

MARCELO BIELSA

DEFENDING

A look at the tactics and style of play of one of the world's most innovative coaches

by **LUCA BERTOLINI**



Leeds United and Marcelo Bielsa Defending Phase

By

Luca Bertolini

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Authors – Luca Bertolini
Editor - Tom Mura
Cover Art By - Barrie Smith



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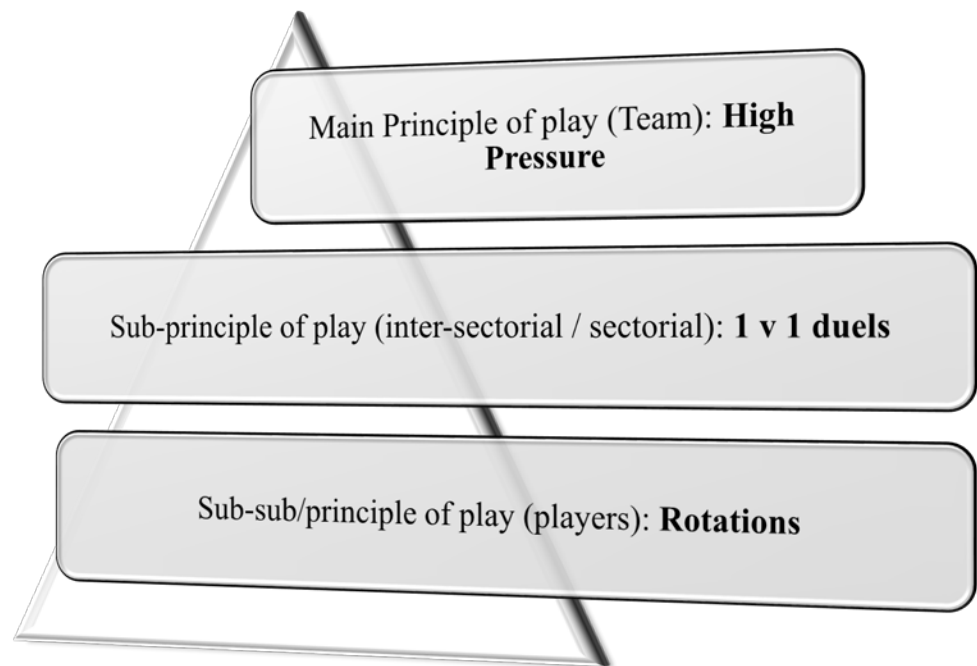
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Introduction

Despite Bielsa and Leeds United are the most interesting news of English Championship last 2 seasons for possession and direct style of play, the defensive phase is not secondary. Apart from the defensive shape, Leeds is very interesting as the phase off the ball is made of principles of play rather than shape, just like the possession phase:

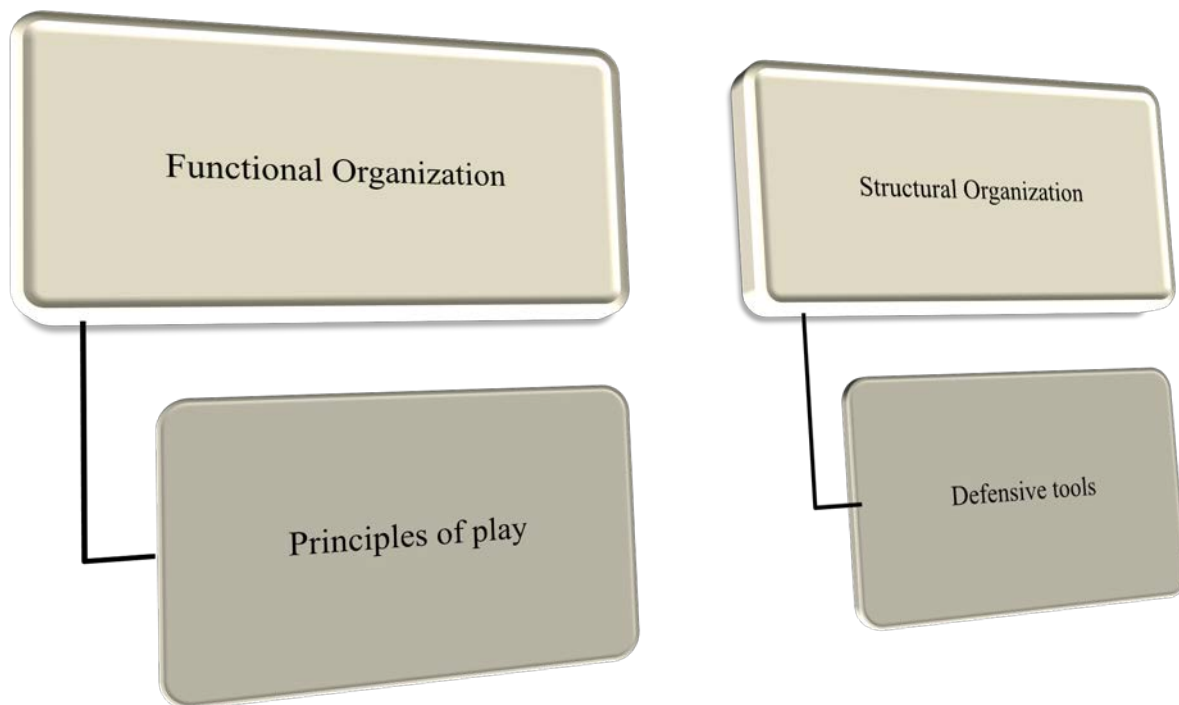
- **High Pressure** in the attacking half / Counter-pressing to win the ball back as quickly as possible.
- Defensive **1 v 1 duels**.
- **Rotations** to keep the defensive duels.

From the Tactical principle of play, we may consider these principles as a pyramid made of a main principle of play, sub-principles and sub-sub principles of play:



Only when these defensive action become ineffective, it is possible to talk about a real defensive shape: 1-4-1-4-1. Anyway, even this shape is not fix, as the 1 v 1 duels transform it at every opposition's passing sequence. Exchange of positions, cut off the field into 2 parts and the passing lanes, overloads of the areas around the ball are the tools to carry out the principles of play, rather than tactical solutions to defend.

Again, using the Tactical Periodization to identify Leeds defensive phase, we may say that Bielsa considers the **principles of play as Functional Organization** and the **tools as Structural Organization** to carry out these principles of play:



Leeds United defensive stats

2018/2019

2018/2019	Ball losses	Challenge Intensity	Ppda
Total	5426	9,3	6,35
Av. P. match	113,04 (p. 90' - 104,57)		

Defensive duels	won	%	Aerial duels	won	%
3769	24,42	64,79	2330	1023	43,91
78,52 (p. 90' - 72,64)	50,88		48,54 (p. 90' - 44,9)	21,31	

Sliding tackles	won	%	Interceptions	Clearances	Fouls	Fouls p.90'
306	150	49,02	1827	747	589	11,35
6,38	3,13		38,06 (p. 90' - 35,21)	15,56	12,27	

Conceded goals	xGA	Shots against	xG p. shot against	on target
54	47,04	432	0,109	159
1,13 (p.90' - 1,04)		9		3,31

Shot against p.90'	%	Blocked shots	p.90'	% blocked shots	% blocked shots against
8,33	36,81	122	2,35	26,2	28,29

Recurrent formations:



4-1-4-1 54%

4-2-3-1 10%	3-4-3 6%	4-5-1 5%	4-3-3 4%
5-4-1 4%	4-4-1-1 3%	3-3-3-1 1%	3-5-1 1%

2019/2020

2019/2020	Ball losses	Challenge Intensity	Ppda
Total	4981	8,9	6,43
Av. P. match	108,28 (p.90' - 100,27)		

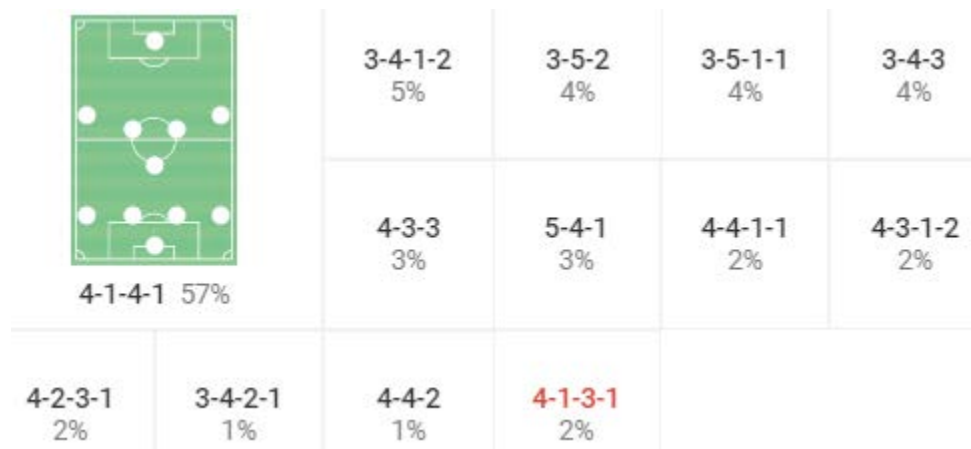
Defensive duels	won	%	Aerial duels	won	%
3503	2197	62,72	1728	805	46,59
76,15 (p. 90' - 70,51)	47,76		37,56 (p.90' - 34,78)	17,50	

Sliding tackles	won	%	Interceptions	Clearances	Fouls	Fouls p.90'
247	103	41,70	1622	638	533	10,73
5,37	2,24		35,26 (p.90' - 32,65)	13,87	11,59	

Conceded goals	xGA	Shots against	xG p. shot against	on target
35	35,91	373	0,096	135
0,76 (p.90' - 0,7)		8,11		2,93

Shot against p.90'	%	Blocked shots	p.90'	% blocked shots	% blocked shots against
7,51	36,19	94	1,89	22,4	27,1

Recurrent formations:



Last season (2017/2018) before Marcelo Bielsa's arrival

2017/2018	Ball losses	Challenge Intensity	Ppda
Total	5807	6,9	8,70
Av. P. match	126,24 (p.90' – 116,22)		

Defensive duels	won	%	Aerial duels	won	%
3329,00	1972	59,24	2645	1088	41,13
72,37	42,87		57,50 (p.90' – 52,94)	23,65	

Sliding tackles	won	%	Interceptions	Clearances	Fouls	Fouls p.90'
352	153	43,47	2262	1139	556	11,13
7,65	3,33		49,17 (p.90' - 45,27)	24,76	12,09	

Conceded goals	xGA	Shots against	xG p. shot against	on target
64	67,34	587	0,115	200
1,39		12,76		4,35

Shot against p.90'	%	Blocked shots	p.90'	% blocked shots	% blocked shots against
11,75	34,07	152	3,04	24,6	24,5

Recurrent formations:



The different variations of formations through the last 3 seasons confirm that Leeds has been turned into a “playing principles teams” from a “shape team” as it was until the last season before Bielsa's arrival. All the formations of 2017/2018 season were very similar, just changing players' positions; otherwise, Bielsa's mix of team's shapes has never effected his principles of play even from a defensive point of view.

Apart from all these considerations, a clear 1-4-1-4-1 can be noticed when the pressure phase hasn't been effective.

Defensive shapes; from 1-3-3-1-3 to 1-4-1-4-1

The attacking rotations place the players into different positions in relation to their static roles; apart from the rotations, a line of 3 at three at the back, an holding midfielder and 2 wide midfielders are always the 2 back lines when Leeds has the possession and during transition phases.



As the 1 v 1 defensive duels is one of the main principles of play for Leeds, the roles in the field are interchangeable.



Dallas drops back to track his direct opponent and Phillips moves up to direct the opposition's possession phase backward.

When the opposition plays backward, the pressing player always joins the third line of three, shaping the back 4 line behind the forward.



Phillips joins the line of midfielders and Dallas is acting as holding midfielder.

The back line allows the center forward to move and press to win the ball back, even tracking the opponents through the middle third. In these situations, the winger who is not involved in 1 v 1 defensive duels shifts across to act as center forward taking the place of the forward.



Bamford is tracking the opposition's center back, Hernandez moves toward the center to change his position and act as center forward.



Bamford joins the line of four and force the opposition's ball carrier backward and Hernandez is ready to press the receiver of a back pass.



The center forward or the player, who momentarily takes his role, during pressure and defensive phases always stands in between the lines to be the first forward passing option for a counter-attacks if the ball is recovered.

When the pressure phase is not effective and the team is forced to stand inside the defensive half of the field, the 1-4-1-4-1 formation becomes clearer.



Apart from the team shape, the 1 v 1 duels are always the main principle of the defensive phase in the middle third, also cutting the field into two parts, overloading the ball area. In this example, the opposition's ball carrier is forced to play a long pass due to the pressure of the holding midfielder, who is pushing high.



The back four line and the holding midfielder must also follow the 1 v 1 principle of play and create numerical superiority around the ball area. The interchanges of positions among the players can also require the wingers to become fullbacks, as in this example, where Harrison is checking the direct opponent along the weak side.

Defensive principles and situations of play

Ball possession losses



Despite being a “Building up from the back addicted team, Leeds losses of possession percentage are lower than the league’s average all over the field, and furthermore in the first third.

The skills to save the center spaces of the field’s thirds has been crucial to concede 19 goal less than the previous season.

In addition, the higher percentages of ball losses in the final third than in the middle third, shows that Leeds can bring the move to the final stage quite easily, breaking through the opposition’s lines.

How high pressure is crucial for Leeds is clear from the increase of the recoveries data improvements through the years:

Season	Low recoveries	Medium recoveries	High recoveries
2017/2018 (4209/91,50 per match)	46,96	33,35	11,20
2018/2019 (4597/95,77 per match)	42,69	39,27	13,81
2019/2020 (3943/85,72 per match)	39,74	32,04	13,93

- **High pressure to win the ball back quickly**

Leeds style off the ball has been like no other team in 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 Championship, indeed, like few other teams in world of football.

The heat maps of defensive actions are very clear and indicative; Leeds trend is to press very high in the field, control the higher area of the middle third and press aggressively again in the defensive half to prevent the opponents from playing inside the first third and the box.

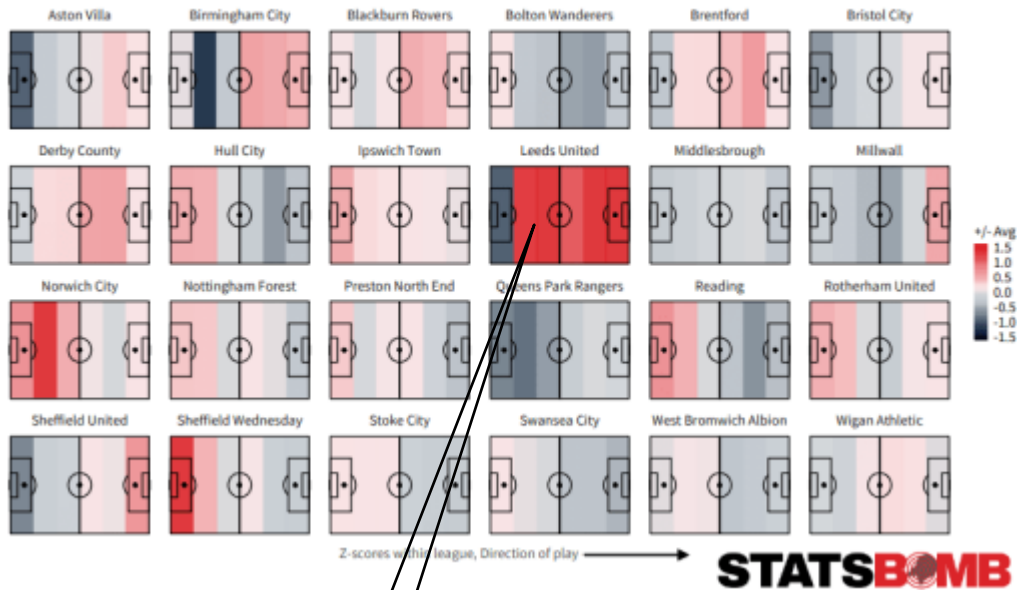
Looking at the difference of recoveries’ areas, in the first season with Bielsa as head coach, Leeds has recovered 6 ball more in the middle third per game and almost 3 balls in the final third, as well as 4 balls less in the first third.

Leeds has become a more balanced team in the middle third during the second season (2019/2020), pressing high in the final third, but trying to force backward or sideward the possession phase in the middle third, to press high again. The 1 v 1 duels all over the field and the exchanges of positions among the players have the aim to press the ball carrier even backward and to provide coverage behind the ball line.

Otherwise, defenders even press high; the recoveries in the middle and final third are also the result of tracking the opposition's forward when they drop back to receive.

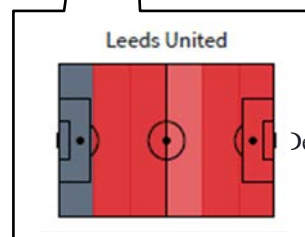
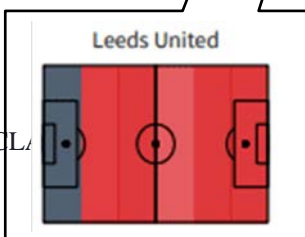
Proportion of Defensive Actions to Opposition Passes

Comparative Frequency by Zone, Championship 2018-19



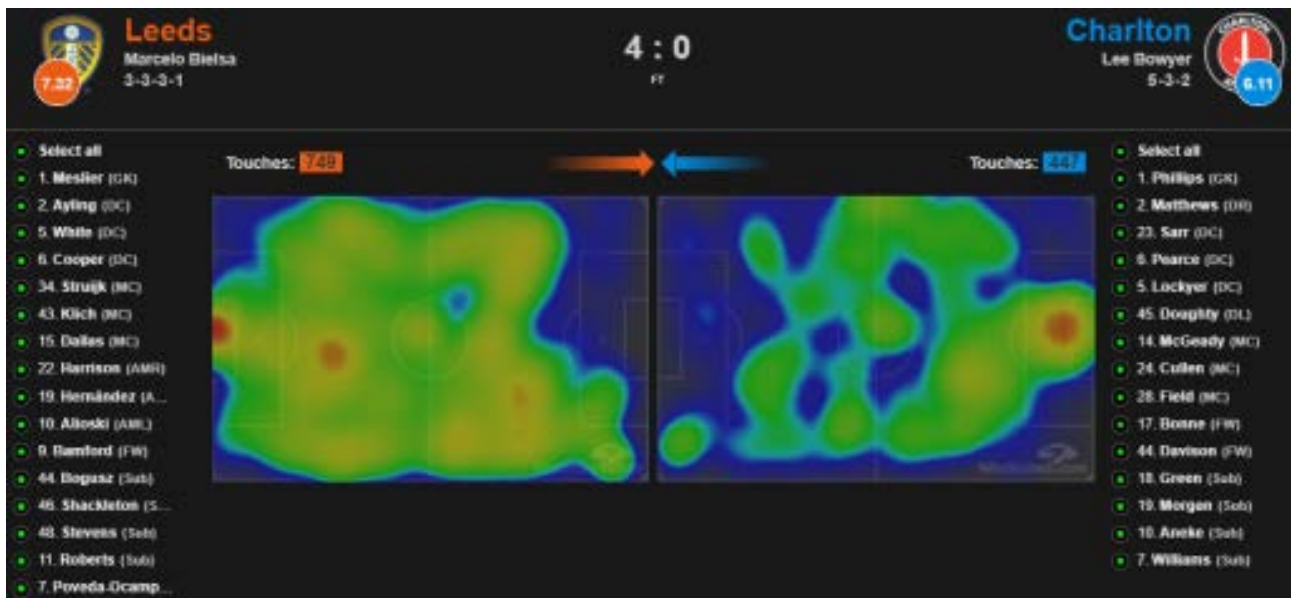
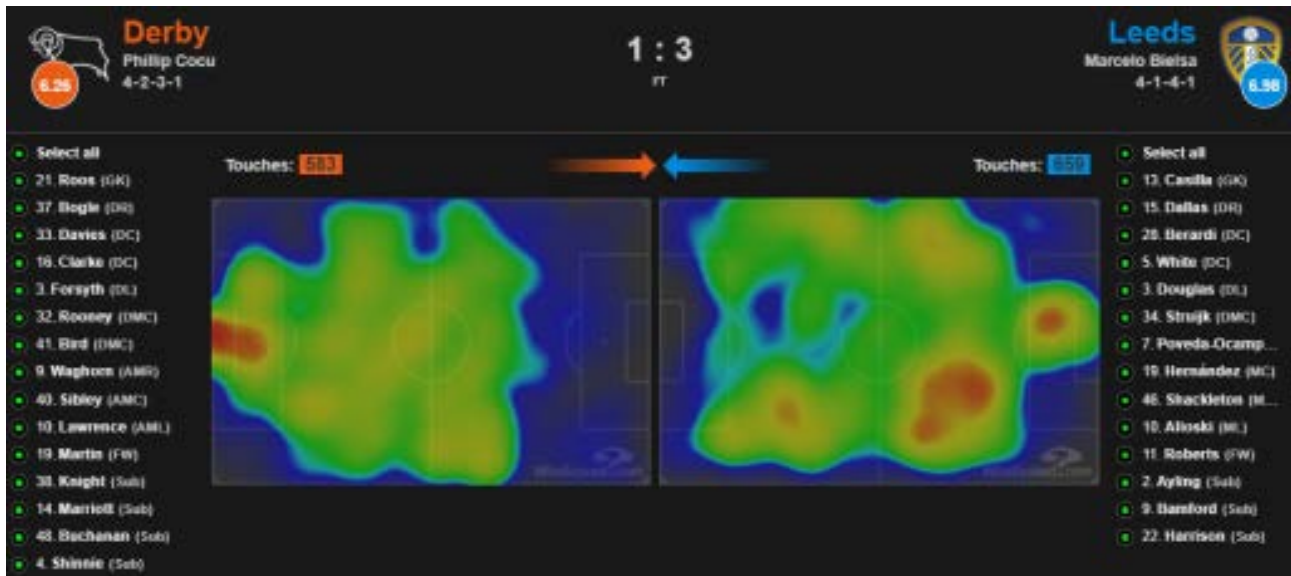
Proportion of Defensive Actions to Opposition Passes

Comparative Frequency by Zone, Championship 2019-20



Leeds is always active in every zone of the pitch apart from near to their own goal; usually high quality pressing teams (Liverpool and Manchester City, as instance) show are significantly active high up the pitch, but Leeds cover nearly all of it. Man oriented pressure against opposition's building up phase and 1 v 1 defensive duels as counter-pressing action after ball losses all over the field are the reasons behind these peculiar heat maps.

The full field's coverage is very clear from these 2 heat maps examples of last 2 Championship away and home matches.



These heat maps are also representative to understand to analyze the covered areas of the field; Leeds played out through the center playing against Derby County, and the team shape has been forced deeper against Charlton.

Apart from the statistical data of a specific match, high pressure, and defensive actions in general, are structural factors of transitions to defend and of phases of play off the ball.

The lowest Ppda of the league for the second season in a row is another confirmation of the pressing minded style of play off the ball.

Rank 2018/2019	Team	Ppda
	Leeds United	6.35
	Derby County	8.27
	Norwich City	8.3
	Ipswich Town	8.5
	Blackburn Rovers	9.04
	Bristol City	9.07
	Preston North End	9.1
	Brentford	9.1
	Aston Villa	9.51
	Wigan Athletic	9.52
	Nottingham Forest	9.58
	Rotherham United	10.16
	Sheffield United	10.2
League average		9.92

Rank 2019/2020	Team	Ppda
	Leeds United	6.43
	Barnsley	7.17
	Preston North End	8.41
	Fulham	8.59
	Sheffield Wednesday	9.01
	Wigan Athletic	9.17
	Queens Park Rangers	9.39
	W.B.A.	9.43
League average		10.18

Looking at the the Ppda against of the last seasons (13,27 in 2019/2020, and 12,56 in 2018/2019), it becomes clear how Leeds has becomes a skilled team to play out from pressure and to manage the high pressure when quick pattern of play are not possible. On the other side, many opponents shaped the team backward in the middle third and in the final third, allowing El Loco's squad to play high up in the field with few passes. Team high positioning and the exchanges of positions among the players during possession phases, require man on man pressure and defensive 1 v 1 duels.

- **High pressure to win the ball back quickly**

The pressure phase has the aim to recover the ball from quick 1 v 1 duels or to force a quick pass that allow the ball recovery.



Pressure on the opposition center back to force a long ball and man mark on the second center back.



Pressure against the opposition's holding midfielder to force a quick and wrong pass forward and man mark on all the easier passing options at the back.



Exploit the wrong pass along the flank, anticipating the direct opponent along the flank, thanks to the previous 1 v 1 man marking tactics.

Counter-pressing phases are managed through 1 v 1 duels too.



Leeds has just lost the possession in this sequence, and the center forward covers the center back (the easiest back passing option for the ball carrier); all the potential receivers are marked 1 v 1 in the middle third.



If the 1 v 1 duels are narrow enough, the ball carrier is double teamed and forced backward; the options to play out and to switch the side are always under preventive pressure (1 v 1 duels.)

Transition phases are crucial for Leeds, as the direct attacks are a big weapon to finish.



In this sequence, 2 near 1 v 1 duels allow a double team action against the ball carrier, who can't save the possession.

The opposition defense is unbalanced, as the teams was just organizing the transition to attack phase, and Leeds can counter-attack.



Cross pass and shot on goal are the consequences of free spaces left by the opposition while organizing the transition to attack phase.

To prevent the opponents from playing out from the back with short passing sequences is crucial for Leeds to stand high the field.



In this sequence, the goalkeeper is forced to go long, as the center backs are marked and he is under pressure while playing the ball.

The attacking 1-3-3-1-3 shape is basically the team shape during pressure phases; the 3 forwards are marking the opposition defenders and No.10 (the Enganche) is marking the opposition holding midfielder.



The opposition's goalkeeper is then forced to go long toward the middle third.

Again, the receiver is double teamed, thanks to the close 1 v 1 duels, and he is forced to play a quick touch to not being under pressure...



...But he loses the ball and Leeds can counter-attack while the oppositions was organizing the possession phase higher up in the field.



The high 1 v 1 duels allow Leeds to counter-attack in numbers and create numerical advantage in the final third and 1 v 1 duels with positional advantages along the opposition defensive line. The center forward can run in behind and between the opposition's defenders, and none of them can really counter him, as the forward is moving at the back of the first center back and too far from the second center back.

- **Man oriented pressure**

The pressure against the ball carriers is a crucial principles of play for Leeds, even during risky situations of play.



Hernandez is pressing high up in the field against the opposition left center midfielder, who can overcome it and pass to the second center midfielder.



Hernandez track the passing sequence and try a second pressure action deeper in the field together with the left midfielder Dallas, who shifts across to counter the receiver. Harrison tracks the opposition left winger down the flank.

Dallas and Harrison manage the double 1 v 1 duels in the center and out wide.



The winger receives and dribbles the ball inside the field and the teammates underlaps in front of him.



Harrison tracks his direct opponent forcing him to play a wrong pass toward the center and Dallas shifts out wide to track his opponent. This way Leeds players positions have been exchanged to follow the direct opponents, rather than staying in their positions to exchange the opponents between them.

To prevent the opposition from exploiting the spaces after the losses of possession is another goal of the pressure actions when the ball can't be recovered quickly.



Hernandez plays a wrong pass to Bamford and the opposition's center midfielders recover the ball; the center forward immediately presses him while controlling the ball and he forces to direction of play sideward, rather than forward.



Hernandez close the passing lanes out wide shifting across toward the ball carrier, who is forced to go long.

Even the center back defend forward, moving out of their positions.

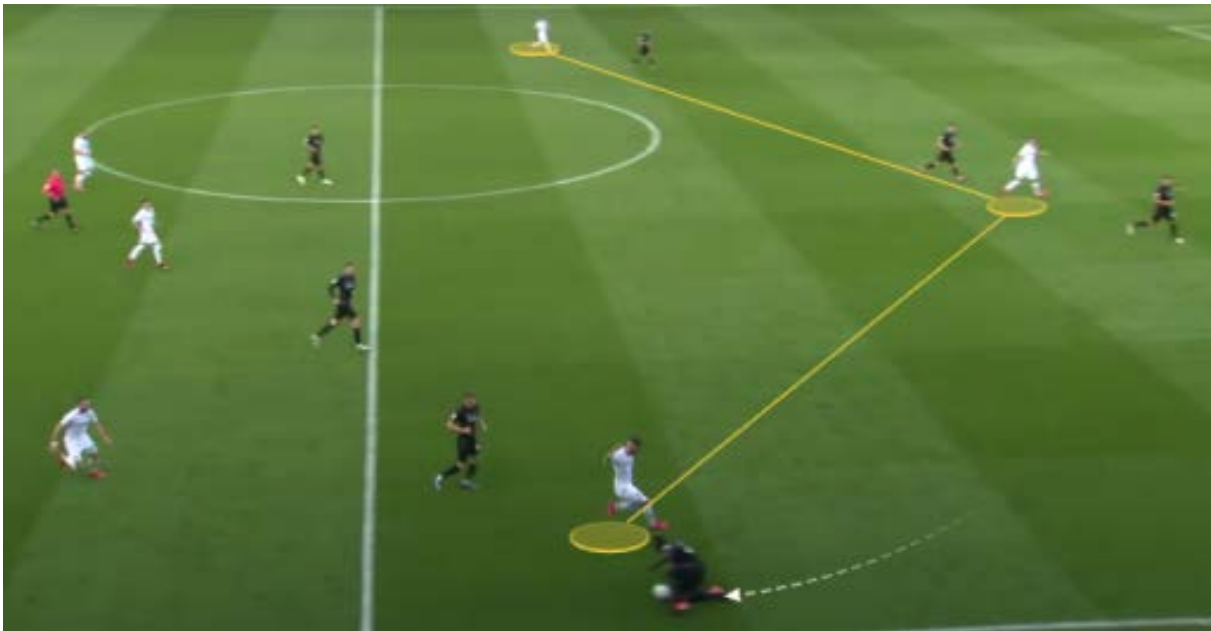


White forces the opposition's center back backward first, moving out of his defensive position...

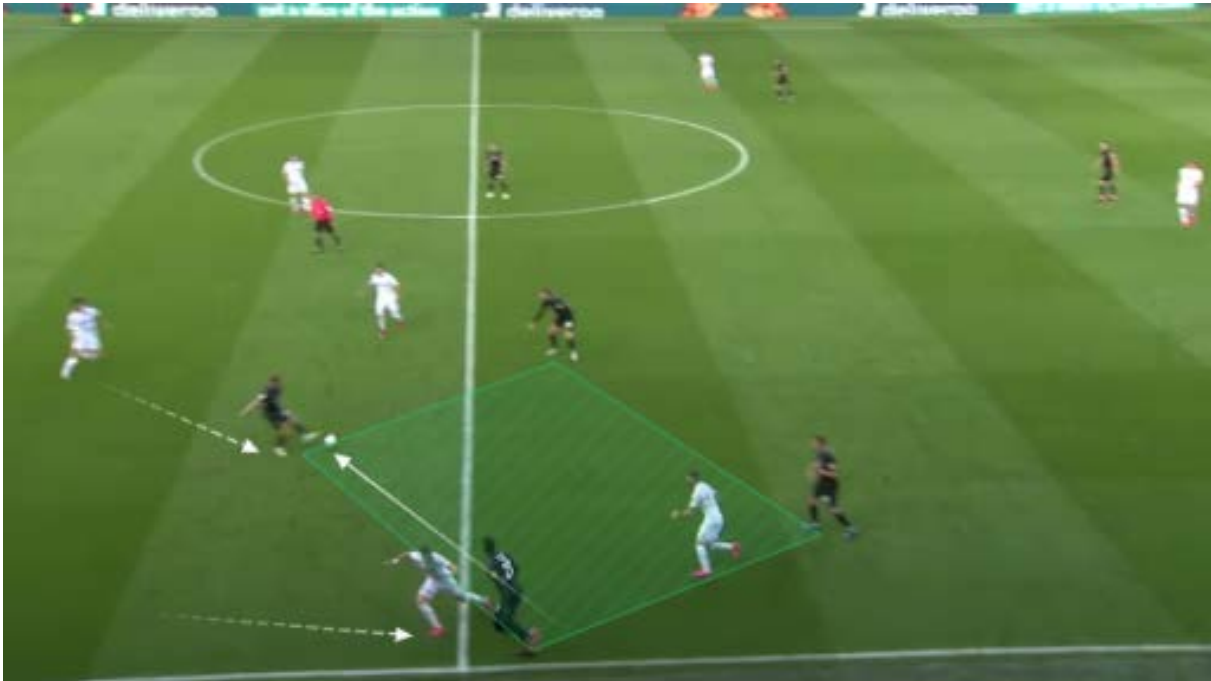


...And running even deeper inside the middle third to stop the opposition's transition to attack.

When the opposition can play out of the pressure, the creation of 1 v 1 duels is always the first goal.



The opposition left fullback can overcome the pressure along the flank, and combine toward the center with an incoming teammates; the opposition can create a momentary 4 v 2 duel around the ball.



The receiver is immediately under pressure, reducing the numerical disadvantage to a 4 v 3, and he is forced to play backward, preventing him from progressing the move.

The second receiver is again under pressure and forced out wide along the flank.



The numerical equality and the 1 v 1 duels are now created again along the flank...



...And the opposition's possession phase is forced backward; Bamford can mark the opposition's center backs and all the other options in the field are marked 1 v 1.

Bamford marks the nearest center back in relation to the ball position and the ball carrier can only pass back to the goalkeeper, who is under immediate pressure of the same forward.



The opposition is forced long again toward the middle third, where Leeds has have time to create the 1 v 1 duels...



...And Dallas can anticipate the direct opponent, winning the ball back.

The possession is lost after a back pass.



The ball carrier is immediately forced backward.

All the nearest passing options are preventively man-marked.



The second receiver is forced to play a sliding kick forward due to immediate pressure.

Even when the pressure phase is not effective, defend forward and press the next ball carrier is always the first aim for Leeds.



The opposition's winger receives along the flank here and he dribbles the ball up, overcoming the initial pressure, before passing toward the center to the dropping back striker.



The center back White, tracks the receiver to force him backward inside the middle third, instead of saving the depth and the final third.

All the other defenders are preventively marking the other opponents 1 v 1.

Despite the potential danger at the back, as the center back opens an available space along the defensive line, the objective of the pressure actions are always to win the ball back, as White does in this move, kick the ball away from the opposition's feet.



- **Defensive 1 v 1**

Rotations among the players are crucial to maintain the pressure and the 1 v 1 duels.



Hernandez and Alioski shift across against the ball carrier, who has time and space to play backward to the incoming teammate.

Bamford shifts across too to create a numerical advantage 3 v 2 against the opponents.



Alioski and Hernandez cross their position to track the receiver of the return pass on the other side.

1 v 1 situations are also a tool to provide safety at the back and allow a free defender to move and anticipate the opponents higher up in the field.



The opposition right winger plays a pass inside the field for a teammate who underlaps; the opponents along the opposite side are marked 1 v 1 and Cooper can move out of the defensive line to counter the receiver and double the mark against him.



He wins the ball back. If he didn't win the ball, the first player involved in the 1 v 1 duel would have tracked the opponent backward acting as center back.

The 1 v 1 duels are crucial to force the direction of opposition's possession and even the receiver, who will be under pressure when he controls the ball. This sequence from a throw-in is very explicative.



All the short passing options toward the center of the opposition's first third are marked 1 v 1, and the throw-in can be taken only with a long hands pass.



Even the midfielders are marked 1 v 1 and the forward is the receiver, after a drop back move in the middle third; Leeds center back tracks him and allow the team to stay placed high in the field. Exchanges of positions are essential to maintain the pressure against the ball carrier.



The opposition's forward drops back to receive and Leeds center back tracks him; meanwhile, the opposition's midfielders are attacking the final third, but they are under 1 v 1 pressure.



The center backs usually drop inside the middle third while tracking the direct opponents when they are in possession, as well as the midfielders move deep inside the first third while tracking the opposition's midfielders. In this example, Cooper runs forward to track the opposition's striker and

Klich exchanges the position with the teammate to track the opponent he was already marking in the middle third.

In this further situation of play, the 1 v 1 pressure down the left flank is overcome with a through pass twice, but the possession is won back maintaining the 1 v 1 duels.



White has tracked the first ball carrier and he forces him to play a wide pass. Alioski counters the ball carrier at the back, but he is late and the opponents can play a one touch through pass in between the Leeds pressing player toward the center, moving the ball out of the condensed area.



Dallas shifts across to track the receiver and keep his body's position toward the sideline, but he can't anticipate him while receiving. White arches his run to track his direct opponent and keeping the

defensive 1 v 1 duels. Alioski runs away from the ball's position, and the opponents have a numerical advantage situation 2 v 1.



White stands in the same area to create 1 v 1 duels against the ball carriers and put pressure against them when in possession; Dallas goes on keeping the first 1 v 1 duel, shifting wide and closing the potential through passing lanes.

The opposition's possession phase is forced wider thanks to White 1 v 1 defensive actions.



Dallas has shifted wider to the side lines, forcing the opponent close to the line and closing the passing lane thanks to his goal side position.

The 1 v 1 duels are the base of the phases off the ball even when Leeds is forced to shape the defensive 1-4-1-4-1. Space coverage becomes secondary, as it's clear from this picture; the distances among

Leeds players are very large and gaps appears in the middle third. On the other side, the ball carrier and the potential receiver are properly marked.



- The opposition ball carrier is forced backward.
- The nearest forward passing options are goal side marked.
- Leeds players along the opposite side are ready to screen the passing options to switch the side and anticipate the receivers.
- The center forward is preventively pressing the nearest opposition's center back.

The opposition's possession is forced backward and the goalkeeper must go long; when the center forward presses the goalkeeper, a teammate (usually a winger tucking in or the Enganche) marks the easiest short passing option.



The 1-4-1-4-1 defensive formation is immediately broken when to keep the 1 v 1 duels requires the defenders to move out of position.



In this example, Cooper has moved out of the defensive line to track the opponent who was dropping back the header the ball and Dallas has shifted across the center to counter the opposition's ball carrier, winning the ball back.

- **Ball's areas overloads**

When the creation of 1 v 1 duels is not possible due to the distances from the opponents, Leeds overloads the ball area to close the ball carrier down. In this example, preventive 1 v 1 duels can be created along the weak side, but not around the ball, as the opponent with possession can dribble the ball forward without pressure.



The center backs White and Cooper delay the opposition's attacking action, and Dallas shifts across the first third to overload the ball's area.



The center backs cover the 18 yds. box and Dallas creates a 3 v 2 duels around the ball, countering the ball carrier directly. The left winger Alioski drops back as support and Harrison keeps the 1 v 1 duel along the right flank.

The opposition's goalkeeper can start the attacking move quickly, passing the ball out wide along the right flank.



Hernandez tracks the ball carrier and Dallas shifts wide to close him down to the sideline.



The ball carrier is forced to play along the flank, thanks to the movements of the right midfielder and of Enganche; the right fullback Ayling closes the passing path, anticipating the direct opponent. The 3 v 2 duel creation around the ball area has fix the tactical issue, in this move.

In this third tactical situation, the opposition can play out, overcoming the pressure actions with a long pass from the goalkeeper out wide along Leeds defensive left flank.



Klich and Dallas force the receiver to play a quick one touch pass, creating a 2 v 1 duel around the ball. All the other passing lanes are screened.



Cooper moves forward to track the dropping back opponent and he anticipates him, winning the ball back. A 3 v 2 duel (or 4 v 2 duel, including the fourth nearest player Bamford) has been created to win the ball back quickly and fix the tactical issue of 1 v 1 duels creation inability.

When the opposition creates a strong side, Leeds overload the same area, cutting the field into 2 parts. The opposition goalkeeper has played a long goal kick and a 8 v 7 situation is created down the flank. A 4 v 3 duel can be recognized at the back that allow Ayling to header the ball. The opposition's center backs are marked 1 v 1.



As Leeds win the ball back, the team can counter-attack in a 3 v 2 situation against the opposition's center back.



The ball area overload and cut of the field into 2 parts has allowed Leeds to win the ball back quickly and to counter attack with numerical advantage.

- **2 sides cut off the pitch off the ball and passing lanes closure.**

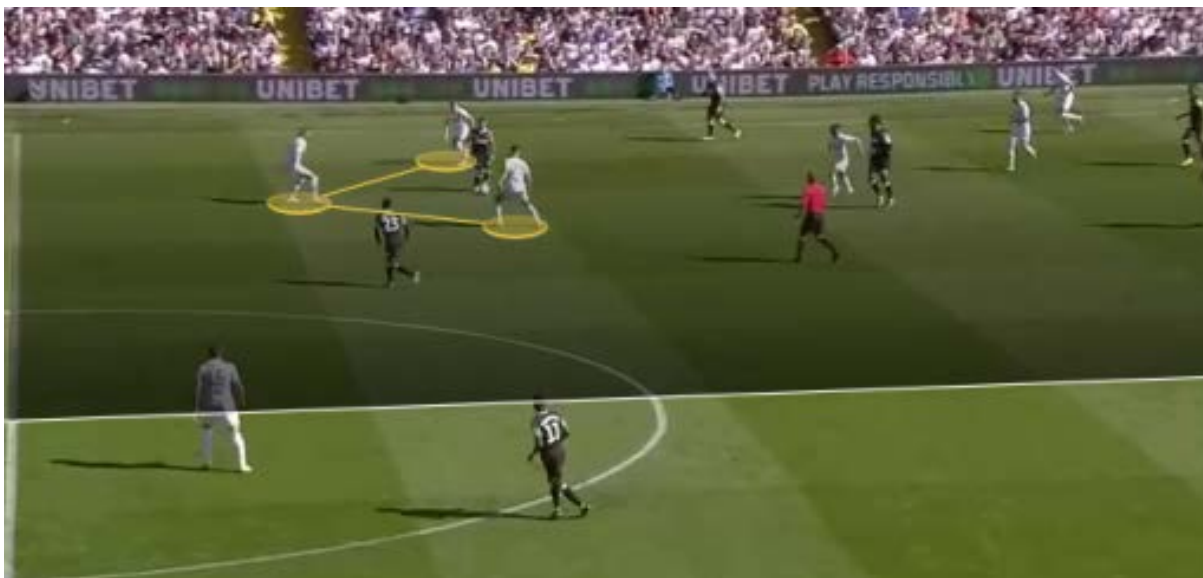
1 v 1 duels and ball's area overload often require Leeds to cut the field into 2 parts.

The opposition's ball carrier is countered in a 1 v 1 duel and he is forced to play a quick pass forward to not lose the possession.



The receiver is then countered in a 3 v 1 situation along the defensive left flank.

When overloading the ball area is not effective, and the opposition can play out of the condensed area, the 1 v 1 duels come back to be the main defensive weapons to stop the opposition's attacking moves.



[The vertical cut off into 2 parts of the field is very clear, in this picture.]

As the opponents have preventively created a strong side, they don't have solutions to switch the side or to effectively play out of the condensed area. The 1 v 1 duels of the spare opponents are usually decisive to win the ball back or stop the offensive actions.



- **Defensive rotations to maintain 1 v 1 duels**



Bamford, the center forward forces the opposition center back to play a quick pass forward.



Struijk move forward to counter the receiver, Hernandez drops back to mark the first potential receiver of a forward pass.

All the opponents are marked 1 v 1 along the defensive left flank.



Ayling and Dallas are marking their opponents (Ayling moves wide and Dallas shifts across).



As Ayling's direct opponent receives, he runs up along the flank and Dallas tracks his direct opponents deeper along the flank to maintain the 1 v 1 duel.

All the opponents around the ball area marked 1 v 1



Dallas and Struijk are marking the opposition right winger and the right center back; the first one is placed goal side and the second one is screening the passing lane toward the opponent.



Struijk shifts wide to track his opponent and Dallas moves forward, arching his run to counter his direct opponent while receiving.

In this move, the holding midfielder Struijk moves forward from the previous position as center back, while White was shifting across and forces the ball carrier backward.



Kilch is tracking his direct opponents running back through the middle third.



Struijk runs deeper inside the middle third to track the ball carriers and Kilch exchanges the position, dropping into the defensive line from the middle third.

In this further example, the left center back White has moved out of his position as center back to force the ball carrier backward.



Alioski moves toward the nearest opponent along the sideline.



White tucks in to track the ball carrier and Dallas has shifted wide to counter his opponent, who was trying to support the possession phase. All the passing options are preventively marked 1 v 1.

As we already analyzed, the basic defensive 1-4-1-4-1 formation is always variable.



In this example, the 4-1 formation is clearly recognizable in the middle third, but the left fullback Ayling has moved forward along the flank to header the ball along the same line of the holding midfielder and the center backs (White and Cooper) are shifting wide to cover his position and keep the 1 v 1 duels.

This next sequence is a crucial example of a central and vertical rotation between 2 midfielders (Struijk and Dallas) to maintain the 1 v 1 duels.



Dallas is preventing the ball carrier from playing forward and Struijk is moving forward to track the opponent while receiving the only possible pass for the ball carrier.



Struijk forces the receiver to play a back pass and Dallas cover the space behind him.



Struijk goes on pressing the opposition's ball carriers and Dallas stands in his position to cover and mark the previous teammates' opponent. As the ball is played out wide, the center forward Bamford shifts across to create a 1 v 1 duel against the receiver.

- **Force the direction of the opposition's possession and a long pass (wingers and midfielders joining the striker to mark the center back or the goalkeeper and the nearest player toward the center).**



Bamford presses the ball carrier in the center and he screens the passing path to his teammate on the right; Hernandez shifts across the center to force the first forward passing option backward if he received the ball.



The opposition center back is forced to play a long pass, as he would be under Hernandez's pressure if he dribbled the ball forward.



Klich forces the opposition's holding midfielder to play backward to the center back and Bamford presses him while receiving. Harrison, the right winger has preventively shifted across to close the opposition's left fullback down if he receives the ball.



As all the short passing options are 1 v 1 marked, the opposition's center back is forced to play a long pass to the final third.



Klich forces his direct opponent and ball carrier backward and to play toward the goalkeeper; meanwhile Hernandez is marking the nearest short passing option. Bamford moves to press the goalkeeper after marking the center back, and Struijk moves out of position to preventively mark the second center back.



The goalkeeper is then forced to play a long pass toward the middle third as he is under pressure and the nearest passing option is man-marked.

Bamford loses the aerial duel, but the opposition is forced to play backward thanks the 1 v 1 duels.



Struijk moves out of position to press the ball carriers and force them to go back to the goalkeeper, acting as center striker.



Bamford acts as second pressing player, tracking the second center back and forcing him backward too.



The opposition goalkeeper is eventually forced to play a long pass toward the middle third thanks to the pressure action and the the covering run of the center striker.

Summary

Bielsa is one of the modern soccer philosopher and all the coaches around the world recognize his role; he is anyway famous thanks his attacking minded and direct soccer style of play. In other words, he is famous for the possession phase of his teams.

But Bielsa is much more than only attacking soccer, as his Leeds has proved in the last 2 English Championship seasons. The defensive data of the team are indisputable.

The defensive phase is made of principles of play rather than of team's shapes, just like the attacking phase, and these principles of play make Leeds so interesting to analyze; this is what this book has tried to do.

But, which are these principles?

- Pressure
- 1 v 1 duels
- Players rotations

And how are they carried out in the field?

- High pressure to win the ball back quickly
- Man oriented pressure
- Defensive 1 v 1
- Ball's areas overloads
- 2 sides cut off the pitch off the ball and passing lanes closure.
- Defensive rotations to maintain 1 v 1 duels
- Force the direction of the opposition's possession and a long pass (wingers and midfielders joining the striker to mark the center back or the goalkeeper and the nearest player toward the center).

The incoming season, when Leeds will face the first English Premier League campaign after 16 years will tell us if Bielsa is also able to take a middle table Championship team and give it a safe seat in the best league of the world.