ATALANTA BERGAMASCA

WINNING WITH ADVANCED 1V1 TACTICS

ATTACKING

by LUCA BERTOLINI

Atalanta Bergamasca

Attacking Phase

By

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Introduction: Atalanta Bergamasca, an Italian new soccer reality (data in hand)

Giampiero Gasperini signed the agreement as Head Coach of the Italian club in June 2016. From then on, Atalanta started to grow up and rise as a club and team, achieving some of the best results of his history:
- Europa League qualifications (2016/2017 and 2017/2018),
- Champions League qualifications (2018/2019 and 2019/2020 with 3rd and 4th table seats),
- Champions League Last 8 (losing to Paris San Germain in the last minutes of the match)
- Italian National Cup final (2017/2018 - runner up).

Atalanta Bergamo, the hottest team of the Serie A right now! Eleven wins from nineteen games mean the sixth place in the table – ahead of higher-ranked opponents such as Inter Milan, Torino, or AC Fiorentina. The employment of new head coach Gian Piero Gasperini has paid off completely. The Italian, who previously trained CFC Genoa for three years, is increasingly focusing on the youth. (The Montagsscout, January 6th, 2017); this title has almost three years and describes the situation of the bergamascan club at the time. A lot of things happened, many talents from that time were sold – but Atalanta is still one of the top teams in the Serie A. Or, even better, it is the most efficient team of the League.

Effective Play Rating of Atalanta Bergamo in Serie A (2014-2019)

The current rating of 7.45 is the highest of all Serie A teams of the 2019/2020 season.

The smart scouting, combined with the fixed game system 1-3-4-1-2, is the reason for their upswing. The style of play is also enormously attractive and has thrilled football fans worldwide. Atalanta likes to dominate the rivals with a lot of ball possession during their attack. Still, they also produce many inadequate ball controls and dispossessions – however, they manage to win many duels right after their high pressure. Alejandro Gómez again plays a crucial role in generating triangular and diamond formations on the field, which helps outplay the opponents; he connects the defensive midfielders (Freuler, De Roon) Pasalic) with the strikers and the players on the flanks. Fluid positional changes are not uncommon, a striker may roam far on the wing, and one of the right/left mids rushes past him right in the penalty area, waiting for the far cross. Above all, Robin Gosens benefits a lot from this tactical idea, scoring 10 goals and providing 8 assists in all competitions.

The balanced squad depth distinguishes Atalanta this season. All players show offensive dangerousity, which makes them variable. The defensive wingers Gosens and Hateboer/Castagne in particular are always looking for the way into the box, staying in the blind spot of the opposing defense, before making a run and scoring (especially Gosens). Creative player Alejandro Gómez also likes to pull out on the left wing and outnumber the opponents there. The central midfield is powerful, while the central defenders are dangerous at standard situations. Smart transfers such as Caldara, Malinovskyi, Czyborra and Muriel are equivalent alternatives in their positions and give the squad the necessary quality across the board.

In the 2019–20 season so far, Atalanta has scored the third-highest goals among Europe's top five leagues with 70. Remember, we are talking more goals than teams managed by Pep Guardiola, Jürgen Klopp, more goals than teams with Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo in their lineups. Giampiero Gasperini has been making heads turn for a couple of years with the work he has done with Atalanta. However, this season has especially been particular. The idea is clear, play with courage, want the ball, attack fearlessly, and be on the front foot the entire game.

League Position	Team	Total	P.90'	Head	Right foot	Left foot	From corners	From free kicks	From penalties	Outside p. area
2	Man. City	102	2.48	11	51	38	8	5	6	16
1	B. München	100	2.8	12	63	22	7	2	6	15
3	**Atalanta**	**98**	2.43	14	44	38	12	4	7	21
2	Barcelona	86	2.12	8	35	41	3	5	6	15
1	Liverpool	85	2.08	18	39	26	11	3	5	12

League Position	Team	Total	P.90'
2	Man. City	1263	30.76
1	B. München	1086	30.39
3	**Atalanta**	**1013**	**25.1**
1	Liverpool	1005	24.62
2	Barcelona	935	23.08
4	Chelsea	898	21.84
1	Real Madrid	897	22.02

Atalanta have **the most touches in the penalty area in Serie A**, yet another astonishing stat that brings out their intention to attack. Only Real Madrid, Bayern Munich, Liverpool, Manchester City and Chelsea have higher touches in the attacking penalty area in entire Europe's top 5 leagues.

While Gasperini's men continue to astonish with impressive attacking stats, they do not even depend on one or two stars to carry their team as well. Although Josip Ilicic and Duvan Zapata, along with Luis Muriel, have done most of the scoring for them, they remain the only team in Europe's top 5 leagues to

have 6 different players 5 or more goals. Even if we choose to ignore the strikers, their midfielders are Papu Gomez, Remo Freuler, Mario Pasalic, Ruslan Malinovskiy, and Martin De Roon 18 goals. The flanks play an essential role in Atalanta's attack as they use the wide areas right from building up play to creating chances in the final third. Atalanta is the second team for flanks' use to attack in Serie A 2019–2020 (around 76% of their attacks come from the wings and just 24% through the middle); the two wingbacks Gosens and Hateboer, are very useful, but they are not the only ones being so crucial out wide.

They are the most influential shooters outside the box with most goals from outside the box in Europe's top five leagues: 13. Their latest signing being Ruslan Malinovskiy, has helped them serve this purpose.

League Position	Team	Total	P.90'	% on target	Head	On posts	Outside p. area	From play
2	Man. City	700	17.05	36	76	20	241	661
3	**Atalanta**	**674**	**16.7**	**39.6**	**92**	**15**	**245**	**631**
7	Napoli	660	16.08	35.3	89	20	306	637
1	Juventus	656	16	36.6	76	17	296	602
5	Roma	613	14.94	35.2	80	18	264	562
6	Milan	595	14.6	33.4	67	16	283	561
1	B. München	587	16.43	42.8	89	14	191	567

The statistical results and those in the field are goals that Atalanta has achieved after a constant growth during the last seasons, even from attacking points of view. The next pages of this book will analyze them.

2017/2018 – 2018/2019 stats (Serie A)

PARAMETERS	38 ➡ matches		TOTAL	TOTAL		38 ➡ matches	PARAMETERS
Passes		⌄	18610	19678	⌃		Passes
Successful passes		⌄	15620	16897	⌃		Successful passes
Received pass		⌄	12864	14174	⌃		Received pass
Smart passes		⌃	365	303	⌄		Smart passes
Successful smart passes		⌃	152	148	⌄		Successful smart passes
Key passes		⌃	124	121	⌄		Key passes
Successful key passes		⌃	121	118	⌄		Successful key passes
Long passes		⌃	1830	1501	⌄		Long passes
Successful long passes		⌃	1037	888	⌄		Successful long passes
Through passes		⌃	304	275	⌄		Through passes
Successful through passes		⌄	98	112	⌃		Successful through passes
Passes to final third		⌃	2506	2398	⌄		Passes to final third
Successful passes to final third		⌄	1819	1874	⌃		Successful passes to final third
Crosses		⌄	617	694	⌃		Crosses
Successful crosses		⌄	216	240	⌃		Successful crosses

The third season's stats with Gasperini as head coach, which has been finished with the first Champions League qualification ever in the club's history, indicate how the Dea has improved and defined play style. The number of passes and the accuracy has improved, and all the data which could be referred to as an efficient offensive style of play have decreased. They could think that Atalanta has been less effective during attacking phases, but it's not true.

The playstyle has become more balanced, and the play patterns have started to be tools to move the opposition and create gaps in the defenses' shapes rather than a way to reach the opposition's 18 yds. Box quickly. The final number of scored goals is unequivocal proof. Indeed, although the total number of passes to the last third has decreased at the end of the 2018/2019 season, their efficacy has increased together with the through passes; this means that these passes were played toward and through larger gaps created after proper combinations of play.

Another interesting data is the higher number of played crosses; the patterns play have been developed along the flanks, rather than through the center. The 4 players rhombus were born.

Team Comparisonator / MyTeam2MyTeam

Atalanta Bergamasca Calcio

Passing Parameters — Comparisonator

PARAMETERS	38 matches	AVG	AVG	38 matches	PARAMETERS
Passes	∨	489.74	517.84	∧	Passes
Successful passes	∨	411.05	444.66	∧	Successful passes
Received pass	∨	338.53	373	∧	Received pass
Smart passes	∧	9.61	7.97	∨	Smart passes
Successful smart passes	∧	4	3.89	∨	Successful smart passes
Key passes	∧	3.26	3.18	∨	Key passes
Successful key passes	∧	3.18	3.11	∨	Successful key passes
Long passes	∧	48.16	39.5	∨	Long passes
Successful long passes	∧	27.29	23.37	∨	Successful long passes
Through passes	∧	8	7.24	∨	Through passes
Successful through passes	∨	2.58	2.95	∧	Successful through passes
Passes to final third	∧	65.95	63.11	∨	Passes to final third
Successful passes to final third	∨	47.87	49.32	∧	Successful passes to final third
Crosses	∨	16.24	18.26	∧	Crosses
Successful crosses	∨	5.68	6.32	∧	Successful crosses

Season	Possession	Positional Attacks	with shots	Counter-attacks	with shot
2017/2018	55,30%	35,24	7,13 (20,24%)	2,87	1,03 (35,78%)
2018/2019	56,74%	35,5	7,39 (20,83%)	3,29	1,16 (35,20%)

The stable percentage of the positional attacks and the increased rate of the possession per game prove the definition of the style of play again; the high defensive pressure is not a tool to counter-attack as high up in the field as possible, but a way to organize the attacking patterns of play inside the opposition's half, unbalancing the opposition's defensive shapes.

The counter-attacks per match increased too, but they aren't proof of a direct possession style, but only a constant and aggressive high 1 v 1 pressure throughout the field.

Team Comparisonator / MyTeam2MyTeam

Atalanta Bergamasca Calcio

Offensive Parameters

PARAMETERS	38 matches		TOTAL		TOTAL		38 matches	PARAMETERS
Goals scored		∨	57	77		∧		Goals scored
Assists		∨	38	48		∧		Assists
Shot assists		∨	379	413		∧		Shot assists
Shots		∨	550	595		∧		Shots
Shots on target		∨	202	221		∧		Shots on target
Head shots		∨	84	95		∧		Head shots
Dribbles		∧	1413	1390		∨		Dribbles
Successful dribbles		∧	999	989		∨		Successful dribbles
Attacking actions		∨	2945	2982		∧		Attacking actions
Successful attacking actions		∨	1569	1598		∧		Successful attacking actions
Touches in box		∨	797	900		∧		Touches in box
Penalties		∧	9	4		∨		Penalties
Successful penalties		∧	5	2		∨		Successful penalties
Expected goals		∨	65.22	71.98		∧		Expected goals

The offensive parameters prove the general improved attacking efficacy; 20 goals (77 against 71.98 xG) and 10 assist more than the first analyzed season and more shots and shots on target. Another interesting data is the number of touches in the box; 113 more than the 2017/2018 season (close to 3 more than the first season).

Duels Parameters

PARAMETERS	38 matches		TOTAL		TOTAL		38 matches	PARAMETERS
Defensive duels made		∧	2977	2820		∨		Defensive duels made
Defensive duels won		∧	717	672		∨		Defensive duels won
Offensive duels made		∧	3315	3255		∨		Offensive duels made
Offensive duels won		∨	1622	1683		∧		Offensive duels won
Aerial duels made		∧	1507	1405		∨		Aerial duels made
Aerial duels won		∧	734	651		∨		Aerial duels won
Pressing duels		∨	375	1326		∧		Pressing duels

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Team Comparisonator / MyTeam2MyTeam

Atalanta Bergamasca Calcio

Offensive Parameters

PARAMETERS	38 matches		AVG	AVG		38 matches	PARAMETERS
Goals scored		∨	1.5	2.03	∧		Goals scored
Assists		∨	1	1.26	∧		Assists
Shot assists		∨	9.97	10.87	∧		Shot assists
Shots		∨	14.47	15.66	∧		Shots
Shots on target		∨	5.32	5.82	∧		Shots on target
Head shots		∨	2.21	2.5	∧		Head shots
Dribbles		∧	37.18	36.58	∨		Dribbles
Successful dribbles		∧	26.29	26.03	∨		Successful dribbles
Attacking actions		∨	77.5	78.47	∧		Attacking actions
Successful attacking actions		∨	41.29	42.05	∧		Successful attacking actions
Touches in box		∨	20.97	23.68	∧		Touches in box
Penalties		∧	0.24	0.11	∨		Penalties
Successful penalties		∧	0.13	0.05	∨		Successful penalties
Expected goals		∨	1.72	1.89	∧		Expected goals

Duels Parameters

PARAMETERS	38 matches		AVG	AVG		38 matches	PARAMETERS
Defensive duels made		∧	78.34	74.21	∨		Defensive duels made
Defensive duels won		∧	18.87	17.68	∨		Defensive duels won
Offensive duels made		∧	87.24	85.66	∨		Offensive duels made
Offensive duels won		∨	42.68	44.29	∧		Offensive duels won
Aerial duels made		∧	39.66	36.97	∨		Aerial duels made
Aerial duels won		∧	19.32	17.13	∨		Aerial duels won
Pressing duels		∨	9.87	34.89	∧		Pressing duels

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The last season confirmed Atalanta as one of the more efficient teams with the ball; the decreases of pass data are negligible. Otherwise, the number of key passes (successful ones included) has considerably increased as well the through passes one, despite a small decrease in efficacy.

Received pass data is even better than the previous season, which means improved accuracy while carrying out play patterns.

Team Comparisonator / MyTeam2MyTeam

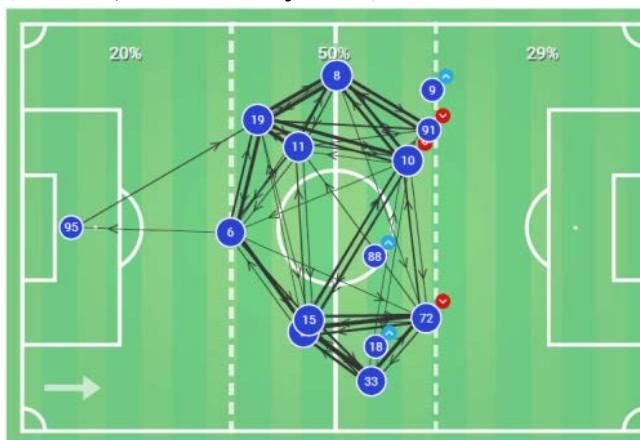**Atalanta Bergamasca Calcio**

Passing Parameters

PARAMETERS	38 ⟶ matches		AVG	AVG		38 ⟶ matches	PARAMETERS
Passes		∧	517.84	515.39	∨		Passes
Successful passes		∧	444.66	443.42	∨		Successful passes
Received pass		∨	373	380.03	∧		Received pass
Smart passes		∧	7.97	7.82	∨		Smart passes
Successful smart passes		∧	3.89	3.87	∨		Successful smart passes
Key passes		∨	3.18	5.26	∧		Key passes
Successful key passes		∨	3.11	5.16	∧		Successful key passes
Long passes		∧	39.5	39.34	∨		Long passes
Successful long passes		∧	23.37	21.87	∨		Successful long passes
Through passes		∨	7.24	7.58	∧		Through passes
Successful through passes		∧	2.95	2.82	∨		Successful through passes
Passes to final third		∧	63.11	62.76	∨		Passes to final third
Successful passes to final third		∧	49.32	47.89	∨		Successful passes to final third
Crosses		∧	18.26	17.58	∨		Crosses
Successful crosses		∨	6.32	6.61	∧		Successful crosses

Season	Possession	Positional Attacks	with shots	Counter-attacks	with shot
2018/2019	56,74%	35,5	7,39 (20,83%)	3,29	1,16 (35,20%)
2019/2020	55,57%	34,50	8,71 (25,25%)	3,03	1,47 (48,70%)

Even if the general data about possession has decreased during the 2019/2020 season, the efficacy has increased; Atalanta shots more through positional attacks and counter-attacks, even if the possession percentage per game has decreased.

Pass Network Serie A 2019/20
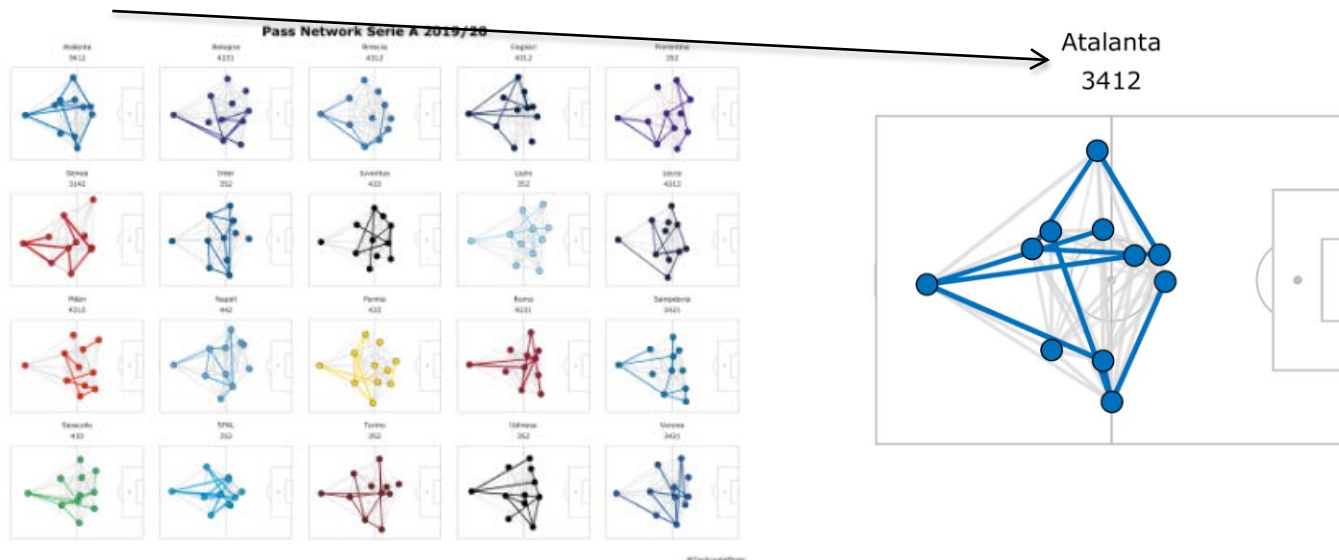
Atalanta
3412

Passing pattern example: Atalanta – Roma (Serie A, 15 Febraury 2020)

Passing pattern example: Atalanta – Psg (Champions League Last 8 round, 12 August 2020)

Positions in the field : Juventus – Atalanta (Serie A, 11 July 2020)

Players positions during possession phases and the passing sonar make the idea of style very clear: move the ball to the middle third quickly, unbalance the opponents along one side and fins the chance to assist a striker and to finish in the center after a switch of side (opposition's weak one).

Team Comparisonator / MyTeam2MyTeam

Atalanta Bergamasca Calcio

Offensive Parameters

PARAMETERS	38 matches		TOTAL	TOTAL		38 matches	PARAMETERS
Goals scored		∨	77	98	∧		Goals scored
Assists		∨	48	52	∧		Assists
Shot assists		∨	413	445	∧		Shot assists
Shots		∨	595	674	∧		Shots
Shots on target		∨	221	267	∧		Shots on target
Head shots		∧	95	91	∨		Head shots
Dribbles		∧	1390	1171	∨		Dribbles
Successful dribbles		∧	989	845	∨		Successful dribbles
Attacking actions		∧	2982	2810	∨		Attacking actions
Successful attacking actions		∧	1598	1314	∨		Successful attacking actions
Touches in box		∨	900	1017	∧		Touches in box
Penalties		∨	4	10	∧		Penalties
Successful penalties		∨	2	7	∧		Successful penalties
Expected goals		∨	71.98	82.99	∧		Expected goals

Duels Parameters

PARAMETERS	38 matches		TOTAL	TOTAL		38 matches	PARAMETERS
Defensive duels made		∧	2820	2703	∨		Defensive duels made
Defensive duels won		∧	672	553	∨		Defensive duels won
Offensive duels made		∧	3255	2836	∨		Offensive duels made
Offensive duels won		∧	1683	1446	∨		Offensive duels won
Aerial duels made		∧	1405	1215	∨		Aerial duels made
Aerial duels won		∨	651	656	∧		Aerial duels won
Pressing duels		∨	1326	1435	∧		Pressing duels

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Atalanta is the most efficient team of the Italian Serie A of the last season; 98 goals (21 more than the previous season – 82,99 xG), a high number of shots, and percentage of shot on target. Again, 3 more touches inside the box than the last season and an increased average of pressing duels have taken to have 10 penalties (6 more than the previous season).

Atalanta Bergamasca Calcio

Offensive Parameters

Comparisonator

PARAMETERS	38 matches		AVG	AVG		38 matches	PARAMETERS
Goals scored		∨	2.03	2.58	∧		Goals scored
Assists		∨	1.26	1.37	∧		Assists
Shot assists		∨	10.87	11.71	∧		Shot assists
Shots		∨	15.66	17.74	∧		Shots
Shots on target		∨	5.82	7.03	∧		Shots on target
Head shots		∧	2.5	2.39	∨		Head shots
Dribbles		∧	36.58	30.82	∨		Dribbles
Successful dribbles		∧	26.03	22.24	∨		Successful dribbles
Attacking actions		∧	78.47	73.95	∨		Attacking actions
Successful attacking actions		∧	42.05	34.58	∨		Successful attacking actions
Touches in box		∨	23.68	26.76	∧		Touches in box
Penalties		∨	0.11	0.26	∧		Penalties
Successful penalties		∨	0.05	0.18	∧		Successful penalties
Expected goals		∨	1.89	2.18	∧		Expected goals

Duels Parameters

Comparisonator

PARAMETERS	38 matches		AVG	AVG		38 matches	PARAMETERS
Defensive duels made		∧	74.21	71.13	∨		Defensive duels made
Defensive duels won		∧	17.68	14.55	∨		Defensive duels won
Offensive duels made		∧	85.66	74.63	∨		Offensive duels made
Offensive duels won		∧	44.29	38.05	∨		Offensive duels won
Aerial duels made		∧	36.97	31.97	∨		Aerial duels made
Aerial duels won		∨	17.13	17.26	∧		Aerial duels won
Pressing duels		∨	34.89	37.76	∧		Pressing duels

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The "Dea" also has the highest shot per game average and the highest shot per game from dangerous areas average (2019/2020).

2018/2019 and 2019-2020 Atalanta – Italian Serie A passing and attacking data comparison

2018/2019:

Parameters	AVG TOTAL	Weekly Rank		Parameters	AVG TOTAL	Weekly Rank
Goals scored	2.03	●	1	Passes	517.84	● 4
Assists	1.26	●	1	Successful passes	444.66	● 4
Shot assists	10.87	●	3	Received pass	373	● 4
Shots	15.66	●	2	Smart passes	7.97	● 3
Shots on target	5.82	●	3	Successful smart passes	3.89	● 1
Head shots	2.5	●	4	Key passes	3.18	● 6
Dribbles	36.58	●	1	Successful key passes	3.11	● 6
Successful dribbles	26.03	●	1	Long passes	39.5	● 20
Attacking actions	78.47	●	2	Successful long passes	23.37	● 18
Successful attacking actions	42.05	●	1	Through passes	7.24	● 8
Touches in box	23.68	●	1	Successful through passes	2.95	● 2
Penalties	0.11	∨	19	Passes to final third	63.11	● 4
Successful penalties	0.05	∧	19	Successful passes to final third	49.32	● 4
				Crosses	18.26	● 8
				Successful crosses	6.32	● 10

2019/2020

Parameters	AVG TOTAL		Weekly Rank
Goals scored	2.58	●	1
Assists	1.37	●	1
Shot assists	11.71	●	1
Shots	17.74	●	1
Shots on target	7.03	●	1
Head shots	2.39	●	1
Dribbles	30.82	●	4
Successful dribbles	22.24	●	3
Attacking actions	73.95	●	1
Successful attacking actions	34.58	●	1
Touches in box	26.76	●	1
Penalties	0.26	●	9
Successful penalties	0.18	●	11

Parameters	AVG TOTAL		Weekly Rank
Passes	515.39	●	4
Successful passes	443.42	●	4
Received pass	380.03	●	4
Smart passes	7.82	●	4
Successful smart passes	3.87	●	1
Key passes	5.26	●	1
Successful key passes	5.16	●	1
Long passes	39.34	●	17
Successful long passes	21.87	●	18
Through passes	7.58	●	8
Successful through passes	2.82	●	3
Passes to final third	62.76	●	4
Successful passes to final third	47.89	●	3
Crosses	17.58	●	7
Successful crosses	6.61	●	2

The last two complete seasonal average offensive data of the Bergamascan club are at the highest level possible for an "on the paper medium club," and they are even higher if we compare them to the rest of the League's teams.

They have been the best team in Italy for average scored goals per match and assists, the same concerning dribbles, successful dribbles. The attacking actions efficacy has been the best in the League, and Atalanta played the highest number of touches inside the opposition's box.

The first positions for all the average passing data and the first one for smart passes prove the possession-based idea of soccer, but not just for the sake of it, to score goals.

The next season was even better, and Atalanta qualified for the UCL rounds for the second time in a row: Gasperini's squad was the best in Italy in nearly all the offensive stats; the average passing data improved, as well (first seat for key passes attempts and successful ones, and smart passes).

The basis passing stats could be ranked in the first seats of the League, as well as the through passes attempts and successful ones.

One last data becomes very interesting; the average of successful crosses per game increased from 6.32 to 6.61 against one cross less (7 against 8). The efficacy of crosses data took Atalanta to be the 2nd team in Italy for completed cross passe, providing the development of the wide patterns of play.

The large range of Atalanta's scorers

Atalanta's scorers are many within the squad; strikers, center, and wide midfielders are all good scorers, thanks to their skills and the Italian team offensive-minded style of play, which stimulates the players to attack the spaces. Counter-attacks or positional attacks (free the spaces to attack them later) don't make any difference.

2018/2019

2018/2019	Total	P.90'	Head	From corners
League average	50.95	1.26	8.9	6.15
Atalanta	77	1.91	13	9
	From free kicks	**From penalties**	**Outside penalty area**	
League average	1,05	4,85	7,5	
Atalanta	/	2	11	
	xG	**Goals**	**xG per shot**	
League average	53.04	50.95	0.11	
Atalanta	72.96	77	0.122	

55 scored from positional play or direct attacks and 5 from counter-attacks.

2018/2019	Total	P.90'
D. Zapata	23	0.67
J. Iličić	12	0.48
A. Gómez	7	0.21
R. Gosens	3	0.13
M. Pašalić	5	0.26
G. Mancini	5	0.19
H. Hateboer	5	0.14
T. Castagne	4	0.17
E. Rigoni	3	0.48
R. Freuler	2	0.06
M. de Roon	2	0.06
L. Valzania	2	0.18
Rafael Tolói	1	0.06
J. Palomino	1	0.04
Musa Barrow	1	0.14
B. Djimsiti	1	0.05

Atalanta scored 26 goals more than the League's average; all the average data were higher than the League ones but from free kicks and penalties. Furthermore, the Dea scored 4 goals more than the seasonal expected ones.

The range of scorers is indicative to understand the variety of offensive solutions which this team take advantage of from its style of play.

The strikers scored a lot indeed (43 goals - more than 55%), but the midfielders gave a high contribution to this stats (18 goals – more than 23%), and defenders, as well (17 goals – 22%).

Midfielders and defender goals'contribution was one of the higher of all the rest of each League's team.

2019/2020

2019/2020	Total	P.90'	Head	From corners
League average	57.7	1.41	9.15	6.05
Atalanta	98 (96+2)	2.43	14	12
	From free kicks	From penalties	Outside penalty area	
League average	1.4	7.6	8.65	
Atalanta	4	7	21	
	xG	Goals	xG per shot	
League average	58.15	57.7	0.11	
Atalanta	83.97	98	0.125	

67 scored from positional play or direct attacks and 3 from counter-attacks.

2019/2020	Total	P.90'
L. Muriel	18	1.18
D. Zapata	18	0.76
J. Iličić	15	0.77
R. Gosens	9	0.29
M. Pašalić	9	0.32
R. Malinovskiy	8	0.44
A. Gómez	7	0.21
B. Djimsiti	2	0.06
R. Freuler	2	0.07
M. de Roon	2	0.06
J. Palomino	2	0.07
Rafael Tolói	2	0.06
A. Traoré	1	-
T. Castagne	1	0.05

Atalanta scored 40 goals more than the League's average; all the average data were higher again; penalty kicks and free kicks skills were improved as well. Furthermore, the Dea scored 14 goals more than the the seasonal expected ones.

The range of scorers is agains indicative to understand how the variety of offensive solutions which this team take advantage of from its style of play was improved more and more concerning the prior season.

The strikers scored a lot again and they gave a big help to the finishing data (66 goals - more than 67%), The center midfielders acted with more defensive tasks, but they scored 4 goals (Freuler and De Roon), covering the more attacking minded teammtes (Pasalic and Gosens score 18 goals totally, and 9 each – nearly 18 %).

The defenders scored less tha the prior season (8 goals), but the missing contribution was without effect thanks to the large amount of goals from forwards.

General Principles of Play

- **The 1-3-4-1-2 or 1-3-4-2-1 formation shapes have myriad variations within them**; the exchanges of positions create a rough 1-3-2-5 attacking shape with different players and positions from time to time.
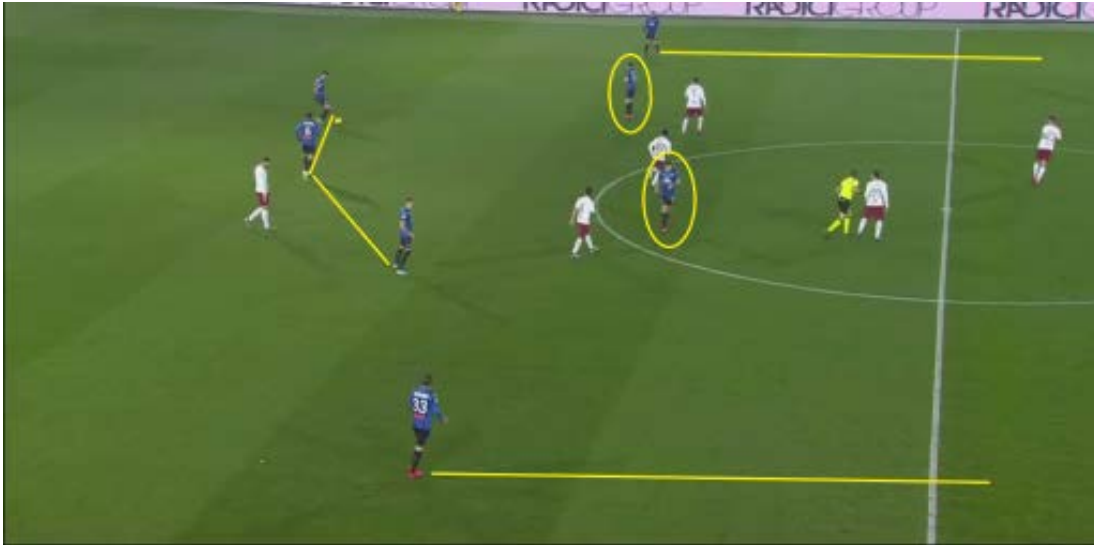
3 players are building up, 2 center midfielders are standing higher up to pass options to overcome the opposition defensive line. The wingbacks are ready to push up along the flanks to reach the strikers' line (3-2 + momentary 2 out wide).

The basic attacking shape involves the wingbacks along the same line as the strikers and one of the center attackers (usually Ilicic) in the No.10 position just above the upper line (2-5). The shapes are never static, and the lines are made of different players from time to time. These exchanges of positions and runs off the ball don't stop inside the box; Atalanta has the highest number of touches inside the opposition's box than all Italian Serie A teams.

- **Mobility and versatile players (center midfielders, wingbacks, strikers) rotate, interchange positions, and are active in different areas of the field, moving through other spaces, creating numerical superiority out wide.** The data about the first match of the 2020-2021 season are very indicative.

PARAMETERS	1 matches	TOTAL	TOTAL	1 matches	PARAMETERS
Passes		531	415		Passes
Successful passes		457	351		Successful passes
Received pass		394	291		Received pass
Smart passes		9	8		Smart passes
Successful smart passes		4	3		Successful smart passes
Key passes		8	2		Key passes
Successful key passes		8	2		Successful key passes
Long passes		50	53		Long passes
Successful long passes		32	33		Successful long passes
Through passes		8	10		Through passes
Successful through passes		3	4		Successful through passes
Passes to final third		67	40		Passes to final third
Successful passes to final third		57	28		Successful passes to final third
Crosses		26	10		Crosses
Successful crosses		12	2		Successful crosses

90% of the passes were short. They are confirming the patient's possession-based style of play. The match's heat map demonstrates as Atalanta covers all the field (middle and final third), moving the opposition in the middle third and playing out wide in the half-spaces in the offensive half to find center finishing solutions. Center midfielders move concerning the wingbacks and forwards positions to ensure passing options.

Team Comparisonator / MyTeam2Others

Atalanta Bergamasca Calcio   Torino FC

Offensive Parameters

PARAMETERS	1 matches	TOTAL	TOTAL	1 matches	PARAMETERS
Goals scored	^	4	2	˅	Goals scored
Assists	^	3	2	˅	Assists
Shot assists	^	13	5	˅	Shot assists
Shots	^	17	7	˅	Shots
Shots on target	^	7	4	˅	Shots on target
Head shots	^	3	2	˅	Head shots
Dribbles	^	29	18	˅	Dribbles
Successful dribbles	^	16	8	˅	Successful dribbles
Attacking actions	^	81	43	˅	Attacking actions
Successful attacking actions	^	39	17	˅	Successful attacking actions
Touches in box	^	33	8	˅	Touches in box
Penalties	●	0	0	●	Penalties
Successful penalties	●	0	0	●	Successful penalties
Expected goals	^	2.19	0.52	˅	Expected goals

Attacking sides   **Shots directions**

Gasperini's team exploited both the flanks during possession phases (left - 37% and right - 39%), using the final third's center space to shot on goal. Shots from the left and right side were attempts from wingbacks and center midfielders, coming from the opposition's weak side, receiving cross or through passes from the condensed one.

- **Mobility creates connections and simple geometrical shapes.** The most recognizable shapes are the rhombuses, the reference for all Dea's patterns of play. The double rhombus along the flanks with link players (the center back and another player, who is not directly involved in a specific situation of play) is very recurrent, as well. The vertical and horizontal axis are other points of reference for Atalanta's possession phase. Rhombuses and axis are independent of the players' roles.
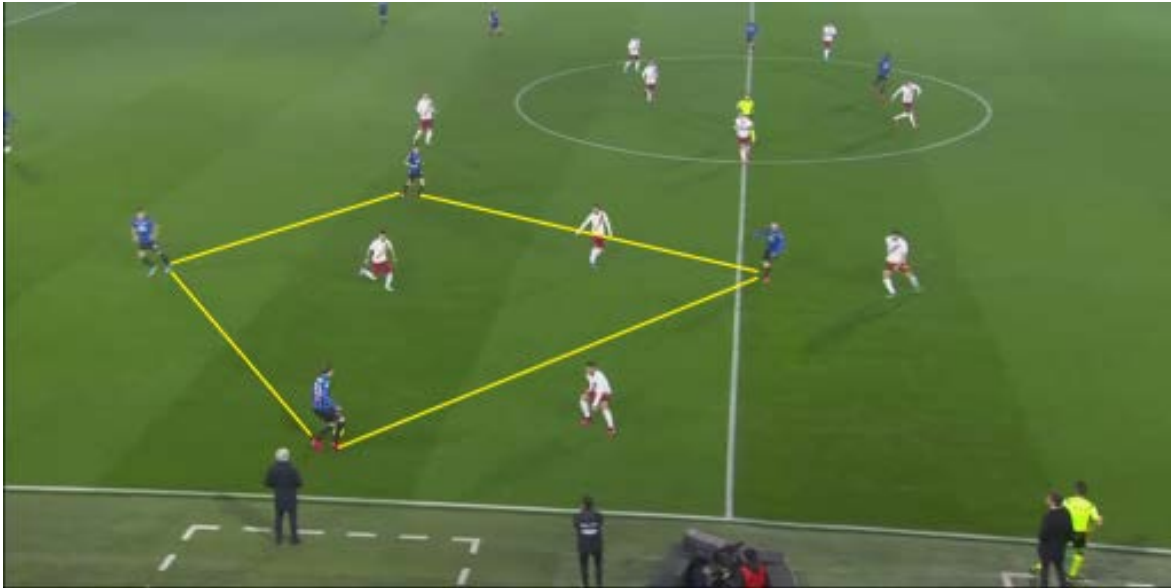
(Djimisiti, Hateboer, De Roon, and Ilicic along the attacking right flank)…

…(Toloi, Gosens, Freuler, and Zapata along the attacking left flank); Gomez dropped back to act as a link player.

- **Create 1 v 1 duels and dribbles the ball up in the field to invite the defenders out of positions and unbalance the opponents**

Atalanta just won the possession back in the middle third. Freuler passes to the first safe passing option; the opposition defensive line is unbalanced. A gap appears along the attacking left flank, where Zapata is already standing free from markers.

Atalanta distributes the ball out wide along the left flank. Gosens receives and the opposition shifts wider to counter the possession phase; meanwhile, Zapata's position as called the opposition's right fullback out of position to preventively mark him. Again, there a large gap behind the fullback.

Zapata drops back along the flank, and he invites the marker to a 1 v 1 duel out of his position. The opponents condense the ball area to create numerical advantage (4v3), but Zapata wins the offensive duel; he can turn and look the flank to play a pass for Gosens to run onto the free space.

Atalanta's center striker dropping back movement along the flank invited the opposition's right fullback out of position, unbalancing the defensive line even more than it was after the loss of possession. Gosens, the left wingback, could then move forward off the ball and dribble it through the final third.

Furthermore, the previous creation of a strong side around the ball, as a transition to attack, created another gap in the center for Atalanta advanced midfielder runs off the ball (Lammers and Malinovsky).

- **Give and Go along the flanks (1-2 combinations, overlaps, exchanges of positions and rotations)**
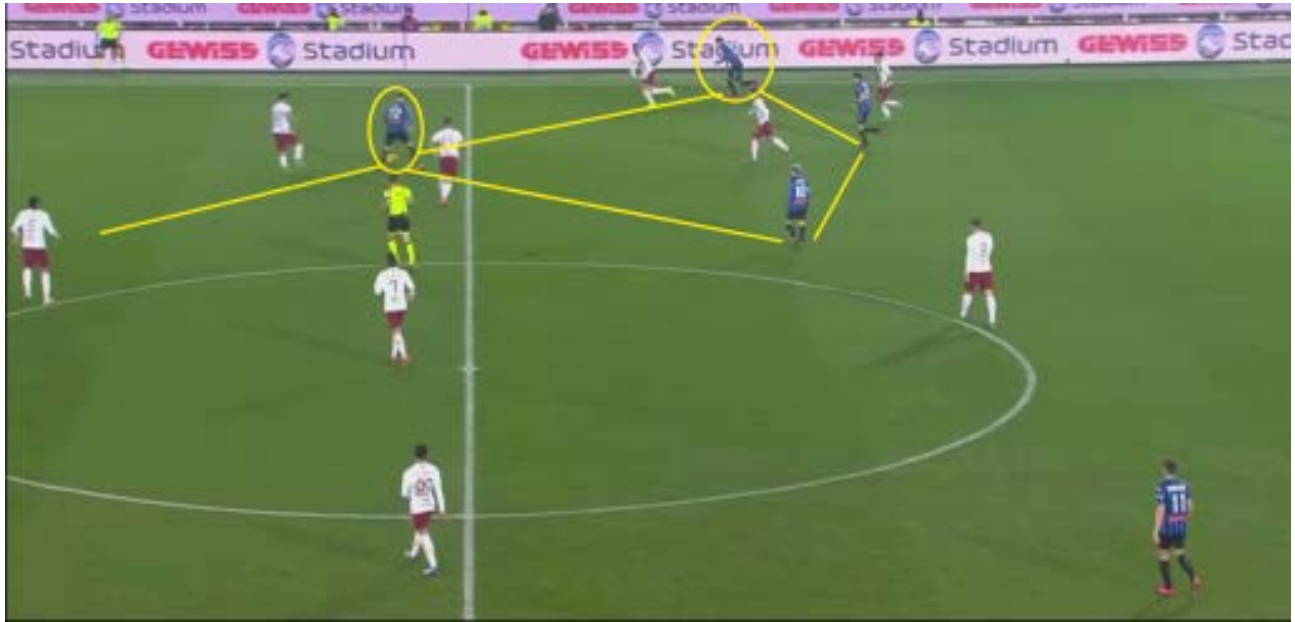
Ilicic has just received the ball from Hateboer, after dropping back; Gomez and De Roon complete the rhombus out wide along the right flank.
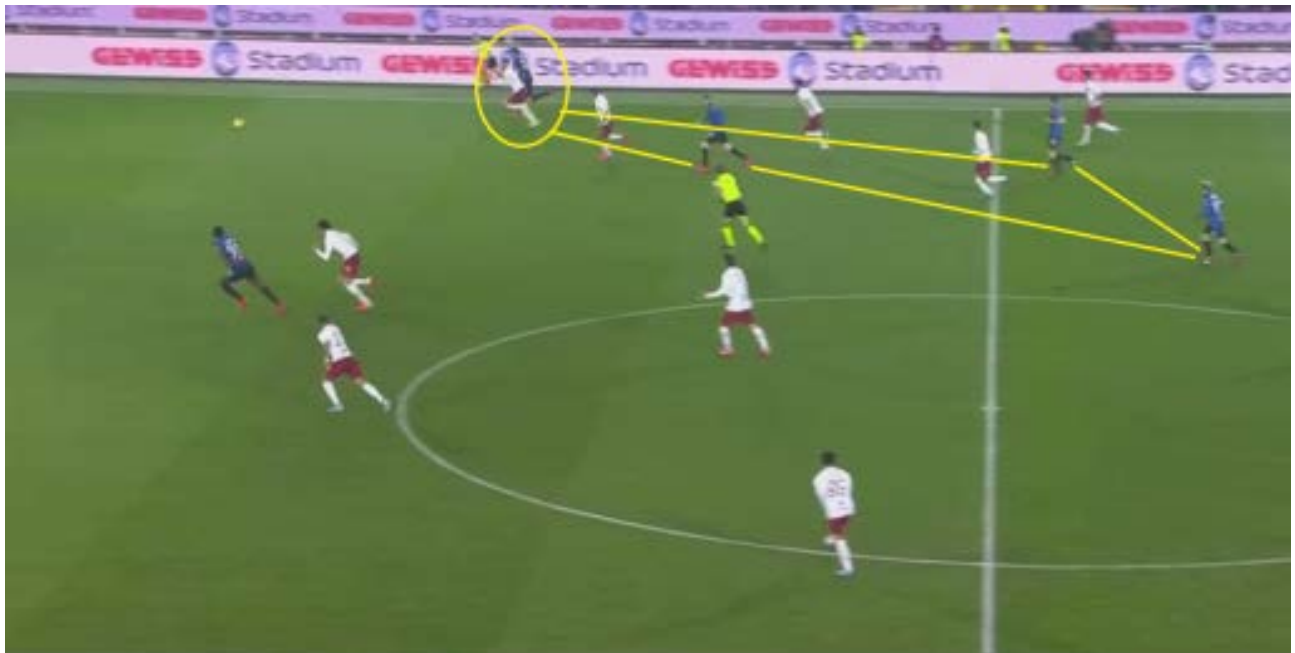
Atalanta wide rhombus has forced the opponents to condense the ball area in the middle third, and the lower wide defender has pushed up, opening a gap along the attacking right flank. Ilicic has space and time on the ball to receive, turn and play the return pass, meeting Hateboer's run off the ball.

Toloi, De Roon, Hateboer, and Ilicic shape the rhombus out wide in the final third; Gomez acts as a link player. Atalanta forces the opposition to create a strong area around the ball.

4 players are out of positions, and a quick passing combination is enough to play out and allow Ilicic to receive behind the opposition's pressure zone.

Ilicic has the ball out wide along the left flank; Gosens underlaps, and Zapata drops back. Freuler completes the rhombus.

Zapata receives, but he can't turn toward the opposition's goal; Gosens supports his move, and Freuler acts as a back passing option.

Zapata maintains the possession, and Freueler has shifted wide; meanwhile, Djimisiti has moved up to support the teammates.

Freueler and Zapata play a 1-2 wall passing combinations and give Gosens the time to run off the ball in behind along the left.

Gosens can receive free from markers, and he could play a ground cross passes along the space between the defensive line and the opposition's goalkeeper.

- **Deep combinations of play to attack the opposition's goal (cuts and runs in behind off the ball)**
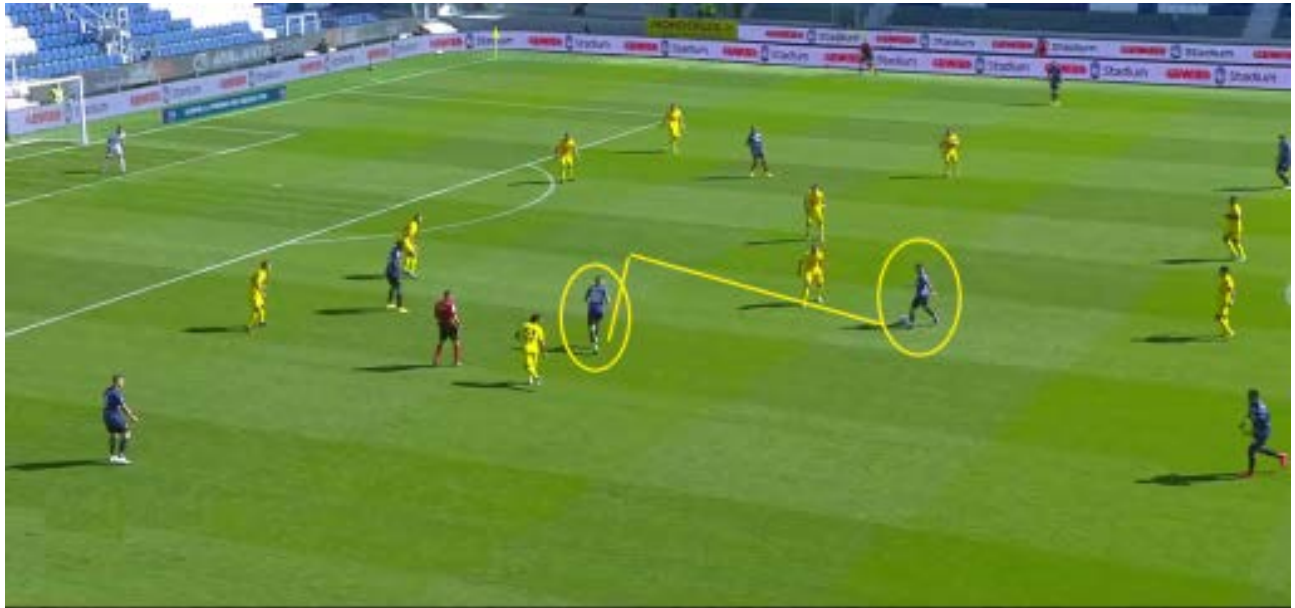
Gomez has the ball in the center, and Pasalic runs off the ball behind the opposition's midfielders line.
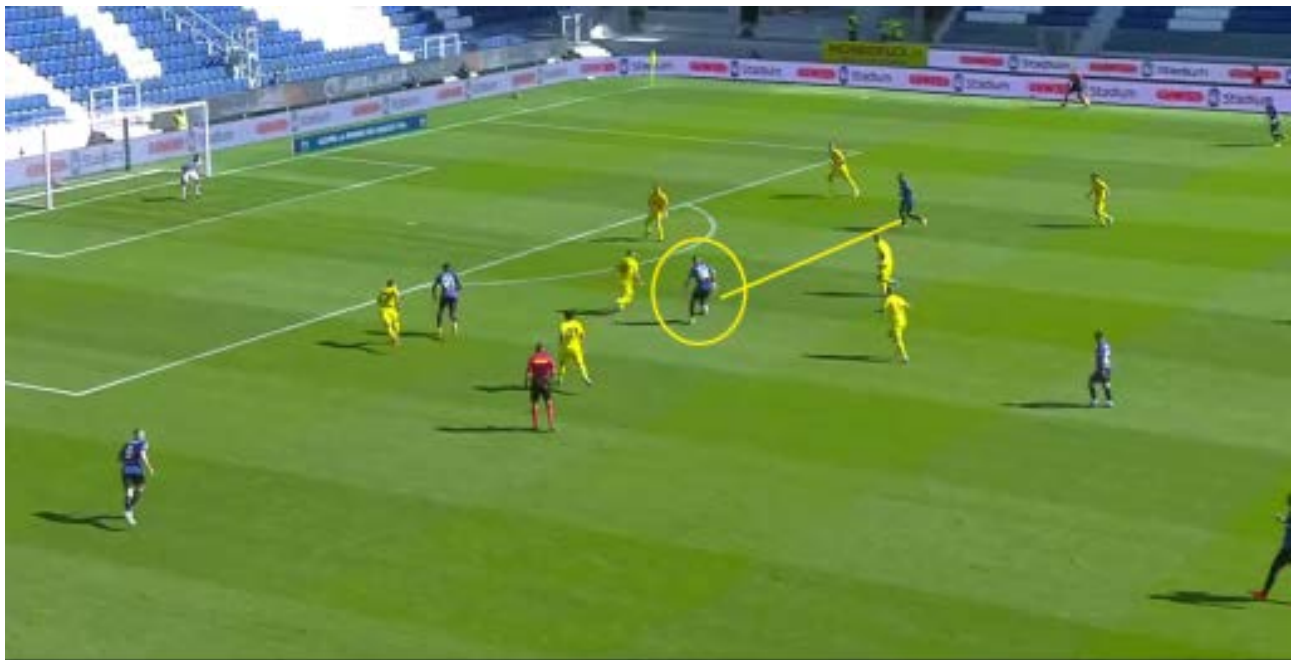
Pasalic receives, but he is under pressure, and he must pass horizontally to Muriel to save the possession.

3 Dea's players can face the opposition's goal.

Zapata, Muriel, and Pasalic condense the center in front of the opposition's goal (zone 14); Gosens is then free to cut inside from the left flank and receive a diagonal pass from Zapata behind the opposition's last defensive line.
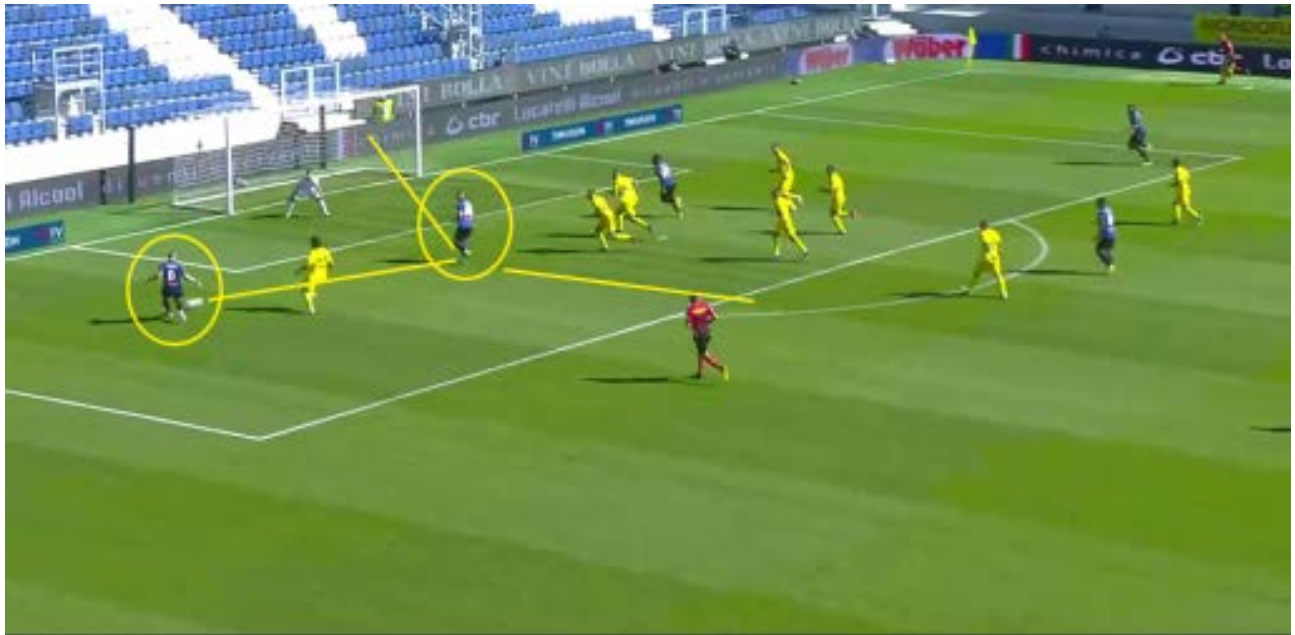
Gosens has time and space on the ball to play a ground cross pass, as well as Pasalic can move off the ball and free from the marker through the weak zone of the opposition's defense.

Pasalic receives and scores.

Specific Principles of Play

- **Atalanta builds up from the back with 3 open defenders and 2 center midfielders**, which often move out wide or drop back along the defensive line; the aim is to gradually progress the move without long passes slowly: play deep, open the field's width first.

1.   One center midfielders usually move into the channel to ensure a passing option; the wide center back and the wingback can push forward along the wing. The first one has a double task; to take part in the building up phase and cover the wingback pushing up together with the wingback.

2.   If the wider center back dribbles the ball forward, the center midfielder stands to retain the defensive shape.

3.   If the center backs stand in their positions, the center midfielder pushes high up and wide in the field.

- **The wide center backs can also play very wide,** along the same vertical line of the wingbacks and the center midfielder cover them getting narrow in the center.

Djimsiti has the ball out wide near the sideline and along the same wingback's line (Gosens).

Frueler shifts out wide to support the teammate, and De Roon shifts across the center to cover the teammate's position.

As Atalanta loses the possession, Freuler and De Roon are ready to counter-press the opposition's first ball carrier. The wide defender has time to retreat, and the center midfielders delay the opposition's transition to the attack phase.

- **The width retention** has the goal of moving the ball through the center to allow a player to tuck in from the opposite side to try to shot and score.

Gosens has the ball on the left of the opposition's box…

…and Hateboer can attack the far post to try to finish. This combination is possible after combinations of play that made the opposition shifting out wide along both sides before forcing the to defend the center space of the first third inside the box.

- **4 players create the wide chains: wingback, center midfielder, No.10, and one striker; they become 5, including the outer defender (if the No.10 is the link player).**

Djimsiti, Gosens, Freuler, and Zapata shape the rhombus along the left flank; Ilicic supports the teammates, and Gomez, in the center and front of the opponent, acts as a link player.

- **Atalanta maintains the shape along the opposite flank, freeing the center and creating quick switches of sides through the uncongested center spaces.**
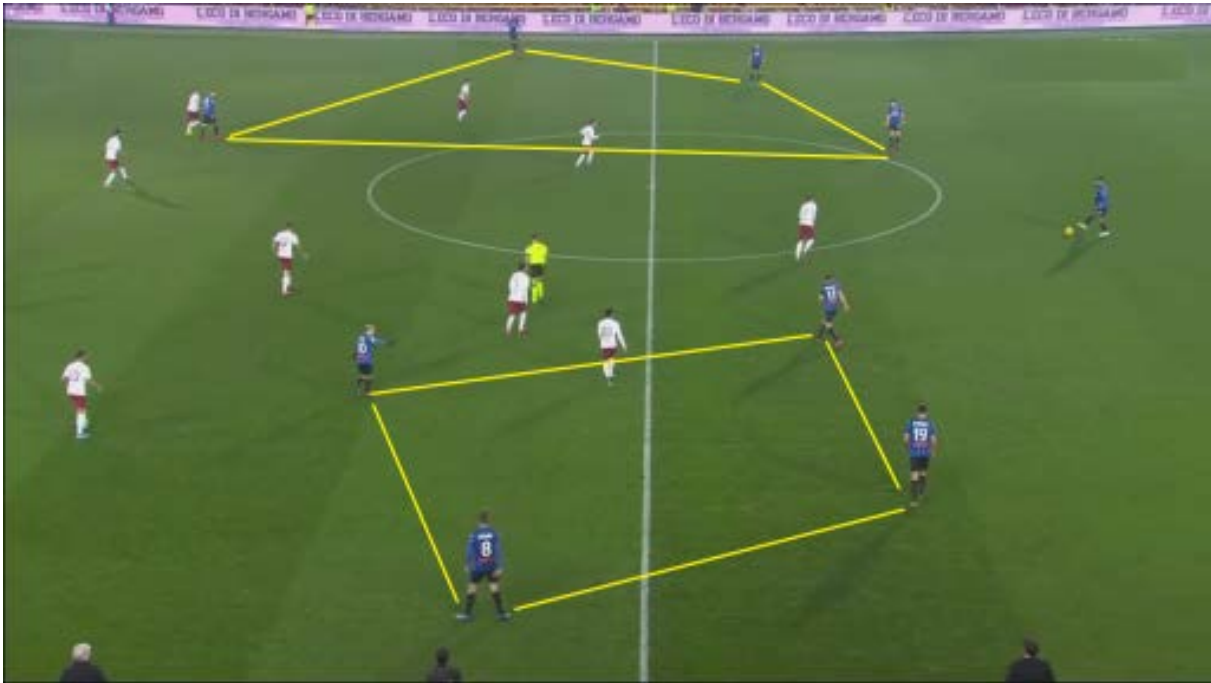
The patterns often take the team to move the ball from one side to another and vice versa. 2 rhombuses along the flanks and the center back (Palomino) acts as a link player.

- **The Dea aims to invite the pressure and move the opponents, creating strong areas along the flanks, before switching the play to the opposite side.** The center midfielders also move forward off the ball too exploit the spaces which the striker creates when it is possible to play out quickly.
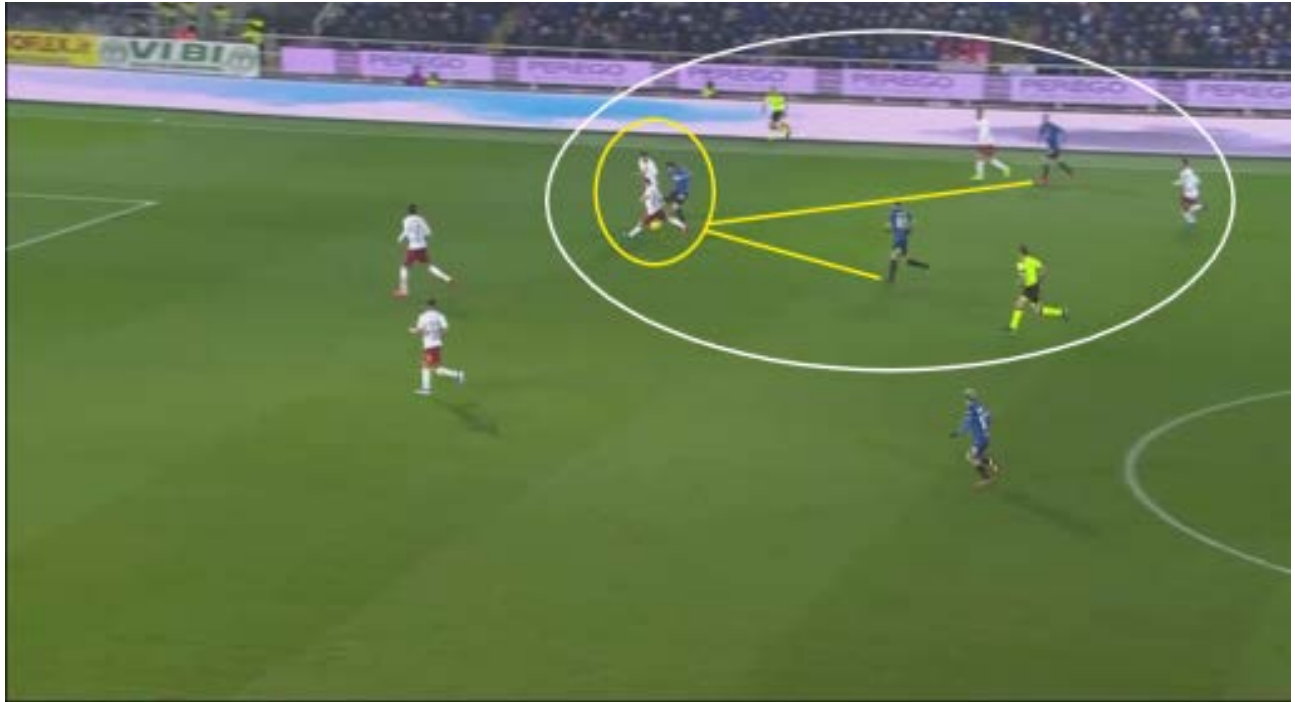
The rhombuses out wide usually invite the opponents to create strong, wide areas around the ball.
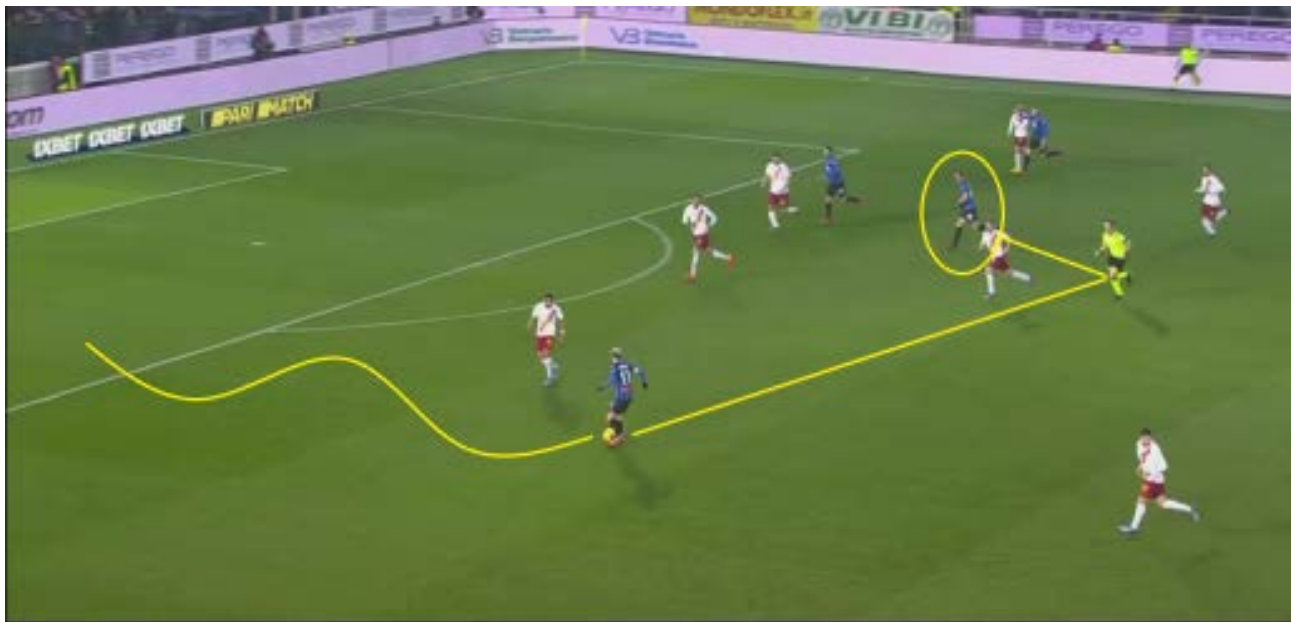
The link players are then usually free to move forward along the weaker zones to receive when the Atalanta can play out of the condensed zone.
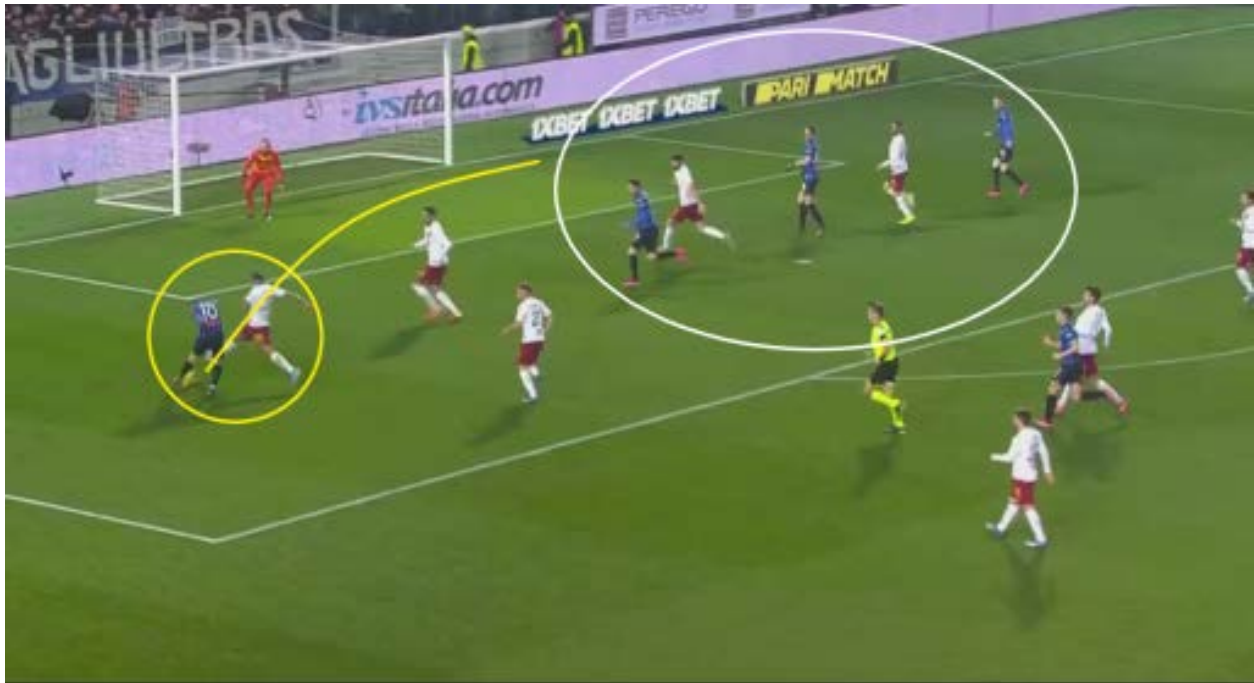
- **Midfielders are free to move and alternate positions in and out half-spaces, all around the middle third, and throughout the finishing zone near the center striker.**

The next images' sequence follows Pasalic, and it shows the movements' freedom throughout the field to support the finishing stage when Atalanta has the possession.

1. Win a wandering ball in the middle third.

2. Save the possession against an opponent's pressure attempt.
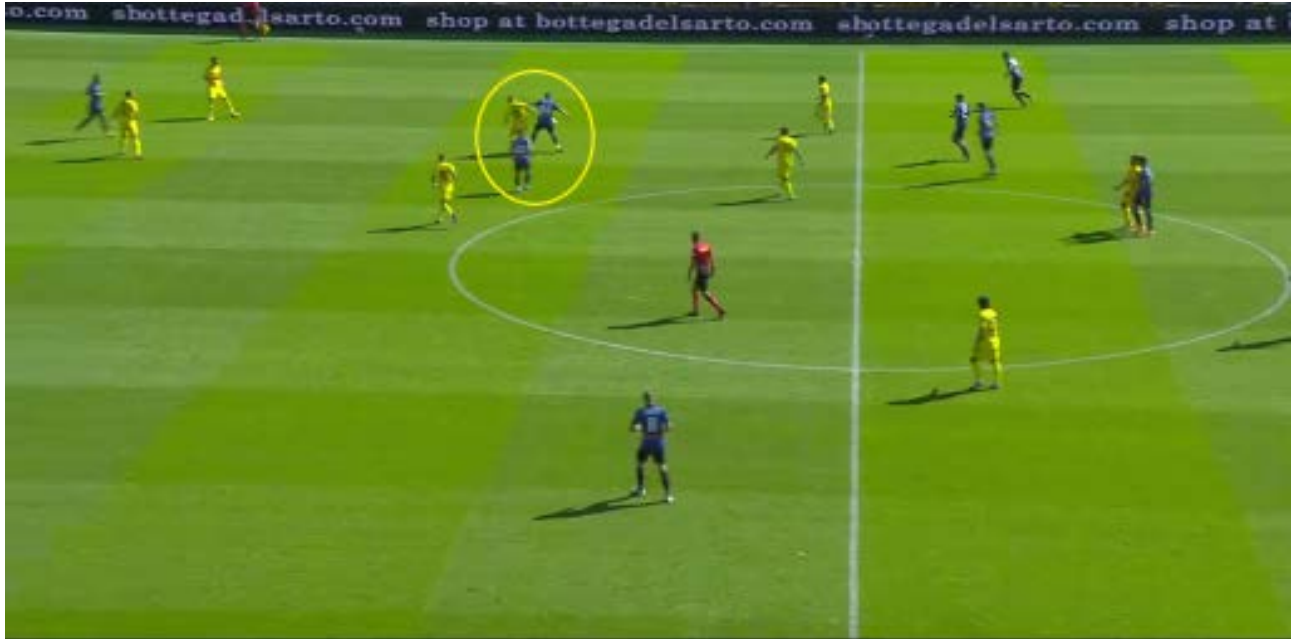
3. Deep play attempt

4. Immediate counter-pressing to win the ball back

5. Quick free-kick to resume the game, distribute and change the side of attack

6. Provide cover behind the ball line if the opposition has numerical superiority.

7. Move toward the ball side to create numerical superiority or support the teammate, if the usual 1 v 1 duels along the flanks don't take the move to the final stage.

8. Support the attacking move behind the ball line, providing cover at the same time

9. Pressure phase to win the ball back quickly

10. Exchange of position with the same role teammates to distribute the ball to the opposite side, after winning the ball back

11. Shift across the center from the flank to follow the teammate's pressure phase and be a safe passing option once the teammates can recover the possession…

…or to follow the direct attacking action of the forwards

12. Act as No.10 to attempt an assist pass

13. Win another wandering ball inside zone 14

14. Move off the ball in behind to receive after a quick passing combination to finish

- **The wingbacks move forward and deep off the ball, ready to tuck in and deep to receive crosses…**
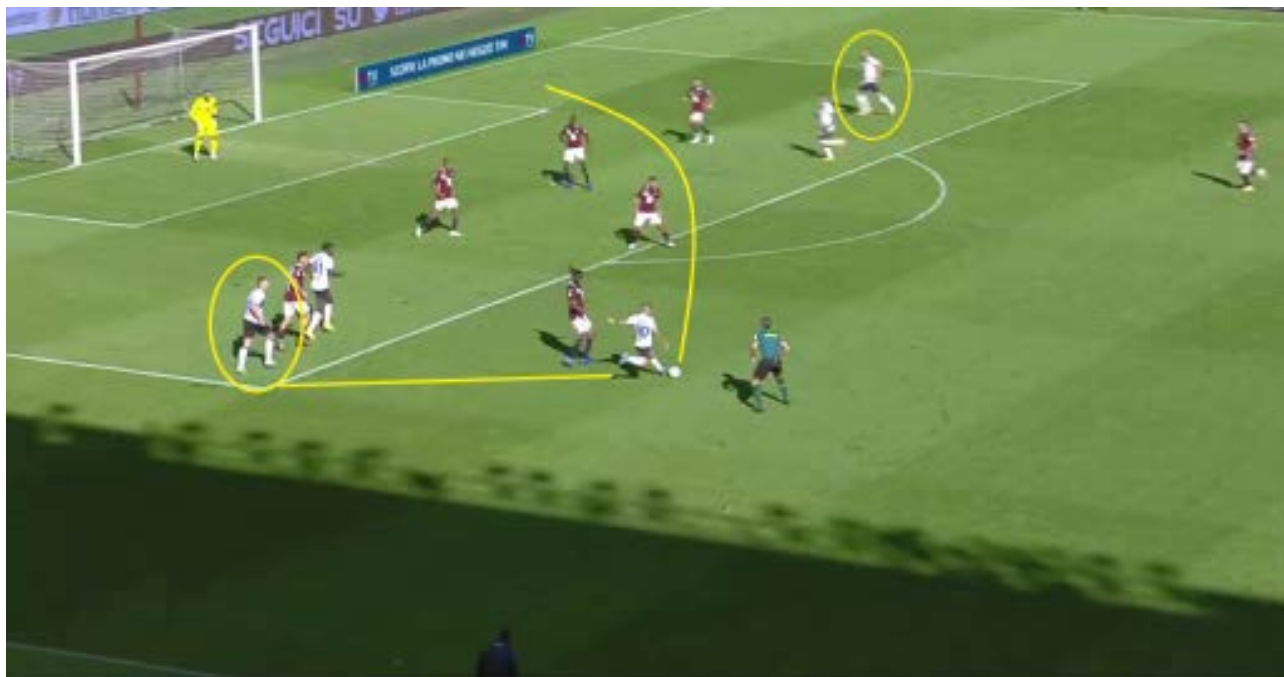
(Gosens, the left wingback passes back to Gomez from the upper corner of the opposition's box on the left. Hateboer, the right wingback, runs off the ball toward the opposition's goal from the opposite flank free from markers, exploiting the narrow opposition's defensive shape in the center or the box…

…The right wingback can exploit the pass from Gomez in behind the defensive line to score; the opposition defensive line can't cover the depth due to the previous flat line's shape.)

…or through passes

(Ilicic is dribbling the ball high in the field along the right flank, as a wingback, after receiving the pass from Hateboer…

…The right wingback cuts inside first after the pass, and he moves off the ball along the half-space to receive a through pass in behind the defensive line from the flank.)

- **The outer defenders are always ready to be active inside the opposition's half to support the wingbacks and the wide forwards**, carrying the ball forward along the flanks or even moving off the ball inside the middle and final thirds (inside the spaces that the forwards create in the center when pulling wide), covered by the center midfielders.

Hateboer has the possession out wide along the right flank. Ilicic shifts across to create space along the opposition's defensive line. De Roon drops back to cover the right defender Djimisiti, who runs forward off the ball to receive a potential pass.

Rotations take De Roon to have the possession as a right defender, Hateboer to move inside till acting as No.10 behind the strikers' line, Ilicic to act as left wingback, and Djimisiti as a center striker.

- **The center striker doesn't attack the depth only**, but he drops back also before attacking the same space he just left free or to help teammates' in behind runs off the ball. It is not uncommon to see a center midfielder pushing beyond them in these situations (Pasalic, more than all the others).
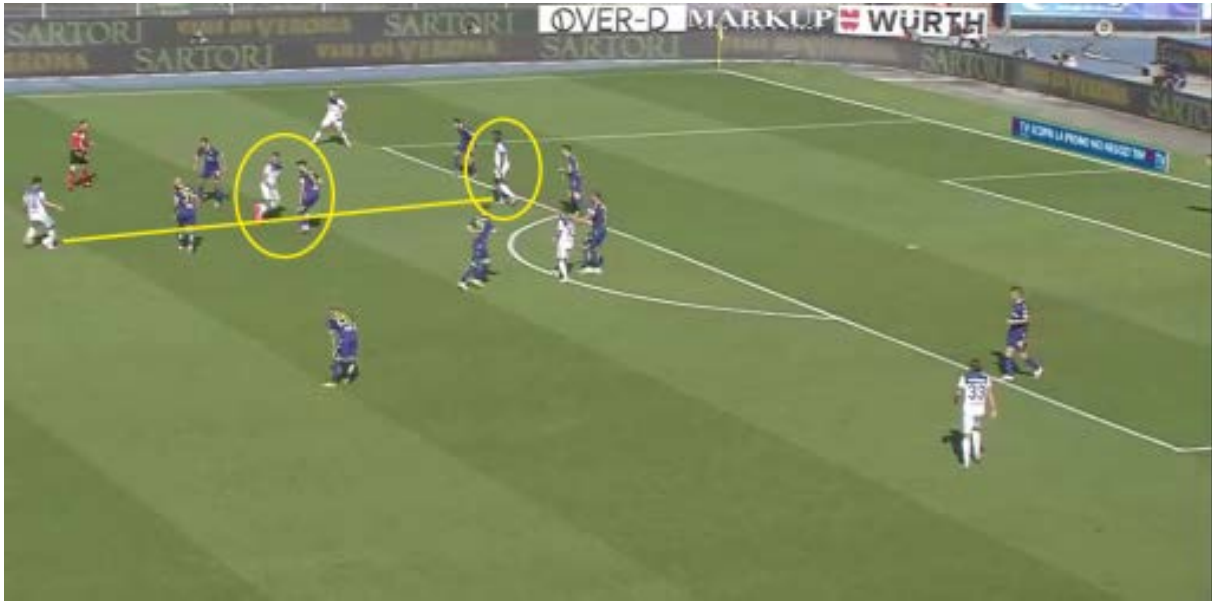
Freuler has the possession, and the opposition has condensed the ball's area throughout the defensive right half-space. Zapata drops back, inviting the direct marker out of positions, and Pasalic runs forward in between the lines.
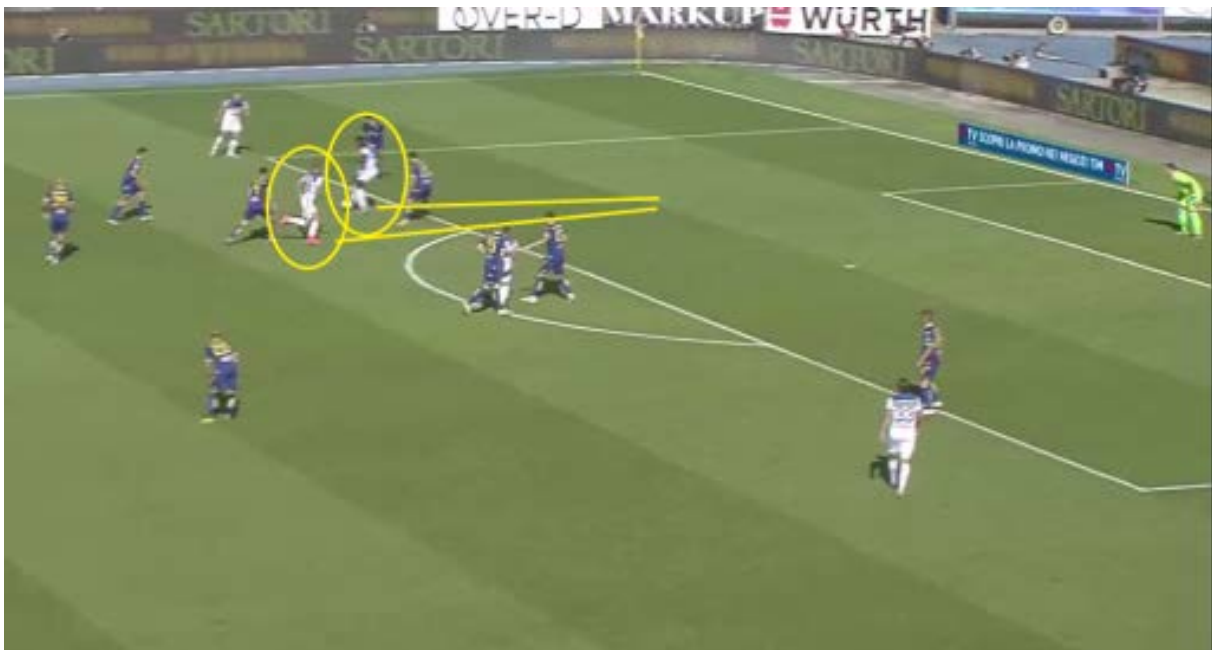
Zapata plays a heel's pass on Pasalic's run; the midfielder can receive in behind the defensive line, moving through the path that the striker's previous movements have opened.

When the center striker shifts out wide to create space in the center, the wingback along the same side occupies the half-space, tucking in.

Gosens has the possession out wide along the attacking left flank; Zapata shifts out wide, and Freuler supports the possession phase, moving out wide.
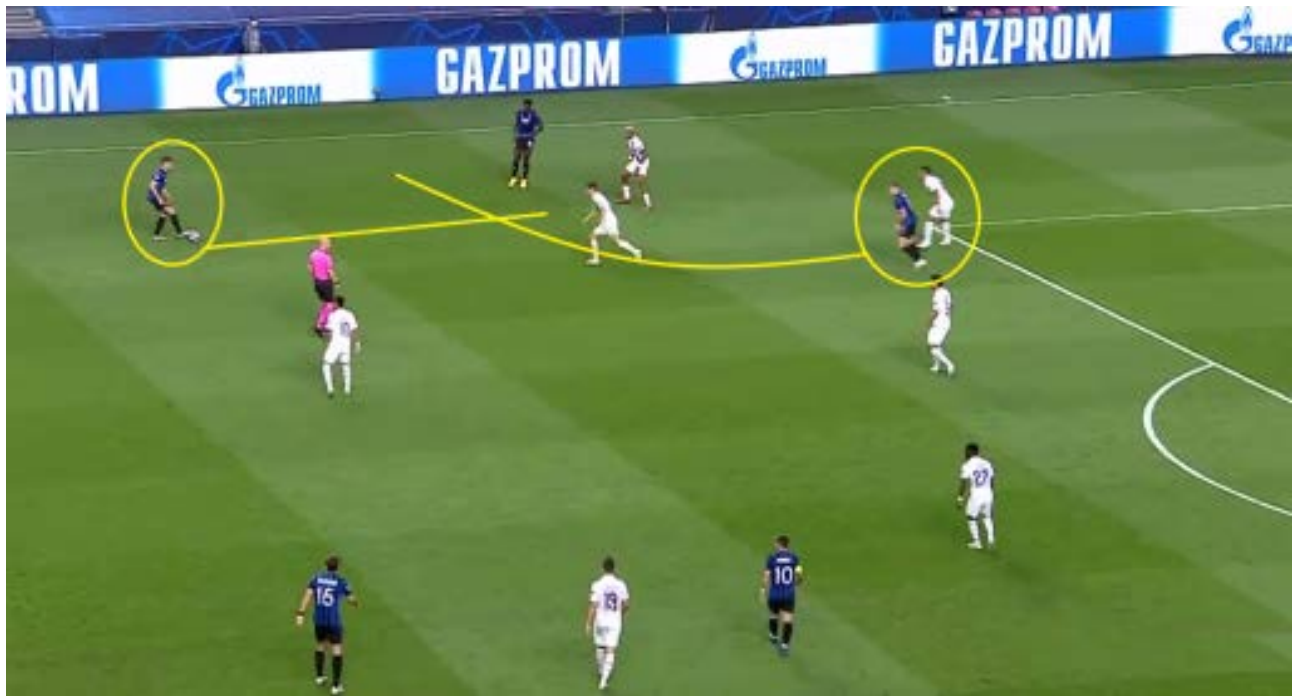
Freuler, the left-center midfielder, receives. The rotation takes Zapata to act as a left wingback and Gosens as a center forward.

- **The attacking players' moves off the ball and the combinations of movements aim to free center spaces by stretching the opposition's shape and gaps creation;** the front 2+1 or 1+2 must be free to finish the move.

Zapata drops back to invite the direct marker out of position and receives from Pasalic, supporting the center striker's attacking move.


Pasalic receives the back pass while moving forward; meanwhile, Zapata opens his body shape half-turned to find a gap between the opposition's back four line.
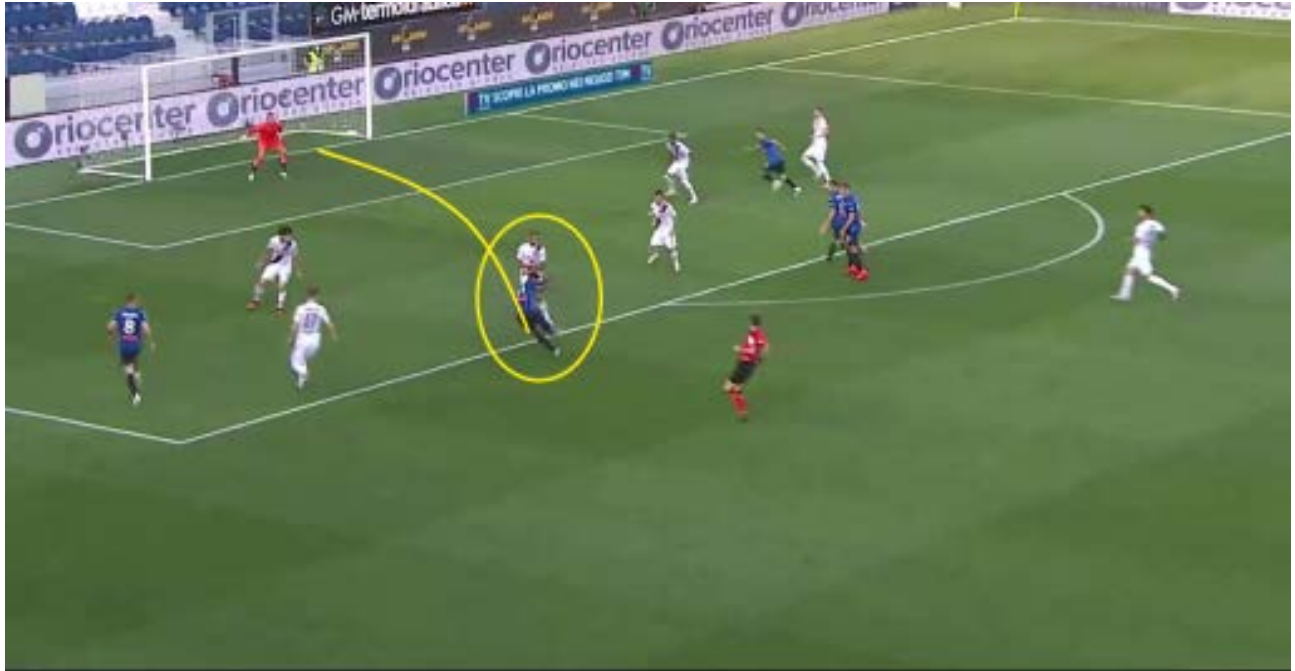
Despite a real gap that doesn't appear, Zapata's previous open run allows him to receive enough space and time to shoot on goal before being under pressure.

- **The advance trio also combines to switch the angle of attack from the half-space to the center quickly.**
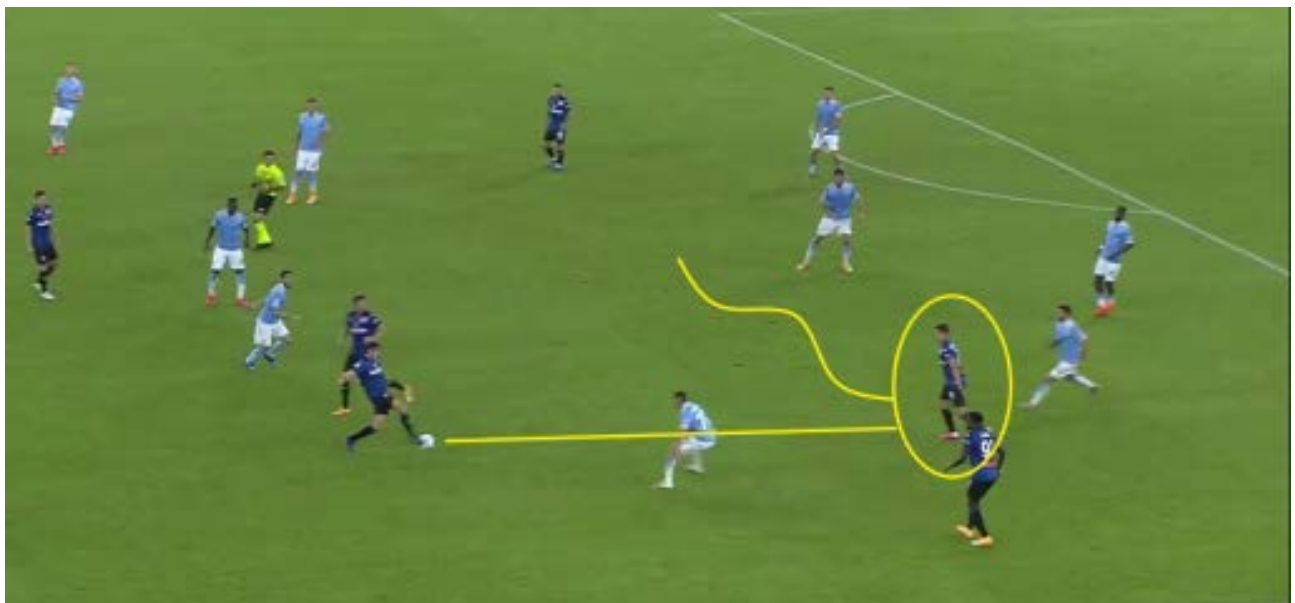
Malinovsky receives from the De Roon, and Zapata shifts out wide along the right to stretch the opposition's back four line. The receiver can exploit the late marking to dribble the ball through the center and drive it nearer to Gomez, who stands on the left.

Gomez receives, and he can turn due to the next defender's wrong position.

Gomez can control the ball and score to the goal's far post, exploiting the opponents' late defensive actions.

- **Gomez has given an exciting point of view about his attacking position in an interview for El Pais: "The referee is always the best point of reference, as he is always alone."**

He usually drops deep to collect the ball and drive it through the half-space, acting as a free player, creating passing triangles, or moving in behind off the ball to finish or assist.

Hateboer is dribbling the ball along the right flank, and Gomez is following the move to support the teammates in the center, running side by side the referee to stay free from markers.

When opponents try to close the ball carrier down the flank, he passes inside the center to De Roon. Gomez moves away from the referee to be an easy passing option for the receiver, overcoming the direct marker's pressure.

Even if Atalanta can't progress the move, the possession phase is safe, and Gomez can distribute the ball without pressure.

The next two footages are very explicative to understand how Gomez supports the attacking moves when Atalanta can't play from the flanks' deep areas to the half-spaces or the opposition's box. As the referee is usually close to the ball position, but backward concerning the condensed areas, he waits for the ball near him and receives after checking away from him. It is challenging for the opponents to mark him preventively, and he can usually face the box to play decisive passes.

In this first example, Atalanta plays out from the left flank, after a 2 v 2 duel that Gosesn and Zapata couldn't win down the left side; as the referee is "always free from markers," Gomez receives without pressure.

In this second situation, Atalanta is playing outnumbered 3 v 2 down the left side, but Zapata has opened a space inside the half-space, shifting out wide before. Gomez runs forward off the ball to support the attacking phase side by the referee's side, and he receives free from markers out of the condensed ball's area.

In this last sequence, Gomez is aligned along the five forwards' line on the opposition's edge of the box, and he is standing near the referee to make any preventive marking action hard.

Ilicic dribbles the ball toward the center to find a teammate who can switch the side, as the opposition is defending deep with five players, and three more are overlading the ball area.

Freuler receives in the center of the final third, and the opposition defensive line must shift across quickly to prevent through passes.

Gomez's marker arches his run to cover through passes paths, and Gomez stands near the referee till the teammate can look at him and the space around his position. The prior ball's area overloading defensive action creates a gap on the other side, and behind Gomez's marker. Atalanta's No.10 can attack this space free, as any preventive marking action wasn't possible due to his position off the ball.

Gomez can receive in behind the first defensive line and along with the opposition's last back one.


Freuler can receive the return pass inside the box and face the goal to shot and score.

Despite Gomez's position hasn't been directly decisive for the attack's developments, his position near the referee at the beginning made any preventive and narrow marking action possible; he and Freuler have had the time to combine due to the late timing of the opponents on the ball.

- **Aggressive transitions to attack after recoveries from losses of possession are another face of the attacking phase of the Dea**; the style of play becomes direct and vertical. Counter-pressing actions are often effective, and these are the situations of the game that make Atalanta so straightforward and dangerous

Hateboer wins the ball on the right, and he has space to dribble the ball higher up in the field.
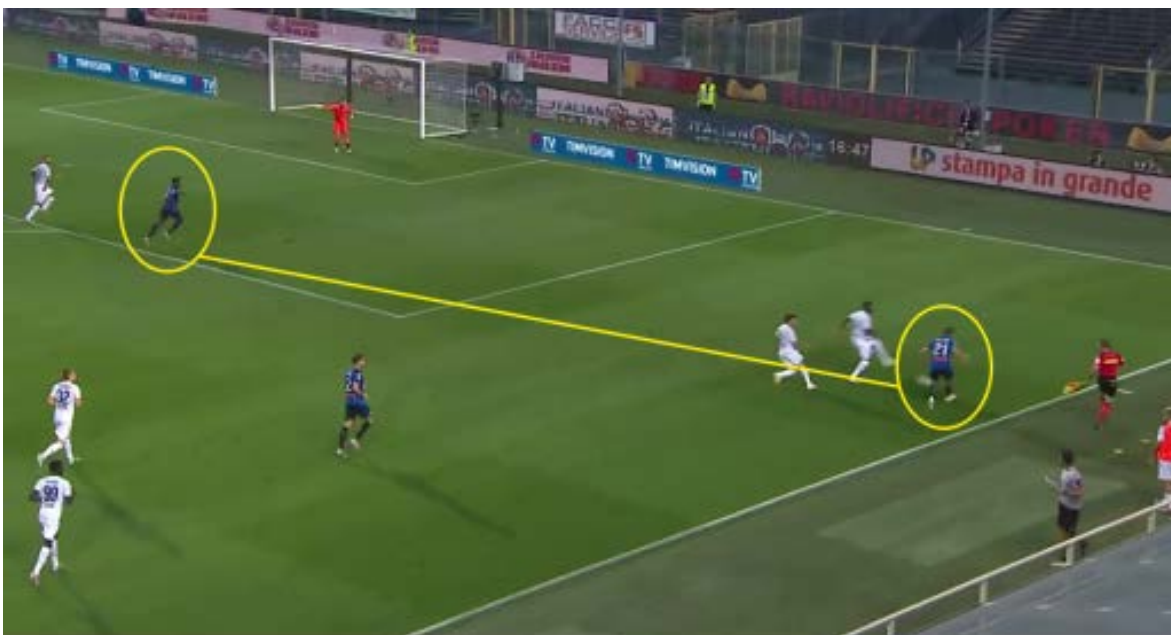
Zapata attacks the goal's first post to receive from Hateboer, who overcomes the defenders' double team attempt.
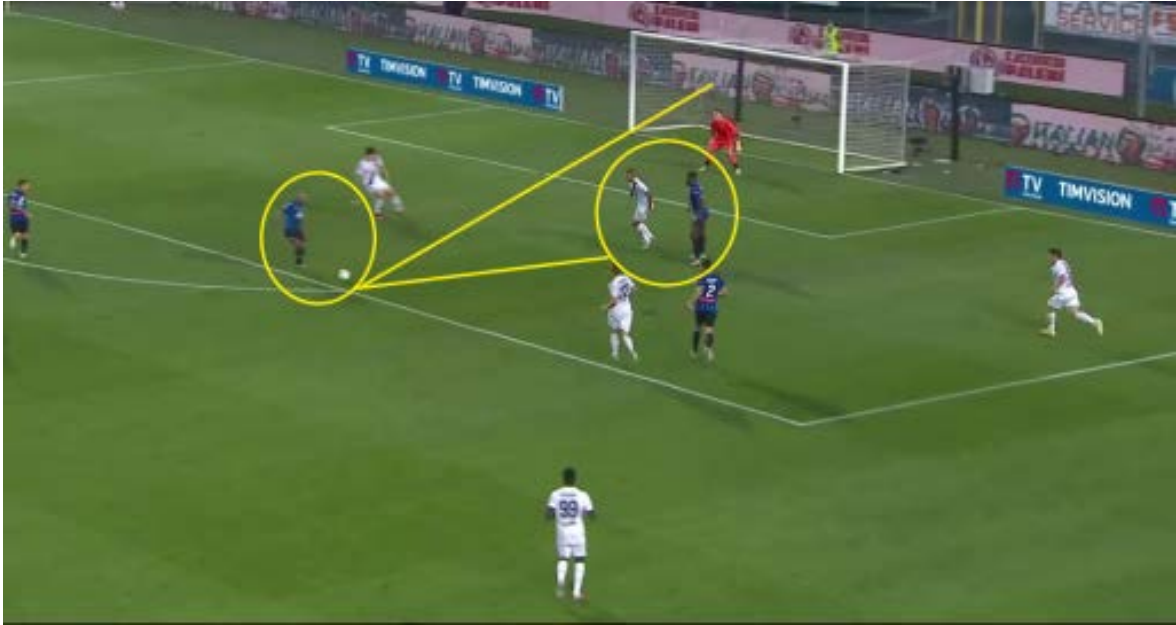
The opposition's defenders can close the goal space to Zapata. Still, Muriel supports the move from the back, and he receives free from marking due to Hateboer's previous deep offensive action. Muriel has space and time to receive and score to the goal's far post.

Summary

Atalanta has a lot of creative variations that appear concerning the opponent, and just some of the recurrent patterns of play can be deeply analyzed. In other words, it is possible to understand how Atalanta plays, but the players' interpretation of the patterns of play is always different from player to player; spontaneity is something that Gasperini usually concedes to his players when they have the possession. The attacking style is a consequence of the 1 v 1 defensive phases, as the players' positions often concern the place in the field where they're standing when Atalanta can win the ball back. Although some principles of play are recognizable:

General Principles of Play
- The 1-3-4-1-2 or 1-3-4-2-1 formation shapes have myriad variations within them
- Mobility and versatile players (center midfielders, wingbacks, strikers) rotate, interchange positions, and are active in different areas of the field, moving through other spaces, creating numerical superiority out wide.
- Mobility creates connections and simple geometrical shapes.
- Create 1 v 1 duels and dribbles the ball up in the field to invite the defenders out of positions and unbalance the opponents.
- Give and Go along the flanks (1-2 combinations, overlaps, exchanges of positions, and rotations). Deep combinations of play to attack the opposition's goal (cuts and runs in behind off the ball)

Specific Principles of Play
- Build up from the back with 3 open defenders and 2 center midfielders
- The wide center backs can also play very wide
- The width retention has the goal of moving the ball through the center to allow a player to tuck in from the opposite side to try to shot and score.
- 4 players create the wide chains: wingback, center midfielder, No.10, and one striker; they become 5, including the outer defender (if the No.10 is the link player).
- Maintain the shape along the opposite flank, freeing the center and creating quick switches of sides through the uncongested center spaces.
- Invite the pressure and move the opponents, creating strong areas along the flanks, before switching the play to the opposite side.
- Midfielders are free to move and alternate positions in and out half-spaces, all around the middle third, and throughout the finishing zone near the center striker.
- The wingbacks move forward and deep off the ball, ready to tuck in and deep to receive crosses or through passes.
- The outer defenders are always ready to be active inside the opposition's half to support the wingbacks and the wide forwards.
- The center striker doesn't attack the depth only, but he drops back also before attacking the same space he just left free or to help teammates' in behind runs off the ball.
- The attacking players' moves off the ball and the combinations of movements aim to free center spaces by stretching the opposition's shape and gaps creation
- The advance trio also combines to switch the angle of attack from the half-space to the center quickly.
- Gomez and the referee as the best point of reference.

- Aggressive transitions to attack after recoveries from losses of possession.

This book aims to sum up all the principles of play of one of Italy's best teams, and now in Europe, of the last seasons. I hope the reader finds it useful and complete.