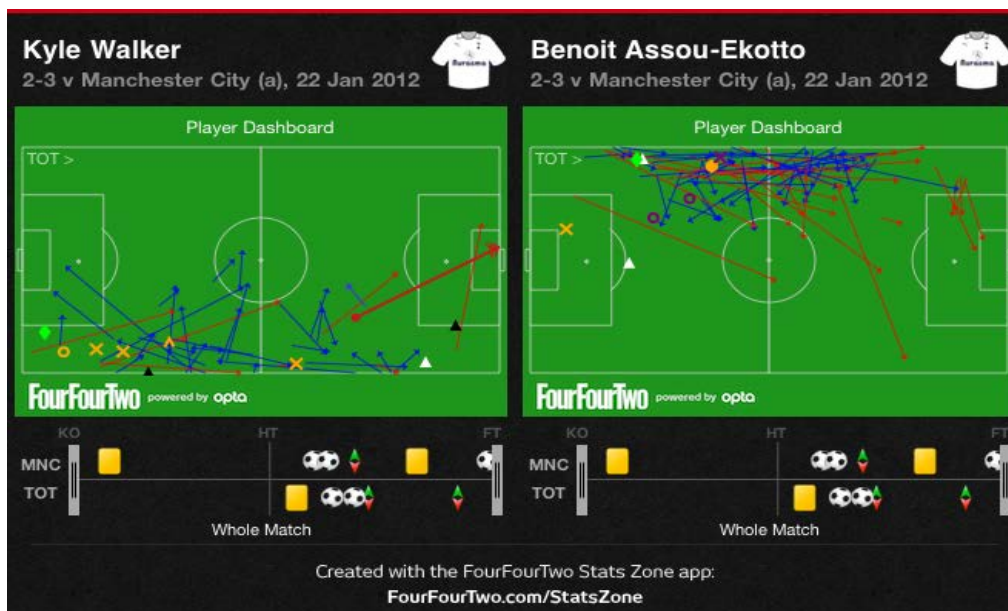
Justin Cresser - Has coached soccer at various levels both in North America and abroad (Hong Kong and Africa). His most recent position was as the Assistant Technical Director at the Soccer Club of Toronto. He has his National Diploma from the NSCAA and is also a certified strength and conditioning coach.

Matt Riley – Harrow International School, Bangkok. You can read more articles by Matt on his blog at www.absolutethaifootball.wordpress.com

Manchester City 3 Tottenham 2. Spurs Leaning to the Left Denies Bale the Right Type of Service.

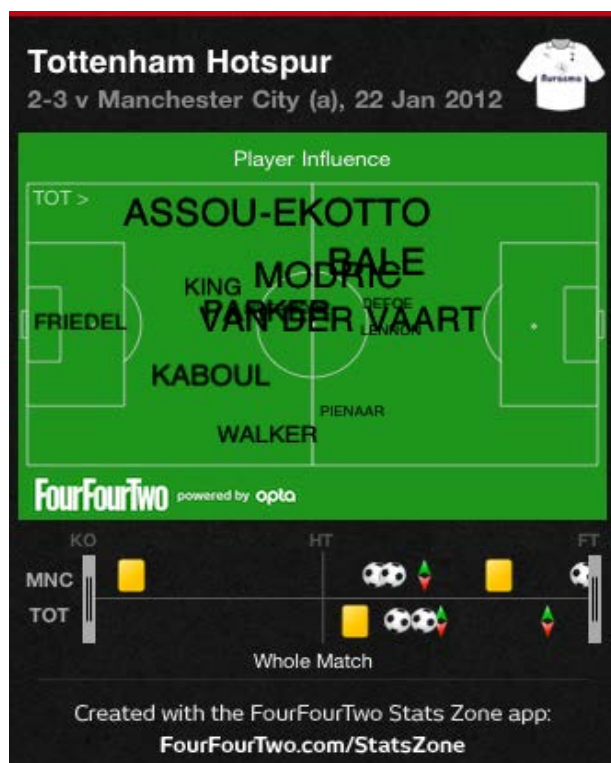


Kyle Walker is a player who matured greatly at Aston Villa last year, but the performance of Assou Ekotto showed he is far from the tactical finished article. Whilst Assou Ekotto combined left flank flair and verve with the ability to go shoulder to shoulder with the mighty Micah Richards, Walker was an increasingly frustrated battering ram. Although Walker's pass completion rate of 76% was 4 higher than Assou Ekotto, there were 61 passes attempted from the left with only 30 from the right. This caused an imbalance in attacks towards that side allowing key man Bale, whilst scoring spectacularly in the 65th minute, only four shots in the whole game, the same number as Balotelli in 25 minutes.



City Compressed for Success

The pace of Cliche on City's left helped force Walker into more defensive positions and make him think twice before making overlapping runs. Barry, Nasir, Milner and Silva played narrowly (unusual for Milner whose early career at Leeds and Villa often involved swashbuckling wide play,) denying Scott Parker the time and space to release Bale, Lennon and Defoe who would easily outpace Lescott and Savic in a foot race. Defoe's goal on sixty minutes was set up by Savic's nervous header as he found himself one on one with the Spurs speedster.



Crossing success.

This was a game with razor thin margins of difference between the teams. City had two more shots than Spurs and 2% more completed passes, but one telling stat was the eleven crosses by Spurs with none successful, whilst City completed five of their twenty three. This is partly explained when looking at the different target men. Rather than the diminutive 1 metre 70 Defoe, City had the 1 metre 93 Dzeko to aim for. A low cross for Defoe to outpace big defenders is harder to execute than hanging a ball up to a target man, but Dzeko's muted performance showed that this is not a guarantee of success either.

Substitutions.

Man City's replacement of Dzeko by Balotelli in the 65th minute illustrated the big German's increasing isolation up front. With only 2 shots (both off target) and little interplay with Aguero, Spurs had just equalized and were flying. The enigmatic Italian needed to slow the game down in central midfield and stop Spurs maintaining their rhythm and momentum.

Three minutes later Harry replied by substituting a fading Van Der Vaart for young Livermore. Partly replying to Mancini's move, Livermore is a deep lying midfielder, but his energy and pace were an asset at a time when Spurs could sense a victory. It nearly came as Defoe toe poked a shot wide from a Bale cross just before the dramatic end. By the 88th minute Redknapp had clearly anticipated a draw with his replacement of the mercurial Lennon by the tough tackling Pienaar. Tactics and reality don't always play well together ...

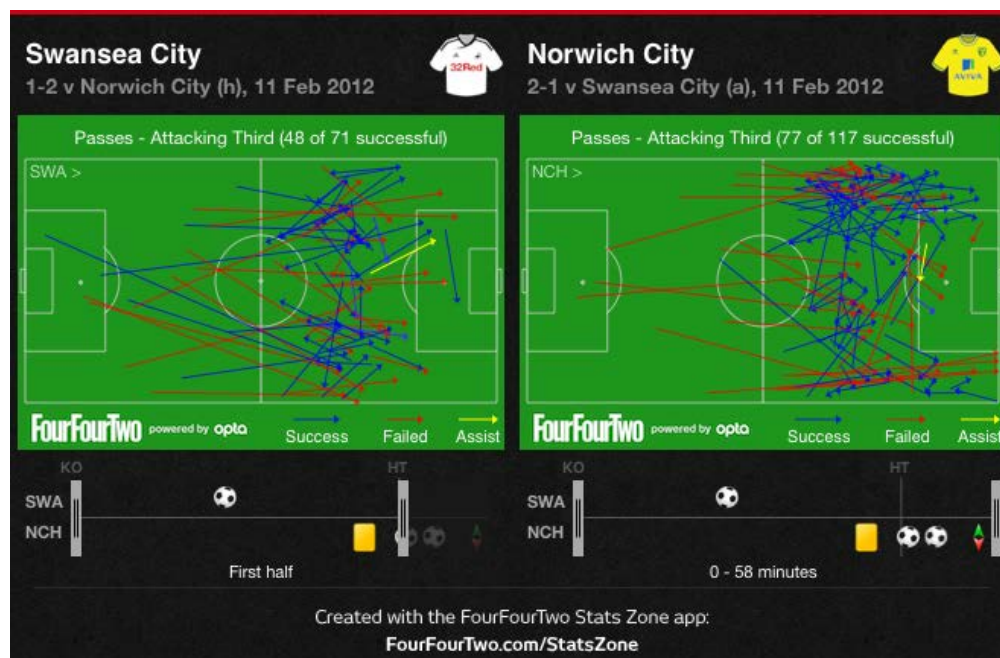
By Matt Riley – Harrow International School, Bangkok. You can read more of Matt's articles on his blog at www.absolutethaifootball.wordpress.com

Away from Middle Eastlands, this season is a tale of two Cities. Swansea in tenth and Norwich in ninth lost only one of their last five league games. The Canaries have, in Grant Holte, a burly throwback striker combining the battering ram from his Shrewsbury Town days with the quick feet that bamboozled Everton defenders last December. Both sides recently lost to resurgent Sunderland but the two coaches, Irishman Brendan Rogers (who signed a new three year contract this week) and Scotsman Paul Lambert insist on style with substance, signing players that fit into an attractive, dynamic system.

A Higher Tempo Turns Weaknesses to Strengths Swansea City 2 Norwich City 3

The First Half.

Norwich started with much more possession than their host, concentrating on attacks down the left midfield channel. Swansea, by playing Williams and Caulker deep gave Norwich no freedom, but coped well with crosses. Norwich played a higher defensive line to pressurize top scorer and lone striker Graham. However, this created space behind the Canaries' back line that Sigurdsson and Dyer exploited to excellent effect. The Swansea goal on 23 minutes was a neat summary of the defensive decisions and their consequences. A disguised reverse pass by Sigurdsson to Dyer in a central position was then laid off to Graham in the left channel to powerfully drive home past Ruddy. Norwich's larger and stronger players found Swansea's pace and angles troublesome. It makes the higher defensive line surprising when the angles and movement of Swansea kept the Norwich defenders from interacting effectively with their midfield. Drury's frustration showed resulting in his 43rd minute yellow card for a crude lunge on the mercurial Dyer. Norwich had plenty of possession and forward passes, but too often they were executed without menace.



The Second

Half.

Norwich's immediate increase of tempo meant their high defensive line allied to faster passing and pressure on the ball carrier caused panic amongst the Swansea defence, especially for the second goal which Pilkington will claim, but was an own goal. The harassing of the Swansea players in possession gave the previously influential Dyer and Sigurdsson far less effective possession, leading to Drury's substitution in the 57th minute.

Player Influence.

Despite his thoughtless shirt pull for the Swansea penalty on 87 minutes, Grant Holt had an extremely influential game. As well as scoring the third goal, his hold up play and distribution was excellent.

The shape of player influence altered as Norwich increased their tempo. In the first half, with much of the play concentrating on the left side, Bennett and Martin on the right had less input in attacking moves. However, in the game as a whole, the influence points were much more centralized as Norwich seized the opportunity to pressurize the deep lying Swansea defenders.



For Swansea, a positive first half display was reflected in strength through the middle, whereas overall the wide play of Rangel was effective, but the influence of the players he tried to find in the centre diminished.

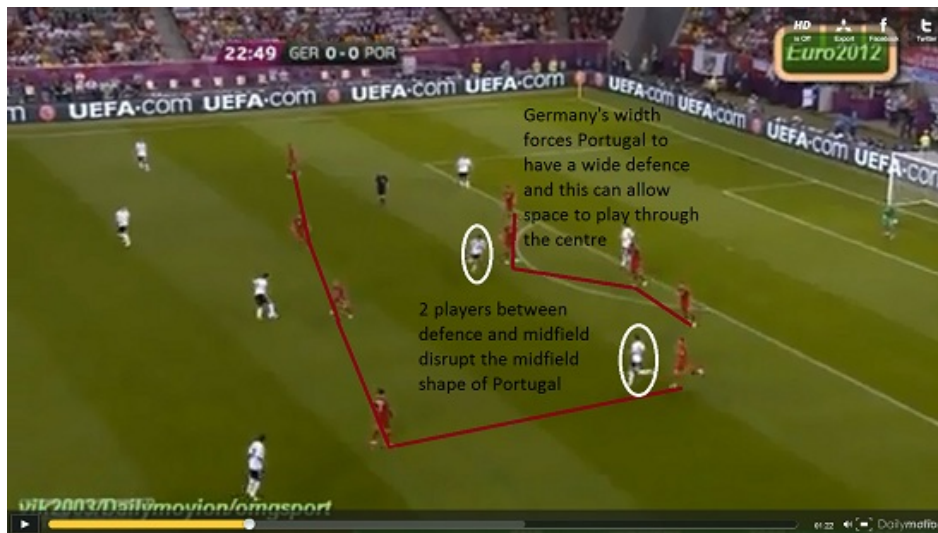


We know that you are interested in tactical analysis and insight so we included this excerpt from Stevie Grieve's new book, "[Winning Soccer Tactics](#)". The book breaks down every game of the Euro 2012 Championship and provides exercises that help to reinforce specific aspects observed in the game.

Germany v Portugal

Germany are in the media billed "Group of Death" with fellow big guns, Holland, Portugal and Denmark. Germany are 4th, Holland 5th, Denmark 9th and Portugal 10th in the World Rankings, so this could bring out some quality football matches. In Germany's first match, they faced off against a strong Portugal team including Cristiano Ronaldo, who scored 60 goals last season for La Liga Winners Real Madrid, including the 1st time a player in La Liga has scored against every team in the league in 1 season. Other notable players for Portugal include Nani, Pepe, Joao Moutinho, Miguel Veloso and Fabio Coentrao.

Germany's width allows attacking variety



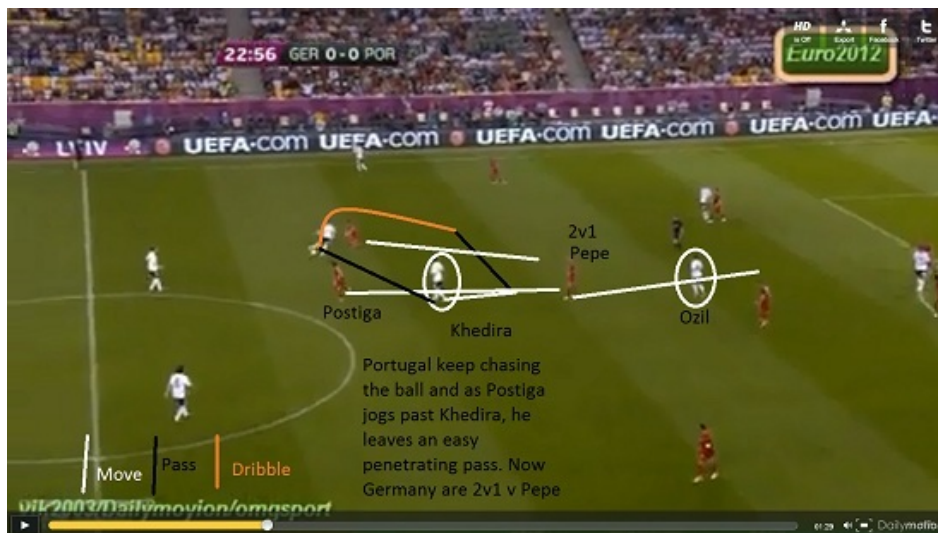
Germany has Lahm wide on the left, with Podolski on the left side inside the box, holding the left back narrow. The Portugal midfield has an ok defensive shape but they have left a massive space between the midfield and back 4. Khedira is in possession with Pepe pressing, and Postiga covering inside to his right. Muller is the player circled in the centre, with Ozil on the right of centre. Ozil and Muller will be switching positions in this movement.

Drawing the midfield forward



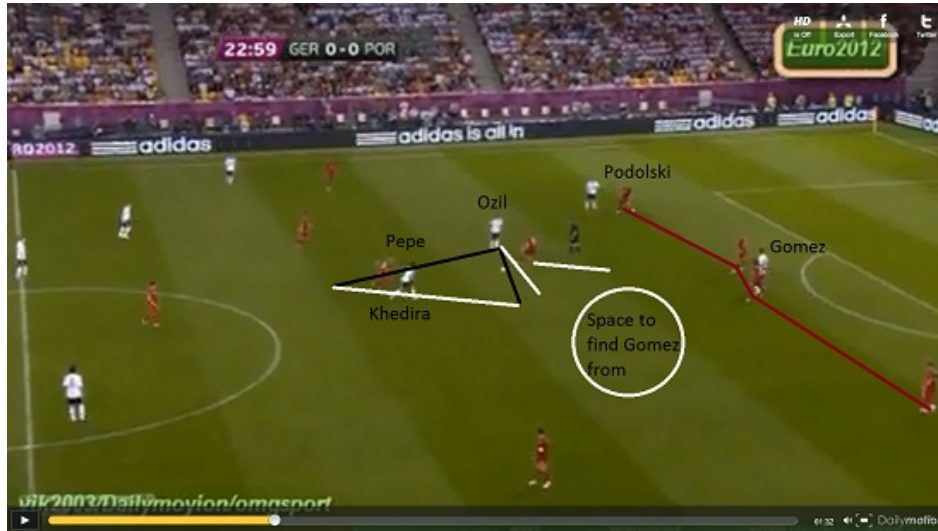
As Germany's midfield drop's deeper, Boateng and Lahm the full backs, stay wide and stretch Nani and Ronaldo's positions, opening up central space. As Schweinsteiger drops off to receive, Postiga and Pepe keep pushing up with them, but the back 4 stay in place, leaving too much space between the lines.

Creating a 2v1 in the centre of midfield



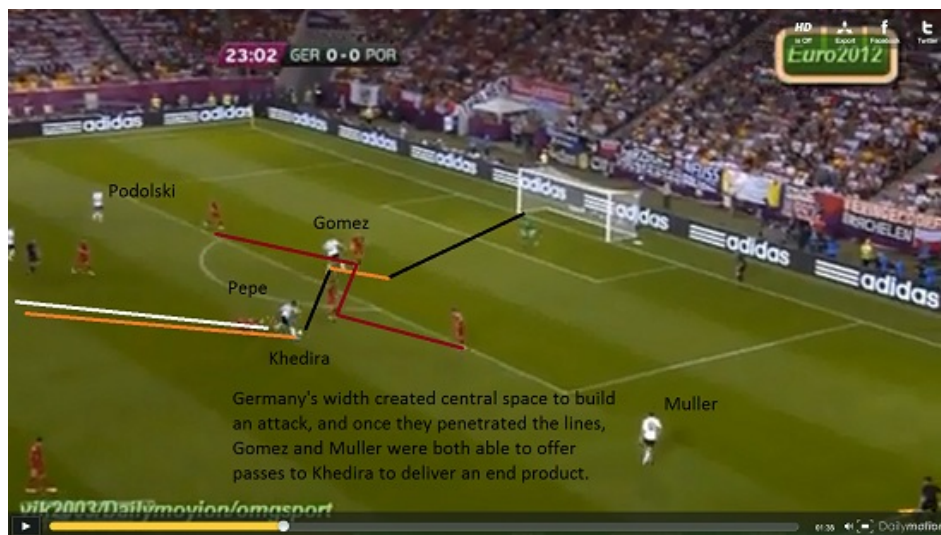
As Khedira passes over to Schweinsteiger, Schweinsteiger turns away from the pressure applied by Moutinho, and passes between Postiga and Moutinho, creating a 2v1 with Ozil v Pepe.

Playing a 1-2 into space



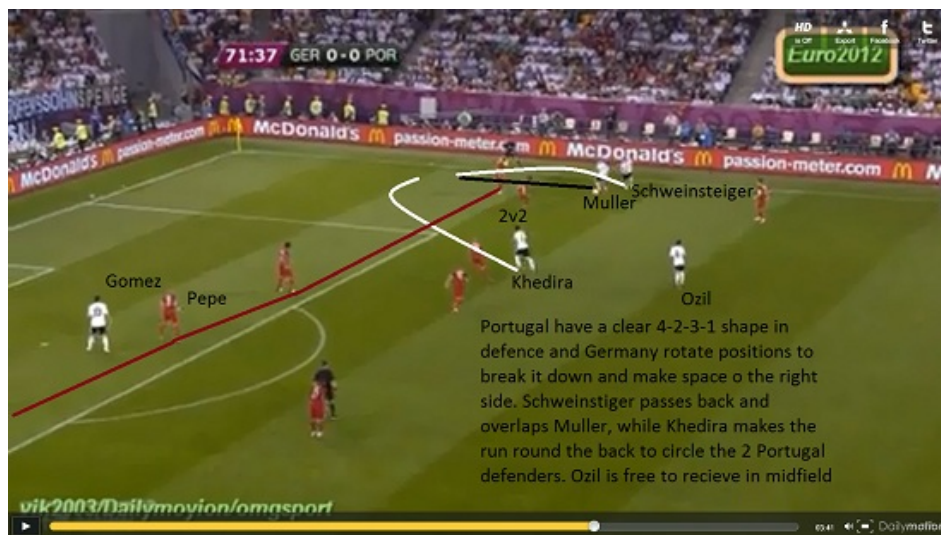
Khedira turns and as Ozil offers wide of Pepe, they play a 1-2 and get past Pepe easily. Veloso has pressed Ozil but this has left a large space to attack for Khedira once he receives the return pass. The left back can't step out and close down the space for Khedira's 1-2 as he has had to drop deep and wider, as the position of Muller makes it easy for a pass to be played wide into Muller if he goes out to press Khedira.

Decision making around the box



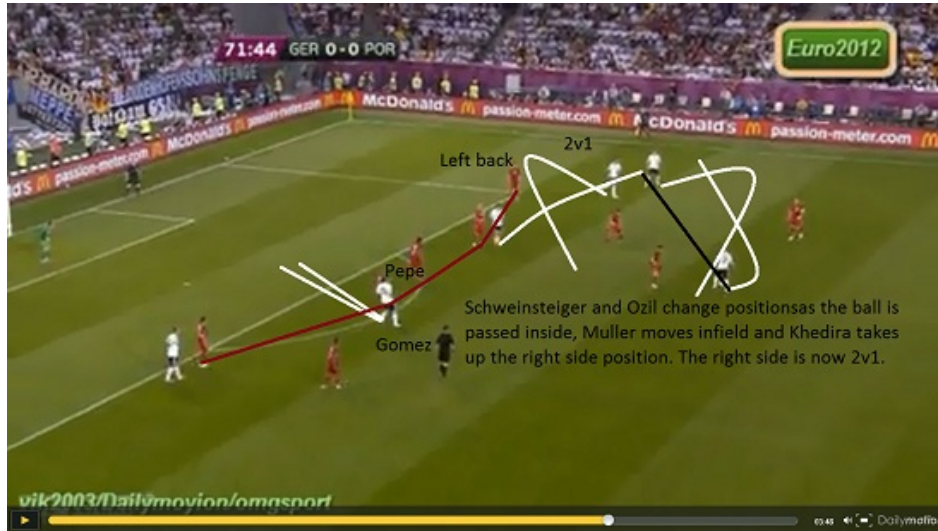
As Khedira receives, he drives into space with the ball. Pepe chases him back and makes a late tackle, which is given for a free kick as Khedira passes to Gomez. Gomez turns with the ball and scores into the far post, but play is pulled back for a free kick for Pepe's tackle. Khedira's run has made the left back tuck in to enable pressure on the ball, and Khedira's options would both allow an end product – Touch and cross or dribble into the box by Muller, or turn and shoot from Gomez.

Gomez's Goal – Positional Rotation in the wide area



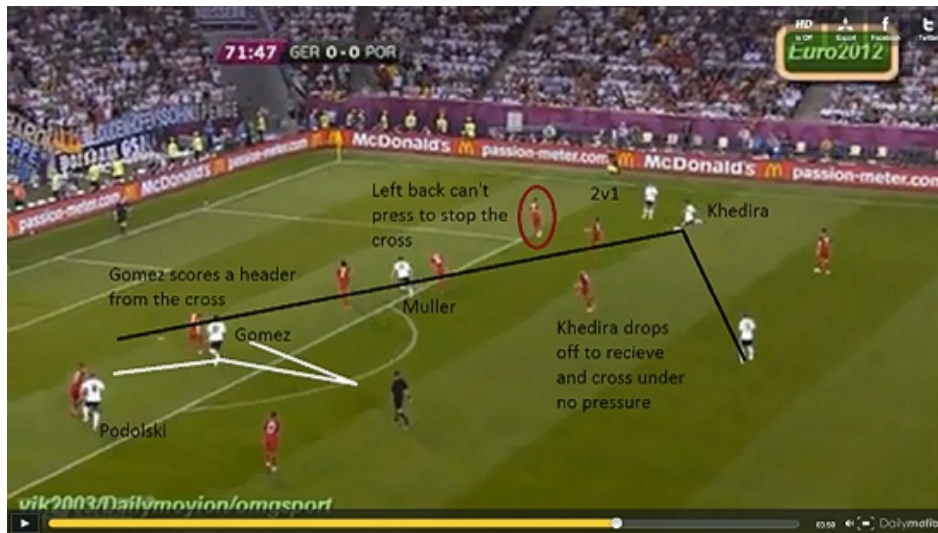
Portugal have a clear 4-2-3-1 defensive shape, with the left back and left central midfielder playing 2v2 with Muller and Schweinsteiger. As Schweinsteiger passes back to Muller, he overlaps Muller, while Khedira makes a circle run round the back to maintain the 2v2 scenario. Ozil is free in space to pass inside to.

Rotation to create spaces



As Khedira circles round, Schweinsteiger quickly moves into Ozil's position and receives the pass from Muller. Muller moves inside to the edge of the box to occupy the holding midfielder – now creating a potential 2v1 scenario on the left back. Gomez has checked outside the box to keep Pepe moving. Podolski has maintained width on the far side, keeping the right back occupied.

Gomez scores from wide position cross

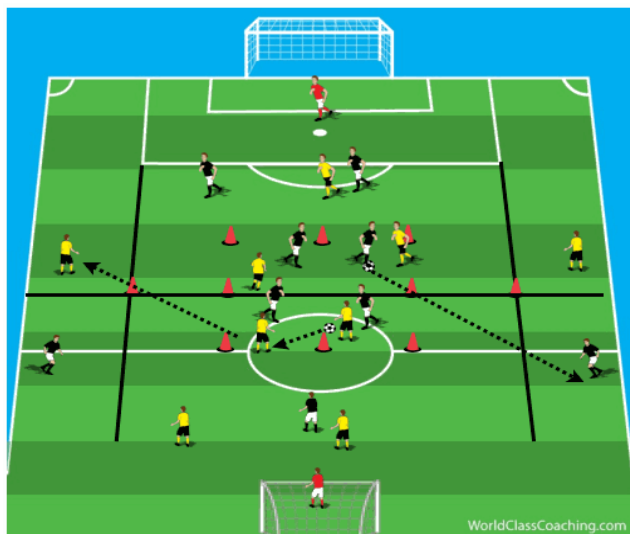


As Khedira drops off, Schweinsteiger returns the ball to the right side where there is a 2v1 against the left back. He doesn't come out to press and Khedira is allowed to cross under no pressure for Gomez to score.

Training session to develop width

Start the session with a 3v2 end line scenario with a central midfielder receiving from a deep pass or from the defence, with 2 attackers who pull wide and stretch the defence, and ask for open passing lanes and to stay wide to offer a route around the defence or to create central space for a dribble.

Transition to wide attack



Set up a field with 2 wide zones in each half, with a square with 2 sections. In each section, the attacking team must keep possession playing 2v2 inside a 10 v 15 yard square. Once the opposition team win possession, they must quickly switch play into the opposite half to one of the wide attackers, who will take a touch and cross for his sole team mate inside the box.

Coaching Points: Transition to attack from a wide area

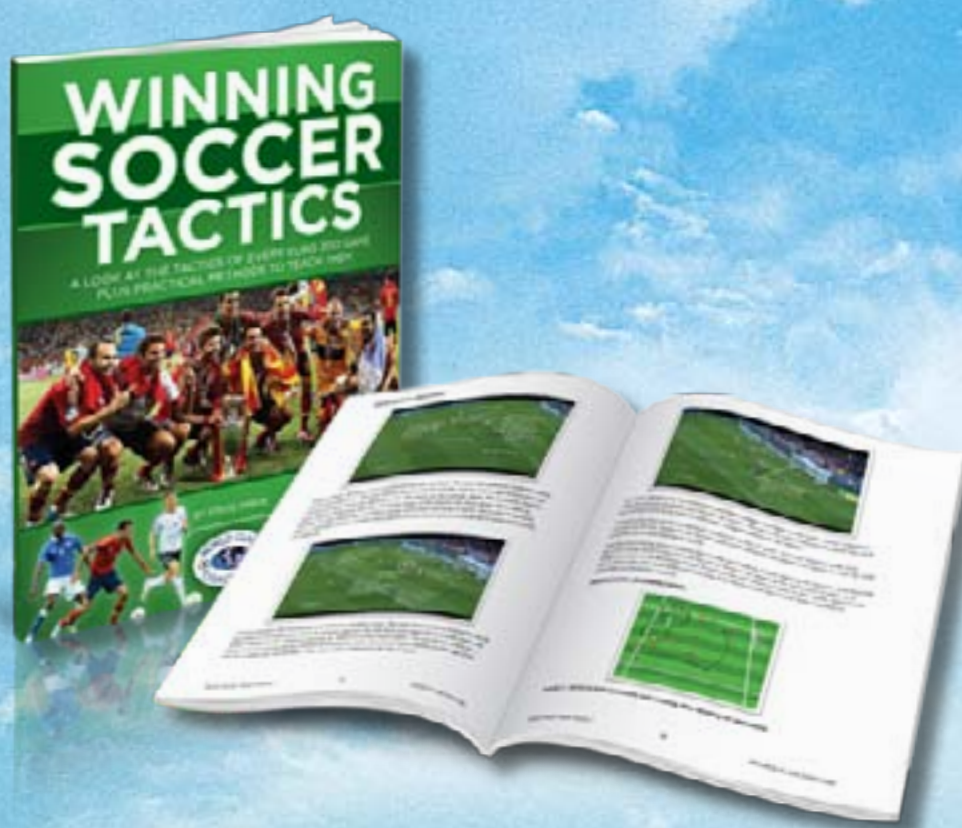
- As soon as the ball is won, quickly pass forward and wide into a team mate
- Team mate looks for a quality delivery after making himself some space
- Timing of the runs with support runs (overlaps and deep late runs)
- If unable to cross due to pressure, fake to cross and dribble 1v1 to find space to cross

Progressions/Variations:

- Use the whole square and play 3v3 inside the square, the 1st team to 4 passes gets to switch and attack
- Allow support runs from the centre and recovery runs from centre and from the other wide player
- Allow 1 of the defenders to press the wide player as the ball is passed
- Allow an attacker to overlap and make a 2v1 scenario in the wide zone

Progress to allowing a 2nd defender to support the wide player if necessary

Winning Soccer Tactics



Winning Soccer Tactics analyses the reasons for Russia's early flight home along with all the other valuable coaching lessons on view at Euro 2012. Every single game is analyzed one by one to explain the tactics and styles of play that enabled teams to progress, and the weakness that led to others dropping out. In addition, every chapter features soccer drills for coaching your team in the playing style and tactics that were victorious in each game.

Click on this page to learn more about
Winning Soccer Tactics



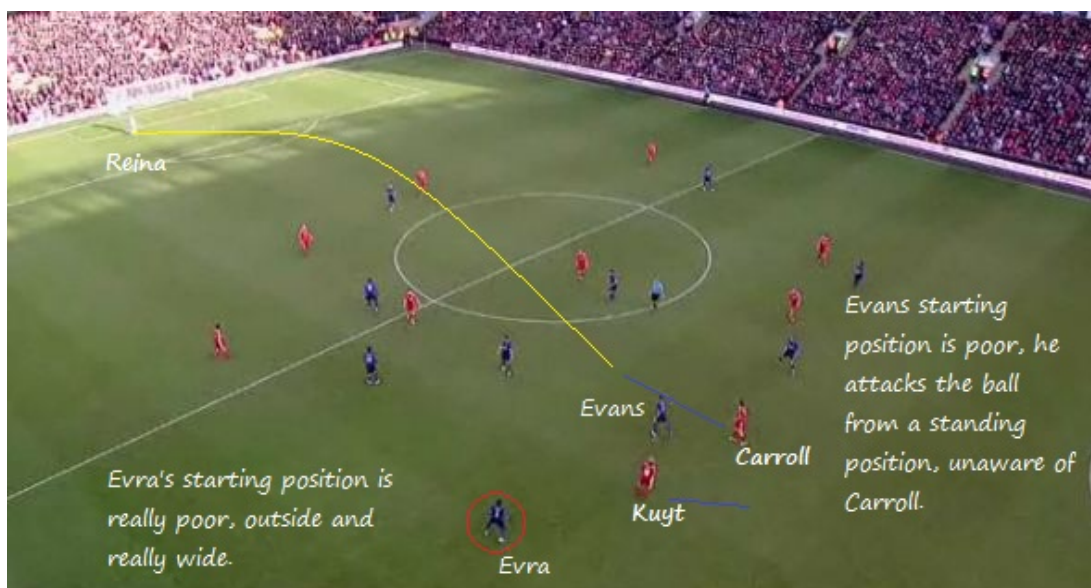
Shocking Defending costs Manchester United

Patrice Evra holds the blame for Liverpool's late winner this weekend in the FA Cup 4th round. Evra has made some poor defensive mistakes recently, this weekend cost Manchester United a place in the 5th round of the FA Cup.

Below, I've outlined his key movements during Liverpool's second goal.

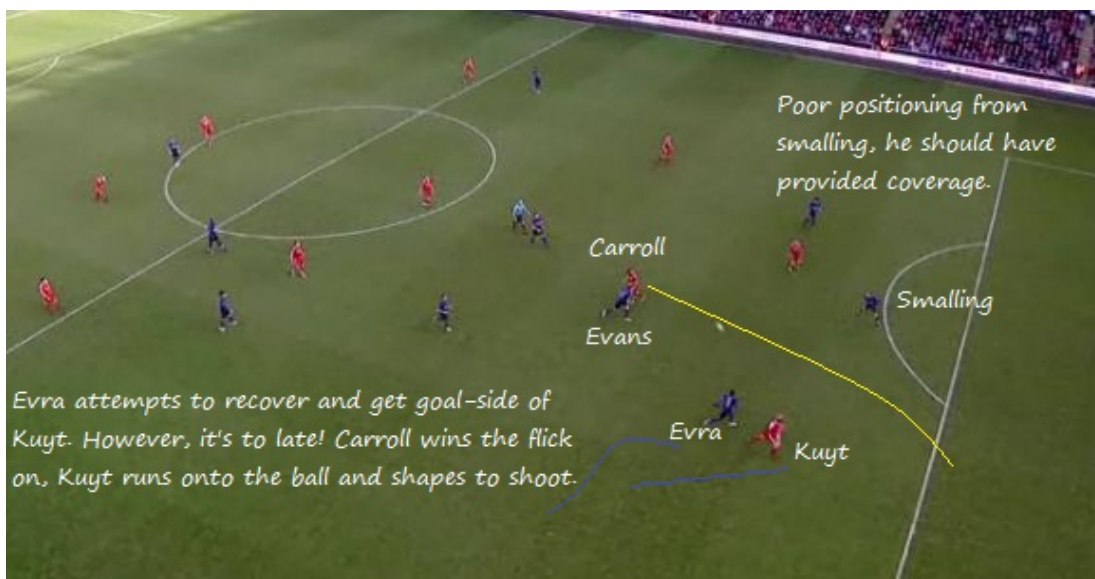
Evra – Out of position (Part 1)

Evra's starting position is really poor. With minutes remaining in the game he needs to be more compact



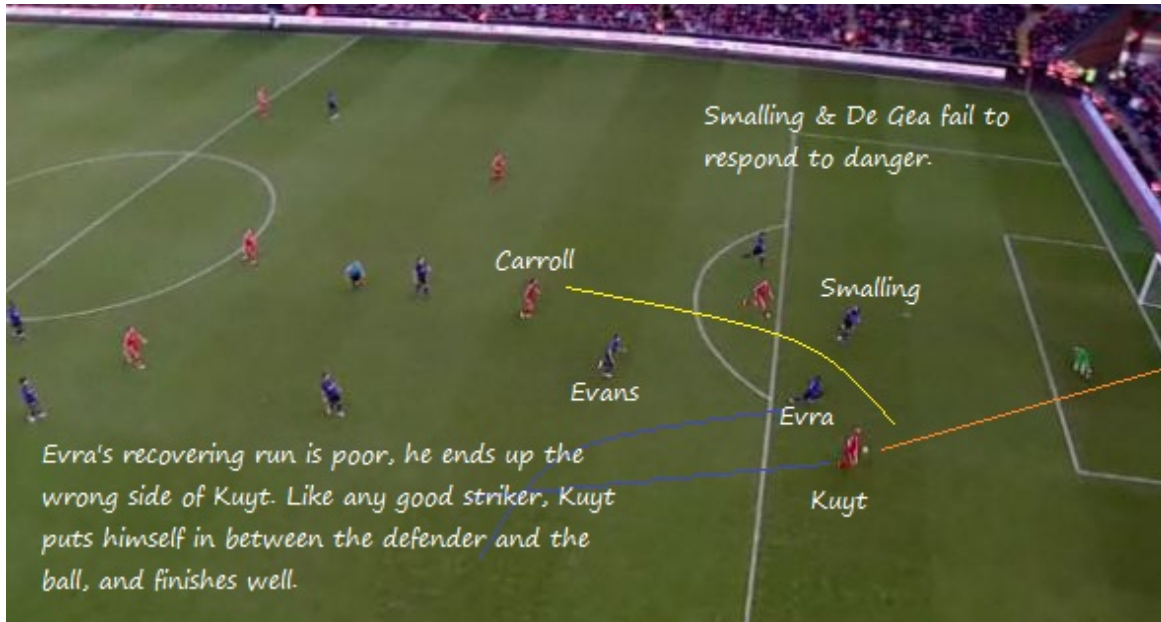
Evra – Out of position (Part 2)

Carroll wins the header and sets up Kuyt. Smalling fails to recover and Evra's recovery is too late.



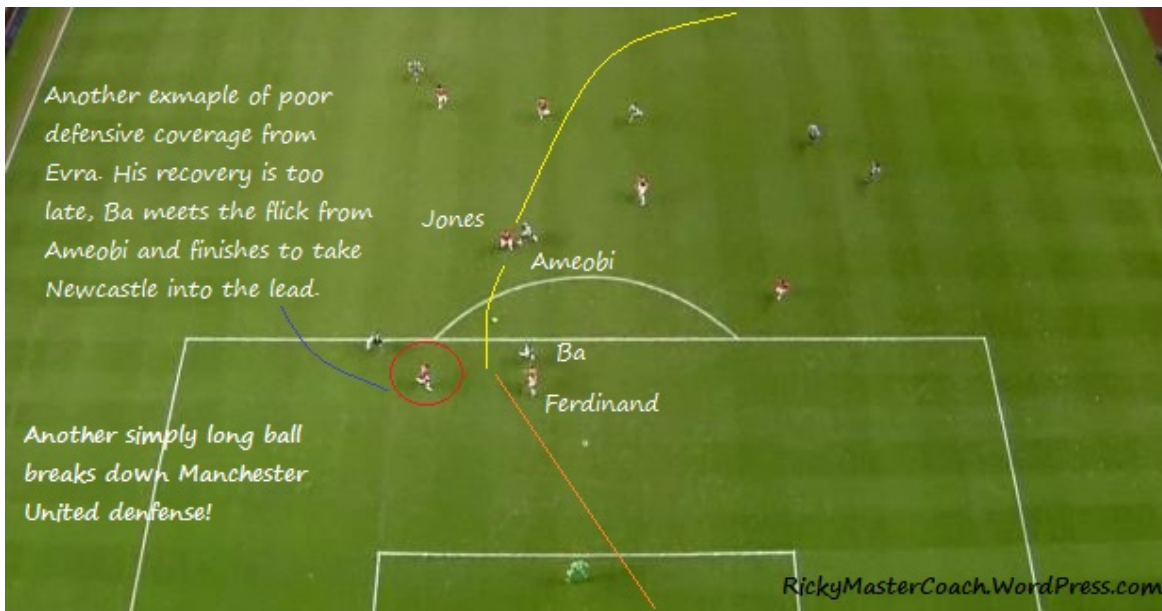
Evra – Out of position (Part 3)

If Evra tackles Kuyt, it could result in a penalty or a sending off. Kuyt manages to finish and win for Liverpool.

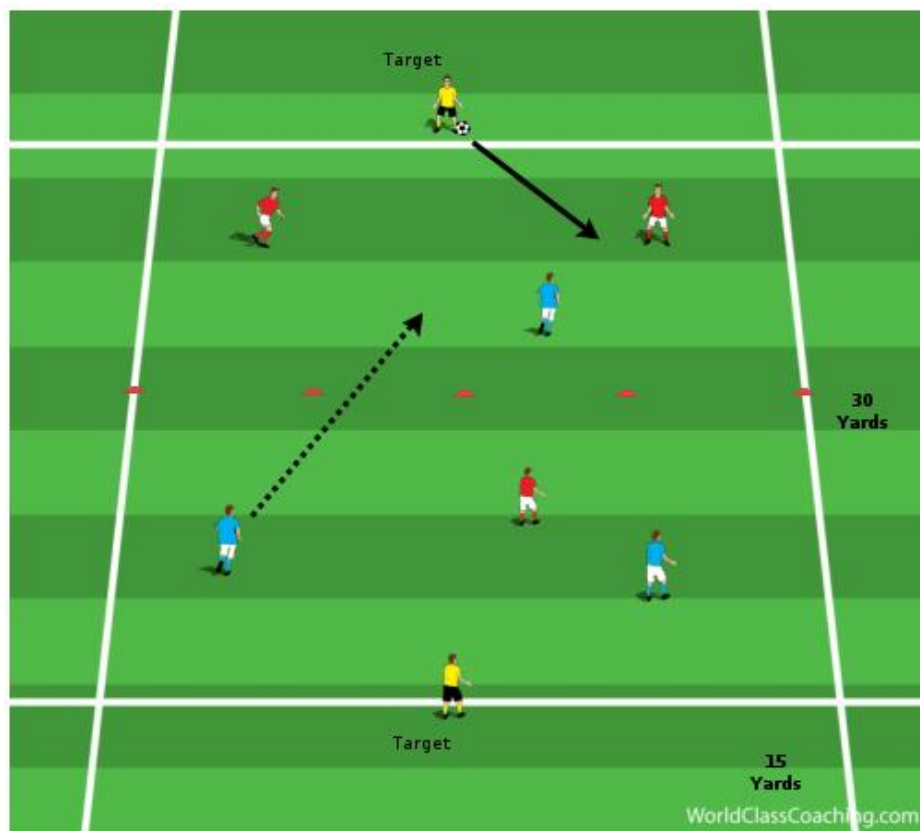


Evra – Out of Position (Another Example vs Newcastle)

Here is a good example of poor positioning from Evra. Here, Ameobi wins the flick on, Evra doesn't remain compact, and Ba scores to take Newcastle into the lead.



Patrice Evra – Improve Decision Making in Defense



Session Outline

The team is split into 2v1's, in a small 15v15 grid. Each grid has a target player; the game will always start with a pass from the target player.

1. The Blue defender puts immediate pressure on the ball, and receives support from another player in the opposite grid.
2. Red team in possession should always play forward into the supporting player, who looks to receive, turn, and then find the opposite target player.

Coaching Points

- Knowing when to pressure the ball (player has head down, poor first touch).
- Where to pressure the ball (curved runs to cut down passing choices).
- Supporting defender must be compact (don't allow space in behind the defensive lines).
- Look to intercept, rather than tackle (helps to attack faster, if you win possession).
- Read visual cues (body movement to suggest a pass).

Ricky Clarke is a USSF 'A' License, USSF Youth License and NSCAA Master Diploma coach. Ricky is the DOC of Mission Valley United, leading several teams to state championships. Ricky also coaches for the Northern California ODP programs and is a state course instructor and NSCAA associate staff coach. Visit [his Blog here](#).

Is it 'world class' movement or horrible defending...you decide?

These two teams never fail to produce boring games, this weekend's games wasn't any different. The game had everything, game finishes, poor ref decisions, fantastic passes and terrible defending. Personally, I think the movement and passing was world class, let me know your thoughts?

Below I've outlined some of the key moments in this game.

Welbeck – Out of position Cahill penalty chance

Ryan Giggs is given way too much on the ball. Welbeck starts his run behind Cahill. It's a poor starting position from Cahill given the amount of time Ryan Giggs has. Welbeck runs across Cahill and exposes Cahill's poor defensive positioning.



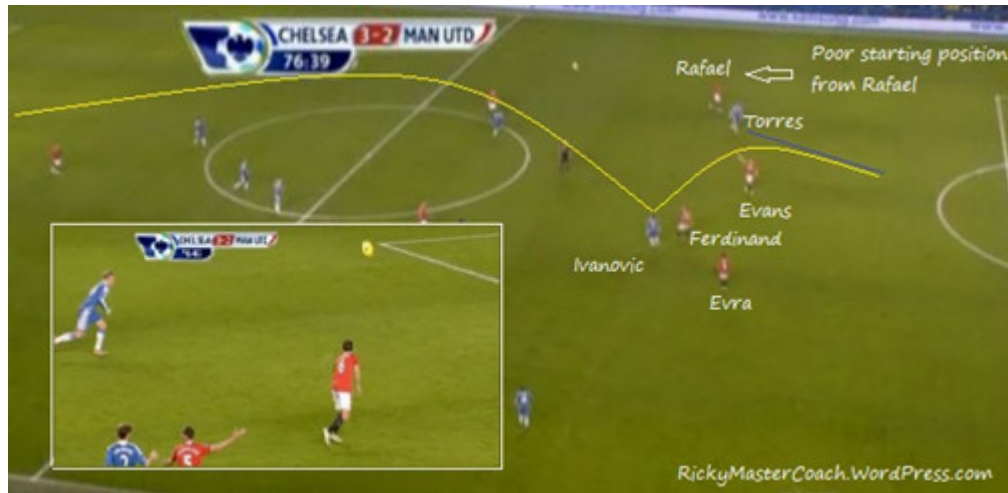
Sturridge – Out of position for Rooney penalty

Ryan Giggs is given way too much time on the ball...again. Welbeck's movement inside creates room for Evra to attack. Sturridge is caught the wrong side of Evra, his poor tackle is a result of this starting position.



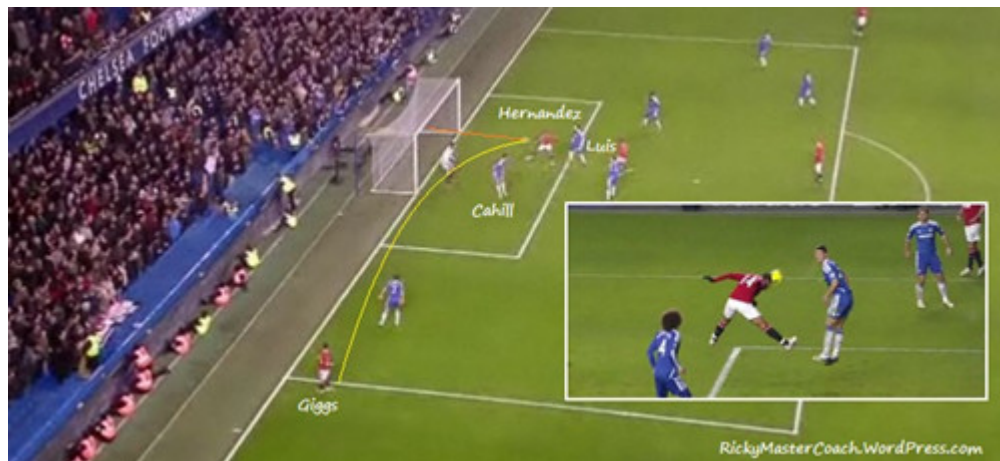
Evans – Out of position for Torres chance

Jonny Evans starting position is very high given the long ball that's just been played. Evans isn't even looking for Torres, his eyes are 'ball watching', plus Rafael's starting position is way too wide. Torres should have scored!



Luis & Cahill – Out of Position for Hernandez Goal

As the ball is played out wide, Cahill can be seen directing Luis to mark Hernandez. However, with a perfect pass from Giggs, both Chelsea defenders forget to mark and Hernandez finds the seam to finish with a header. Poor positioning from Luis, he's looking forward and should be able to deal with the pressure.



Key Man of the Match

This game exposed some serious defensive mistakes. However, Ryan Giggs was at the center of everything for Manchester United. He made three out of the four passes listed above, and his influence still continues to help Manchester United achieve results.

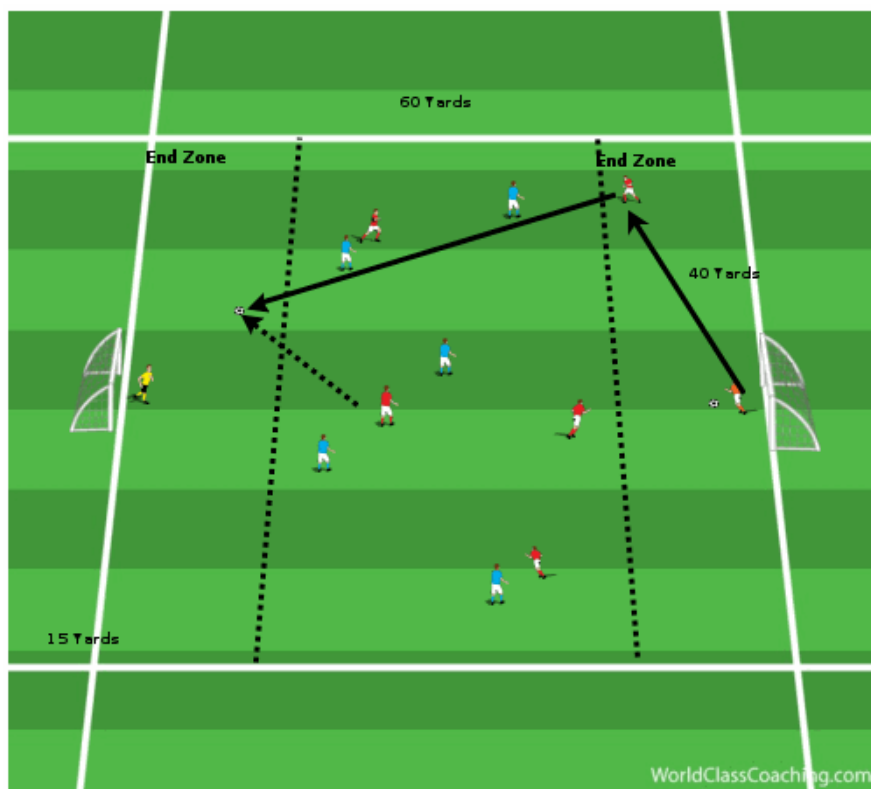
The session below outlines developing the 'Killer Pass' like Ryan Giggs.

Ryan Giggs See below his influence on the game.



Developing a Killer Pass

The ability to defend against quick passing and electric movement will test the skills of defenders at any level.



Session Outline

The field is split into three grids with the teams playing 5v5 + gk's.

3. The game always starts with the GK rolling the ball out to an unopposed defender, dropping off into the end zone.
4. The defender can dribble or pass into the middle attacking zone. The defender should be looking to retain possession, but find a pass into a runner attacking the end zone.
5. The blue team can't defend the runner, until the ball has entered the end zone.
6. Off-side rule applies in the end zone.

Progressions

- Add supporting players to the attacking team.

Coaching Points

- The player in possession, always looking to play forward through seams.
- Movement and support based on ball rotation.
- Cultured passing, curved, chipped and disguised passes in the attacking part of the field.

Ricky Clarke is a USSF 'A' License, USSF Youth License and NSCAA Master Diploma coach. Ricky is the DOC of Mission Valley United, leading several teams to state championships. Ricky also coaches for the Northern

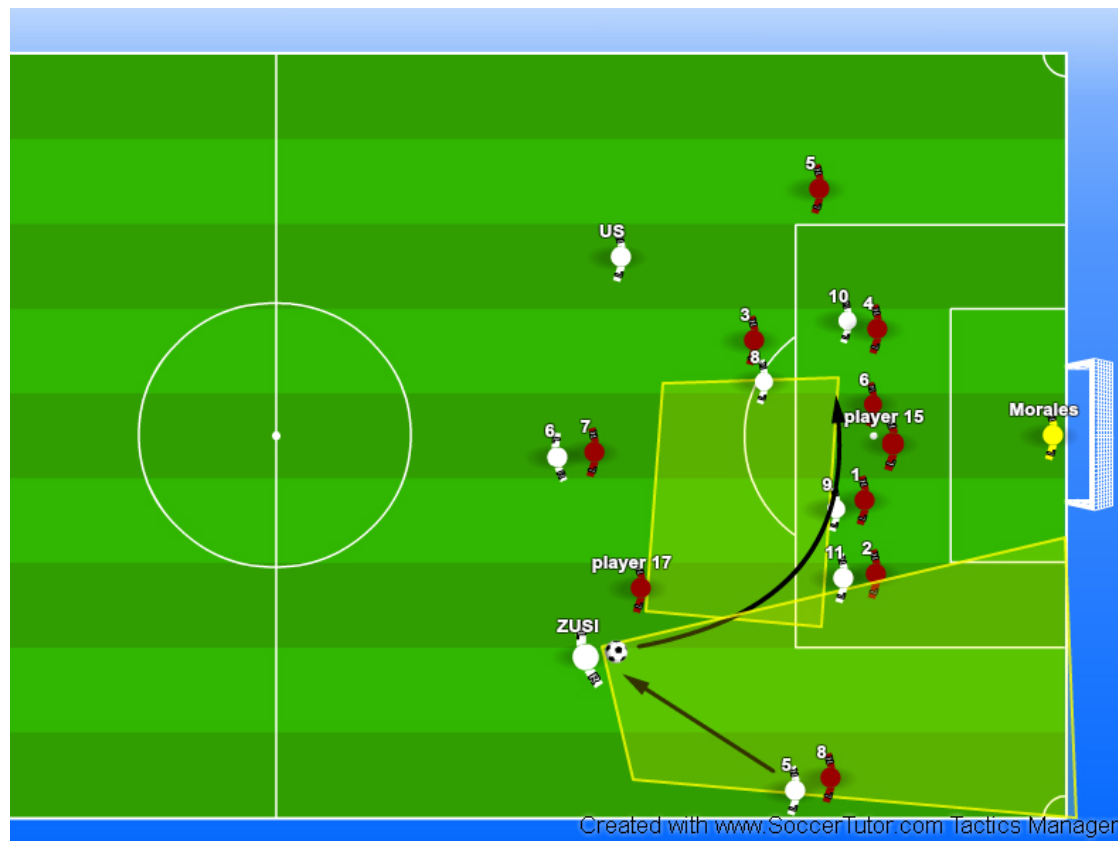
California ODP programs and is a state course instructor and NSCAA associate staff coach. Visit [his Blog here](#).

USA MNT LACK OF ATTACK LACK

After watching our US MNT take on Venezuela, one thing struck me above all others; The US MNT has a problem with coming up with more than one way to attack. The US had many possessions end with the front 4 stopping somewhere around the 18 or 22 yd line and whipping less than quality balls into the penalty area or passing them out of bounds. The modern game today is more dynamic and multi dimensional in all phases. The US MNT is not.

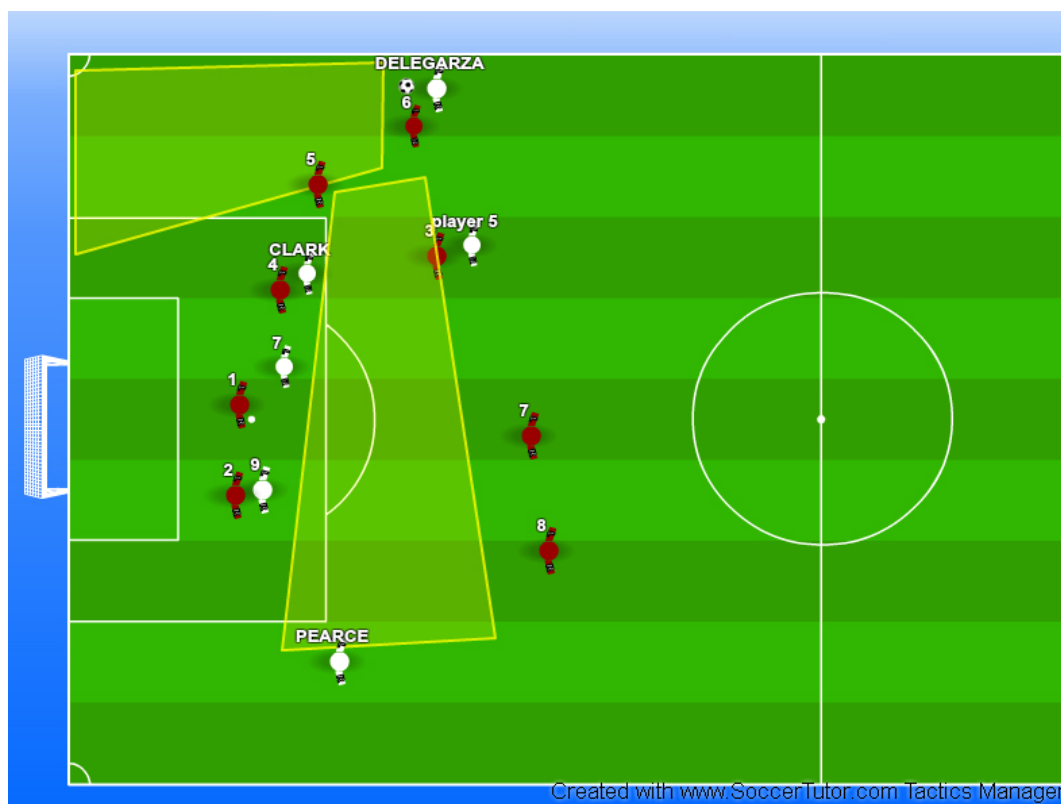
The refusal of the US to use the full length of the pitch limits the players' abilities and the chances of scoring. Delagarza, Zusi, Bunbury, Feilhaber, Shea, and Pearce showed zero interest in attacking the goal line from wide positions. Players must take advantage of the flanks and attack the goal lines as well as attacking the spaces in front of the penalty area.

Another area not exploited was the space between the back 4 and the midfielders of Venezuela. A perfect example was the free kick by Zusi in the 26 minute (I almost fell out of my chair when Twellman commented he would not be surprised if Zusi shot). The initial ball in was well played and the header by Shea saved by Morales, the rebounded ball found its way back to Zusi, by way of Cameron, who could have played a penetrating pass into Bunbury at the 16 and had many options on the ground.



Venezuela at that moment had 5 players behind the 14 yard line and a gap between the mid field defense and backs of about 30 yards as well as a 3v2 crossing opportunity on the right flank with Bunbury and Cameron. Instead a poorly crossed ball was played into no one and cleared away. Zusi did not even look to attack any other way besides crossing from the early position in front of 5 backs. It does not even make sense to say this much less act it out.

At the 60 minute mark Pearce made an attempt to dribble around the defense to the goal line resulting in a corner. Even with the obvious 2 handed holding and tackling of the US players by Venezuela (an apparent rule difference between the Mexican Federation and FIFA) the US was dangerous on free kicks. Almost 100% of the time the tactic of cutting the ball back at the 20 and crossing early balls was used. Either coach K is not getting his ideas across or there is instruction not to tactically attack the goal lines. Most of the attacks were us players not penetrating past the 18 yard line and swinging balls in or losing possession.



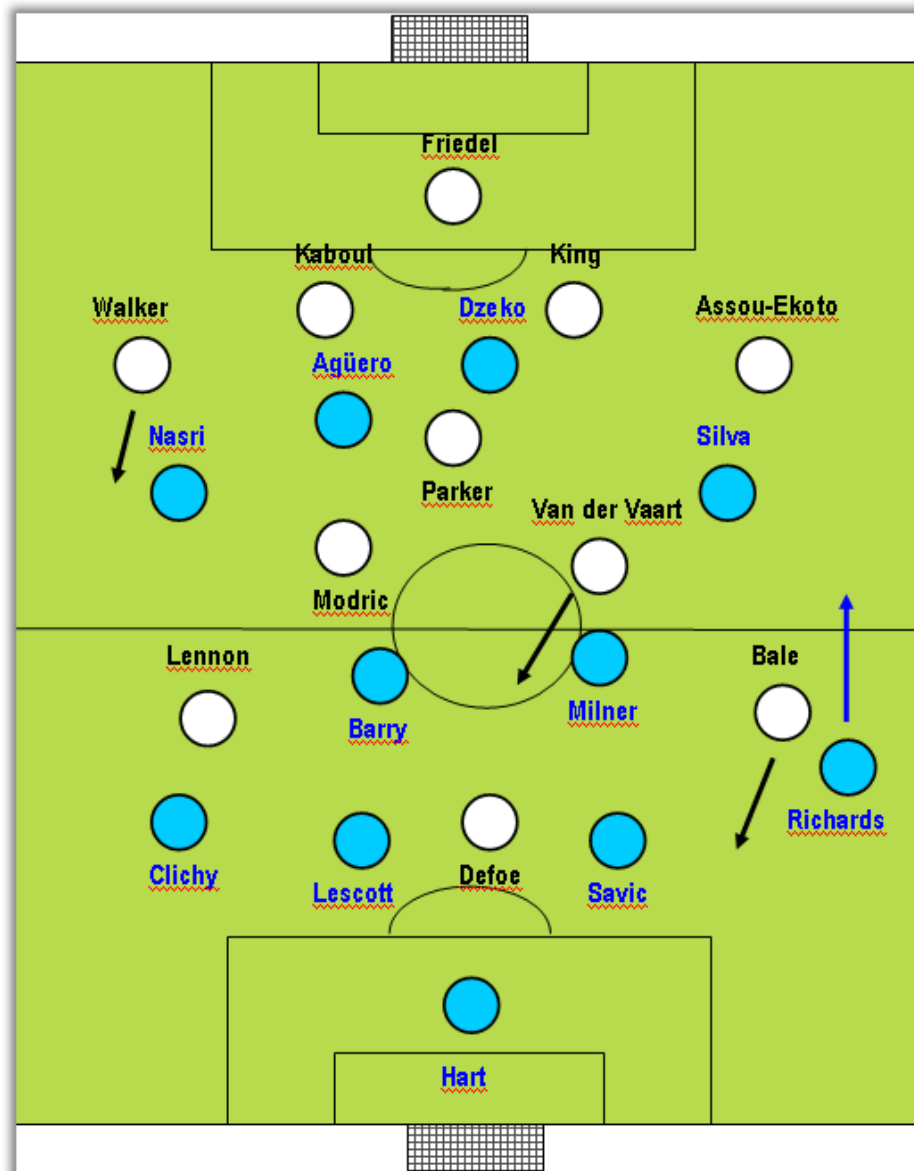
We can bemoan another poorly refereed USMNT match, or say how “unlucky” the US was when it came to scoring, but the simple truth is the USMNT does not look to be imaginative and tactically aware in the attack. Our forward players do not move, when they receive the ball they turn and go forward instead of creating odd man attacks, and our back players do not come up in the attack and support enough. I want to see our boys stop running into the invisible wall at the 18 yard line and use the whole pitch to attack. Otherwise we will be watching the others in the quarter finals and beyond yet again. Wake up coach!

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The Official Academy of Greek Sports Giant Panathinaikos F.C.

City Dominate, Suffer and Win It (Very) Late

By Vasco Mota Pereira – Coach, FEUP University, Portugal and assistant coach for Futsal Club Infante Sagres.



In what could prove to be a decisive match for Tottenham's title hopes, the match between Manchester City and Tottenham was very interesting indeed, with numerous tactical nuances and an uncertain outcome. Mancini left out De Jong, playing Barry and Milner in the middle instead, with Agüero just behind Dzeko, who also got the nod. Spurs went with what seemed to be an attacking lineup, but it proved otherwise.

With both teams wary of each other's potential, the first few minutes were a bit of a standoff. Both Barry and Milner lack Yaya Touré's attacking drive in the final third, which meant that it was up to Silva and Agüero to try and stir things up offensively. However, despite their manager's claims otherwise, Spurs were tactically aware and went for a conservative 4x1x4x1 approach, with van der Vaart side by side with

Modric (they would eventually change sides), Parker patrolling the space in front of his defense and Defoe a bit stranded up front. The chart below shows van der Vaart's limited influence in the final third throughout the match.



This meant that Modric tracked Barry and van der Vaart tracked Milner and both pairs ended up cancelling each other out of the game. The problem for Spurs came when Silva or Nasri pulled inside (Silva was the key orchestrator, as always); Spurs' wingbacks were not willing to track them down, meaning Parker had to chase them, which in turn freed Agüero.



Spurs' midfield, with Parker behind Modric and van der Vaart

As for the Londoners' offense, Adebayor's absence was key. Even though Defoe has improved his link-up play and here tried his best to challenge Savic (a strategy what would pay off for their first goal), he just didn't provide the presence Spurs needed to hold up the ball and allow the rest of the team to join, which made the team lose the ball more and more quickly.

The second half brought a more dynamic approach from City. Even though Barry and Milner continued to stay put, the wingbacks started to push forward and, most importantly, Silva and Nasri were much more active. Their movement, together with Dzeko's, was essential for City's first goal. Silva strayed to the middle all the way from the right, Dzeko moved to the left and Nasri made a short diagonal to the middle, leaving the opposition's defense stranded, not knowing who to mark – and suddenly, there was a huge avenue right down the middle.

Even though City's second goal came from a corner, the most important aspect is the play that led to it. Silva drifted once again to the left to overload that side and was only stopped by a last-minute ditch, revealing the growing difficulties Spurs were having to know who to mark – especially with Parker often being dragged out of position.

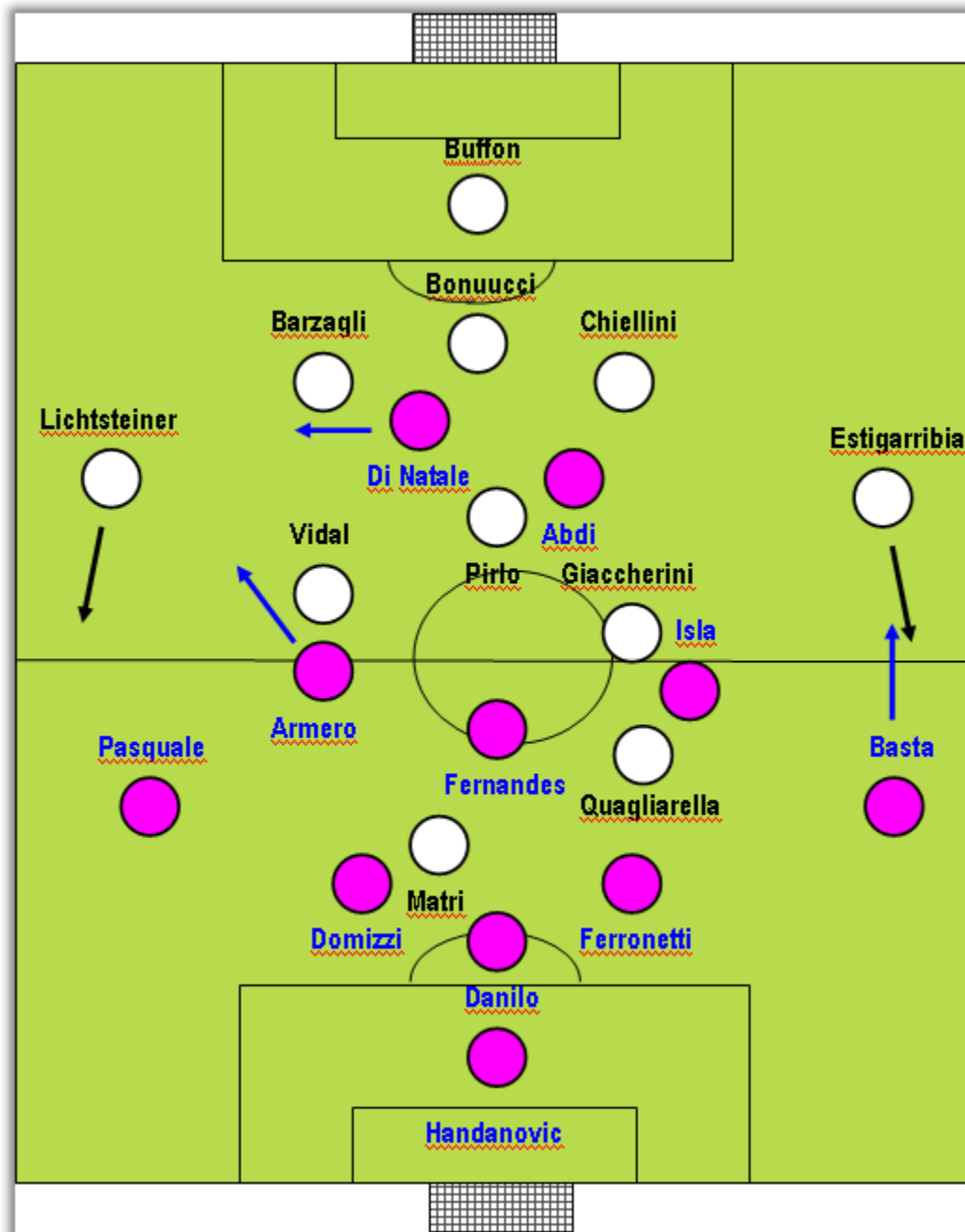
When it seemed City were in total control, Savic threw it all away two minutes later, allowing Spurs back in the game with a disastrous headed approach that left Defoe free to go around Joe Hart (who also had a terrible approach, incidentally) and score. A few minutes later, Bale equalized with a great goal, revealing a curious tendency: out of the 5 goals, 3 were the direct result of a winger pulling inside.

After that, Silva and Nasri started tiring out, meaning they were not as willing to track back, and Tottenham started pushing men forward, especially after Livermore came in for van der Vaart and brought more stability to the midfield. In fact, the penalty that gave City the victory came 30 seconds before the 5 minutes of injury time were up and Spurs had actually had the best chance to finish the game just a few minutes earlier.

In conclusion, City dominated most of the game, deserved the lead, but were not able to put the game out of reach. Spurs were very fortunate with the timing of their first goal and their conservative approach could have brought heavy consequences once again at the hands of Mancini's team. The Italian, in turn, will surely be missing Kompany's skills and leadership.

Udinese (almost) fails to show up

By Vasco Mota Pereira – Coach, FEUP University, Portugal and assistant coach for Futsal Club Infante Sagres.

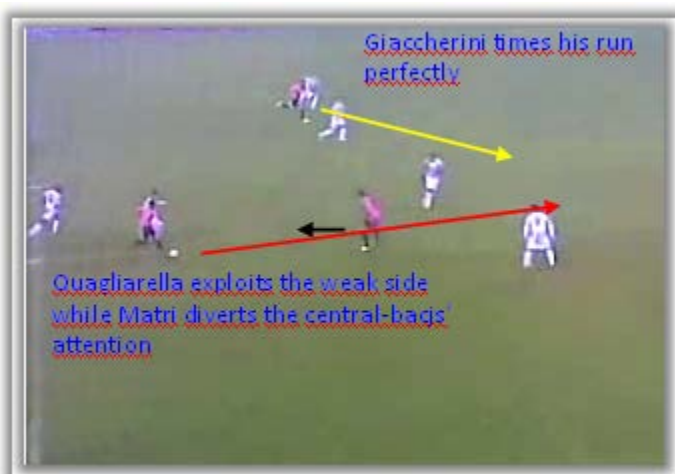


Starting lineups

Pundits (unlike myself) are often criticized for giving their opinions according to the result, and not according to what they think the game offers at that particular moment in time. The match that pit Juventus against Udinese was supposed to present two title contenders - but unfortunately only one of them showed up (for most of time, that is). In fact, the match seemed to go against what would be expected by most - myself included.

These two teams had met a little over a month ago, but this time Juve were without Pepe and Marchisio (replaced with Giaccherini and Quagliarella) and Udinese weren't able to call upon Asamoah and Pinzi). Just like the match in December 2011, Antonio Conte chose to mirror the system of Udinese, going with what can broadly be described as a 3x5x2, where as Francesco Guidolin had to reshuffle all of his midfield, which would prove decisive for the final outcome.

In the second minute, the *bianconeri* were already performing one of their trademark moves. If we compare the first clip with the first goal against Roma (second picture), we will be able to see several similarities. Even though the players finishing the moves are not starting out from the same position on the field, the principle is the same: a quick run on the weak side of the ball in order to take advantage of numerical inferiority or equality.



Udinese started out by assuming a clearly counter-attacking stance, keeping a low defensive line and choosing to be up in numbers. Pasquale's fielding on the left wing was surely intentional, since Guidolin will have wanted someone to mark Lichsteiner a bit closer. With Asamoah and Pinzi absent, Udinese found themselves with no out-ball and no one to act as a pivot, a role that Pinzi plays so well. This meant that, unlike the match in December, there was hardly anyone to take the ball up to Di Natale or Abdi, which in turn meant that Juve just kept on piling up the pressure. Armero, playing out of his natural position, tried to deputise as the exit man, but often seemed to forget that his job wasn't just motoring up the field.



As seen here, Udinese's midfield was constantly left exposed due to Armero's venturing forward

It is still strange to notice, particularly in a league as tactically aware as the Italian, how much time Andrea Pirlo is allowed on the ball. He was able to dictate the tempo and re-start the moves after Udinese throwing the ball forward, in a desperate attempt to relieve the pressure. Actually, Abdi did not exert any sort of pressure upon Pirlo (even though he seemed to have tried at first), and he even started going backwards, possibly trying to help his porous midfield. Therefore, it was no surprise that he didn't make it back on the second half - his replacement, Floro Flores, was a bit more incisive.

When Juventus scored towards the end of the first half, there was some curiosity as to what their plan B would be, given that they had been so hesitant. Oddly enough, just when everyone Juve had the game in the bag (and so it seemed to yours truly), they suddenly dozed off and let Udinese back in the game with wayward passes that mostly Isla intercepted, using those interceptions to counter-attack. Di Natale shot for the first time on 52 minutes and, only two minutes later, Floro Flores scored. Even though the goal came apparently out of Juve's own mistakes, Udinese seemed to be right where they wanted. Feeling the game was getting out of hand, Conte replaced Quagliarella (such an improvement on that particular position, when compared to the out-of-place Pepe).

Once again, Udinese's goal meant nothing and they ended up conceding precisely when it seemed that Juventus would play into their hands. After that, it was one-way traffic and the team from Udine showed that they never wanted anything more than a draw.

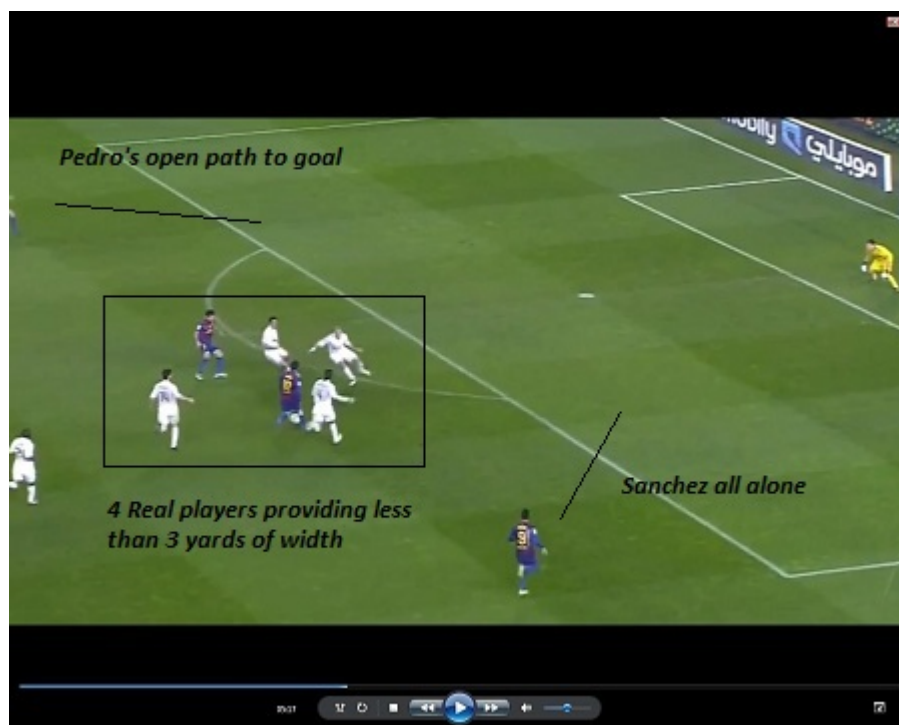
I would just like to point out two issues. The first one has to do with Matri. Almost unnoticeably, he managed to have 50 touches (Di Natale had 27, as a reference), from which he mustered 3 key passes, 5 shots (3 of which on target) and 2 goals. It doesn't get much better than that for a striker. The second issue relates to Giaccherini. Not only is he an avid scorer (he scores 1 goal every 5 games, on average), but he also has a tendency to find spaces to run into, opening spaces for himself and others to score. Definitely a player on the rise.

By Waleed Zaghloul.

Barcelona vs Real Madrid 2-2

Real Madrid has performed very well in the latest Clasico, but that was not enough to beat Barcelona. Real Madrid's high pressure style caused Barcelona a lot of trouble as they struggled to play their trademark possession football. Despite the good performance, Real Madrid could only muster a draw and had to come back from two goals down. Barcelona prove day after day that they are a phenomenal team and even though they did not play very well they still managed a draw and secured qualification into the Copa Del Rey semifinals. Evaluating the goals scored in this game will show you that Barcelona are lethal when give a small window of opportunity.

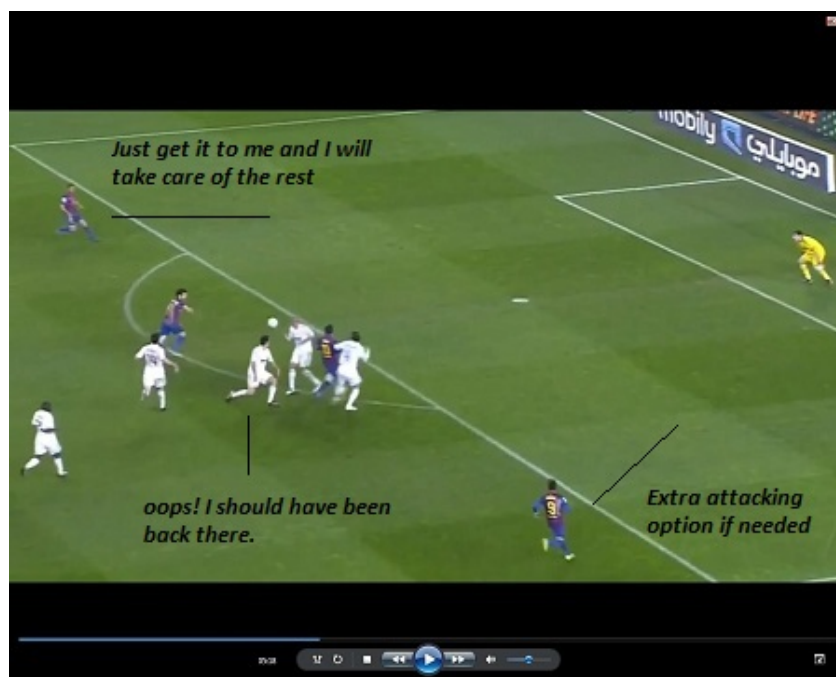
Barcelona's First Goal – Can Anybody take the Ball off Messi?



Messi's brilliant ability to dribble with a lot of pace, created this first goal. Having said that, the Real Madrid defense made it easier for Barcelona to score. Messi actually had the chance to pass the ball to the other side to Alexis Sanchez and he also would have had the goal at his mercy.

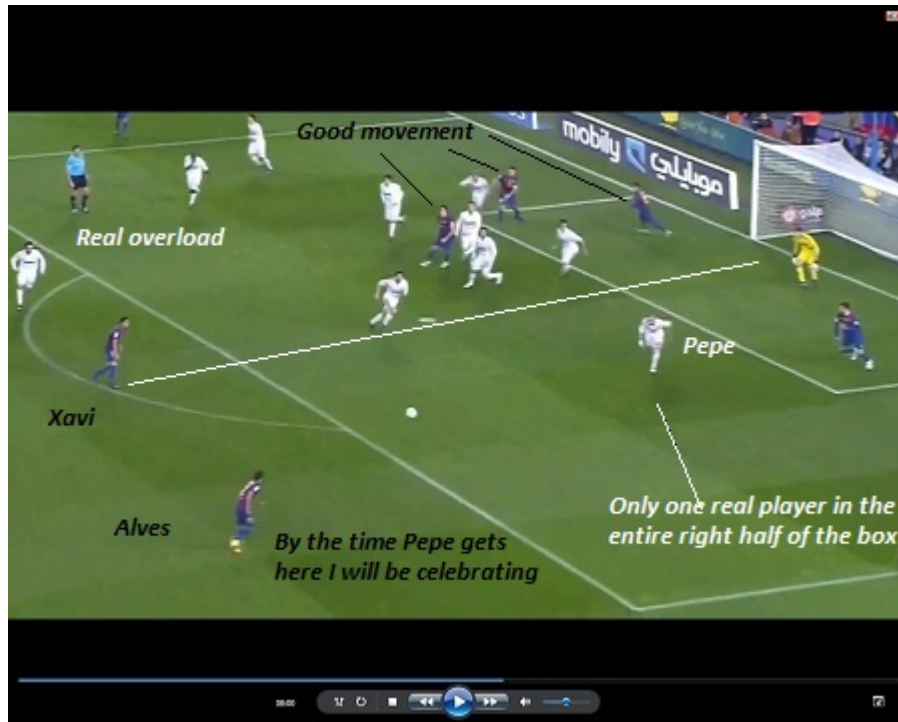


This angle shows how much space Barcelona and Messi had at their disposal. The three Real Madrid defenders were all in a three yard area which left two Barcelona players (Pedro and Sanchez) wide open with an open path to goal. The main culprit here has to be Arbeloa who came all the way from the right back position to pressure Messi which was Pepe's task. The situation was further complicated by Ramos when he did the same thing (although you could argue that he came from Messi's blind side, so his mistake is not as grave as Arbeloa's). Having three defenders covering a three yard area certainly will provide no balance for your defense and will be punished by a team of Barcelona's caliber.



Barcelona's Second Goal - Real Madrid's unbalanced defense!

Messi brilliantly punished Real Madrid for being ultra-aggressive on the play and passed the ball to a wide open Pedro. The Real Madrid defense was penetrated so bad on that play, that Fabregas could also have taken the ball in and scored himself before the defenders would have recovered.



Lack of balance again!

The second goal is another example of how Real Madrid's ultra-aggressive approach worked against them. The three Barcelona runners, who ran from right to left managed to drag six Real Madrid defenders with them leaving Pepe as the only defender in sight of Dani Alves (and he was about 14 yards away!) Yes, the ball did take a deflection on the way, but all top teams should keep their team shape in order to be able to handle any developing attack from the other team. Having said that, the finish by Alves would make any striker or attacking midfielder proud!

Real Madrid's First Goal – Genius Through-Ball



Abidal not goal-side and then another mistake...

On this first goal for Real Madrid, Abidal seems to be very complacent. First he fails to get goal-side of Ronaldo.



Then, instead of following the runner (Ronaldo), Abidal opts to go for the interception and takes himself completely out of the play which left covering defender (Puyol) no chance against the much faster Ronaldo. This was a situation where the tactical discipline of Barcelona (as a team) was clear; they had 5

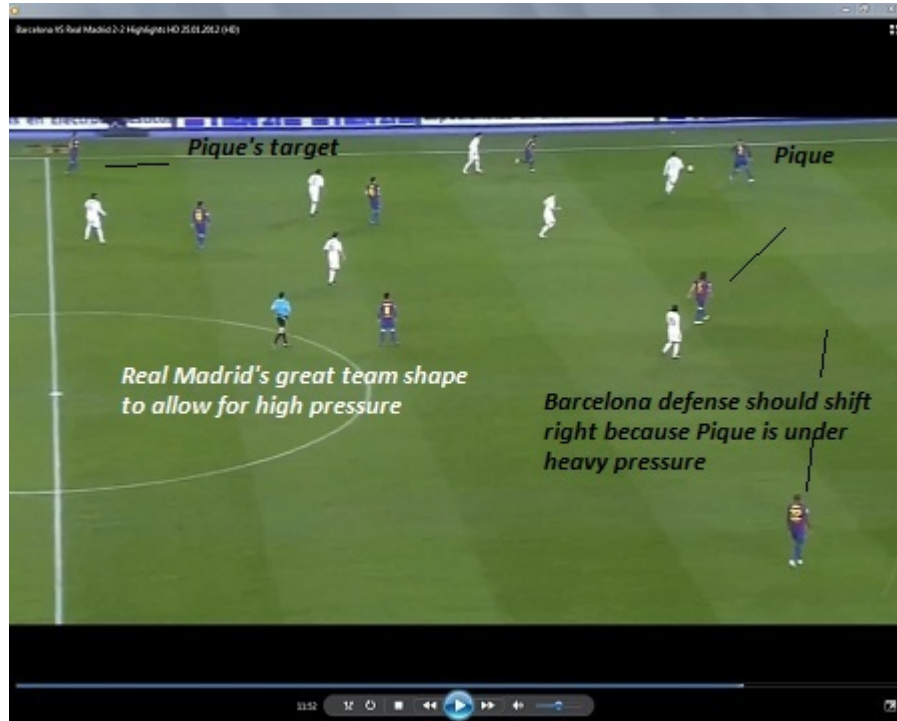
players back with two retreating quickly. Abidal's lack of discipline on that play gave Ozil a window to penetrate Barcelona's defense which he utilized brilliantly. Ronaldo also finished well to cap the great pass. With Abidal in position, goal-side of Ronaldo, it would have been a much more difficult scoring chance to create given the number of Barcelona defenders against only 4 Real Madrid players.



Did Puyol need to step up here?

Abidal's failure to close the space between him and Puyol forced Puyol to make a decision. He can either stay deeper (which he did) to try to catch up with the pacey Ronaldo or he could have opted instead to push up at the same line with Pique and Abidal. The later could have been the better choice since Pique had no time to get over to support and Abidal was out of position. This goal is a good example of how critical it is to be mentally tough and able to concentrate on tactical duties EVERY play.

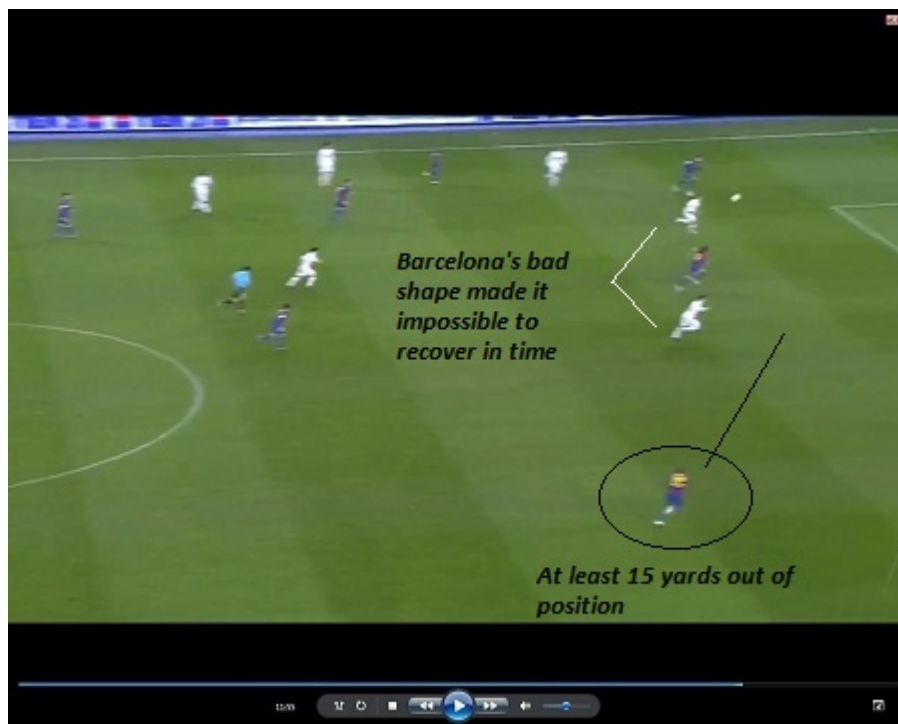
Real Madrid's Second Goal – Exemplary High Pressure



This is a fantastic picture. Show it to your Players! Who can guess that Barcelona is playing 4-3-3 and Real Madrid is utilizing a 4-2-3-1?

Here the fantastic team shape and discipline for Real Madrid creates a scoring opportunity out of what should have been a routine clearance by Pique. Here is one of the few times where the lack of discipline bites Barcelona. Pique should have easily cleared the ball to Alexis Sanchez, but his horrible clearance instead lands on the head of Gonzalo Higuain. With Pique under pressure, both Puyol and Abidal should both tuck in and support Pique instead he loses the ball. Failing to do so has caused Real Madrid to penetrate the Barcelona defense with one pass yet again.

On the other hand, this goal is a fantastic example of how a disciplined high pressure team can take away all the space and short passing options of their opponents. Pique intended to bypass all five Real Madrid players with a long pass, but his failed clearance was brilliantly turned into a goal by Higuain and Benzema.



All three Barcelona defenders are culprits in this goal. Abidal is nowhere close to the ball and failed to tuck in and pick up Ozil running through the middle (did not provide balance). Puyol did not support Pique who was under pressure, so when Pique lost the ball, Puyol was left scrambling to catch up with Ozil making a run behind him. Puyol was caught defending facing his own goal and ended up on the ground watching Benzema's great finish.

Final Word:

Barcelona remains one of the toughest teams to beat. They produce some brilliant football and fantastic ball possession. If they had an Achilles heel it would be their defense. They are all prone to making mistakes and could be sometimes prone to quick counter attacks. Barcelona's attacking style of football minimizes the chances that their defense will face too many tests during a game even against top opposition (ask Manchester United). Opposing teams have the best chance, in my opinion, of beating Barcelona by utilizing a very disciplined defensive approach and catching them on the counter attack or off set-pieces. Mourinho has attempted this approach with Real Madrid, but is yet to beat them even once.

On the other hand, Real Madrid put a valiant effort to try and stop Barcelona, but as they have found time and time again it is easier said than done. They have elevated their pressure on Barcelona when they had the ball, and the second goal is a testament that this will work sometimes. On the negative side, when Real Madrid players give all they have in a game against Barcelona and still find themselves unable to beat their bitter rivals, they lose all their discipline and commit some very hard fouls to try and stop Messi and company.

Verdict:

1. I think Real Madrid might beat Barcelona to the La Liga title this year, but I doubt they will be able to beat them! Real Madrid have been very disciplined against all their other La Liga opponents and have dropped very few points in the league. Barcelona on the other hand have drawn 4 away games and have fallen behind their arch rivals.
2. Dani Alves' goal for goal of the season!

Waleed Zaghoul is an NSCAA Premier Diploma coach. He has been coaching on the youth soccer scene for about 15 years. He has coached a variety of youth club, High School and all-star teams in Nebraska, Utah, Colorado and now the Northern Virginia area.



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The Anatomy of a Counter Attack

By Waleed Zaghloul

Counter attacks are a great weapon in football and has been used by numerous teams over the years to great effect. This weapon is not utilized by many youth teams in the US, possibly because it is difficult to teach. As coaches, before we can coach counter attacks, it might be useful to analyze the components of most successful counter attacks. In this article, we will dissect counter attacks and attempt to identify their main components and how they are carried out.

First, players (and coaches of course) need to identify when counter attacks are possible. There are two main scenarios, one from open play and one from set-pieces. From open play, it is usually a bad or an intercepted pass from a team that is attacking in numbers. From set-pieces, it usually a cleared cross.

Step #1 Identification



After the defending team identifies a counter attacking opportunity, they need to act quickly. Speed is critical in moving the ball forward before the opponent gets a chance to react and recover. Speed here could be in different forms; one touch passes, penetrating passes, pacy runs with the ball or a combination of any of these forms! These different possible combinations are part of the beauty of counter attacking goals; they could come in a variety of different ways.

Step #2 Speed



All it took was three successive one-touch passes!

The next it was Donovan to Davies (pass #2)...

Then Davies back to Donovan (pass #3)... with this pass came what is probably the most critical success factor of a counter attack...

Step #3 Switching Play



The success of the first three steps of a counter attack created a high chance scoring opportunity (which is the goal of any attack). As with any scoring chance, a good finish is essential and that is the last step here.

Step #4 The Finish



In a future article I will look at some more counter attacking goals to see if they follow our 4 main steps.

Waleed Zaghoul is an NSCAA Premier Diploma coach. He has been coaching on the youth soccer scene for about 15 years. He has coached a variety of youth club, High School and all-star teams in Nebraska, Utah, Colorado and now the Northern Virginia area.

Finding Space as a Lone Striker

Youth strikers generally develop in two striker systems, and often, the transition into a system that employs a lone striker can be a frustrating one. The difficulties arise because of the systematic differences in how strikers must create and find space for themselves. In a two striker system, strikers are able to use each other's runs to create space for one another, but in a lone striker system, the midfielders must take on a bigger role in causing the defense to shift in order to create space for the lone striker.

This season, Robin Van Persie and Arsenal have clearly figured out what it takes to score with only one player up top; a fact reinforced by Van Persie's incredible scoring record over the course of the 2011/2012 campaign (27 goals in 30 appearances in all competitions at the time I'm writing this). Van Persie's goals have come from a variety of situations, but one of the things that has set Van Persie and his supporting cast apart is the ability of Arsenal's midfielders to work the ball through opposing midfields. When the opposing midfield is beaten it forces a player on the backline to step forward to pressure, which creates space for a lone striker to move into. In the example below, I'll walk you through a situation where Arsenal uses their numerical advantage in central midfield against Manchester City's 4-4-2 to cause City's backline to shift, which opens space for Van Persie to exploit:

1. **Van Persie** is tightly marked by the two **central defenders** as the **Arsenal midfielder** attempts to work the ball into the attacking third.



2. The three **Arsenal midfielders** work the ball through the two Manchester City midfielders. Once behind City's midfield, one of the **central defenders** is forced to step forward to pressure the ball.



3. Having recognized that one of the **central defenders** must move forward to pressure the ball, **Van Persie** begins his run into the vacated space.



4. The **Arsenal midfielder** plays a killer pass into the vacated space for **Van Persie** to run onto as the defence scrambles to recover.



This scenario perfectly demonstrates one of the basic differences between creating space in a two striker system vs. a lone striker system: In a two striker system, the movement of one striker can be used to draw a defender out of position to create space for the second striker, but when playing with a lone striker, the attack needs midfielders capable of getting behind the opponents midfield to force the backline to shift out of position.

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