

3-5-2

DEFENDING



**FORMATION
SERIES**

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Defending

By

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Introduction

Pressure – When possession is lost the nearest player(s) try to regain the ball or to delay the opposition attack, applying pressure on the ball; the farther player(s) help this action by making recovery runs to deny the opponents the chance to play forward quickly.

Pressure phase can be divided into 3 different actions:

- **Counter-pressing:** it is the pressure around the ball during the transitions to defend phase of play, just after the loss of possession, to try to force the opposition toward a specific area, to win the ball back as soon as possible.



In this first sequence, Internazionale Milan's right wingback D'Ambrosio attempts a long pass in behind for the more advanced forward Lautaro, after a dribble action along the sideline instead to play a short pass to the nearest team-mate, the first forward Lukaku, who dropped back, but under pressure. The striker runs toward the final third between the opposition's center-backs.



As the pass is too short and the opposition's right center-back can cover the space, to mark him at the back, retreating his position while the ball was moving, Lautaro must lay the ball off with a header. All Inter's midfielders, who are supporting the attacking move, pushing up

in the middle third, are still placed behind the opposition's holding midfielder, who recovers the possession.



The player with the ball can play a safe pass beside at his right, but the receiver is immediately under left midfielder Borja Valero's pressure, and the opposite left wingback Biraghi is covering his area, and his body position is turned toward the center is ready to counter the ball carrier in case of ball dribble toward the flank. This first quick individual counter-pressing action forces the opposition to combine with short passes, and Inter's midfielders can advance near the ball's position.



The center holding midfielder Brozovic can press the opposition center midfielder while he is controlling the return pass, the right midfielder Vecino closes the nearest and most accessible passing lane and the right wingback D'Ambrosio shifts across the center to overload the ball area; the center back De Vrij and the left defender Skriniar could counter the potential opposition receiver behind this pressure line easily, while the right defender Godin is man-marking the second opposition's player behind the counter-pressing line.

- **Aggressive pressure:** it is the pressure phase of the defending team, when the opposition has already made the possession safe, to force the direction of play backward or sideward, denying time and space and, if possible, to win the ball back directly or after a wrong choice of an opponent.



The center forward Lukaku is pressing the opposition center back with the ball, forcing him to turn backward and toward his own goal, while the right midfielder Vecino is running up to double team the ball carrier.



The development of the previous counter-pressing action, when the holding midfielder receives the back pass can be analyzed as aggressive pressure also, as the center holding midfielder Brozovic presses aggressively, the right midfielder Vecino closes the nearest and most accessible passing lane and the right wingback D'Ambrosio shifts across the center to overload the ball area and counter the closest opponent to him.

- **Positional pressure:** it is the closure of passing lanes to the opposition to force mistakes or direct the attacking phase toward a specific area of the field, where the numerical defense advantage allows an aggressive pressure action, exploiting the situation. In this case, as the definition suggests, the positions of the players on the field are very important to ensure coverage and balance to not create gaps in the defense shape.



Inter's players near the ball position in the middle third create numerical advantage around the opposition ball carrier; the holding midfielder Brozovic pushes up the field to counter him 1 v 1 while the opponent is passing the ball, the forwards, Lukaku and Lautaro, are positioned very close to him to force a quick play, limiting the available time on the ball, and the right midfielder Vecino is ready to counter the receiver of the pass while controlling the ball. Inter players and the ball carrier create a 3 v 1 duel, and a further 1 v 1 duel is going to be played just out of the ball area.



In this second example, the right midfielder Vecino is pressing the opposition ball carrier

at the back, preventing him from turning, one forward Lautaro is closing the passing lane toward the nearest ball carrier's option, the center midfielder Brozovic and the left one Borja Valero are screening the next further passing options.

All the potential opposition's receivers in the weak defensive side are free, but they are standing on the same lines of the opposite teammate; for this reason, it would be hard to progress the move, as Inter could cover the weak side with just a quick shift across team run.

The opposition ball carrier, his nearest teammate, and Inter's pressing players create a 2 v 2 duel on the ball and the other two midfielders of the defending team screening the forward passing lanes.



Inter opposition has already closed down the defensive left flank, and the left wingback Biraghi is pressing the ball carrier, forcing him to turn and pass backward.

The left defender Skriniar and the left midfielder Borja Valero are standing at the sides of the nearest ball carrier's teammate inside the field; they all create a 3 v 2 duel around the ball.

The center holding midfielder is screening the opposition center forward, who previously dropped back toward the ball position to try to be a passing option. The duel becomes a structured positional 3+1 v 2+1.

Delay – The defender(s) forces the attacking team to slow down the rhythm to organize the defense phase can be organized; it's crucial that not to be overcome quickly, as the time for the team to organize the defense shape is shortened.



The opposition center back has the possession in the middle third, but Inter's forwards Lukaku and Lautaro are standing near the holding midfielder, ready to counter him while receiving; Inter's formation shape (3 – 2) is forcing the opposition building up phase toward the defensive left side, following the ball carrier's dribbling direction of play. This way, the opposition must slow down the rhythm, as there aren't immediate passing options.



The opposition center back has the possession in the middle third, but Inter's forwards Lukaku and Lautaro are standing near the holding midfielder, ready to counter him while receiving; Inter's formation shape (3 – 2) is forcing the opposition building up phase toward the defensive left side, following the ball carrier's dribbling direction of play. This way, the opposition must slow down the rhythm, as there aren't immediate passing options.

Depth –The immediate organization behind the pressuring defender(s), where all the other predetermined players should recover into defensive positions to support the teammates if their pressure action is not valid; this is what "providing defensive cover" is.



Inter opposition can move the ball inside the defensive first third, in this example, even if out wide along the right attacking flank; they have been able to overcome the pressure in the middle third and to force Inter to defend deep.

The team without possession lines up the back five along the 18 y box to save the goal from opposition's blind runs attempts and to only concede wide and less dangerous passes to the opposition. This way, the midfielders can drop back:

1. To cover the space between the ball carriers and the goal (Borja Valero, the left midfielder is shifting wide on the left).
2. To retreat to mark the most dangerous opposition passing options (the holding midfielder is running back to mark the second most advanced opponent).

Internazionale Milan's right defender Godin and right wingback D'Ambrosio can counter the only advanced opposition forward.

Balance – When the team overloads the area of the ball, defenders away from the ball or on the opposite side of the field must position themselves to cover the spaces (central areas or weak sides) to prevent penetrating runs into these spaces where the opponents may receive a pass.



The second example of positional pressure is also very indicative to understand the balance positioning of the player back to the ball position.

The right midfielder Vecino is pressing the opposition ball carrier at the back, preventing him from turning, one forward Lautaro is closing the passing lane toward the nearest ball carrier's option.

The center midfielder Brozovic and the left one Borja Valero are screening the next further passing options, as well as they are also providing cover behind the ball position between it and the defense line.

The pressing/cover players create a strong side around the ball; meanwhile the back five line is providing balance at the back, saving the 18 y box from opponents' penetrating runs.

All the potential opposition's receivers in the weak defensive side are free, but they are standing on the same lines of the opposite teammate and far away from the penalty area; for this reason, it's hard for them to progress the move, as Inter is balanced at the back and could cover the weak side with just a quick shift across team run.

Compactness – While the defending team is retreating toward the goal to organize the defense phase, time and space for the opponent must be limited, concentrating their defense all around the area of the ball. Defenders also recover centrally towards their goal to limit the opponents' ability to directly attack the goal. Compactness is very linked with delays actions that are preparatory for defensive compactness



Inter's holding midfielder Brozovic, who is out of position and replaced by the left midfielder Borja Valero, and the left wingback Biraghi, who has pushed up the flank, try to close down the opposition ball carrier down the sideline along the defensive left flank in the middle third. All the other players retreat their positions to shape the defense lines.



The ball carrier can play out through the gap between the pressing players; the left defender Skriniar is countering the receiver, forcing him to control the ball backward and avoiding him from combining with the nearest teammate, who is pushing up beside him. Meanwhile, the left wingback, and the right wingback D'Ambrosio are retreating their positions and the momentary holding midfielder Borja Valero is standing at the back of the ball area.



The opposition center back receives and dribbles the ball up; the opposition's numerical advantage on the ball (3+3 v 2+1) in the middle third takes the defending team to stop pressure actions and to drop deep inside the own half to shape a compact formation. The forwards are running backward, as well.



The opposition can switch the side from right to left, as Inter aims to defend deep and to shape the back lines formation, conceding space in the middle third, rather than pressing the opponents on the ball.

The back five defensive line is already shaped; the center defender De Vrij and the right defender Godin can easily control the opposition center forward and the right wingback is turned toward the center to prevent any in behind passes between him and the right defender.

The opposition is allowed to play wide only.



Inter defense shape can close the space along the right side, and forces the ball carrier to play backward again. The right defender Godin moves out position to help the wingback, as he would be involved in a 1 v 2 duel if an opponent receives along the flank; this run opens a gap in the middle, but the holding midfielder Brozovic could mark the opponent inside there quickly, and the right midfielder Vecino can screen the passing path toward him. All these back runs are useful to delay the rhythm of opposition's possession.



The opposition holding midfielder has the possession yet, but Inter has shaped the 5-3-2 formation at the back; the outer defenders are marking the opposition's strikers, the midfield trio is screening all the passing path toward the last defensive line; the holding midfielder Brozovic can face the ball carrier, the right midfielder Vecino and the left one Borja Valero could counter the opponents in front of them with a quick forward step. The forwards complete the compact formation, standing close to the middle third line, and only the broader and less dangerous passing options could receive without immediate pressure.

Strength's factors

It is simple to vary the game plan (attacking and defending) if the coach instructs midfielders and wingbacks to either advance further or drop deeper up the pitch.



The three at the back protect the box while the holding midfielder can create a numerical advantage against the opposition forwards, giving team defensive solidity; the wide defenders help to cover the vacated wingback positions when they push forward, shifting wide and the holding midfielder can cover the gap along the defensive line.



The 5 players of the middle line inside the opposition half enhance the chances of winning the ball back further up the field when the team is standing high up the field.



Lukaku forces the opposition center back to play quickly to a dropping deep midfielder, closing the passing lane to the second center-back; the goalkeeper would be easily under Lautaro's, the second forward, pressure, as well as, the opposition left fullback would receive under Inter's right wingback Candreva's pressure while controlling the ball.



The opposition midfielder receives under the right midfielder's pressure (Vecino), and he can only pass out wide to the left fullback, as Lukaku is screening the back passing lane and the high positioned holding midfielder and the second forward Lautaro could counter the second center-back inside the penalty area.

The development of the situation of play creates a 3 v 3 duel high up the field on the final third's right side.



Lukaku and Vecino are man-marking the nearest passing options for the fullback, who is receiving, and Candreva forces him to play a quick and high pass along the flank.



The right defender Godin is placed very high on the field, and he anticipates the opposition winger, winning the possession, thanks to the aggressive pressure of the 3 players involved in the previous 3 v 3 situation.

As all the midfield trio is also placed high on the field, the ball recovery allows Inter to play a new attacking sequence being already placed closed to the final third.

The midfielder rotation takes Borja Valero to play as holding midfielder at the back of the ball area, Brozovic just behind the forwards' line as well as Vecino very close to the right wingback Candreva, who is almost on the same line of the forwards.

The narrow distances allow the opposition counter-pressing actions (1 v 1 duel),



but the high positions of Inter's midfield line allows managing the ball possession, playing out from the opposition pressure's area.



The right midfielder Vecino receives, and he is free to turn toward a weak area of the field in the center.

The ball carrier has now many passing options:

1. Wide path on the right (the wingback Candreva)
2. Safe back option (the momentary holding midfielder Borja Valero),
3. Forward and diagonal passing option behind the forwards (Brozovic)
4. Long pass in behind for the forwards (Lautaro and Lukaku), who could take advantage of the 1 v 1 duels against the opposition center-backs.

The strikers and the wingbacks are often able to stop the opponent's building up phase; meanwhile, if the midfielders push up, they can limit the opposition passing options to progress the move forward.



The opposition's goalkeeper has the possession to start the move, building up from the back; the center-backs are standing out of the penalty area ready to receive, but the forwards are ready to put pressure against them. Lautaro, on the left, is screening the passing lane to the right center-back, Lukaku is facing the left center-back, and he could counter him quickly if the opponent would receive. The right midfielder Vecino is pressing the opposition holding midfielder, who is dropping back to be an option.



The goalkeeper chooses to play over the pressure lines and toward the right midfielder, who is dropping back to receive; he is under the left midfielder's, Borja Valero, pressure, who prevent him from turning with the ball and force a wide pass on the right side. Vecino's high pressure avoid any pass toward the weak area of the field and force the creation of a strong wide side along the right flank in the final third. The left wingback Biraghi, the left defender Skriniar and the holding midfielder Brozovic are placed high up the field to press and to close all the forward passing lanes.

The opposition left fullback receives, but he is forced to play toward the center.



The left wingback Biraghi is countering the receiver, also closing all the forward passing lanes along the flank. The left defender Skriniar is pressing the direct opponent at the back, while he is trying to drop deep to receive. Lautaro is standing close to the right center-back, who shifts wide to be a back support option, and Borja Valero is tracking the opposition right midfielder, who is pushing forward off the ball.



The right fullback must play inside to the second center midfielder, who is shifting a little wide to receive. Borja Valero and Brozovic momentarily leave the opponents and stay place high to close the passing lanes to the receiver and prevent him from playing a well-directed and weighted forward pass.

As the opposition midfielder receives, Brozovic put pressure against him and Borja Valero shadows the easiest forward passing lane.



The ball carrier must pass forward quickly to avoid losing the ball in a 1 v 1 duel.



Borja Valero, the left midfielder, tackles the direct opponent a first time to prevent him from receiving, exploiting his high position on the field.



The right midfielder Vecino retreats the position to counter the receiver a second time, anticipating him in a 1 v 1 duel in the center space of the middle third.



Vecino can play a back pass to the center-back De Vrij, making the possession safe, with the team that is already placed high on the field and ready to attack after a quick transition to attack phase.

As the opposition has been forced to overload the ball position, available spaces are then opened along the right side of the middle third to play through.

Weakness's factors

Good team communication is vital as the 1-3-5-2 (1-5-3-2) formation has so many midfielders; they must shape a proper formation with each other, the opposition, and the ball position. Pressure and coverage actions must be performed with the right timing, as the team's shape often doesn't position the players already ready for these defensive actions.



This sequence shows the first goal that Inter conceded against Barcelona in the last Champions League home match (12-10-2019). The opposition right midfielder has the possession in the final third, and Inter midfield trio is covering the backline of five with rotated positions but along the same line. Brozovic, the holding midfielder is positioned on the left, but he puts late pressure on the ball carrier, Vecino, the left midfielder, is standing in the center and Borca Valero, the left midfielder, is on the right. Both of them are trying to screen the passing lanes to protect the defense line. Borca Valero doesn't check the opponents at the back, and the center defenders are countering 2 v 1 the opposition right midfielder, which is momentarily acting as the center forward.



The midfield line concedes a passing lane toward the box, and the right defender marks the opponent with a wrong placement, as he is not covering the goal space.



Vidal, the momentary center forward, can receive facing the opposition goal, with the direct marker at the back, and he can lay the ball off for the teammate, who has moved between the other two central defenders, De Vrij and Skriniar.

None of the defenders, despite a numerical advantage situation (3 v 2), covered the goal space behind the attackers; the left defender Skriniar is standing in a useless position, as nor he can't mark an opponent, neither he can cover the space behind the teammates. The left defender doesn't double team the nearest opponents.

Both the wingbacks are too far away from the ball position to double team the opponents.



(The potential right defensive shape in the middle would have been the right and left defenders acting as markers of the opponents and the center back with coverage and double-teaming tasks.)



The opposition second forward scores free from pressure.

The wingbacks' positions are the most important of this system of play as it is up to the wingbacks to run up and down the pitch while attacking and defending; if they are not fit or fast enough, the formation risks dangerous situations. The opposition may attack the space behind, overrunning them; these gaps are the weak points of the formation at the back.

Inter has just lost the possession high up the pitch and with a wide shaped formation. There isn't center coverage as Vecino, one of the two forwards who are retreating the positions is countering the ball carrier, and the second one, Borca Valero, is standing on the same line of the ball, while the ball carrier is attempting a forward pass. The right and left defenders are out of position; the left wingback Biraghi and the right one, D'Ambrosio are retreating to help the only defender, De Vrij.



With 3 at the back, the opposition can exploit the gaps along the flanks in the final third.



The midfielders try to recover the space, but they have placed at the back of the opposition receiver the forward pass, and the ball carrier can dribble the ball up the field, while Inter is trying to shape a 3 players defense line out of the 18 y box. A 3 v 3 (+2 retreating players) is apparent in front of the penalty area.



As only three defenders can save the final third, the space that they must cover is the center one in front of the goal, and flanks are gaps they can't cover.

The center defender seems not to direct the ball carrier, neither to counter him; only Borca Valero, who can run toward him, forces him to play at the left. The right wingback, D'Ambrosio, who shifted to the center to act a 3rd right center defender, has also turned his body toward the center. He can't follow ball direction to close the opponent at his right; this way, he loses time, conceding the space for the opposition left attacker to receive.



The left opposition attacker can receive, having enough time and space to power a shot on goal, as both the right wingback D'Ambrosio and the center back Skriniar are too far away to counter the opponent's attempt.



Only a good Handanovic's save action can prevent the opposition from scoring.

Flank's gaps behind the wingbacks are the weakest factor of a three/five backline. If the wingbacks don't position themselves along the line of the three center teammates, the opposition finds gaps beside the center trio, both to cross the ball into the box from the flanks and to attack the goal starting from the center but along a sideward line related the opposition wider defenders (relative width).

If the players do not track back and fulfill their defensive duties, then the opposition may overload the ball area at the back.

The following sequence shows another dangerous situation for the 1-5-3-2 defense formation along the flanks, even when the wingback is standing along the three center defenders' line and the outer midfielder is tracking the ball carrier down the wing (2 v 2 duel).



The left wingback is properly covering the final third third space of the flank, at the beginning, as well as the left midfielder Borca Valero is trying to close the opposition's ball carrier down the side line; the left center defender Bastoni is ready to create numerical advantage, meeting the inside movement of the opposition's right winger. In this potential situation, the left wingback Biraghi may double team the opposition ball carrier along the flank.



The left wingback makes a mistake as he steps a little toward the center to stand closer to the opposition right-winger, and he opens a path for the ball carrier to dribble the ball through. The left midfielder Borca Valero's action becomes then useless, as the opponents can bring the ball into the final third along the flank. The ball carrier has speed quality advantage against Inter's the left midfielder, and he can dribble the ball up to face the wingback in a 1 v 1 duel.



As the left wingback Biraghi shifted toward the center a little before, he is now on late, tracking the opposition winger, who can beat him at speed, and he can arrive near the goal line to play a cross pass.



The defenders can't double-team the opposition ball carrier:

- The left defender Bastoni must close the ground passing paths toward the zone 17 inside the box
- The left midfielder must stop his run from marking the nearest back pass option for the opposition, in case a cross pass is not possible.

Despite a mistake along the flank, the coverage inside the box is proper in this situation, as Inter's three defenders ensure numerical advantage against two forwards in front of the goal, and two midfielders are ready to win the second times of the ball along the penalty area goal line.

This sequence is another proof of how vital the wingbacks' work is.

The next sequence shows how to lose possession in the final third with high wingbacks dangerous can be.



Inter loses the possession in the final third on the attacking right flank; a high line of four (the forwards, Lukaku and Politano, the right midfielder Vecino and the right wingback) is placed high up the field. The right wingback tries to prevent the opposition ball carrier on the left from playing a long pass forward, but he can't.



The opposition center forward can receive, turning inside, as the marker can't counter him from this side of the ball.

The second forward can run forward between Inter's defender, as his marker can't stand inside and in front of him, but he on the other side of the ball line.

To combine quickly at the back of the defenders is quite easy due to markers' positions.



The opposition second forward can receive, turn and dribble the ball up the field and Inter must manage the counter attacking situation with just one defender, De Vrij, at the beginning.

Four players are retreating the positions, but 3 of them are at the back of the opposition's first forward, who turns off the ball and act as potential passing option in the center.



The player in possession dribbles the ball up the field; the center defender De Vrij tracks him. The left defender Skriniar can't double team the opponent, as he must run back to screen the run's path of the first opposition forward, who is moving toward the goal.

The other three Inter's players who are trying to recover the positions are too late to be really active.

Moreover, the player with the ball is left-footed, and he is dribbling along the left side of the field. It is tough for the defender who tracks him to force him out of the goal space, first of all, and then to send him toward the weak foot, as he could face the goal the same, and be able to finish, despite the right foot.



The opponent can dribble inside the penalty area he can shoot on goal.



He scores the equalizing goal, in the end, winning a 1 v 1 duel.

The non-possession phase of the 1-3-5-2 (1-5-3-2) team must count on speedy wide defenders who must cover the space left behind the wingbacks when they are attacking. If the opposition can play in behind the wingbacks, a center-back or a defensive midfielder need to immediately come out wide and engage the player with possession or who is moving off the ball, opening gaps in the center.



The right wingback D'Ambrosio is standing over the ball line while checking the opposition left-winger, and he opens a passing path for the ball carrier to play a through ball between the outer defender Godin and the wingback. The opposition center forward runs in behind the center back De Vrij and the right defender Godin.



The opposition forward can receive inside the opposition 18 y box, and the right defender tracks him; even if there is space in the center of the box, a cross pass would be useless, as there are no potential receivers. To shot on goal is the only solution, that is limited by the defender action, who recovered the position quickly.



Eventually, the goalkeeper can save the shot.

One of the three center defenders becomes useless if the opposition plays with one forward to mark; this situation may be confusing for the defenders, due to the decision-making about who should follow and mark the only opposition striker.



The opposition is keeping the possession between the middle third and the final third. Inter has shaped the backline of five along the edge of the penalty area with close distances between the players (Godin is the right defender, De Vrij is the center back, and Skriniar is the left defender.)

The three Inter's center defenders are very closed to each other in the same area.

The only safe passing option for the opposition's ball carrier is the right-winger, who is free from markers, as the left wingback Biraghi is standing along the defenders' line.



Inter's left wingback can counter the opponent while receiving, and he wins the possession.

The three defenders' distribution is advantageous to manage the transition to attack phase inside the penalty area.



The left defender Skriniar breaks the line to receive the lay-off pass from the left wingback Biraghi, who must manage the individual counter-pressing action of the prior ball carrier.

The center back De Vrij is ready to mark the opposition center forward if he receives the ball again.

The right defender Godin is covering the goal space together with the right wingback.

The left defender can kick the ball away from the penalty area to clean it.

The wingbacks are also very important to avoid the opposition from playing inside the first third, as they are expected to push-up and put pressure against the opposition's fullbacks or wingers; this stops them from having time on the ball or being able to turn and to pass or dribble forward.

The next sequence explains the difference between the right time and the late one against oppositions' wingers.



The left wingback Biraghi is pressing the opposition winger while receiving, preventing him from dribbling along the flank and forcing him to turn toward the center and a condensed area of the field.



The opposition can switch the side toward Inter's defensive right flank; the right midfielder Vecino's position is too centralized and close to the momentary holding midfielder Lautaro, who is covering the teammate's Brozovic position. The opposition's player with possession can receive and pass out wide without pressure. The right wingback D'Ambrosio is then alone along the flank, and he must face a 1 v 2 duel, as the opposition's left fullback receives.



The right wingback doesn't recognize the situation and he tries to press and counter the receiver, who can pass forward immediately to the winger.

The other four defenders drop deeper to defend the penalty area.

The right defender Godin must move wide and deep to counter the opponent and prevent him from playing a cross pass into the 18 y box.



Even if the right defender can't prevent the cross pass, he can counter the opponent, making his action complicated.

The left defender Skriniar and the left wingback Biraghi can mark the only opponent in front of the goal. The other opponent inside the penalty area is not a real danger, as the center back De Vrij and the right midfielder Vecino could counter him easily.



Thanks to the right defender action, the center back De Vrij can intercept the ball and play it out of the penalty area.



The right wingback receives, and the transition to attack phase of play is now safe enough to play out of the first third.

It is evident how the wingbacks' pressure timing is crucial to allow a 1-5-3-2 team to stay properly shaped inside the first third.

The left wingback Biraghi pressed the opponent with the right timing and prevented him from playing forward along the flank.

The right wingback did not recognize the situation of numerical disadvantage along the opposite flank, and he opened a gap at the back because of an out of time pressure action that obliged the right defender to move wide quickly to stop the opposition attacking phase.

The holding midfielder's positional discipline is crucial to prevent the team from losing defensive stability. While the holding midfielder does provide coverage and defensive solidity, fixing risky situations, the team should drop as a team to protect the defense and condense the space. (The central midfielders must have excellent technical skills to control the possession; if they are not, the team risks to allow the opposition to break through the midfield when the ball is lost.)



Inter is shaping the classic 3-5-2 attacking shape, with the defensive line in the middle of the field and two lines of 5 + 2 inside the opposition half. The distances between the players are vast, as the right wingback D'Ambrosio is touching the sideline, and the opposite one, Biraghi, is very close to the left sideline. The forwards are standing close to each other and along with the gaps between the opposition defensive trio. The right defender Godin is dribbling the ball up without pressure.



The opposition can close all the ground passing paths and to mark the forwards; only a long pass or a switch of side allow to progress the move, avoiding the opposition pressure.



One of the forwards receive an in behind pass and he tries to play quickly inside the penalty area toward Lukaku, who is moving toward the teammate, turning his body to the goal, to be able to finish just after the reception.



The opposition defenders counter him and fight for the ball inside the penalty area to clean it.

The situation may be risky, as there isn't a real midfield's support from the back; the left wingback Biraghi is too far away from the ball position, as well as the left midfielder Borca Valero.



The opposition can clean the penalty area, despite the left wingback runs inside quickly.



The holding midfielder moves forward very quickly to cover the gap and to support the transition to defend phase to prevent the opposition from playing out the first third.

Brozovic counters the opposition receiver through an aerial duel first to avoid a safe ball control.

Thanks to the open ball playing situation, the midfield line has moved forward to make the distances between the lines narrower.



The holding midfielder allows the teammates to cover the space behind the ball line, tracking the opposition ball carrier, trying to counter him while dribbling the ball and preventing him from doing it forward.



As the ball carrier tries to change direction, the holding midfielder can tackle at the back and dispossess him.

The holding midfielder action allows the whole team to drop back and cover the space in front of the first potential receiver.

The left wingback Biraghi, the left midfielder Borca Valero and the right midfielder Vecino, who shifted across the center create a 3 v 1 situation against the nearest opposition ball carrier's advanced passing option before the holding midfielder can tackle him.

The strikers play a crucial role in the defensive phases; their pressure helps to stop the opposition from building up and playing out from the back, and it forces the opposition's ball carriers' quick passing choices that may take them to make mistakes and to lose the ball. The opposition defenders may have to play long balls that the five players across the midfield should catch easily.



Inter's forward Lautaro is forcing the opposition ball carrier backward during the building up from the back phase of play. The left midfielder Borca Valero is pushing up the field to support the pressure phase and to counter the opposition's right wingback if he receives the ball. The second forward, Lukaku is standing between the opposition holding midfielder and the left wingback, and he is ready to press both them.



The forwards' deep pressure forced the right wingback to receive under pressure and allowed the midfielder to push up the field along the same side of the ball to get closer to the potential receivers' of the passes. The left wingback Biraghi and the holding midfielder Brozovic are pressing two opposition players along the defensive left flank. Lukaku could press the receiver of a switch of side toward the opposition left wingback.

Lukaku is forcing the opposition left wingback to play a long pass to prevent him from tackling and attempting to win the ball back; he is also screening all the center passing lanes to switch the side, in this footage.

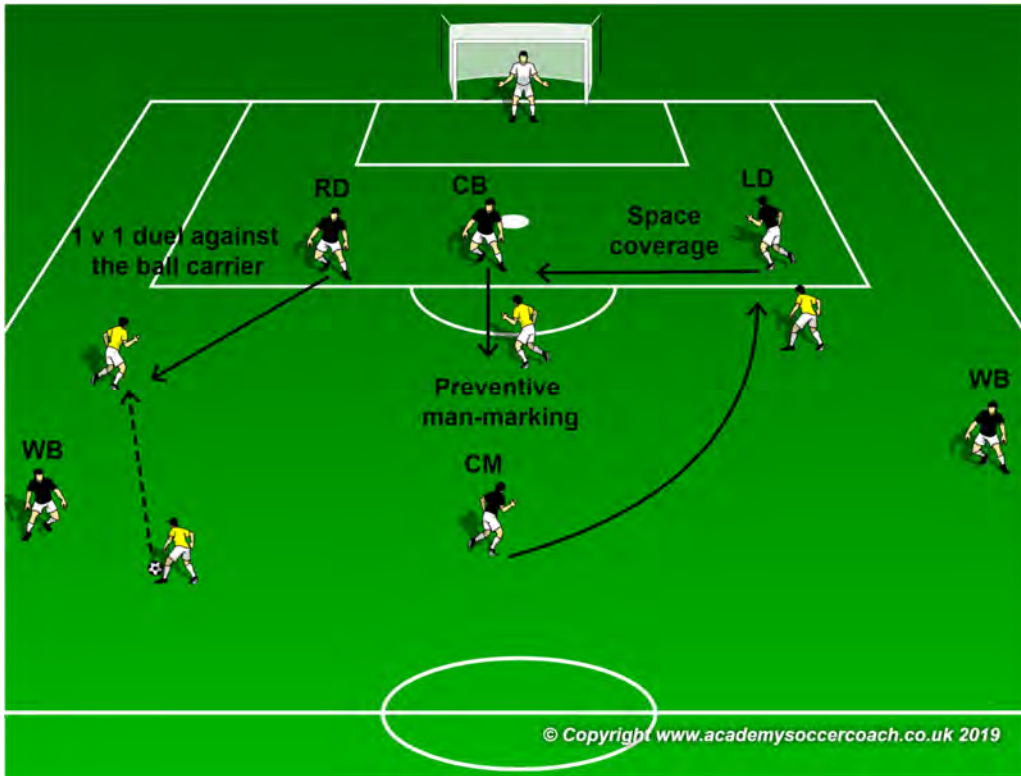


The right wingback and the right midfielder Vecino are pushing up the field to counter two potential receivers of short passes from the ball carrier. The second forward Lautaro and the left midfielder Borca Valero could easily counter the opposition center back and the right defender along the opposite side.

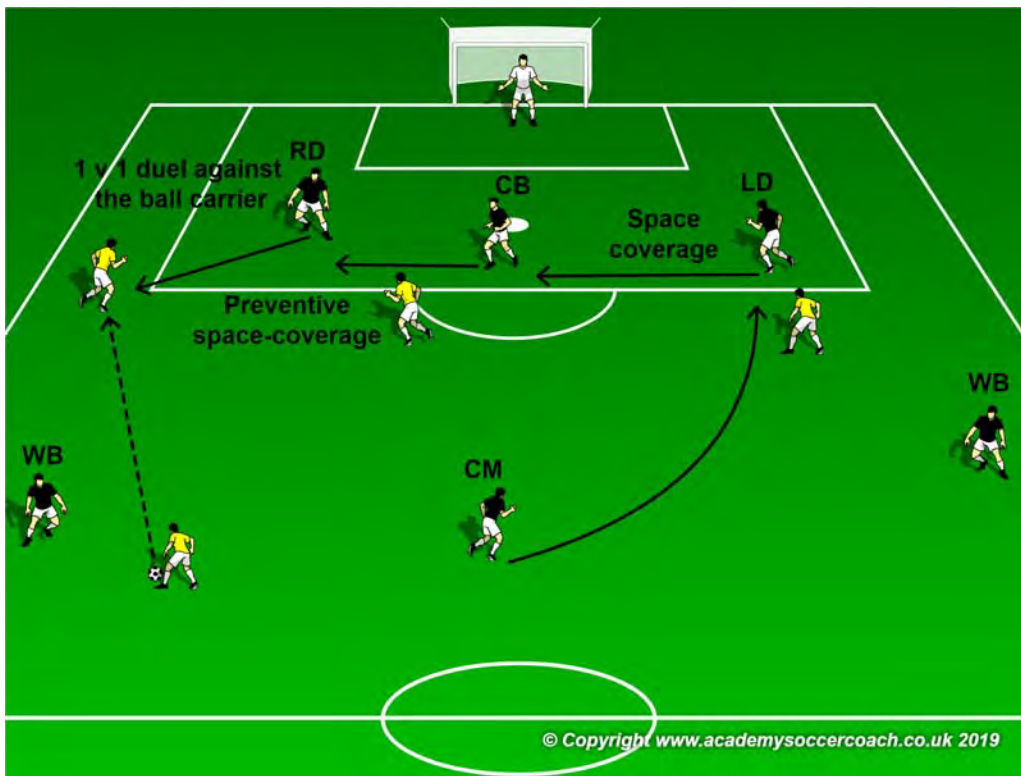
In this last example, the forwards, Lukaku and Lautaro, the left midfielder Borca Valero and the center midfielder Brozovic are helping the pressure phase against the ball carrier and the nearest potential receivers, creating a 4 v 4 duel and a strong area around the ball.



If they don't work properly, the opposition building up phase becomes easy due to their numerical advantage at the back, and the team must defend deep very soon, as the spaces back to the wingbacks must be covered.



The wide defenders must pay attention to cover the space behind the wingbacks down the flanks, where the 1-3-5-2 formation is usually vulnerable. These channels are problematic when a wide defender needs to come out wide to cover the area and to engage the opponent. This action drags the center-back out of position to fulfill the first gap, and the opposite wide defender must shift across the center to close the second gap, opening a potential weak area on the other side of the position. The holding midfielder must now drop back into the uncovered space.



Holding midfielder:

- The holding player must provide safety and stability at the back that is so important when playing a back three.
- He must have great positional sense but being always be on the move to drop into defense when gaps appear quickly, closing them down or marking the opposition's players, who are running into space.

Outer midfielders:

- The coach can imprint the identity and the game plan on a 1-3-5-2 team in the middle trio, as the midfielders dictate the timing of playing patterns to control the game.
- In a three players midfield sector, coaches can choose:
 - 1) To play with a holding midfielder alongside a box-to-box player and an attacking midfielder with less defensive tasks (they can have alternated roles depending on the situations of play). In this sequence, Brozovic is the holding midfielder, Sensi has defensive tasks, and Barella is active as attacking midfielder; the right defender Godin tries to play forward in between the lines, but the opposition intercepts the ball.



The opposition left midfielder can control the ball without pressure at the beginning.



Inter's attacking midfielder has moved forward, over the center striker, and he can't recover the space. The second forward Lautaro runs back to cover his position.



Inter's right wingback runs inside the field to force the direction of play of the opposition left midfielder with possession.

Sensi, who is acting as defensive midfielder shifts toward the center; he counters the receiver of the second pass from opposition's left midfielder to the right one. He wins the ball back, anticipating the opponent.



The holding midfielder receives the ball to start the transition to attack phase of play



He dribble the ball backward and away from the condensed area and he plays out wide toward the left wingback Asamoah. Sensi, the left midfielder shifts wide to support him and Barella, the right midfielder drops back to stand in his position.



As Asamoah receives along the left flank, Sensi becomes the attacking midfielder and Barella shift across the center but in a more defensive position.

- 2) Two box to box midfielders always providing support during attacking and defending phases, pressing the opposition's midfielders and preventing them from creating passing patterns of play (for instance, Pogba and Vidal or Marchisio in Antonio Conte's Juventus).

The next footages are taken from an old Juventus match against Benfica, with Antonio Conte as manager. The midfield trio included Pirlo as holding midfielder, Pogba as a right midfielder, and Marchisio as a left midfielder. They are all aligned in front of the back five to screen the passing lanes to the opposition.



Pogba is standing in front of the ball carrier to close the forward passing lanes and to force him to play a less dangerous side pass; Marchisio, on the other side, is marking the nearest opponent, who is trying to shift across the center to play in between the lines.



The opposition can only distribute in the middle third, without advancing on the field; the outer midfielders are standing very close to the advanced opposition midfielders.

Juventus shapes the 1-5-3-2 inside the defensive half with three narrow lines; even the forwards are standing inside the own half, despite being on the other side of the ball line.



As the second center midfielder receives, Juventus' left midfielder Marchisio moves forward to counter him and to force the direction of the opposition possession backward.

The whole defensive shape moves up to maintain the distances between the lines.



As the opponents try to open the play wide, the left wingback shifts wide too, together with the left midfielder, who supports the teammate's pressure action.

The holding midfielder Pirlo and the right midfielder Pogba shifts across the field too, to maintain the distances.

- 3) Or two attacking midfielders who are balanced by the holding midfielder and the inverted fullbacks (for instance, De Bruyne and David Silva with Fernandinho in Pep Guardiola's Manchester City), as Guardiola uses to do when he shapes Manchester City with the 1-3-5-2.



In this sequence, Manchester City has just lost the possession inside the final third, and the attacking midfielders (De Bruyne on the right and David Silva on the left) are placed very high on the field, as well as the wingers.



The opposition ball carrier dribbles the ball up the field, but De Bruyne, who lost the possession, tracks him and he tries to force the direction of play toward the holding midfielder Fernandinho and the right inverted fullback Walker; they all together create a 3 v 1 duel around the ball (1 v 1 against the opponent and two players ready to cover the space just at the back).



This last sequence is an example of coverage sequence when the holding midfielder pushes up and out of the midfield's line to send the opponent dribbling action backward. He is standing up the midfield line, and the advanced midfielders stand behind him to provide balance at the back.

Forwards:

- In a 1-3-5-2 formation, the forwards are the first players who must take action when the ball is lost in the final third (transitions to defend), and they are the first line of defenders when the opposition builds up from the back and tries to play out. They can force the direction of the play of the opposing team toward a precise wide area, and they can close down the passing options out wide, as well as the channels through the center.
- They don't drop back too much deep into defensive positions because of the six players in the center (three defenders and three midfielders), but they may move wide to counter opposition's 1 v 1s attempts against the wingbacks.