

THE ROLE OF THE
HOLDING
MIDFIELDER

DEFENDING



by LUCA BERTOLINI

The Role of the Holding Midfielder (Defending)

By

Luca Bertolini

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Authors – Luca Bertolini
Editor - Mike Saif
Cover Art By - Barrie Smith



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Introduction: who is the holding midfielder?

In the last twenty years, No. 6's role has developed from a purely defensive role to a position where players are tasked to be protagonists in all the phases of play and asked to show many more skills than the only defensive ones. This kind of player is usually included in a double pivot center midfield, where the other teammate is more defensive.

As we have analyzed in the attacking book, when the holding midfielder is the lower apex of a three-man midfield, he usually acts as a deep-lying playmaker. They can be deep creators, exploiting the players' passing abilities, as the former Bayern Munich's No.6 Thiago Alcantara, a sort of low No.10.

An example of a double pivot midfield, where the players alternate the offensive and defensive tasks is Bayern Leverkusen 2018/2019 version; Baumgartlinger and Aranguiz were the No.6s in the center, supporting the pressure phase high in the field (the first one presses, the second provide cover behind him.) Breaking the opposition's transition to attack and turning it into the attacking phase is one of the German team's crucial offensive tools.

Otherwise, the RB Leipzig former center midfielder, who now plays for S.S.S. Napoli is a destroyer of the opposition's possession and attacks, rather than a creator, apart from the system of plays he was included into (1-4-2-2-2, or 1-3-5-2). His 2018/2019 defensive statistics were impressive:

- 24 defensive duels per game (51,5% won).
- 1.5 fouls committed that is such low data for a purely defensive attitude player.
- 12,6 km ran.

B.V.B.'s Alex Witzel is an example of versatility, as he is an attacks organizer and helps the defensive phase. He helps the building-up phase, and he also moves forward off the ball to exploit his abilities to play assist and shot on goal. In the meantime, he is also brilliant in his defensive Positioning, closing down the opposition wingers and preventing them from tucking in dangerous center positions. He also has pressure tasks, defending forward, and engaging duels higher up in the field.

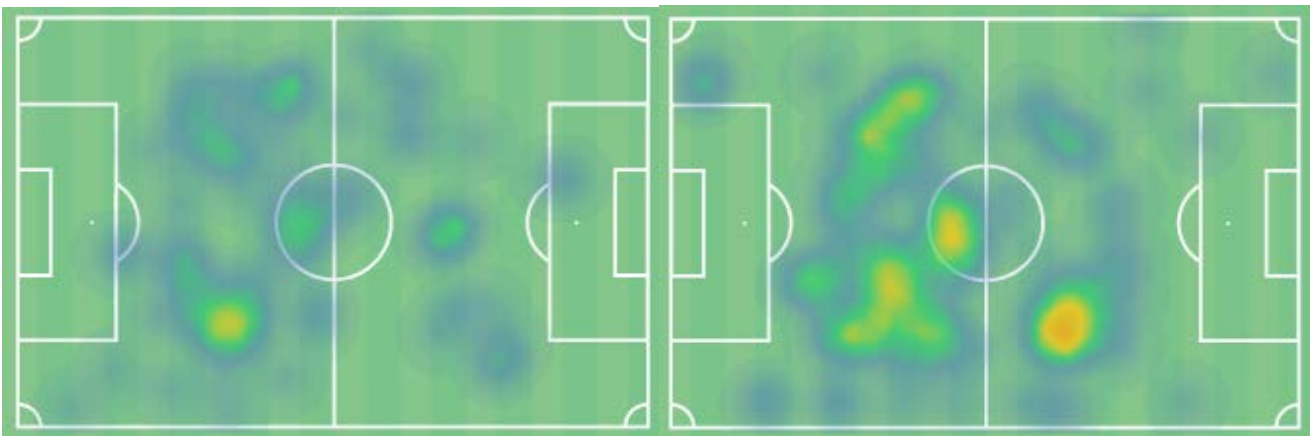
A holding midfielder in his proper definition is probably the purest form of a defensive midfielder, as he holds his position close to the team's defense. In contrast, other midfielders move forward to attack, and he protects the own goal by disrupting the opponents' attacking moves. Moreover, following this first and straightforward definition, that type of player makes short and simple passes to more attacking teammates after intercepting or capturing the ball or supporting the building-up phase.

To define deeper and better such midfielders, which protects the back defensive line, closes the passing lanes and save the dangerous areas, presses higher up in the field, launch the building-up phase, and support the consolidation and possession phases of play, we can extract the following characteristics and skills:

- They have good positioning and spacing capacities.
- They focus on protecting their team's goal, and defend a zone in front of their team's defensive shape, or man-mark specific opposition attackers.

- They move to the fullback or center-back positions if those players move forward to join in an attack. They capitalize on both their defensive, ball playing, and reading skills.
- They drop back between the C.B.s in back 4 systems of play if the fullbacks have pushed high, and three players shape the backline during possession phases.
- Their main defensive strengths are anticipation and interception, apart from pressing the attacking players.
- They must know how to defend passively, keep the defensive line compact, reduce space in front of the defense, and shadow the opposite attacking midfielders.
- **Box-To-Box (B.T.B.) players** are more dynamic midfielders, focusing on excellent defensive and offensive Positioning. When not in possession, they concentrate on breaking up play and guarding the defensive line. When in possession, they dribble, know how to play forward, pass to teammates higher up the pitch, and often arrive late in the opposite box to create chances.

These next heat maps are screenshots from Bayern Leverkusen – RB Leipzig of the 2018/2019 season.

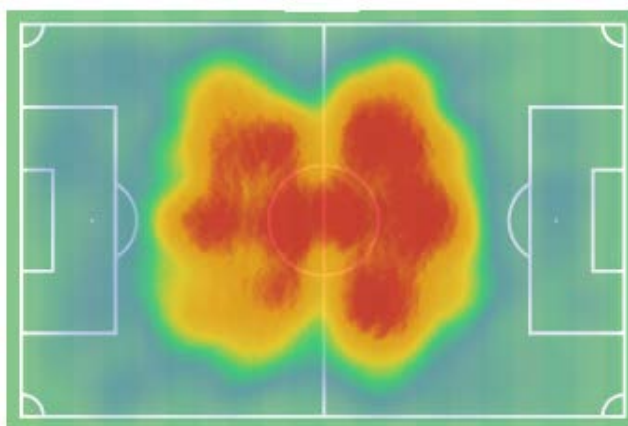


(Baumgartlinger on the left and Aranguiz on the right)

The holding midfielder as a defensive screen: Fernandinho (Manchester City), Casemiro (Real Madrid), and Busquets (Barcelona).

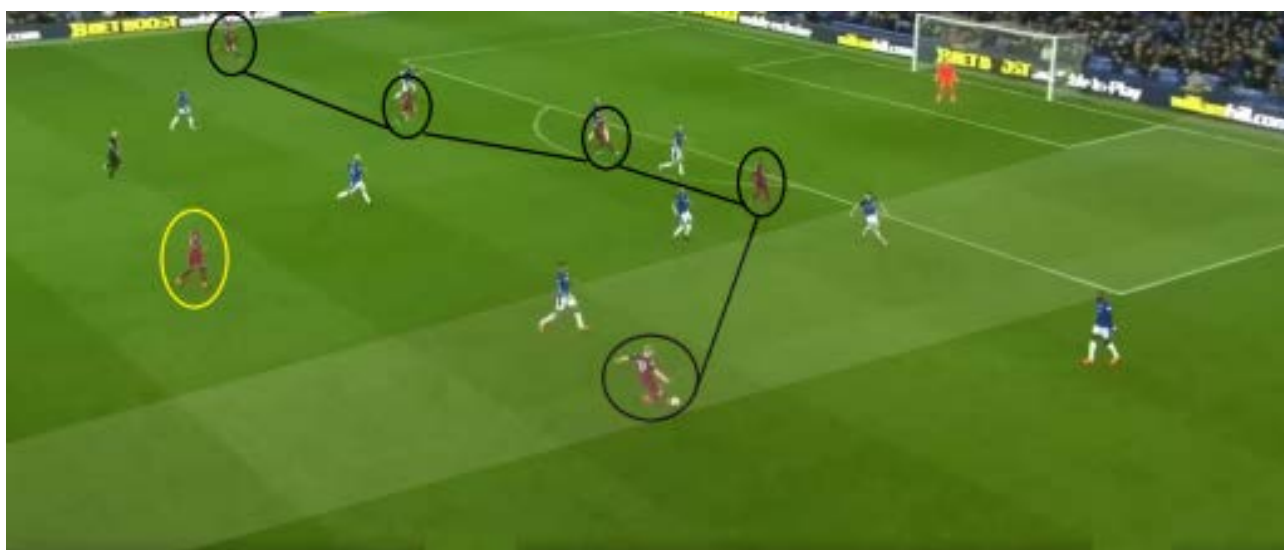
Thinking about the role, and the position of the defensive midfielder, who has a screen and cover tasks essentially, three players embody the typical man in front of the back 4 or 3: Fernandinho, Busquets, and Casemiro.

Fernandinho has been the crucial player of the double Premier League title in a row (2017/2018 and 2018/2019) for Manchester City. In the 1-4-3-3 of Citizens, he was used to sitting in front of the backline to cover the attacking midfielders, who usually joined the attacking line to overload the flanks and the half-spaces

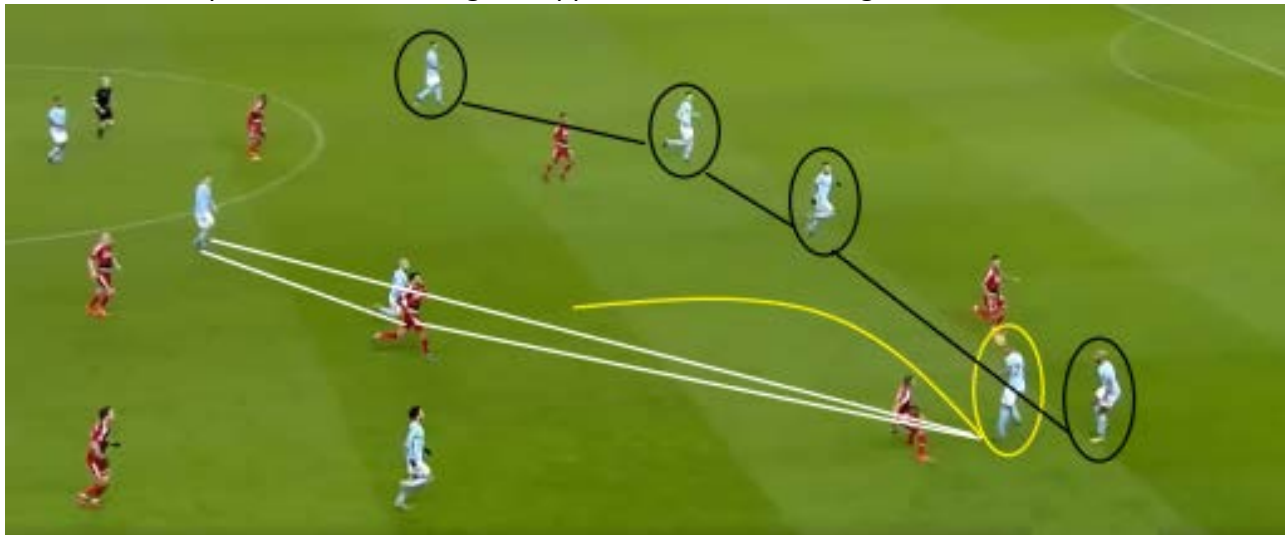


This is his seasonal heat map of the 2017/2018 season

This next picture sequence is an example of City's attacking shape with a line of 5 and the holding midfielder at the back to cover the center space in front of the defensive line.



De Bruyne has the possession inside the half-space, Sterling, Gabriel Jesus, and Silva stand in the center, and Sanè provides width along the opposite flank concerning the ball.



In this second example, Fernandinho stands in front of the back 4, and he allows De Bruyne and Silva to stand higher up in the field.

This way, the advanced midfielder can support the counter-attacking moves just after the possession's recovery. Fernandinho prevented Silva and Sanè from dropping back along the left flank. They could stand high up in the field and play a quick transition to attack even if they played in a numerical inferiority situation.



Silva can support Sanè and Aguero and launch the counter-attack. De Bruyne, who stands in the center, can move higher up in the field, already standing close to the ball position, and high up in the field.

Furthermore, Fernandinho used to cover the fullbacks or the central defenders when City attacked in numbers.

In this situation, Mendy faces a 2 v 1 situation along the left flank in the first third; David Silva and Gabriel Jesus are too far from the ball position to equalize the situation.



Fernandinho covers the fullback position at the beginning, tracking the first potential receiver, who is moving forward off the ball.



As the opponent receives, Fernandinho counters him along the flanks, delaying his action, despite not winning the possession back. His defensive action out wide allows Mendy to track back and close the ball's path toward the box.



Fernando and Mendy can double team the opponent, prevent him from playing into the box, and win the ball back. Meanwhile, Silva can screen the back passing path to a potential support opponent.

No. 25's ability to read the game and his pace off the ball allowed the midfielder to run and move all around the field, shuttling across, and closing all the gaps behind the ball line, once the ball was lost.



In this example, Fernandinho was over the ball line, and David Silva lost the possession due to the direct opponent pressure.

Furthermore, the opponents had the numerical advantage along the defensive right flank, just after the ball's recovery, in a 4 v 3 situation.

No counter-pressing actions are not immediately possible due to distances and spaces around the ball line.

Despite his high position in the field, Fernandinho helped recover the possession and create numerical advantage down the flank...



Fernandinho retreated along the flank to counter the ball carrier, allowing the teammates along the sideline, covering the space for a through pass. Fernandinho created a 4 v 2 numerical superiority situation from an inferiority situation after the loss of possession.

Fernandinho's positioning ability also allows him to counter-attack the opposition's counter-attacks after the loss of possession.



Walker lost the possession in a 2 v 1 duel in this situation along the right side of the final third. De Bruyne is too far to counter-press immediately.

Fernandinho stands in the center, as back holding midfielder and protection of the six attacking teammates.



Fernandinho immediately presses the first receiver (and passing option) in the center, and he prevents De Bruyne from attacking the opponent and maintain the position near the ball.



Fernandinho wins the ball back; De Bruyne can receive and passes to Walker. The right fullback receives between the lines free from markers, and he passes out wide to Bernardo Silva.

The Brazilian prompt defensive action allowed Man City to counter-attack the same offensive action of the opponents.

Committing fouls to stop the opposition's transitions to attack is the final solution; Fernandinho was the midfielder tasked to commit fouls against the first opposition's ball carriers in the center.



Sterling lost the possession along the left flank, and the opposition tried to launch the counter-attacking action.

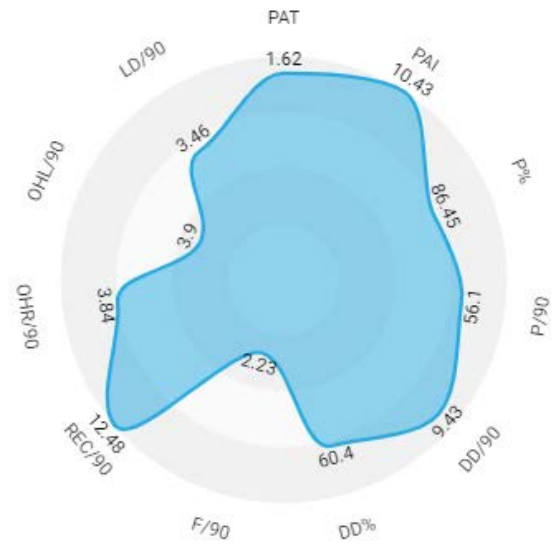
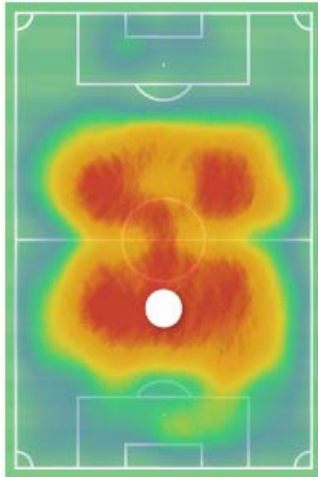


Fernandinho tracked to the first opposition's receiver, preventing the teammates from opening gaps at the back.

Due to all teams' high position, there was available space inside the field's defensive half. Fernandinho broke the opposition's offensive action with a foul, preventing the space's exploitation inside the City's defensive half.

Casemiro is included in a more defensive team, as Real Madrid midfielder, concerns Manchester City and Barcelona.

POSITION



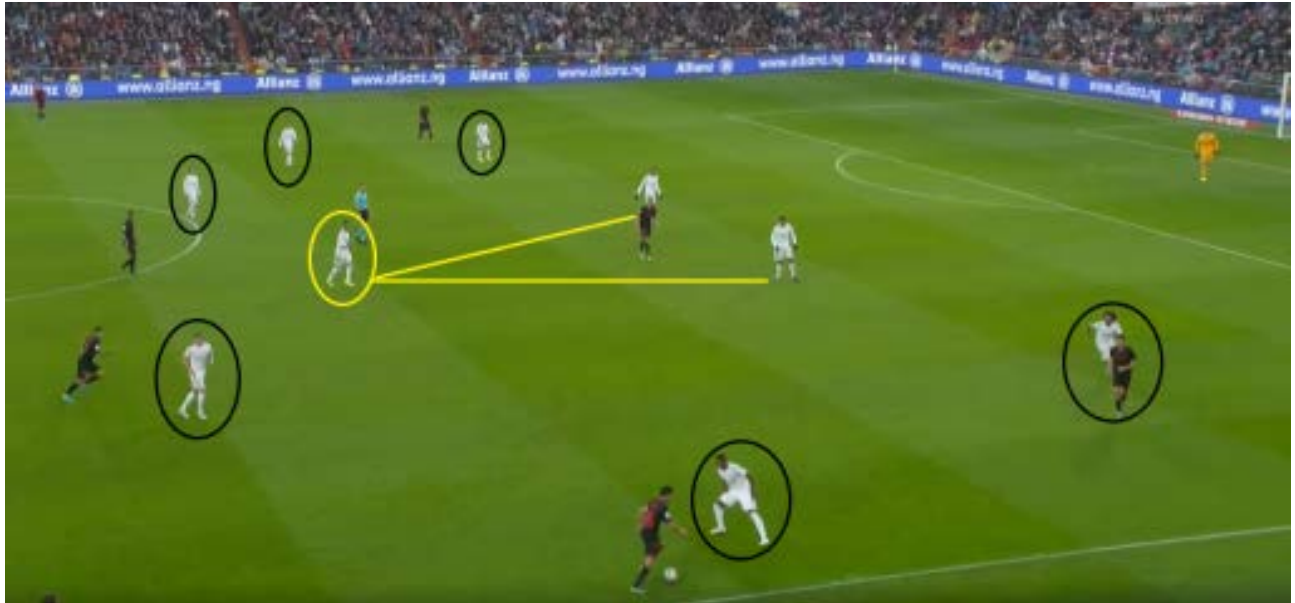
The defensive shape is narrow and compact both vertically and horizontally.



The center midfielders and the wingers cover the fullbacks and the center backs; this way, Casemiro can patrol and screen the spaces in between the lines.

The 4-1-4 shape prevented the opponents from playing between the lines, forcing the ball carrier to play backward.

When the opposition plays out wide, and Real Madrid must shift across, Casemiro usually screens the center-backs, maintaining the center position if the fullback and the winger can face the opponents.



Marcelo and Vinicius faced 1 v 1 the direct opponents, all the defensive shape-shifted across, and Casemiro stands in front of the center backs to close all the through/diagonal passing options.

When Real Madrid presses high up in the field, the fullbacks are often standing along the forwards line, Casemiro stands in the center spot



In this situation, he marked the opposition's advanced midfielder back to the advanced teammates (Modric and Lucas Vasquez)...



...and he headed back the long ball of the opposition goalkeeper who was forced by the Real Madrid high pressure.

When the opposition can counter-attack, he usually drops in between the center backs to ensure the center's numerical advantage.

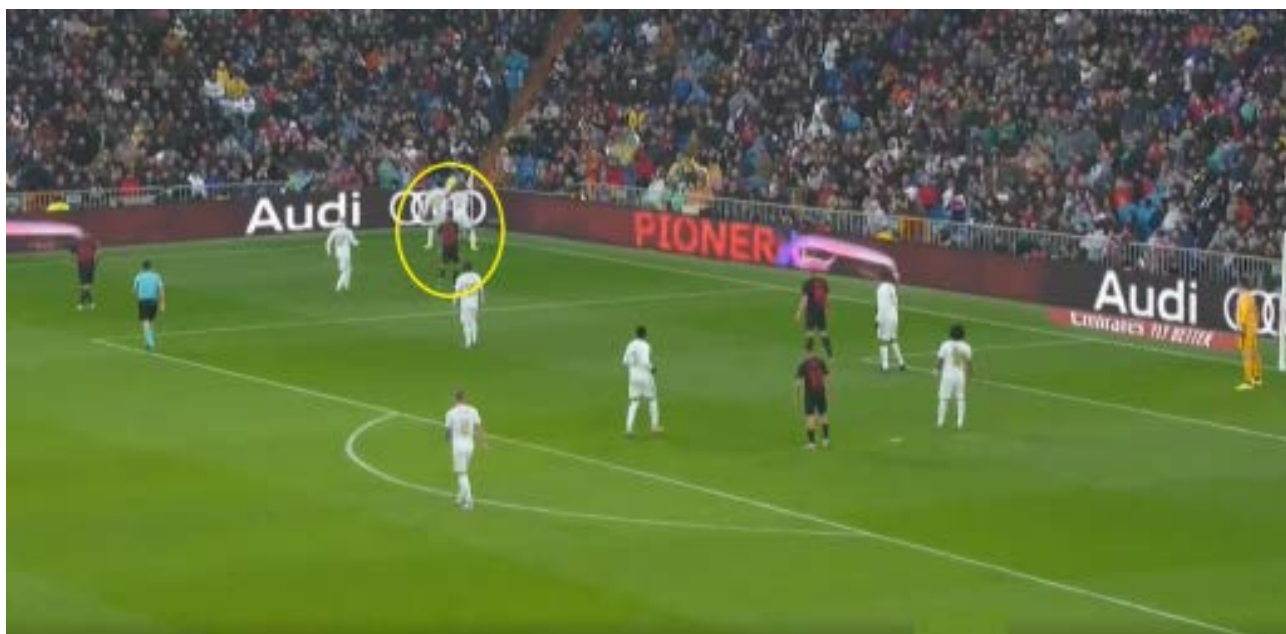


The opposition's ball carrier dribbled the ball forward with two other teammates who supported him sideward; they had a 3 v 1 numerical superiority situation along the attacking left flank.

Casemiro dropped in between the center backs to create a 3 v 1 situation in the center, preventing the ball carrier from passing toward the center.



When both the fullbacks retreated along the defensive line, Casemiro moved out of the back four lines and tracked the ball carrier, forcing him out wide.



The opponent with the ball was forced to the corner flag, and Real Madrid created a 3 v 2 numerical advantage situation in the middle of the penalty box, breaking all the opposition's attacking chances.

Real Madrid was placed high in this situation, but the possession was lost; only the center backs were standing inside the defensive half.



Casemiro dropped back in front of them and started to cover the depth before the opponent with the ball could play the long pass.



He tracked the opposition's center forward, tackling him inside the box, preventing him from shooting on goal.

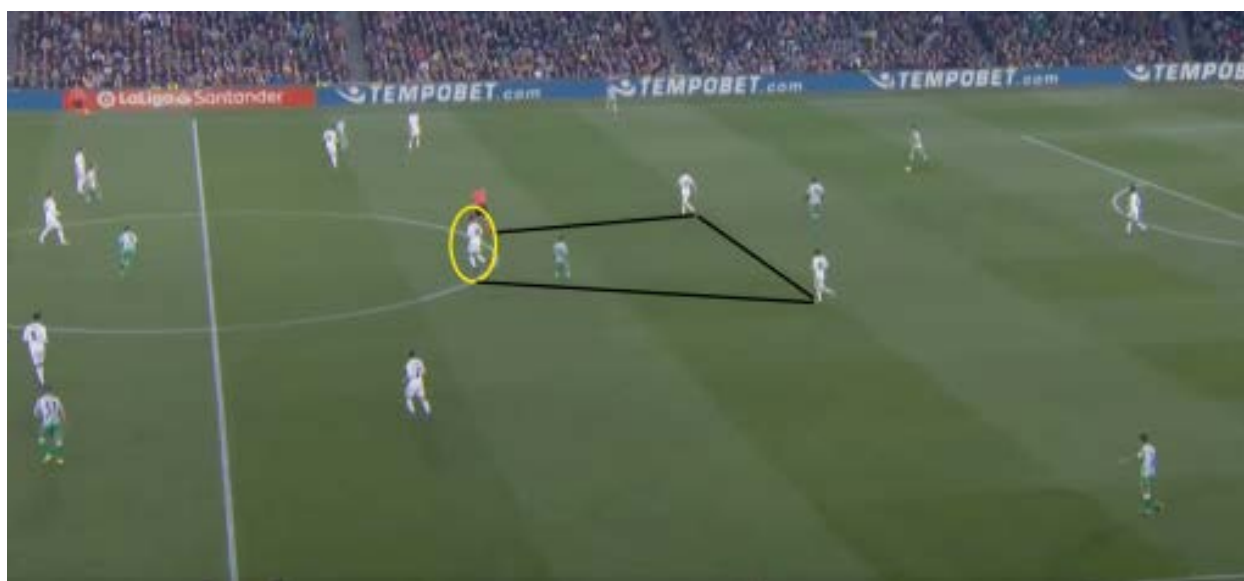
Apart from the system of play, Casemiro usually screens the center backs or the center back, and fullback is the ball is out wide, dropping back as a center lower pivot when he is one of the two center midfielders.



When Casemiro is the holding midfielder in a 3 men midfield sector, he screens the center backs and the fullbacks, and the other 2 teammates stand flat higher up in the field.

When he is playing in a 2 center men sector, he is always the one who screens and presses the opponents with the ball; the other one is the pivot, like Luka Modric in the picture above.

In this further example, Casemiro acts as holding midfielder, and the other midfielders stand flat in front of him in a 3 men midfield sector.



Modric and Lucas Vazquez are the flat midfielders in front of him. When even the center midfielder presses high, or when the team is counter-pressing, shaping a sort of 1-2-1-4-3, Casemiro plays the same way in front of the center backs.



Real Madrid creates a 5 v 4 along the attacking right flank.



Casemiro attacks the first passing option in the center, preventing the back teammates from moving out of their positions, leaving their direct opponents, as there are involved in a 2 v 2 (3 v 3) situation.

Casemiro has been one of the best tacklers and interceptions midfielders of La Liga during these last seasons.

2019/2020

3	●	12.51	Ball recoveries
14	^	3.9	Ball recoveries in the opponent half
13	^	0.56	Ball recoveries in the opponent half that lead to a shot within 20s
1	^	7.04	Interceptions
63	▼	9.62	Ball losses
60	▼	3.96	Ball losses in his own half
45	▼	0.39	Ball losses in his own half that lead to a shot within 20s
1	●	17.53	Defensive actions
1	●	11.28	Successful defensive actions

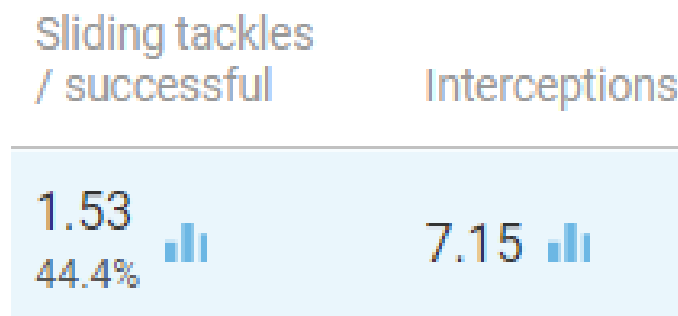
2018/2019

1	●	13.13	Ball recoveries
23	^	3.66	Ball recoveries in the opponent half
17	^	0.55	Ball recoveries in the opponent half that lead to a shot within 20s
2	●	6.21	Interceptions
28	▼	7.81	Ball losses
39	^	3.22	Ball losses in his own half
16	^	0.26	Ball losses in his own half that lead to a shot within 20s
2	^	16.5	Defensive actions
1	●	9.51	Successful defensive actions

These are some data from this current **2020/2021** season; the first picture is the top defensive indicators table.

5	▲	10.55	Ball recoveries
43	▲	2.55	Ball recoveries in the opponent half
20	▲	0.51	Ball recoveries in the opponent half that lead to a shot within 20s
2	▲	7.15	Interceptions
58	▲	10.89	Ball losses
59	▼	4.25	Ball losses in his own half
19	●	0.17	Ball losses in his own half that lead to a shot within 20s
1	●	18.2	Defensive actions
1	●	14.97	Successful defensive actions

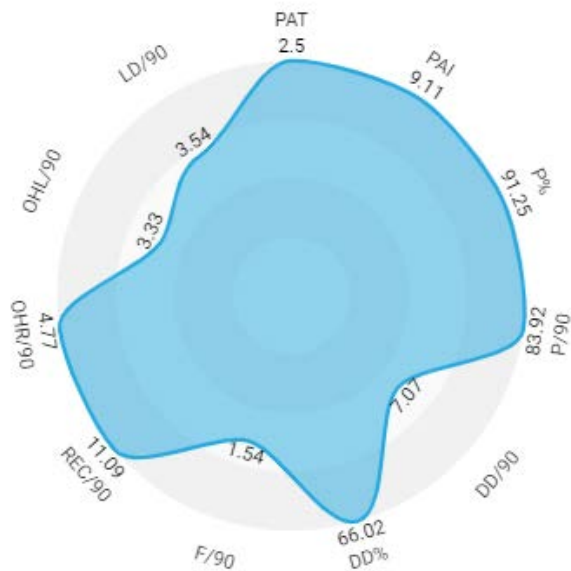
Casemiro sits second for interceptions, and he stands at the top of the rank for defensive actions made and successful.



Furthermore, he performs 1,53 sliding tackles per game and 7,15 interceptions per game so far.

Busquetz is the typical defensive midfielder, considering the historical attacking style of play of the club he played for all his career.

2019/2020 metrics



Legenda:

Pat: Tackles every opposition’s 30 possessions

Pau: Interceptions every opposition’s 30 possessions

P%: Passes accuracy

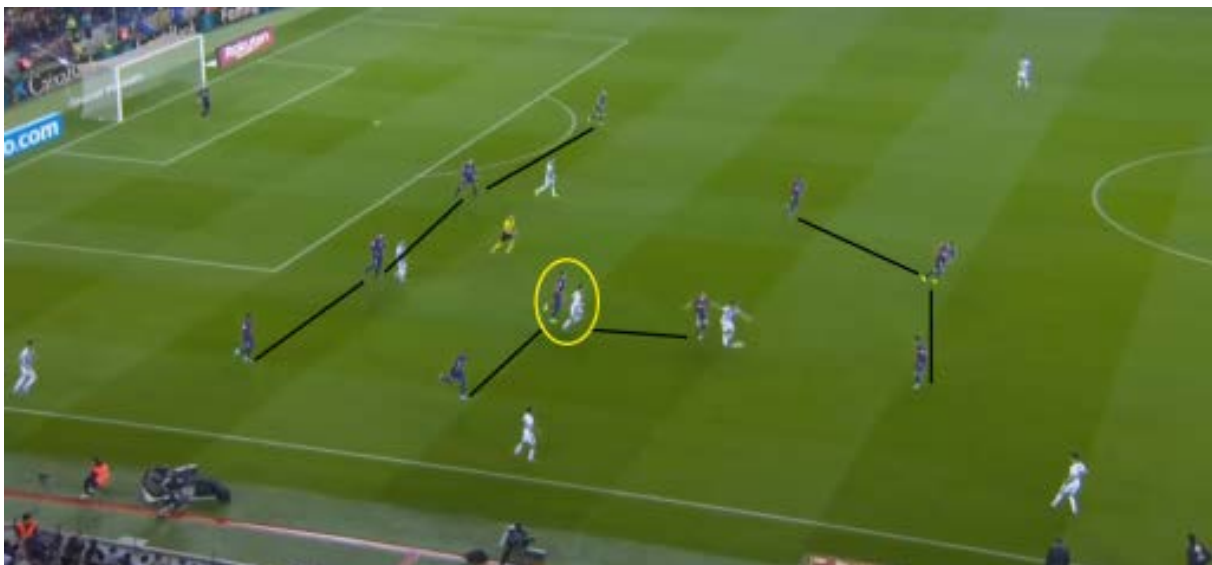
P/90: Passes every 90’

DD%: Defensive duels won

Rec/90: Recoveries every 90’

Ohr/90: Recoveries in the opposition’s half every 90’

He has played with two of the best midfielders of soccer history (Xavi Hernandez and Andres Iniesta) and technically gifted teammates. He has always been included in the starting 11 as screen, protection, and support for all these teammates and the backline. Busquetz has played as a deep-lying midfielder in 3 men and 2 men sectors (as basic match tactics and as momentary defensive shapes. Positioning and awareness are his best skills as a holding midfielder.)



In this first picture, Busquets acted as a deep-lying midfielder back to Vidal and F. de Jong...



...During the move's development, Ansu Fati shifted out wide as the fourth left midfielder; Busquets completed the midfielders line beside de Jong, shifting toward the ball position.



As the sequence of the opposition's possession continued, and Barcelona shaped again the defensive 1-4-3-3 in the middle third, Busquets acted again as a lower pivot, marking the opponent (and closing the passing lanes toward him) in between the lines in the center spot.

Busquet's ability to play as a center midfielder in a 2 men sector and as a lower pivot in 3 men sectors allows his teammates to alternate their positions.



While the opponents were building up from the back, Ansu Fati dropped back to mark the opposition's winger, preventing Jordi Alba from creating a gap along the left flank; de Jong moved higher up to positional press the potential receiver on the left defensive side. Busquets maintained his position to screen the opponent between the lines.



The opposition was finally forced to play out wide first and then play a long ball along the flank. Vidal shifted wide out, de Jong shifted across, and Busquets went on screening the opposition between the

lines, preventing one teammate of the back four from moving out of position, maintaining the 4 v 3 duel at the back.

The back four and midfielders' coordinated movements forced an opposition's attempt inside the penalty box, although they couldn't recover the possession.



During the first seasons after his debut, he played as a screen in front of the defense, allowing Xavi to play higher in the field as the second pivot, providing physical presence behind him, and dropping deep along the defensive line of the team. Busquets is recognized as the defensive midfielder between the center backs at the times of Guardiola's Barcelona and positional play sublimation, allowing the fullbacks to be effective attackers along the flanks and allowing the wide forwards to overload the half-spaces. Pep Guardiola then exported the same idea at Bayern Munich with the inverted wingers (Robben and Ribery).



This sequence of a match against Athletic Bilbao started with Iniesta with possession on the right, Xavi moving higher up as midfielder, and Busquets as a deep-lying midfielder.



Xavi received between the lines, Pedro moved higher up after dropping back, and Sergi Roberto supported his attacking move along the right attacking flank. Jordi Alba and Iniesta did the same along the left flank, and Busquets allowed all these attacking movements off the ball, maintaining his position as a defensive midfielder.

Busquets was and is the positional player per excellence in Barcelona, and he also good at retaining the ball under pressure.

The role and the positions of a defensive holding midfielder

We now look at the three players I have now just briefly analyzed to deeply look at the main defensive tasks of a holding midfielder; some other few examples are added in the end. Defensive actions, defensive duels, interceptions, tackling (strong, accurate, with both feet.)

- Casemiro (2018/2019)
- Fernandinho (2018/2109)
- Busquets (2019/2020)

Seasonal Rank	TOTAL AVG / 90	Parameters
8	323	Ball recoveries
6	139	Ball recoveries in the opponent half
1	20	Ball recoveries in the opponent half that lead to a shot within 20s
9	158	interceptions
63	261	Ball losses
57	97	Ball losses in his own half
46	9	Ball losses in his own half that lead to a shot within 20s
9	406	Defensive actions
3	285	Successful defensive actions

Seasonal Rank	AVG / 90 TOTAL	Parameters
39	2.78	Aerial duels made
34	1.51	Aerial duels won
28	7.07	Defensive duels made
13	3.3	Defensive duels won
48	4.05	Offensive duels made
36	2.44	Offensive duels won
39	3.23	Pressing duels

(Busquets last 2019/2020 season parameters)

- They must prevent the opponents from playing into dangerous areas



Casemiro shifted out wide to prevent the opposition's ball carrier from playing through the center, and he forced him toward the sideline.



He allowed the fullback to stay along the back four line at the beginning without creating gaps and double the mark as the ball carrier was near him.



Sanè and Walker lost the possession to an opponent who anticipated them and who could counter-attack...



...and Fernandinho dropped back to counter his action through the center, preventing the center backs from moving out of their positions.



Busquets shifted through the middle third, tracking the opposition's ball carrier and forcing him toward the second center midfielder de Jong, preventing him from dribbling the ball through the center.



The defensive tracking action of the Spaniard and the double-teaming action of his teammate prevented the ball carrier from progressing the move forward inside the final third.

- They mark 1 v 1 the opponents to delay the opposition's attacking phase and allow the teammates to retreat



Casemiro prevented the opponent from turning while receiving and forced him to play backward



The opposition's receiver had not a short passing option due to a 3 v 2 numerical inferiority in the center, and he was forced to play long to the left attacking side.

Casemiro stands behind the pressure area, providing cover to the back four.



Casemiro's position allowed the teammates to stand and protect the weak side...



...and they could double team the opponent, who was forced to play a wrong pass backward; Real Madrid could win the ball in the end.



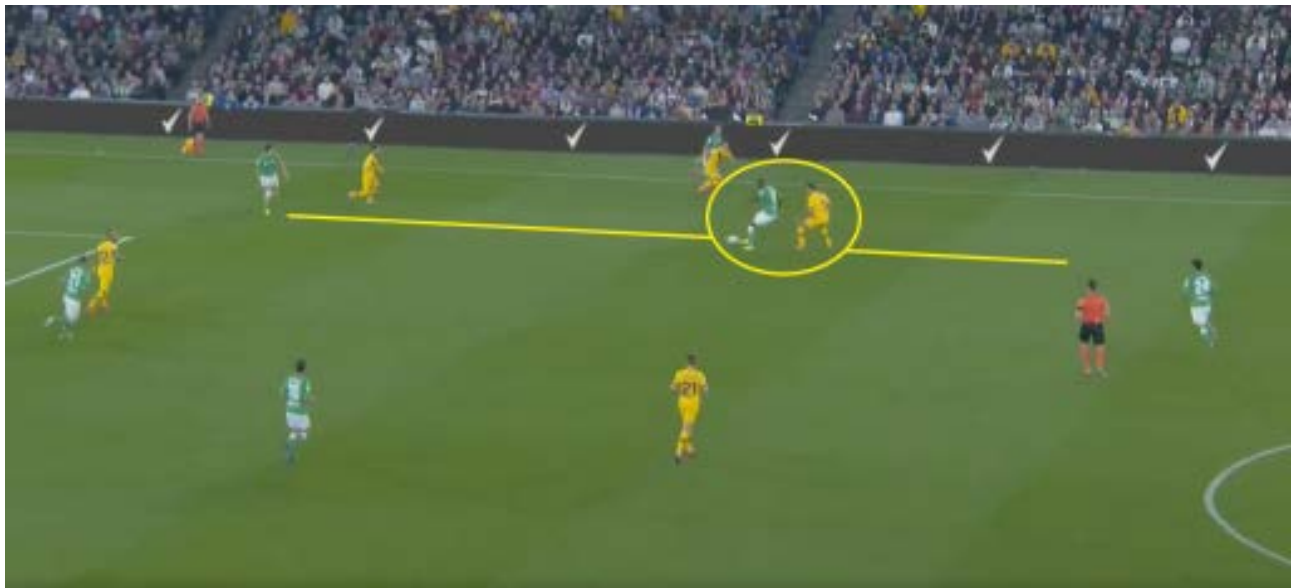
City organized a 3 v 3 duel out wide to prevent the opponents from playing toward the box; Fernandinho dropped back into the defensive line, covering the gap to the box and marking 1 v 1 the only opposition's center forward.



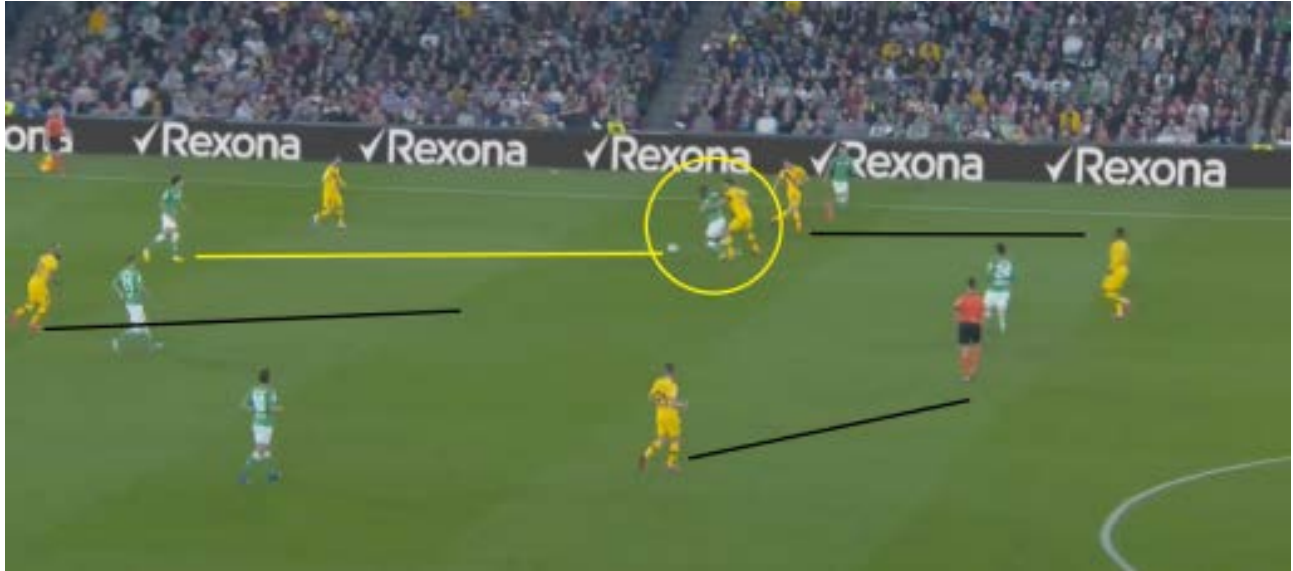
Salah received, but he couldn't turn toward his goal. Fernandinho's Positioning allowed City to overload the ball side and protect the weak one at the same time.



The opposition forward was then involved in a numerical inferiority situation inside the box, without any chance to pass back or turn. Fernandinho could win the ball back in the end.



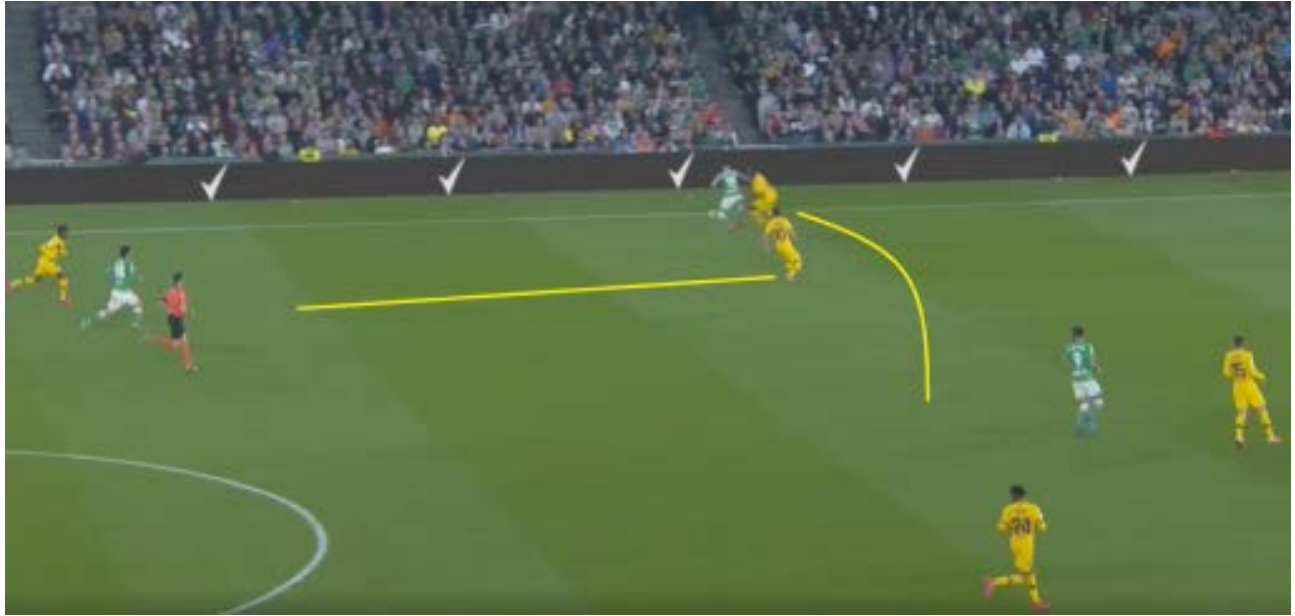
Busquets moved forward to mark the opposition's receiver and to prevent him from turning backward, closing down the gaps that Barca's attacking shape created.



He delayed the ball carrier action and allowed Vidal to retreat and de Jong shifting across; the right fullback could recover his position along the defensive right flank.



The ball carrier whom Busquets was marking played backward, but all the short passing options were closed, and the ball carrier was forced to play a long pass to the attacking left side for a teammate's run off the ball.



The first defensive delaying action of Busquets allowed the teammates to recover their positions, forcing the opposition's winger out wide to the sideline.

- They help in providing cover by tracking back to support the defenders.



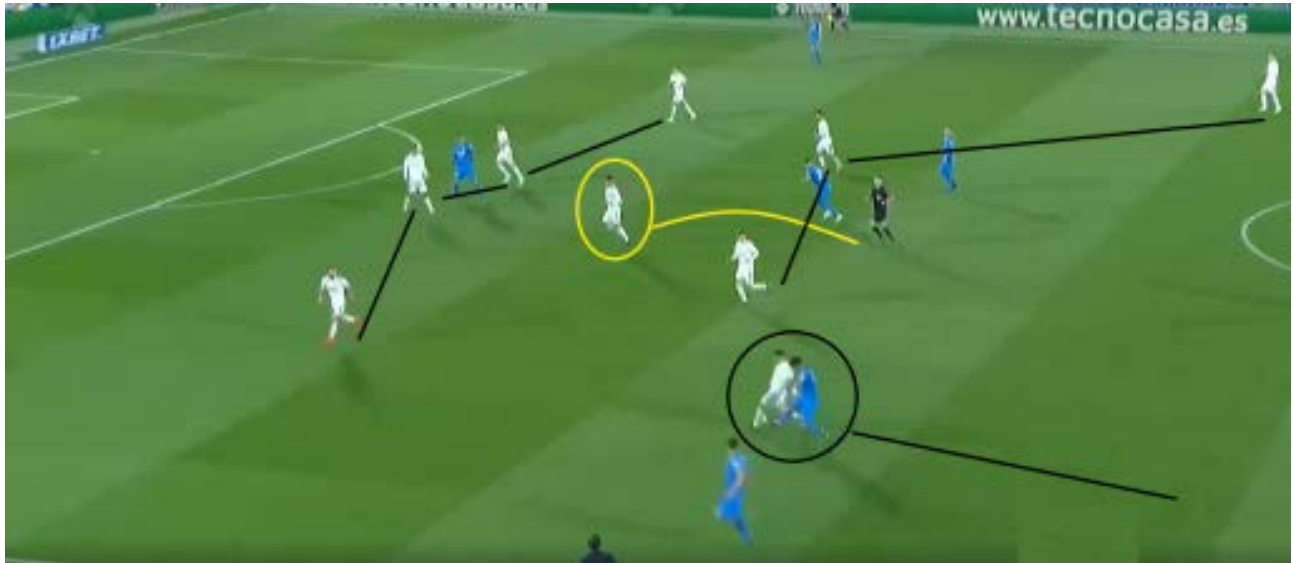
Casemiro screened the passing lanes to the wide gaps sideward the center backs, marking the opponents 1 v 1.



The opponent could receive a through pass in the center, but Casemiro dropped back to help the center back, who could cover the depth.



As the deep spaces were closed and the first passing option was marked 1 v 1, Casemiro had time to retreat again, tackle the opposition's ball carrier, and dispossess him.



An opponent won the wandering ball at the beginning. Still, the defensive shape and the center's deep-lying position holding midfielder in front of the back four delayed the opposition's attacking move, and the new ball carrier was dispossessed again.



The distance between the center and the fullback created a gap between them and the midfield line that an opponent could have exploited after an inside pass.



Fernandinho retreated, marking the receiver, preventing the backline teammates from moving out of their positions, and opening other deeper gaps.



Although Barcelona created a numerical advantage situation along the defensive left side, a gap appeared between the center back and the fullback, who was forced to attempt a tackle, making the gap even bigger. Busquets tracked the direct opponent through the middle third....



...and countered the ball carrier after the ball's reception, allowing the center back standing in their positions and covering the depth. This way, the opponent could not progress the move forward...



...and the center back could shift across to double team the opponent together with Busquets.

In the meantime, the second center back and the midfielder could also retreat and create a 3 v 1 situation in front of the penalty area.



The possession was won back along the borderline of the penalty area.

- **Ability to communicate with the attack and the defense**



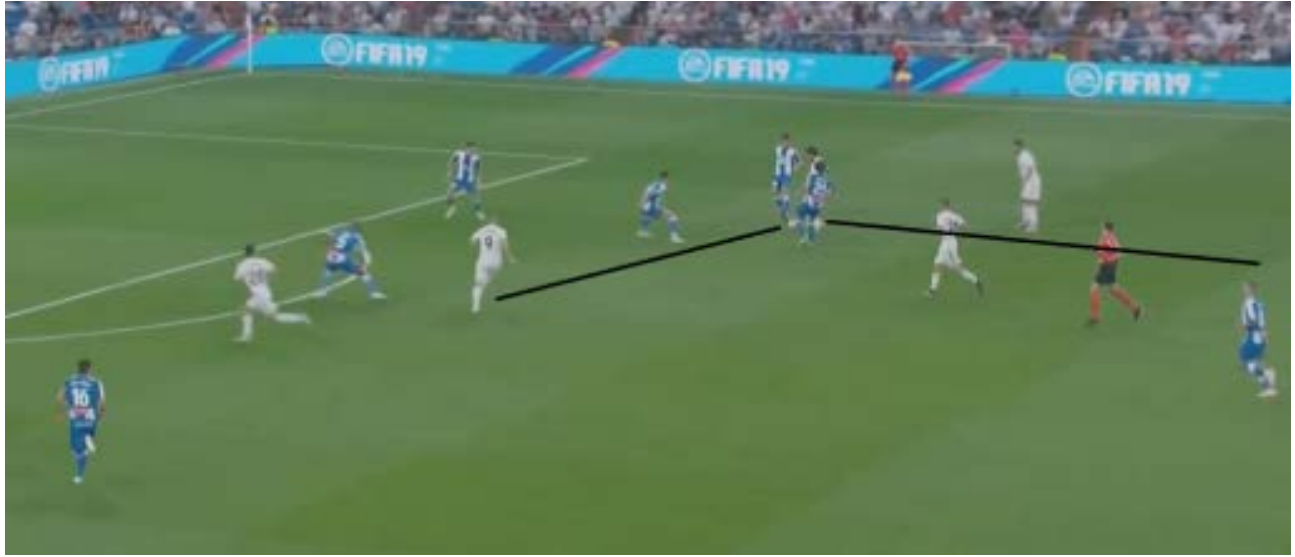
Casemiro dropped back into the defensive line, covering a gap inside the right area of the middle third.



He then quickly moved through the field to counter the opposition center midfielder, preventing the teammate from moving out of position and opening another gap.



He countered 1 v 1 the ball carrier, passed backward, winning the ball back, and started a new attacking phase for Real Madrid.



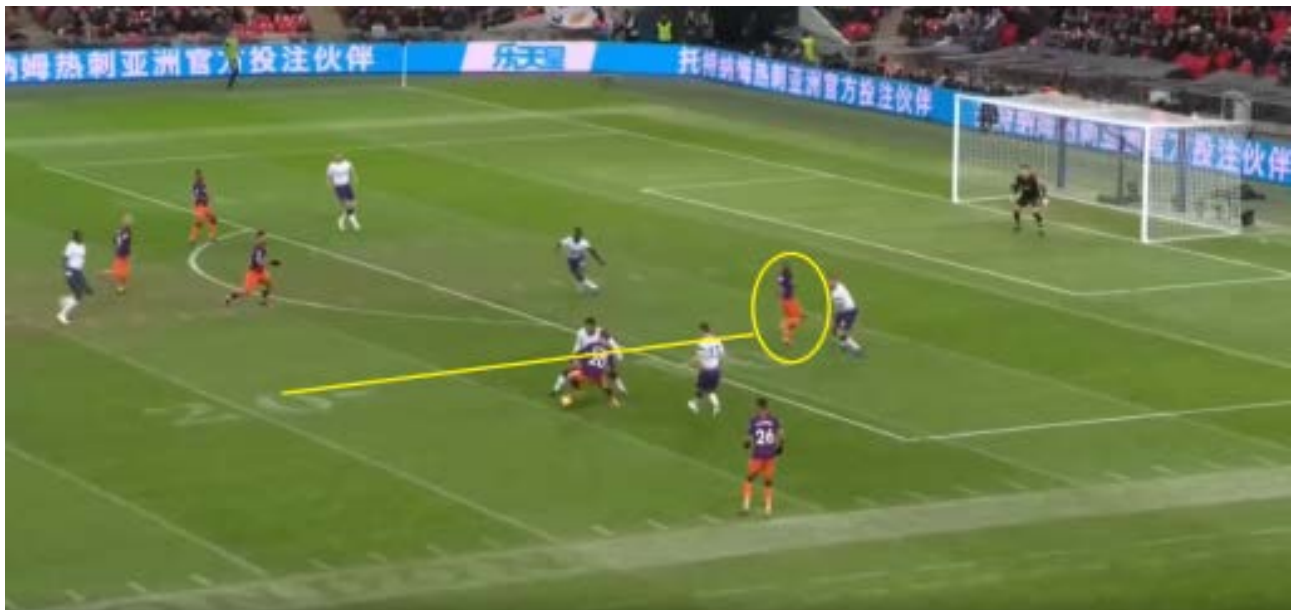
With just a few passes, Real Madrid could face the opposition's goal inside the final third.



Fernandinho moved up to counter the opposition's holding midfielder and prevented him from turning toward the goal.



He won the ball back, combining 1-2 in the center...



...and moving off the ball inside the opposition's penalty box, after winning the ball back.



After the inside run without receiving the ball, he retreated out of the penalty area to fight for a possible second time of the ball and prevent the opponent in front of him from winning the ball.



Busquets closed the dribbling path to the opposition's ball carrier; meanwhile, all the teammates around the ball were retreating their positions.



He stopped the opposition's counter-attacking move and started a new offensive phase for Barcelona.



As a quick attacking move was not possible, Barcelona distributed the ball from the right to the left sides of the field, and Busquets stand behind the ball line as holding defensive midfielder.

- Stamina (they need to run and put pressure on their rivals always.)



Casemiro dropped back to counter the ball carrier in a condensed area around the ball, allowing the fullback to cover the pocket of space under the line.



He forced the ball carrier to dribble out wide....



...and play a back pass. He also tracked the ball path until the sideline...



...countering the other receiver, and breaking the opposition's possession phase.

- Their ability to read the game is continuously tested as they have to try to break the opposition's game in the midfield itself.



Casemiro dropped back to double team the opposition's ball carrier, who was already under the center back's pressure.



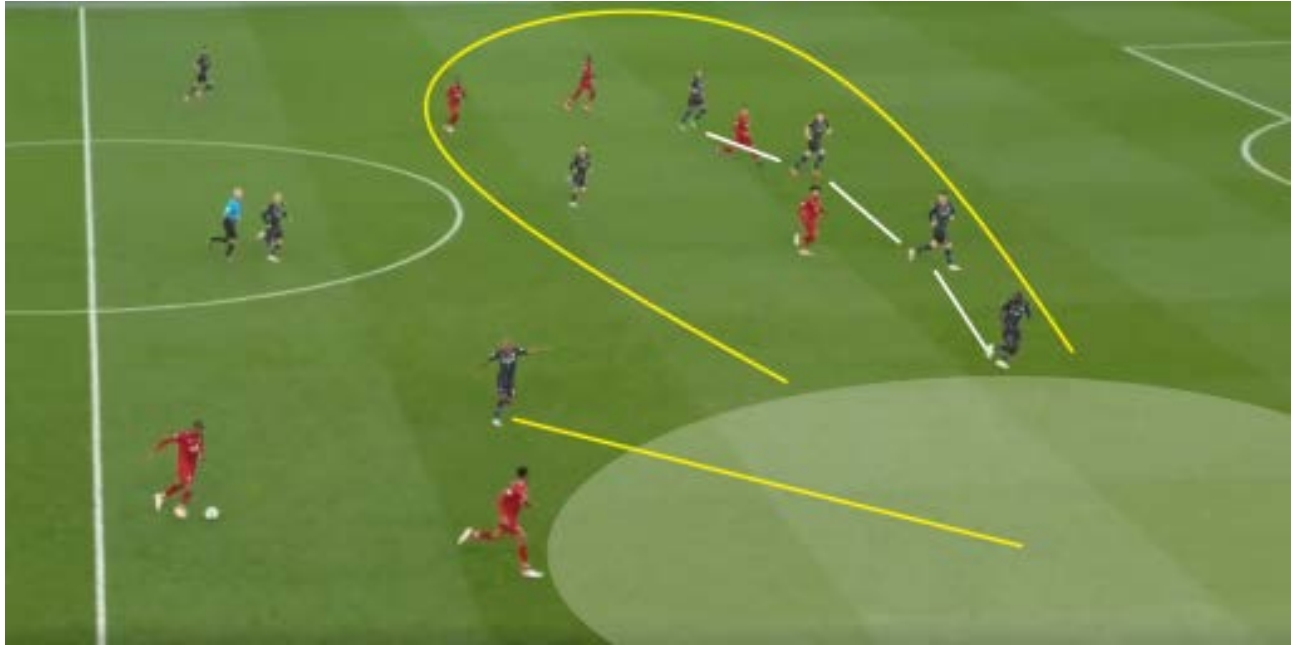
They both forced the ball carrier out wide, despite not winning the ball back.



The center's combined defensive action and the holding midfielder didn't bring the ball back to real Madrid but broke the opposition's action and forced the ball carrier along the sideline.



The opposition played out wide, and Fernandinho shifted wide to fill the gap along the left flank, preventing the fullback from moving out of position.



Fernandinho delayed the opposition's attacking move and forced them to combine before progressing the move. His action allowed the teammates to stand narrow in the middle and maintain numerical superiority in front of the goal.



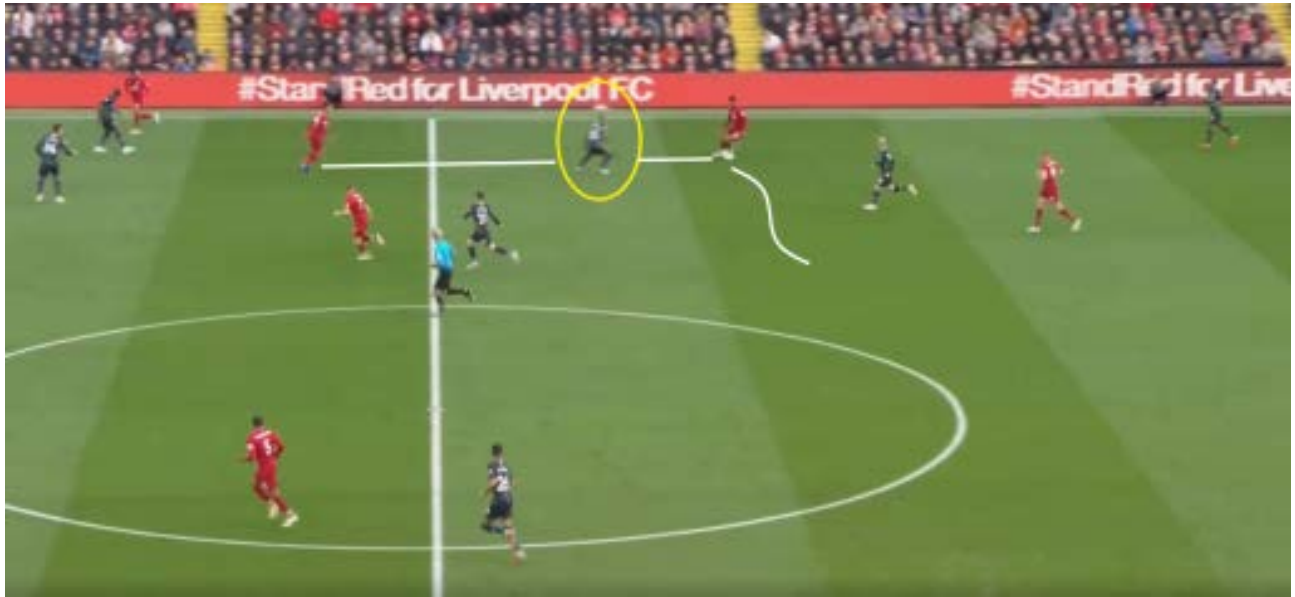
When the opposition's fullback dribbled the ball along the flank, Fernandinho tracked the ball carrier down the win, preventing the left fullback from leaving his position at the beginning.



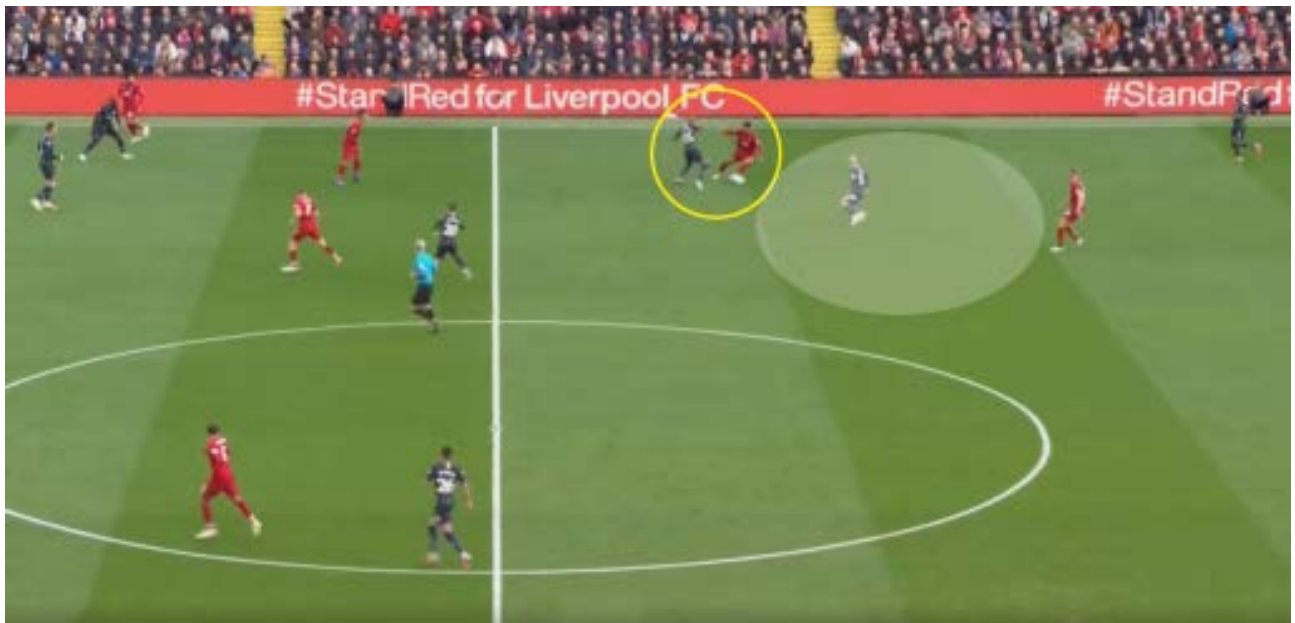
This way, Fernandinho closed the opponent down, prevented him from crossing, and City maintained the numerical superiority inside the box.



Bernardo Silva tracked the opposition's midfielder in front of him, and Fernandinho stand along with the passing out wide. Both City's players countered the triangle passing shape of the opponent.



Fernandinho forced the ball carrier to dribble the ball inside the field through the center, delaying the opposition's attacking phase.



He drove the opponents backward, and David Silva closed the easiest back passing lane.



This way, Fernandinho won the ball back, winning the 1 v 1 duel, and dribbling the ball forward.



In this sequence, Busquets attempted a shot on goal from a long distance, but the opposition's defense rebounded the ball.



He counter-pressed the opposition's possession phase immediately...



...and stopped the opponent beside him, as he was trying to double the mark of his teammate.

This way, Barcelona won the ball back quickly.

- They need to fill the gaps in the midfield.



Real Madrid's opponents could progress the move in the center just after the ball's recovery, in this example.



Casemiro moved forward quickly to prevent the receiver from turning...



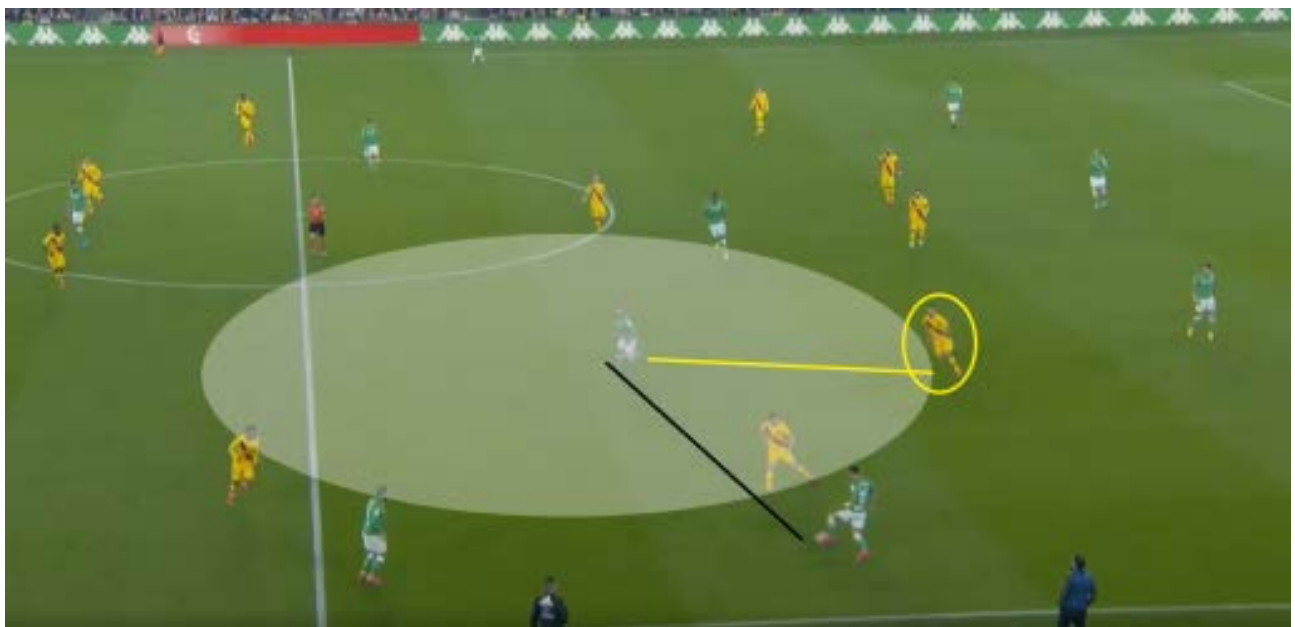
...and he won the ball back, passing to the sector's teammate beside him (Luka Modric.)



Fernandinho stand close to the opposition's right midfielder, who had space to move through.



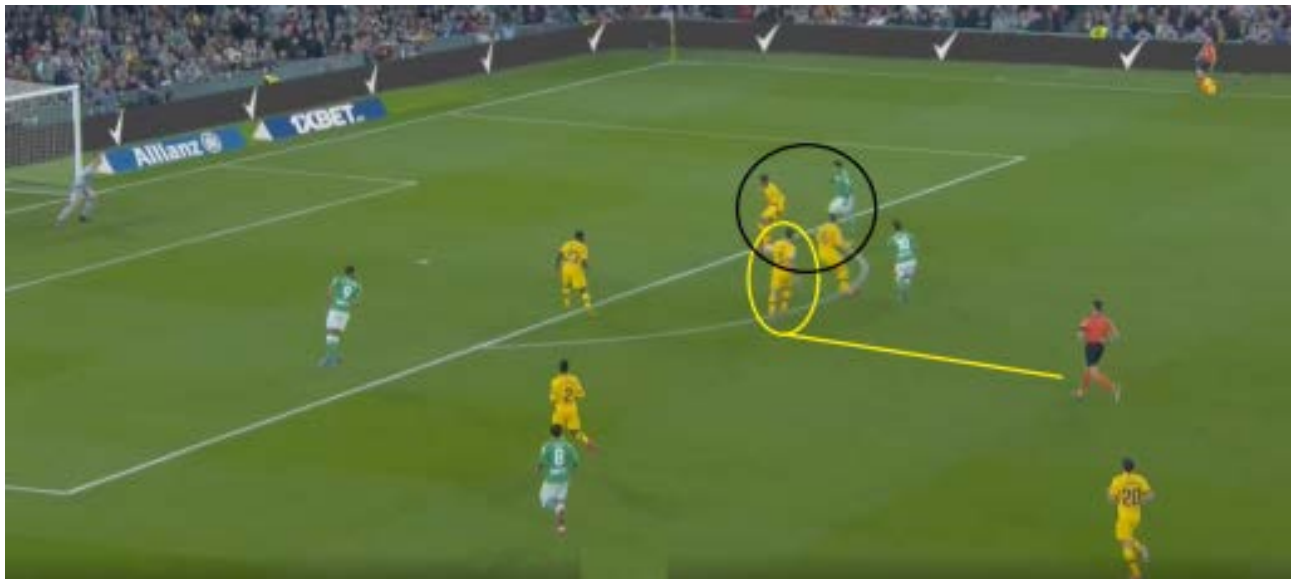
He tracked the opponent's movement, and he tackled him winning the ball back and allowing his teammates to stand high up.



Busquets is out of position in this sequence, and the opposition's left fullback could find a through pass in the middle. The receiver had space to receive without pressure.



Busquets tracked the ball carrier, who started to dribble the ball forward; this way, the center back could maintain the 2 v 1 duel in the center, and the fullback could do the same with the wingers.



The opposition's ball carrier could drive the ball to the penalty area, but he couldn't find any passing solutions, thanks to Busquets tracking the back run and center back moving forward.



Busquets attacked the ball carrier after his turning back movement with the ball, and he won the ball back as the ball was open.

Summary

A holding midfielder's role has many meanings, both from an offensive and a defensive perspective. As it has many variations when a team has the possession, the same is when the team is off the possession. His position in front of the backline takes this type of player to act in many ways to save the goal from the opposition's attempts.

I decided to analyze three players who act in this position for three different clubs and play styles to find the common points and define the required skills for a deep-lying midfielder during defensive phases. In the end, these are the essential skills:

- They must prevent opponents from playing in dangerous areas.
- They mark 1 v 1 the opponents to delay the opposition's attacking phase and allow the teammates to retreat.
- Stamina (they need to run and put pressure on their rivals always.)
- Their ability to read the game is continuously tested as they have to try to break the opposition's game in the midfield itself.
- They need to fill the gaps in the midfield.

This book also includes some info about the classic holding midfielder, his position as a defensive screen (and a few info of the statistical data about Fernandinho - Manchester City, Casemiro - Real Madrid, and Busquets – Barcelona.) The central part is then about the role and the positions of a defensive holding midfielder, including many examples of play situations.