

THE ROLE OF THE
**CENTER
FORWARD**

DEFENDING



by **LUCA BERTOLINI**

The Role of the Center Forward (Defending)

By

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Introduction: What are the defensive tasks of a center forward?

A center forward is often the first defender when his team is off the ball, and the opposition builds up from the back. In the first situation, he becomes a defender on the opposition's front foot; he put pressure against the defensive backline (goalkeeper, center backs, fullbacks, or even wingbacks of a 5 men shape), forcing the direction of play. (The next footages are screenshots of the last Champions League final 2019/2020 that Bayern won against Paris Saint Germain.)



Bayern has just lost the possession in the final third, and Lewandoski counter-presses to force a back pass to the goalkeeper, exploiting the five teammates in front of the penalty box's edge line.



The Polish striker also presses the goalkeeper to force a long ball while the teammates preventively press the potential short passing combinations.



The previous high positioning of Bayern required PSG to stand deep inside the first third; Bayern can recover the possession inside the offensive half, and the midfielders provide passing options retreating their positions behind the opposition's forwards.

A center striker also helps the creation of pressure traps, besides exploiting pressure triggers also.



PSG's goalkeeper has the possession, and Bayern's winger tucks in to mark the center backs. Müller marks a center midfielder inside the box, and Lewandowski marks the opposition's holding midfielder in the center, standing behind the teammates.



The only possible solution for the goalkeeper is to play a long pass to the left flank; the right fullback receives, but he is under Bayern's left-winger, and he is forced to play a long pass in behind. The German team's defensive line stands high up in the field while shifting wide, and the opposition's potential receiver is off-side.

The defending team can force the opposition's action during the building-up phase without playing a high-pressure defensive action.



Bayern's center backs are free to play inside the box, but PSG's create a rhombus in the middle to screen the opposition's holding midfielder and the second center midfielder; the wide forwards narrow, in the center allowing more options to play toward the left to the fullback.

As Bayern's center backs combine to progress the building up phase, the chances to receive for the fullback concern the center-backs and the ball carrier.



PSG's high-pressure increases, creating numerical superiority in the center (5 v 3). In this picture, Bayern's right fullback and the winger could receive after a fast distribution phase.



PSG forces the direction of play backward again, but Bayern's goalkeeper can play a long pass toward the attacking left flank, where the fullback can receive free from pressure.

Bayern can play out wide, overcoming the opposition's pressure inside the first third.



Otherwise, Psg creates numerical superiority along the flank (3 v 2), using the touchline as an extra defender, winning the ball back thanks to the retreating right midfielder.

A center striker is also the first defender when his team loses possession in the final third. In the second situation, when the team loses the possession, he becomes the first counter-pressing player or must be an advanced passing option for the ball carrier after the ball's recovery.



Bayern has just lost the possession in this sequence, but four players prevent the opponents from progressing the move; as the ball carrier can only play a back pass, the center striker (Lewandowski) drops back and counter-presses the first receiver of the opponents.



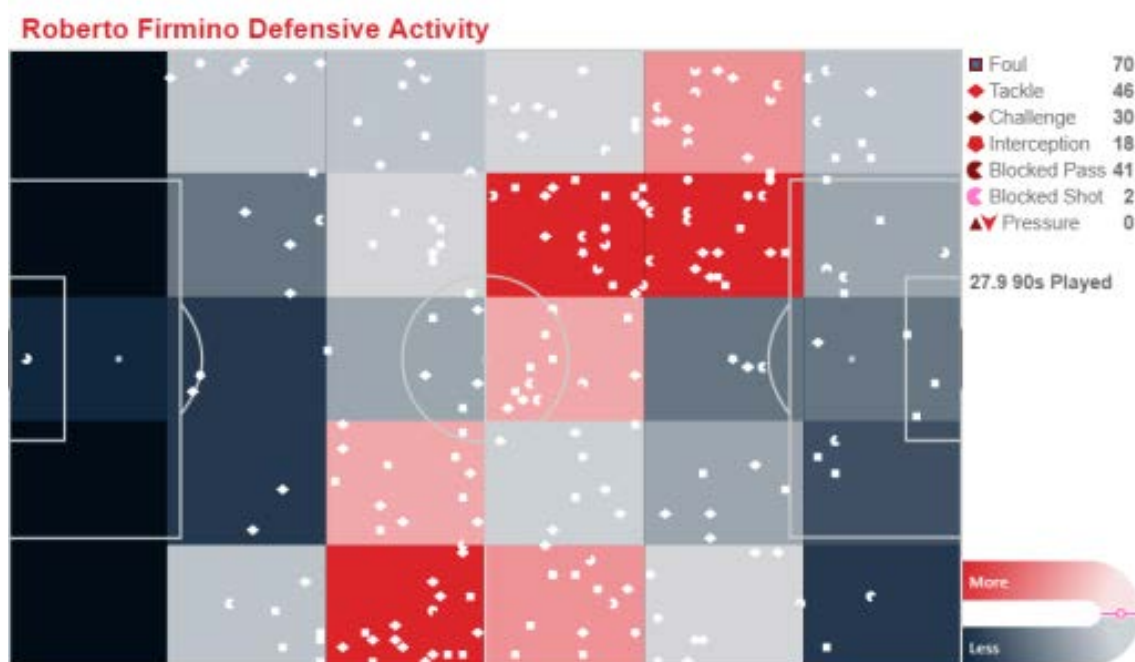
He wins the ball back with a tackle...



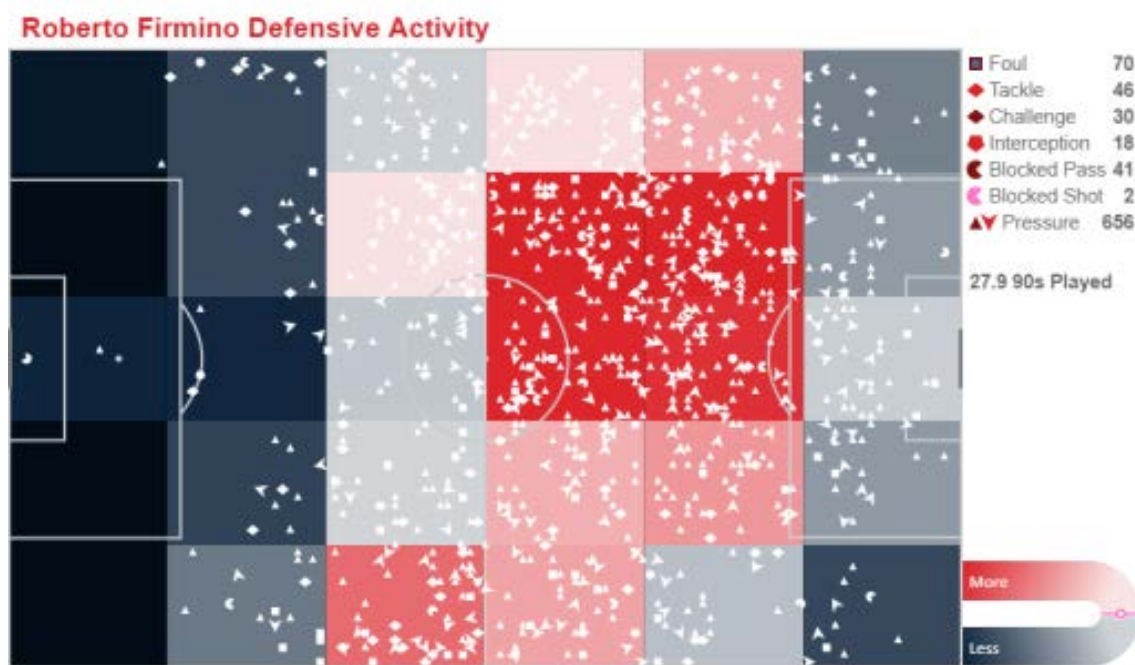
...And the opponent commits a foul to stop Bayern's new attacking action.

Anticipation, reaction, and positioning are the main characteristics of great strikers when they have possession. Still, these skills are crucial even when the team hasn't the possession or loses the possession.

Roberto Firmino is the perfect example of this kind of player from a defensive perspective; his heat-map shows the defensive behaviors with and without pressure factors (2018 / 2019 season).



The defensive actions without the pressure factors show three specific areas in the field where Firmino performs them.



The field areas become much more extensive, including the pressure factors, and Firmino seems to be an all-around defensive striker.

The defensive positions of a center striker

This kind of player often stands between the center backs or between the center back and the fullback. He forces the play's direction to create pressing traps with the teammates if the immediate ball's recovery is not immediately possible.



Usually, a center striker stands between the center backs when the opposition builds up from the back. He forces the opponents' possession direction through his body position and run's direction.



A center striker is the defensive team player who tracks the ball's path when the opposition distributes to find a space to play out from the back. These movements are also often pressing traps for the opposition.



In this sequence, Kane shifts wide to act as a fourth player in a zonal 4 v 3 duel, providing numerical superiority, forcing a long pass to the other side, and preventing the ball carrier from dribbling the ball high up in the field to exploit a 3 v 3 situation.



Leeds United can switch the side, but the pressure trap is ready along the right defensive flank. The defensive line has already shifted out wide once the center midfielder has dropped back, and the second one moves up to counter the ball carrier. The center striker has then forced a switch of side toward a specific and pre-ordered area of the field where Tottenham could create a 6 v 5 duel, closing down all the potential passing paths to progress the move.

When the opposition's holding midfielder has the possession, and he is under pressure, a center striker should cover the back passing lanes to the center backs (standing in front of one of them if he's playing in a two strikers system, or tracking the ball path, if he is the only striker.)



The opposition's ball carrier is under pressure, and all the passing options are closed down.



(As Tottenham can win the ball back, he stands in between the lines to be a passing option. (Kane's defensive positions will be analyzed further in this book.)

Sometimes, a center striker is a tool for a specific pressure trap and tactics, as in these following footages from an Italian Serie A match (Napoli vs. Milan.) Zlatan Ibrahimovic is the main actor in these specific situations.



The opposition's goalkeeper has the ball, and Ibrahimovic is ready to press the left center back, who is considered the more technically gifted player between the opposition's center. 3 teammates are ready to counter the opposition's center midfielders and the right fullback. The goalkeeper has only one option to play a short pass.



The center back receives, but Milan shapes defensive triangles out of the penalty area, and the receiver can only play a back pass to the goalkeeper.

This second situation is similar to the previous one, but Milan creates a numerical superiority along the defensive left flank between the middle and the final thirds.

Milan forces the opposition to play out wide toward the right flank.



Ibrahimovic marks the left center back. The three teammates stand in the same positions as the previous situation, but the center midfielder at the right, who is now screening the opposition's left midfielder, rather than marking behind him.



The right center-back can only a back pass again, and Ibrahimovic moves to close down the passing lane.



The goalkeeper receives, and he can only play a long pass out wide where Milan creates a numerical superiority situation (3+3 v 3); as the fourth advanced players retreat, the left fullback moves up in the field, and the left midfielder shifts out wide to mark the potential passing lanes toward the middle.

The next sequence is the same as the previous one, but it takes Milan to win the ball back and to allow Ibrahimovic to receive as a target player.



Napoli's goalkeeper can only play out wide to the left, and the center back and the fullback are the only players having time and space on the ball after the ball's reception.



The fullback can't progress the move along the flank, as the opposition's left fullback presses him, the winger shifts out wide to close down the back passing lane, and Ibrahimovic, as a central striker, stands between the center backs. Furthermore, both midfielders are man-marked.



Milan wins the ball back, and the advanced midfielder dribbles the ball inside the field, exploiting the space that Milan could create by forcing the action out wide toward the touchline.

The center striker can receive Ibrahimovic, exploiting the space between the center backs, dropping back, and escaping their potential pressure.



In this other situation, Ibrahimovic marks the left center back again. The only options for the opposite to play short passing combinations are alongside the right flank close to the touchline. As the right center back receives, the midfield line stands close to the opposition's center midfielders to create a 4 v 2 duel in the middle, preventing the ball carrier from exploiting the space and the potential passing paths toward them.



The center back is then forced to play a long pass to switch the side, find a chance to overcome the pressure and find a free pace to play through the middle third.

The center striker is not correctly marking the opposition's center back, but he is close enough to put pressure against him. The first center midfielder screens the opposition's center midfielder; a potential passing option is playing 2 v 1 near the center cycle. The ball carrier could only pass out wide to the fullback or to the goalkeeper to maintain the possession.

When the opposition's pressure isn't effective, and the center midfielders can receive, Ac Milan aims to create numerical advantage around and in front of them and the potential receivers, asking the center forward to be the first passing option when the ball is won back.



The center midfielders' line is placed in front of the center midfielders (the ball carriers and his teammates); the right-winger and fullback, together with the holding midfielder, shape a second line behind the opposition's winger and No.10, and they are ready to counter them if they received.



Overloading the ball's position, the direction of play is then forced again backward. The previously advanced midfielder moves forward along the field, forcing a new back pass to the defensive line. The center striker stands along the same line to shape a momentary two pressing forward lines against the opposition's defensive line.

Although the opposition's possession doesn't start from a goal kick, the tactic of freeing one center back only along the defensive left flank worth the same, the advanced midfielder presses the holding opponent, who dropped back to support the center backs.



The holding midfielder is forced to play out wide; meanwhile, the center striker marks the left center back to prevent him from receiving.



The left-center midfielder receives, and he is also forced to play out wide toward the left flank, thanks to the 3 v 2 duel against him; the center striker drops back to create the numerical superiority situation.



Ac Milan recovers the possession, and Ibrahimovic exploits his previous position to stretch the defensive line and prevent the center backs from getting closer in the center.

Usually, the center striker also becomes a target player when the opposition plays out from the pressure area, looking for a through pass, and the possession is recovered.



The opposition's holding midfielder attempts to play a through pass, but Milan's holding midfielder wins the ball back in the center, intercepting it just slightly shifting across.



Ibrahimovic then drops back and receives a pass to make the possession safe, acting as a target player.

Looking at the old-style target man, we might think that he is physically strong, heavy, and tall; but it's not like that in modern soccer. Players are required to be mobile, whatever their physicality is.

The return of the target striker: defensive factors.

The target man's return as a central striker results from the high pressure and the efficacy of this defensive tactic against the rising of the building up from the back style, after Guardiola's Barcelona Fc. Many teams tend to play longer passes to the final third, after beating the first pressure phase of the opposition, as the higher pressure take the defensive team to place a second line of players just after the first one; some seasons ago, overcoming the first line of pressure meant to find spaces, but during this last seasons, overcoming the first line of pressure often means to find a second one against the ball carriers in between the lines.



The following footages represent the basic defensive tasks of a center forward; in this first sequence, Lewandowski marks the center back, as the opposite winger does. The opposition's direction play is forced to a center midfielder who is easily under pressure....



...and double-teamed; the defensive rhombus has closed all the chances for a progression from the back.

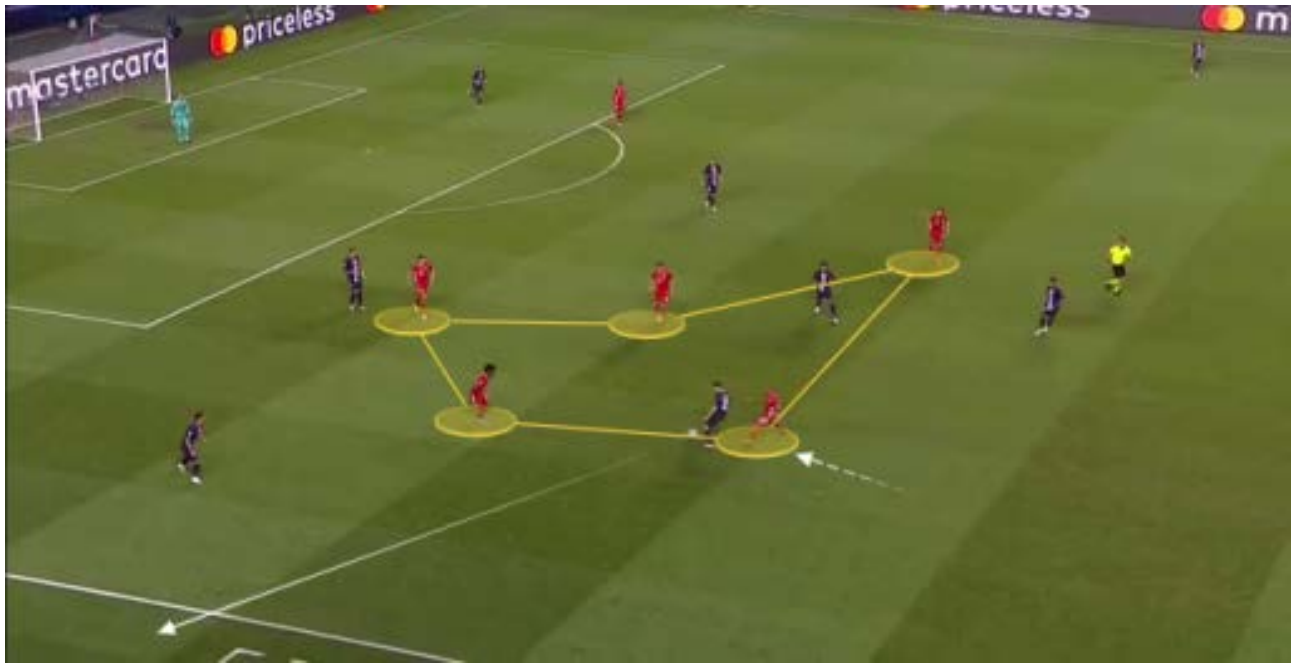


The ball carrier can only play a long pass to the final third, where the possession team is outnumbered, as most of the players were forced to stand lower and deeper in the field to counter Bayern's high pressure.

Bayern's first pressure and second advanced line are overcome thanks to a quick combination and a cut pass, but the high pressure provokes a wrong side pass and the recovery of possession.



The left-winger and Müller mark the center back, and Lewandowski attempts to close the passing lane to the center, but he can't, and the ball carrier can play through the pass. The lower midfielder moves forward to press the receiver and prevent him from turning.



The line of three and the center striker move toward the ball, and they prevent the receiver from playing a back pass. They create a 5 v 3 duel around the ball, and the left midfielder must play a quick pass to prevent the opponent's pressure. The ball carrier receives, but he plays a wrong pass out wide, and Bayern recovers the possession.

In this next sequence, the center striker is the upper apex of a three-pressure pressure line, and the midfielders stand narrow in the center; PSG deliberately leaves the flanks free to exploit and protect the center.



The center striker stands behind these two pressing lines, and he acts as an option to overcome the pressure without a risky long pass, as he is positioned without immediate pressure.

(This the first situation where the center striker acts as an upper passing option.)

(And this is the second one when Psg has created a midfield's line of five and a weaker side along the defensive right flank.)



The right fullback plays a long pass from right to left and exploits the opposition's defensive shape's weaker side.



Lewandowski receives after shifting wider and having stretched the opposition's defense, and he lays the ball back to the incoming fullback, maintaining the possession.

This is the concept of a mobile center striker, who acts as an advanced pivot out wide, helping the team to maintain the possession even out of the center final third where he should be expected to stay.

This tactical return has also changed the way a team off the ball presses against the building up phase, and as it counter-presses after the loss of possession; the target man usually doesn't counter-press, and instead he often receives the first passes after a ball's recovery when his team plays longer passes due to move the ball out of the condensed areas.



Bayern wins the ball back along the flank in this first sequence, but the possession is immediately lost due to a too-long pass that Lewandowski can't control.



The center striker immediately counter-press the long ball against the opposition's center back, forcing him to play to the goalkeeper and prevent him from exploiting the zonal and numerical superiority 3 v 1 back.



Lewandowski also presses the opposition's goalkeeper, and his teammates push up high up in the field to support the pressure phase. PSG's goalkeeper could have played a side pass to the right, but he plays a wrong ball to the holding midfielder instead, making the pressure effective.



Lewandowski stands between the goalkeeper and the holding midfielder, who can only receive and pass back to the center. The direction of pressure could provoke a loss of possession while trying to pass toward the weak side.

The counter-pressing action of Lewandowski and the support of the teammates have forced Psg to play deep in the side the first third and to create a quick passing combination to overcome direct defensive action attempts.



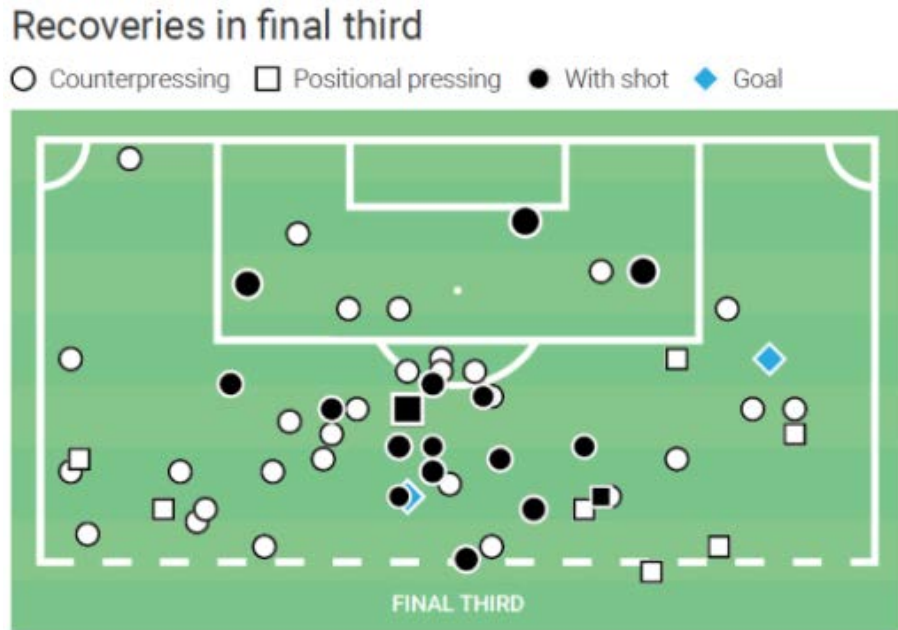
Six Bayern's players press the opposition's possession phase along the flank, and the two near the ball are aggressively pressed.



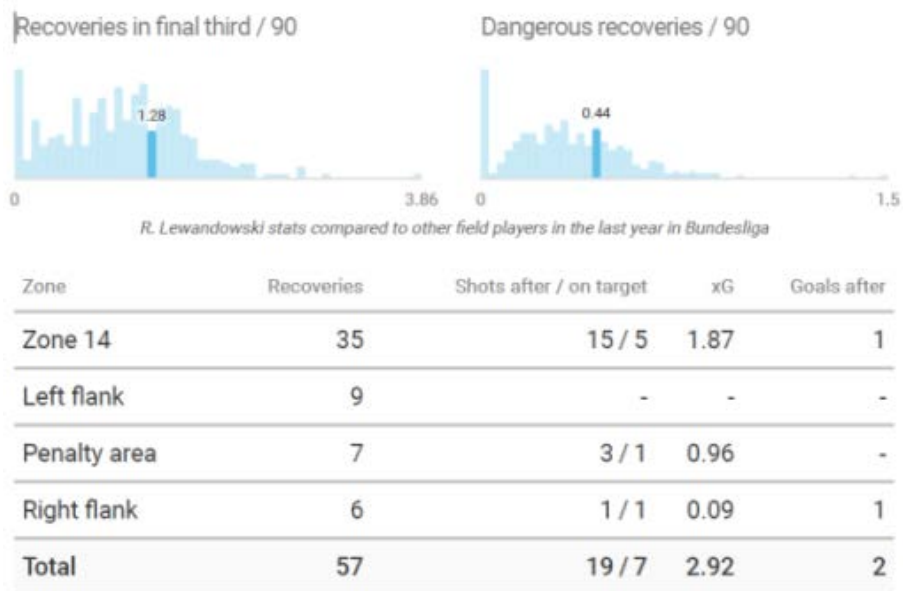
They lose the ball. Thanks to Lewandowski, an incoming player can receive without pressure who stands between the center backs, making them busy and preventing them from moving forward to counter the opposition's new ball carrier.

Despite the center striker was not involved in the ball's recovery actions, his counter-pressing action forced Psg to play backward; first, he forced the ball carrier to play out but back inside the first third, he joined the ball's area to create a 6 v 4 duel. He then prevented the center backs from leaving their positions to counter the teammate with the ball after the recovery of possession.

Robert Lewandowski is an example of a target striker for Bayern Munich, but not only; as we analyzed in the attacking version of this book, he can also be defined as an all-around striker from a defensive point of view.



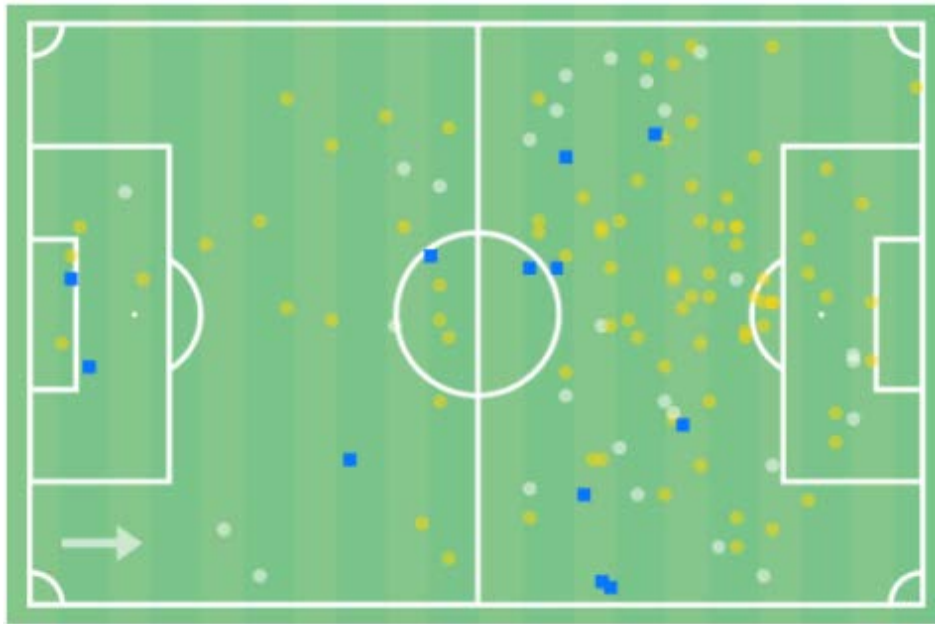
The general defensive heat-map of the Polish striker of Bayern Munich is crucial to look at the width of his defensive action and the variety of his defensive actions (counter-pressing and positional pressure); furthermore, his strength when Bayern is off the ball takes the German team to generate chances and goals, if he is not himself to shoot or score.



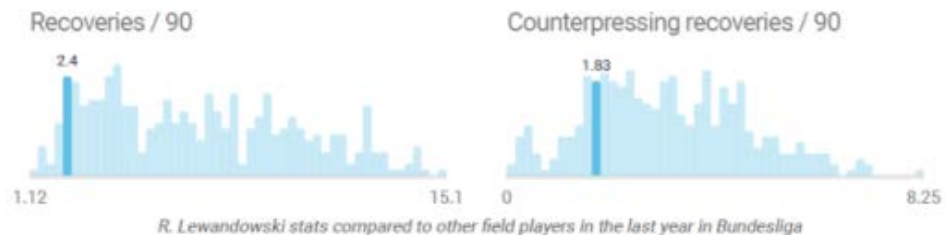
Otherwise, it is clear that zone 14 is the central area of action for a center striker when the team is off the ball; apart from the defensive actions alongside the flank, these positions are crucial for him to help the team maintain possession after a ball's recovery.

Recoveries

● Positioning ● Counterpressing ■ Interception



Widening the focus on the whole field, it is possible to discover why Lewandowski is an "all-around player" from a defensive perspective; he is active inside the offensive half and even inside the defensive one.



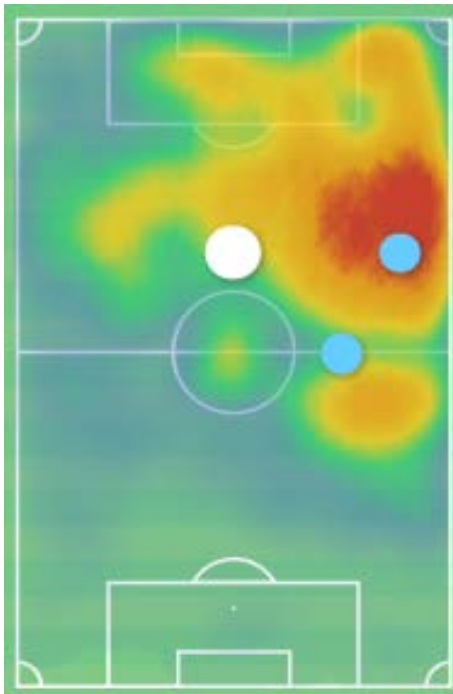
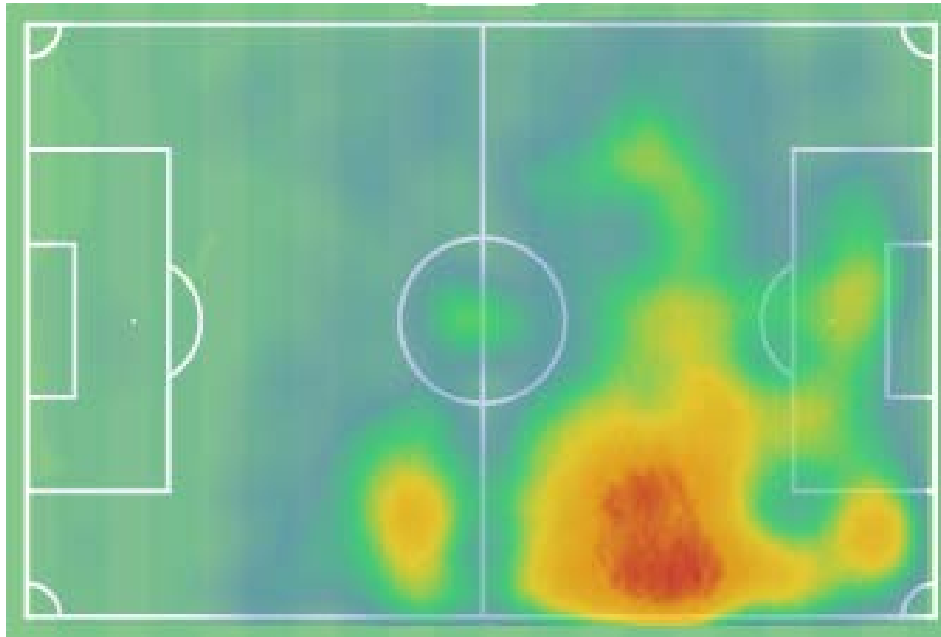
Third	Recoveries	Counterpressing	Interceptions	Sliding tackles
Own third	13	10	2	0
Central third	42	28	8	0
Final third	68	54	2	0
Total	123	92	12	0

Looking at the general data of defensive action, despite having an obvious higher number of defensive actions inside the final third and in the center of the field, the data shows how Lewandowski is also very active inside the first third (excluding the free kicks and corner kicks).

His recoveries and counter-pressing actions are also considerable inside the first third, considering that many of them are part of counter-pressing action.

Der Raumdeuter – The space interpreter when he is defending

Thomas Müller is a space interpreter when his team has the possession, and he can play the same way even when Bayern is off possession. The heat-map confirms his tendency to play alongside the center-right area of the field, furthermore after Hans-Dieter Flick's arrival as a head coach of the Bavarian team.



Defensive duels / won	Aerial duels / won
5.94 / 60.6%	3.49 / 35.2%
Interceptions	Losses / own half
2.41	13.79 / 14.7%
Sliding tackles / successful	Clearances
0.92 / 45.8%	0.38
Loose ball duels / won	
4.17 / 38.5%	
Recoveries / opp. half	
4.44 / 62.9%	
Fouls	
0.65	

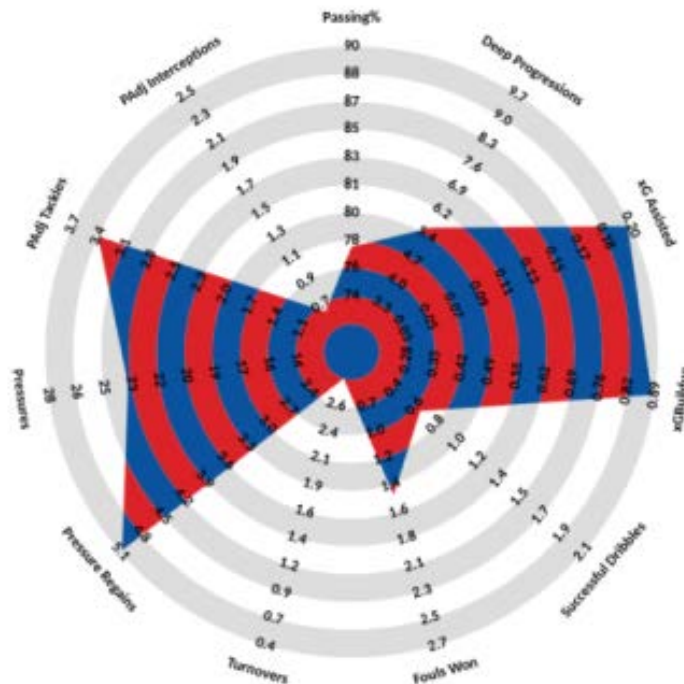
The average of successes in his defensive actions (duels) is very indicative for an attacking-minded "space interpreter" (recoveries in the opposition' half more than all the others.)

Playing Positions



His positioning in the field concerns David Alaba's tendency to dribble the ball alongside the field's left flank. As we analyzed in the attacking version of this topic, Müller is the target player of long passes by Alaba.

Thomas Müller
Bayern Munich



If the building-up and assists stats confirm the German player's crucial role, the pressure actions and the tackles that take the team to win the ball back are indicators of how great the help of Müller is also as defensive "Space Interpreter."

As we stated, anticipation and positioning are the primary skills of a striker, both during attacking and defensive phases; these are also the primary skills of Thomas Müller, the so-called Space Interpreter. Space awareness could be the two words that sum up him quickly. Concentration, composure, and tactical sensitivity are some invisible characteristics that make him a unique player. He has played in all the attacking positions of the 1-4-2-3-1 and of the 1-4-3-3; furthermore, he has been a crucial player for many coaches with different styles, like the direct one of Jupp Heinkes, or the positional and possession one by Pep Guardiola, and pressing and counter-attacking based by Hans-Dieter Flick which led Bayern Munich to win all the six trophies of the last season.

The Champions League 2019/2020 semi-final match when Bayern scored eight goals against Barcelona is the best example of Thomas Müller's defensive skills, and his capacity to link them with a space interpreter's requirements team is attacking.



In this first sequence, he has exchanged the position as a central striker with Lewandowski, and he is screening the passing path from the goalkeeper to the center back at his right, forcing a hands' pass to the left one.



The pressure trap of Bayern is ready, thanks to the defensive shape alongside the defensive right side and the back four line along the middle line of the field. Although the ball is driven to the opposition's striker, he receives in a 6 v 3 situation of play in the middle third.

In this second example, Müller is standing in a No.10 position, and the wingers have tucked in to support the center striker pressure action against the goalkeeper.



The wingers are marking the center back, and the left fullback, the center striker, is pressing the goalkeeper. Müller also forces a long pass as he screens the center midfielder, preventing the pass over the pressure line.



Müller wins the ball back during the development of the move, winning a second time of the ball close to the penalty area, exploiting his previous No.10 position at the beginning of the pressure phase.

The striker and the wingers forced the first long pass, the high defensive line took the opposition to playback, and stood deep inside the final third. Müller can attack the wandering ball, winning it back for Bayern in a dangerous position.

The skills as a space interpreter take Müller to be such a smart player in all defensive situations.



In this sequence, the opposition plays out from the back alongside the left. Müller helps create a numerical superiority 3 v 2 around the ball that forces the ball carrier to play to the goalkeeper. The winger forces the direction of play backward, and Lewandowski and Müller close the short passing lanes, making the pass to the goalkeeper the only solution.



The goalkeeper receives, and Lewandowski forces the center to play out wide toward Bayern's defensive left flank.

Müller screens the passing path to the holding midfielder, and he is also ready to press the second center-back, both when the goalkeeper had the ball and when the ball carrier has received the ball; in the end, Müller helped the pressing trap creation toward the flank.

Thomas Müller is a space interpreter also as a center midfielder and as a temporary winger.



In this sequence, he substitutes the right-center midfielder in front of the holding one, pressing the opposition's ball carrier while receiving and forcing him to play a side pass instead of a through one to the strikers. The opposition's left fullback receives back in the field concerning the ball carrier's previous position.



Müller goes on pressing, and he stands in front of the new ball carrier, preventing him from playing forward and back to the teammate.

The new ball carrier can only play another pass back to the goalkeeper.

As the team's defensive phase has only sent the opposition back inside the defensive half, Bayern shapes its classic formation when off the ball; the 1-4-1-4-1.



Müller usually acts as the right-winger, exchanging his position with the real right one, who shifts across in front of the holding midfielder.



The winger has pushed forward as a center midfielder, but his pressure action is not practical. Müller shifts across and backward to cover his position and the opposition's potential receiver, who stands in front of the dribbling teammate.



He counters him and wins the ball back, launching the counter-attack for Bayern,

As a "space interpreter," Müller supports the attacking moves after the ball's recovery.



After winning the ball back, he supports the attacking action from the back, and he wins a second time of the ball just out of the penalty area, as a No.10.

He plays a 1-2 triangle passing combination inside the box, and he can score a goal for Bayern. This sequence is a crucial example of the effectiveness of Thomas Müller for the Bavarian team.

When Bayern's wingers or center midfielders are out of positions due to pressing actions or developments of previous attacking moves, Müller often covers their positions, even along the weak side of the defensive shape.



Three teammates shift wide to counter the ball carrier along the left flank to prevent him from playing out from the first third in this sequence. The opposition can only switch the side to the left flank.

Bayern is a floating team defensively; in this situation, a 1-4-2-3-1 shape prevents the opponents from playing through passes and forces a wide development of the possession phase.



Thomas Müller acts as the advanced right midfielder narrow to the center one and the striker; this way, the right fullback can push up and preventively press the fullback. The opposition's ball carrier can only play backward.



Lewandowski tracks the movement of the other center's ball back, and Müller pushes up and tracks the opposition's center back with the ball to force a back pass and drive the opponents back inside their defensive half.

The German player's energy is crucial for Bayern during pressure phases, as he provides a non-stop preventive action.



He presses the center back first, and then the goalkeeper; the center striker marks the other center back as before, and the goalkeeper can only play a long pass. The high line of four in the middle third creates 1 v 1 duels against all the potential receivers.

Simultaneously, the high defensive line presses the opposition's forwards and prevents them from progressing through the field.



This way, Bayern quickly creates condensed areas around the ball out wide. Müller usually takes part in creating numerical superiorities out wide, using the touchline as an extra defender.

When the opposition builds up from the back, the wingers and the center striker usually create numerical equalities out of the box. They screen the forward passing lanes to the opponents behind the pressure line. This way, the opposition has to play more passes inside the box to find a pocket of space.



Müller often stands behind the first pressure line and the potential opposition's receivers, and he is ready to press the potential receivers.

In this sequence, the three up front create a 3 v 3 duel against the goalkeeper and the center back, and they screen the three opponents behind.



The left-winger moves out of position to press the goalkeeper, the center striker marks the holding midfielder, and Müller presses the second midfielder, who drops back to support the building-up phase. The goalkeeper can only play a long pass again that the Bayern's midfield line can win high up in the field.



Thanks to his previous position, Müller can backbeat the opposition's defensive line, receive the long ball from the holding midfielder, and play a volley cross pass in the penalty area center.

The center striker attacks the ball and scores, exploiting his previous central defensive position against the opposition's center back.

Bayern Munich's defensive aim is to create numerical advantage against the opponents when building up positional attacks. In this sequence, the backline of five provides a 5 v 2 horizontal superiority. The defenders can press the opponents between the line, ensuring the numerical advantage at the back (3 v 2 if two defenders pushed up to counter the opponents in front of them).

Two midfielders screen the passing lanes toward them, and the third one stands around the weaker area of the defensive shape. The ball carrier can only play a back pass to the center back under the immediate pressure of Thomas Müller.



The ball carrier can only play a longer back pass to the center back.



Thomas Müller pressing the center back receives and can only play another back pass to the goalkeeper; Lewandowski helps the pressure phase stand near the second center-back and prevent him from receiving.



Müller presses the goalkeeper and has enough time to play a quick pass to the center back.

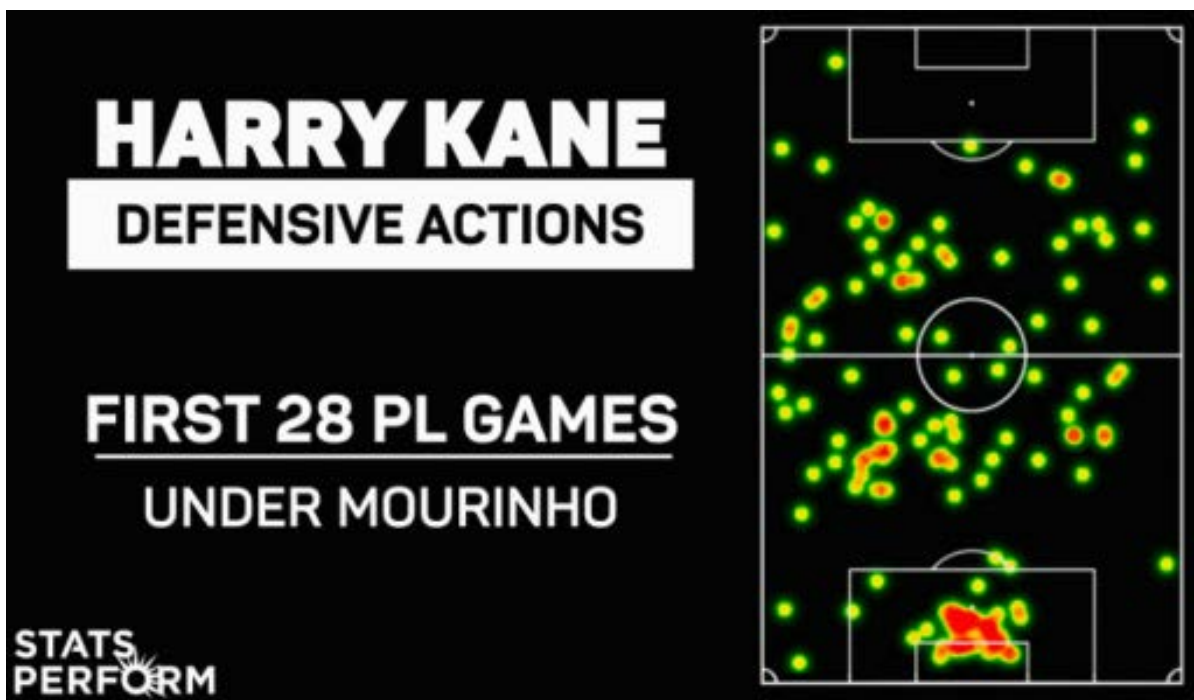
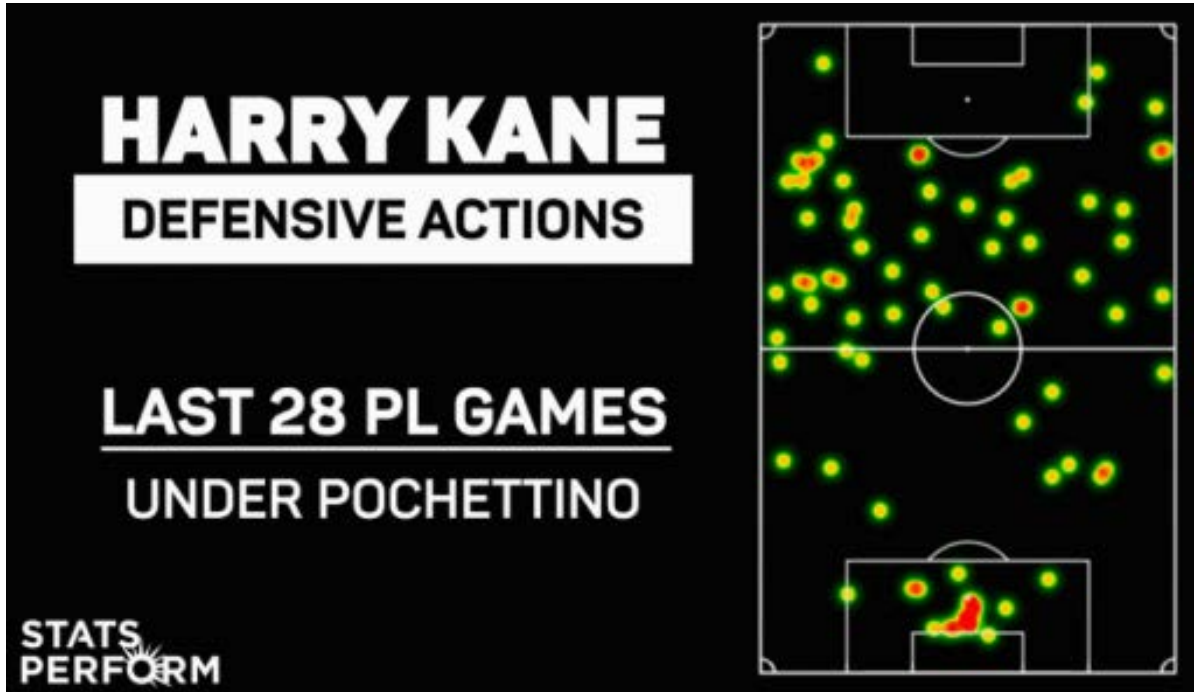


Bayern's high-pressure phase creates 1 v 1 duels with the wingers and the striker, and the high position of the defensive line forces the ball carrier to play a long diagonal pass to the opposite flank.

Despite the opposition can play out wide from the pressured zone, the receiver is isolated, and the opponents can't progress the move.

Harry Kane at Tottenham: a case study about a playmaking striker when his team is off the ball

The English striker's defensive evolution, or development, becomes clear from comparing the heat-maps of the last games with Pochettino as a Head coach and the first ones under Mourinho when Spurs decided for the change on the bench.



Harry Kane's defensive contribution has increased because of his more backward position as a playmaking striker.

The next sequences are explicative to understand how the different position has affected the center striker's defensive contribution.



In this next sequence, two opponents cut off the center midfielder with a short pass in the center; Kane's position between the lines allows him to drop back and counter the receiver.



He tracks him backward since he drives him to an outer position, placing his body between the opponent and the goal to defend.



He wins the ball back, and he dribbles the ball higher up in the field.

In this next sequence, Kane has dropped back inside the first third to contest the opposition ball's carrier.



This way, he prevents the midfielders and the defenders from leaving their positions to cover the depth, and he wins the ball, passing it back to the easiest passing option, the left fullback.



The fullbacks receive free from pressure, and he passes to a free teammate who has pushed up free from pressure thanks to the previous Kane's action.

This next image is useful to understand how Kane has improved his defensive awareness and skills.

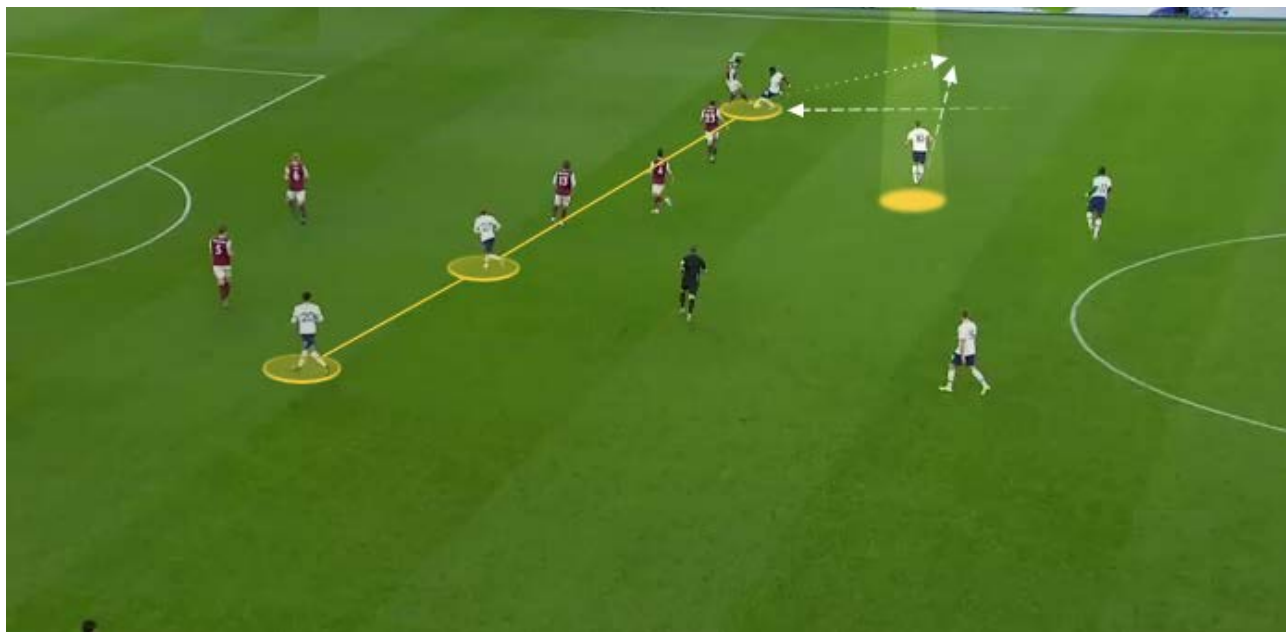


He has dropped back to counter the ball's carrier, preventing him from exploiting a numerical superiority against a teammate, who can stand in his position and move toward the advanced passing option for the opponents.

This next sequence is a counter-pressing action of the English striker that shows how the position in between the lines has become crucial for the attacking phase and the defensive phase.



Kane receives between the lines, but he loses the possession.



The opposition distributes toward the left flank, and the right fullback pushes high up in the field to counter-press the possession phase.

Kane shifts out wide toward the defensive right flank, and he counters the opponent's dribbling action.



Although the opponents can win the ball after the duel, the defensive action of the central striker in between the lines and of the pushing up fullback have created a strong side of the ball and allowed the right midfielder to shift wide also to counter-press immediately and again the opposition's ball carrier.

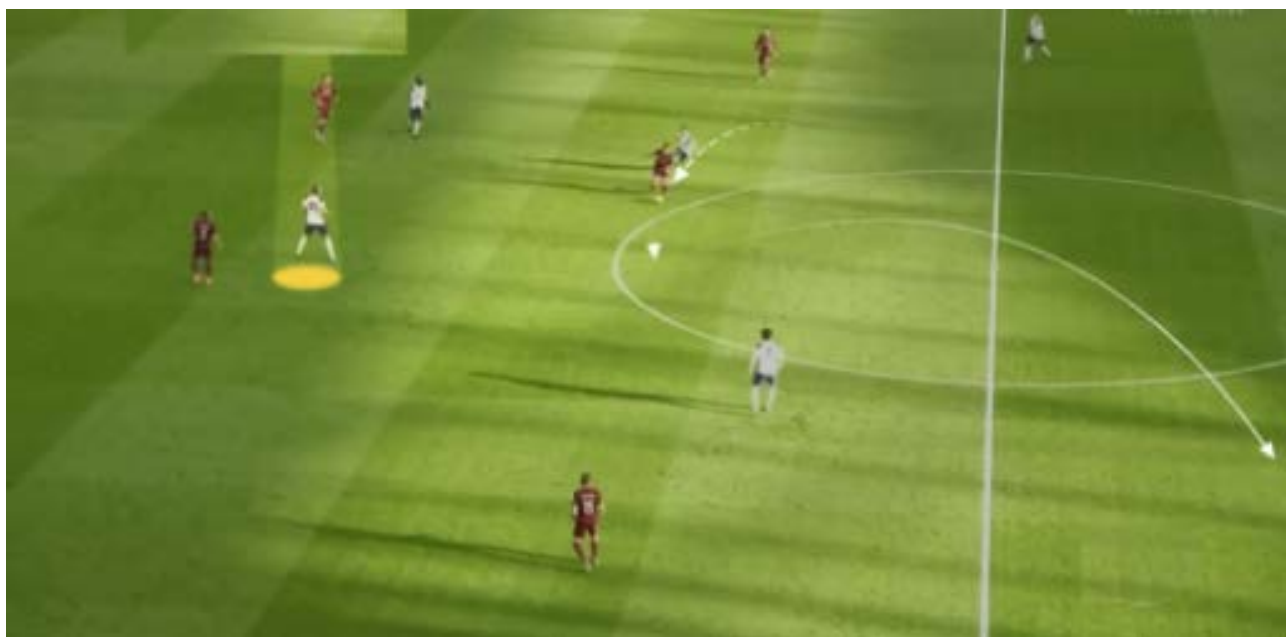


He wins the ball back and plays a long pass to the attackers along with the defensive phase.

Although Kane has become a more defensive player, he still presses the opposition's center backs to create pressure traps.



The opposition's ball carrier is under pressure, and Kane preventively presses the second center-back and easiest passing option.



Despite the holding midfielder receives, he is under pressure, as he is the only possible passing option for the opposition to progress the move.

Summary

This book aims to analyze and show the defensive tasks of a modern center striker, a mobile player, if not an all-around player, as soccer has become a "liquid-organization" game. The defensive phase has always been a very tactical situation of play, concerning the attacking phase, which is often an "individual and decisive idea" moment of the game, at least when a team attacks the opposition's goal. Still, I would say that it is not valid anymore, or at all at least, as the mobile organization takes the player to be in different positions time after time. Center strikers are the first defenders of the team, but not only in the final third.

There are many types of center forwards, and their defensive actions concern their positions in the field; despite this variety, I tried to sum up all the main factors of their defensive phase.

The main points of this book are:

- The defensive tasks and positions of a center forward?
- How the return of the target striker has influenced the defensive phase
- How Thomas Müller, Der Raumdeuter, or The space interpreter acts as a defender for Bayern Munich
- Harry Kane's study and his defensive actions for Tottenham as a playmaking striker

I hope that looking at players like Lewandowski, Müller, Ibrahimović, and Kane, I have been able to point out all the most crucial defensive actions a striker may deploy to help his team off the ball.