

*THE ROLE OF THE*  
**WITHDRAWN  
FORWARDS**

**DEFENDING**



by LUCA BERTOLINI

# **The Role of the Withdrawn Forward (Defending)**

*By*

*Luca Bertolini*

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



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**Introduction: the defensive phase with and without the False 9 the day when the role was born.  
Real Madrid – Barcelona (2–6) 2009, May the 2<sup>nd</sup>**

**Barcelona defensive phase without False 9**



Before the crucial signal from Pep Guardiola that gave birth to the False Nine, when Real Madrid's holding midfielder had the possession, and the center striker couldn't press him quickly, the wide midfielders were forced to move of their positions, working with the classic mark/cover defensive process.



If their actions were not adequate, and the opposition could play out from the back, overcoming the opposition's pressure, the fullback or the holding midfielder had to push up, opening gaps and chances to create passing patterns of play alongside the flank or in the center.



In this second situation, Xavi was forced to move out and push forward to press the opposition's ball carrier, and Iniesta had to shift across the center to provide cover. Messi's position was not effective due to the play's direction and the wide starting position alongside the right flank.



The only solution for the wide midfielders was to defend with the right timing and stand narrow in the center to counter the opponent; defending with an equal number of players (2 v 2 duels in the center) was the most comfortable solution possible face. But when they were late in countering the ball carrier, and the winger could receive, they had the chance to attack the final third with the only back four-line to beat. This is the way Real Madrid scored their leading goal after few minutes.



As Xavi and Iniesta were often out of position due to their pressing tasks, and Messi helped them shifting across the center. Still, without the right timing, the holding midfielder had to move out from his position to cover the space and help the fullback not to isolate him in 1 v 1 duels.



In this sequence, Xavi and Iniesta, together with Messi, couldn't close the passing lanes toward the defensive right side. Despite the retreated their positions, the holding midfielder shifted out wide to double the mark against the winger to help the fullback.



This picture represents the usual defensive shape before the new Messi's position in the center; 3 v 3 duel in front of the defenders (center striker and wingers), and 2 v 2 duel behind the first pressure line.

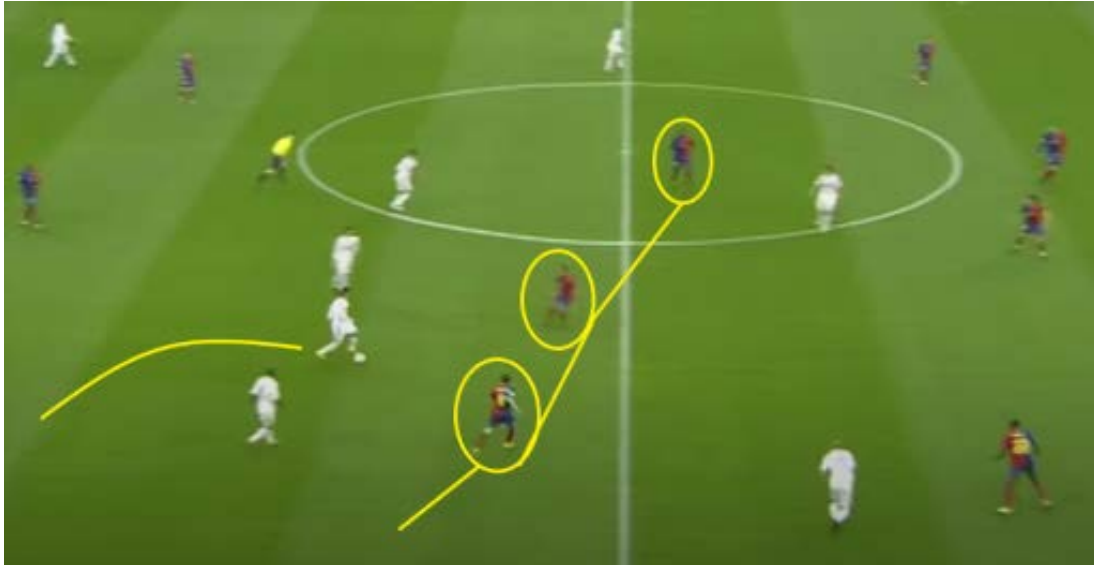


The only possible defensive action was to delay the opposition's possession phase without having chances to press or win the ball back.



The holding midfielder was then forced to push up to create numerical superiority or equality if the opposition's center striker dropped back to support the center midfielders; in this example, only the well-timed defensive action of Xavi prevented Real Madrid from progressing the move.





The three striker shape wasn't effective when a Real Madrid's center back could dribble the ball higher up in the field; Xavi and Iniesta shifted out wide to counter the center midfielder and the winger alongside the ball's position, but they were always outnumbered 3 v 2 due to the center back. The holding midfielder had to stand in the center to provide balance and cover the space among the center back, the winger, and the central striker.

### **Barcelona defensive phase without False 9**

And, this is this the signal from Pep Guardiola to Lionel Messi: the Catalan coach is telling the best player of the world to change his position in the field, to stand in between the line, and to act as a False 9. 6'10" after the start whistle of that math.



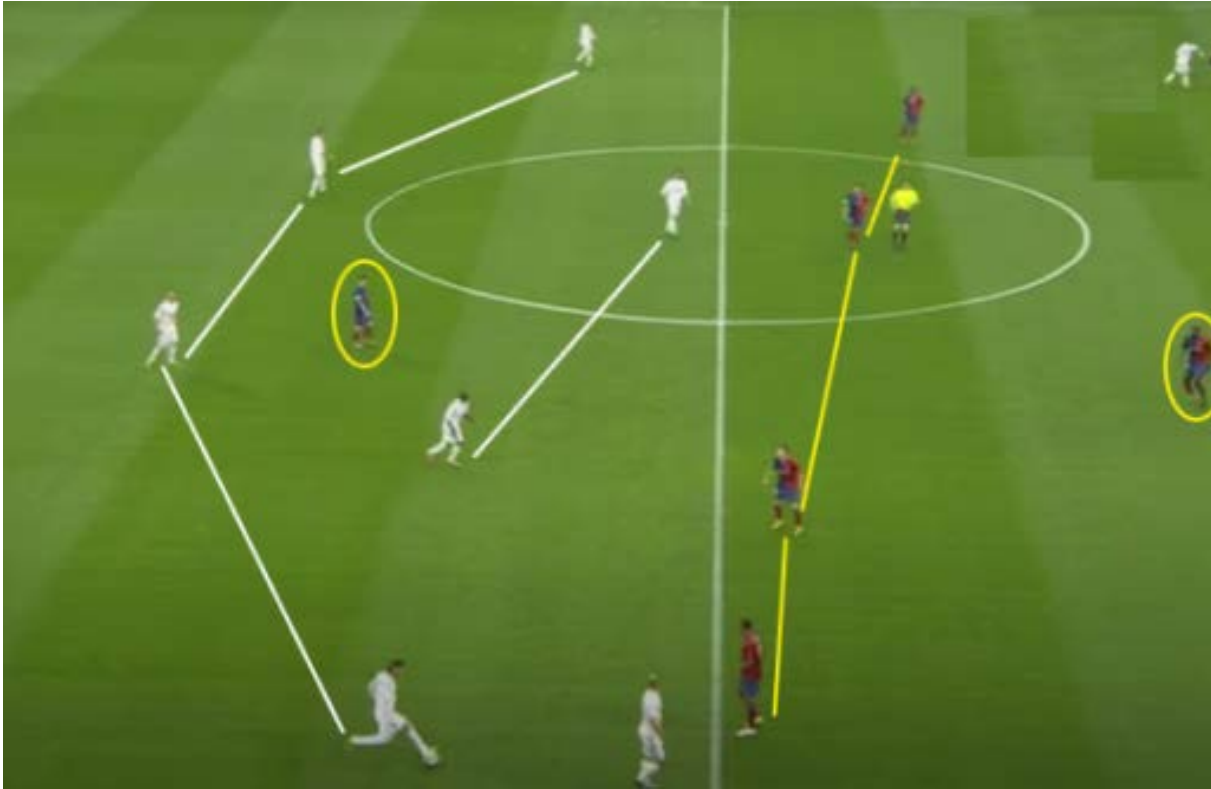
Those two guys looking at Pep Guardiola behind the bench still don't know that this is one of the most crucial signals of a coach among all in soccer tactical history. From now on, another match would have started, and another way of playing soccer and winning has begun.



Messi started to stand between the center back and the holding midfielder off the ball and the center back with the ball could only pass out wide to the right fullback.



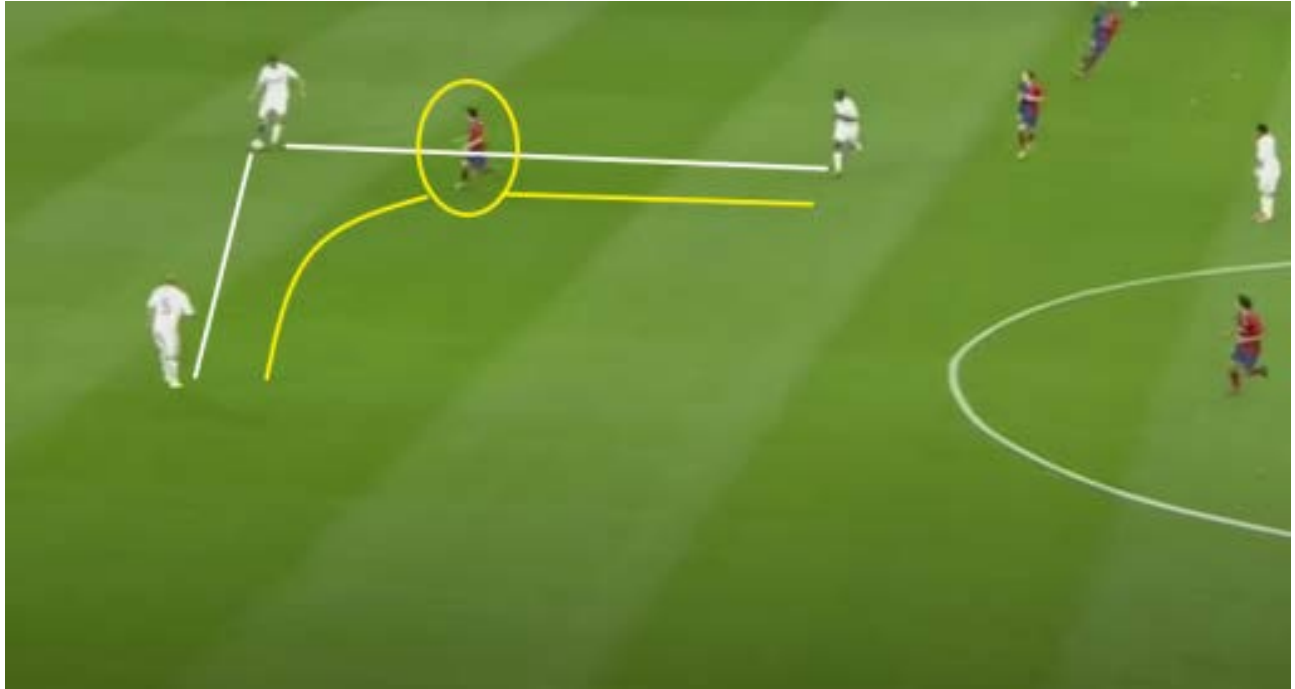
The center striker could then press the fullback who received the pass. The strikers could press the opposition's back four with two players rather than three and create a midfield back four lines that could face the opposition's sector with numerical or positional advantage.



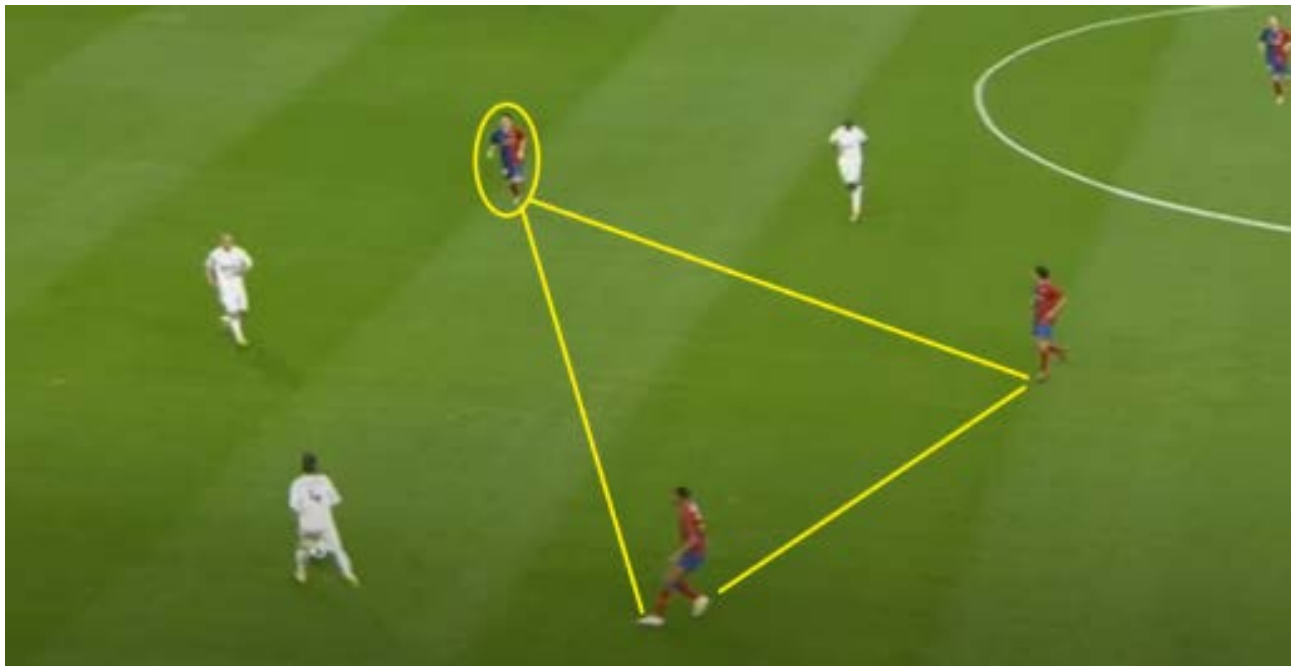
Although the fullback could receive, the winger and Xavi stand out wide, marking the opposition's winger and center midfielder. Messi's position between the center backs and midfielders forced a long pass, as he could press all the potential receivers in the center.



As the holding midfielder received, Messi pressed him 1 v 1, maintaining the line of four in the middle to provide cover to the backline.



Messi started to press the holding midfielder and the center back, giving the midfielders the chance to track the ball's path and to start the pressure phase at the right moment.



When Real Madrid played out wide to the fullbacks, Barcelona's pressure phase began to be effective, as Messi was the additional player who pressed in the center, the winger of the back four could press the fullback. Furthermore, the wide midfielder could balance the teammates, closing down the passing lanes to the center midfielders.

When Barcelona was forced to stay along with the middle third, Messi could direct the play's direction and create pressure traps.



In this sequence, Messi forced the direction to the defensive left side, pressing the opposition's left center back; the right one received, and the right fullback had the task to try to play out wide. The false nine's pressure action allowed the teammates to stay close to their direct opponents without moving out of their positions and prevented all the potential forward passes.



As he received, Barca's winger and left midfielder were ready to counter them and to force the direction of the opposition's possession back.



When the midfielders' line could stand higher up in the field, Messi pressed the center backs, and the winger put pressure against the fullback; these defensive tactics was easy to deploy, as the midfielders line had only to shifts across the field to achieve the same positional defense along the flanks.



The false nine also dropped back to counter the holding midfielder or the center backs if they tried to dribble the ball higher up in the field.



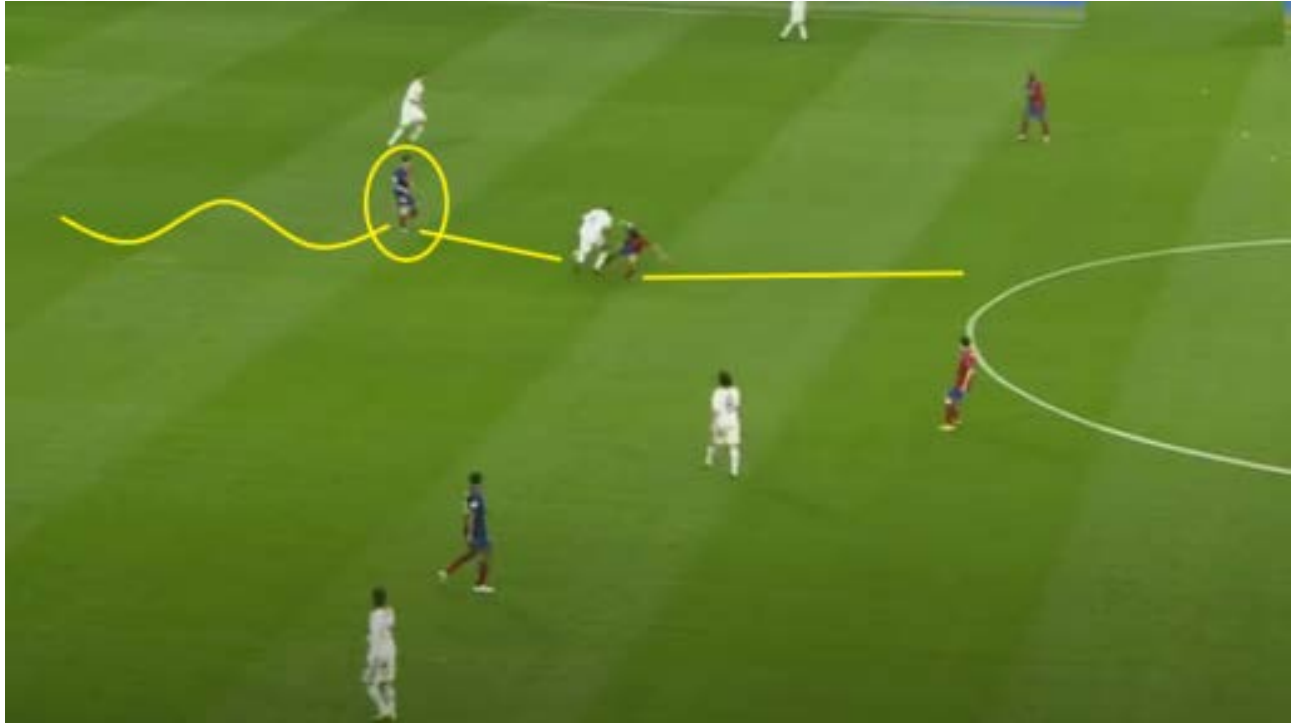


When Real Madrid created numerical superiority along the flanks (center back, winger, and the concerning midfielder), Messi as a false nine, the winger, the wide midfielder, and the pushing up fullback could counter the opponents and create a numerical superiority that leads to a positional superiority, as the fullback had against the opposition's winger and the wide midfielder against the center midfielder in front of them.

Even when the False Nine couldn't force the direction of play out wide, and the opposition's midfielders could receive, the False Nine's pressure was effective.



Messi pressed the center back in this situation, but the ball carrier could pass forward to the holding midfielder; his position allowed the midfielder to stand behind the potential receivers and press them with the right timing.



Xavi could press the holding midfielder with the right timing and win the ball back, giving Messi the necessary positional advantage to counter-attack.



Messi could receive facing the opposition's goal, and the opposition's center back couldn't recover the space against him. He couldn't either attempt a sliding tackle to prevent Barcelona's false nine from scoring.



The team shape with the false nine seemed to be a 1-4-2-3-1, rather than a classic 1-4-3-3; furthermore, Messi's position was a No.10 position, as the Real Madrid back four stands deep without any forward to mark.



Messi's position created this specific passing map and allowed Barcelona to score 6 times.  
**Rotating false nine against the opposition's holding midfielder and the closure of passing lanes**

Spain won the second European Championship in a row in 2012; that team gave a great example of developing a false nine. Three players rotated in that position, action after action.



David Villa, Fabregas, and Iniesta were three attacking midfielders, and their tendency to drop deep and retreat when the team was off the ball created a peculiar 1-4-6-0 shape.



The three up the front of the middle six usually didn't press the opposition's center backs. Still, they started to put pressure when the holding midfielder received, preventing him from looking for crucial passes easily.

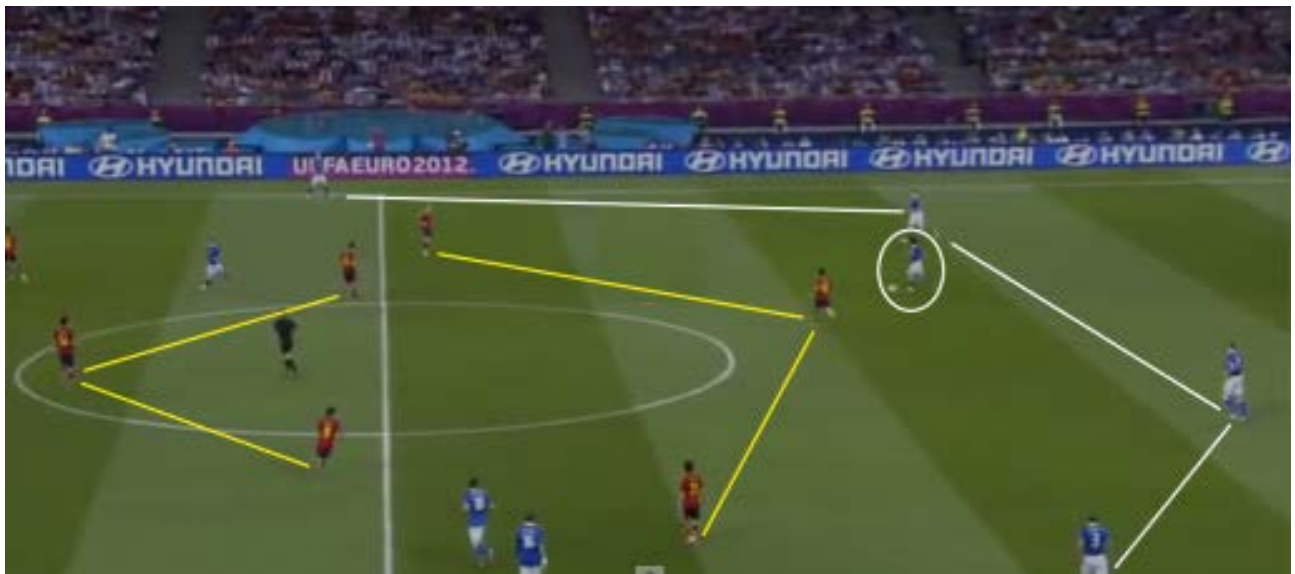
All the images of this chapter are taken from the final match against Italy, and they showed how the opposition's midfielders were pressed continuously to force long balls from the center backs. As we already stated, the opposition's center backs were free to distribute at the back, but all the passing paths were marked.





Here again, the momentary false nine marked the opposition's midfielder, the second one marked the left fullback, who shifted across the field, and the third one invited the opponent to play along the right flank.

The double triangle shape prevented the opposition's holding midfielder from finding easy passing lanes; the false nine marked the opposition's holding midfielder. The other players who usually rotated in that position were placed deeper between the center backs and the fullbacks. They were ready to counter them both along each side.



David Villa marked the holding midfielder, Iniesta was placed at the left, and Fabregas at the right.

None of the rotating false nine moved out from their positions when they couldn't press the holding midfielder; if a center back dribbled the ball out of the first third, one center midfielder usually ran out to counter the opponent.



Xavi ran out to counter the opposition center back. The false nine slot standstill in their triangular positions; Fabregas marked the only opposition's center midfielder who dropped back to provide support.

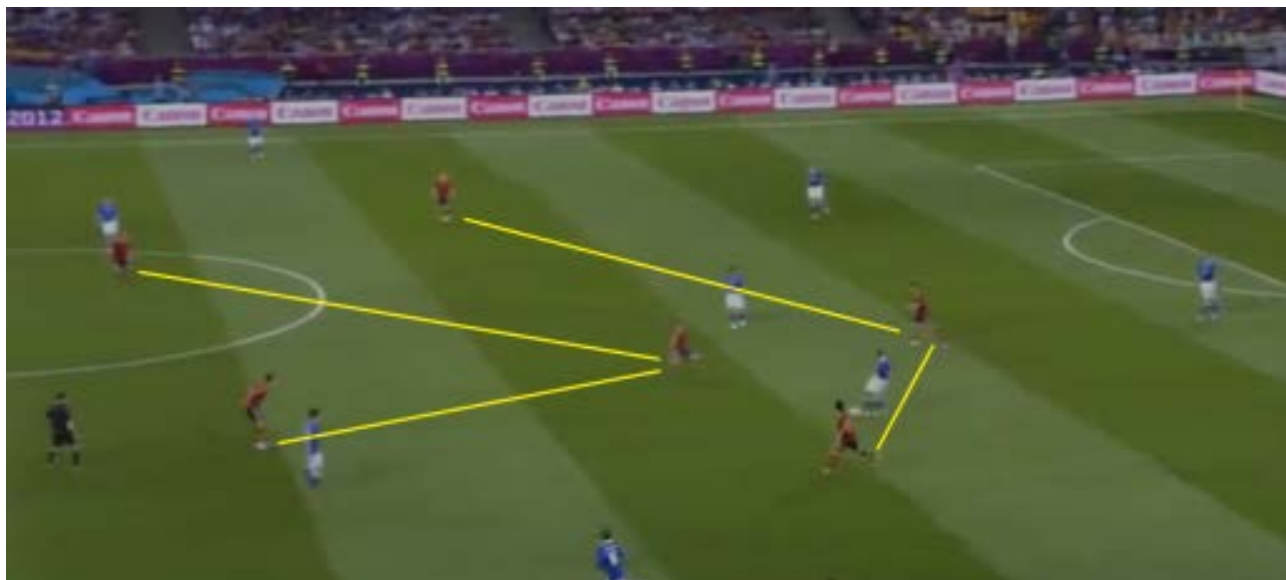
The center midfielder also usually ran out to support the false nine's defensive action against the holding midfielder.



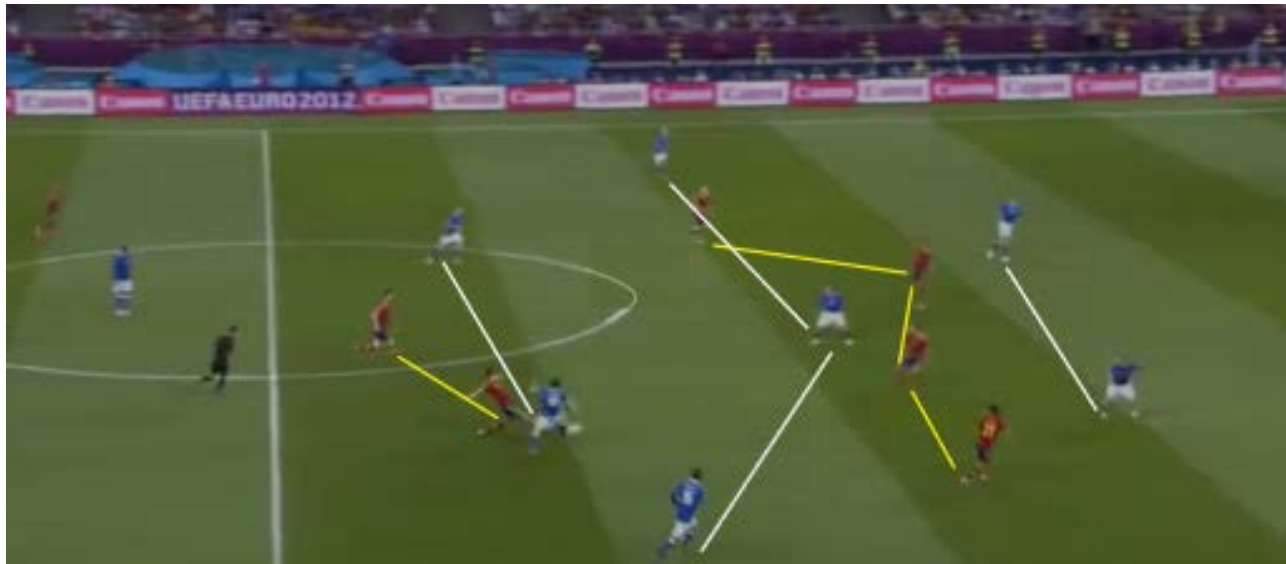
Xavi ran out again to double team the holding midfielder to cover a pocket of space that the center back could have exploited to pass to the holding midfielder.



When the opposition's center back could play out from the first third, Spain went on defending on the front foot, moving higher up in the field, and maintaining the triangular shapes.



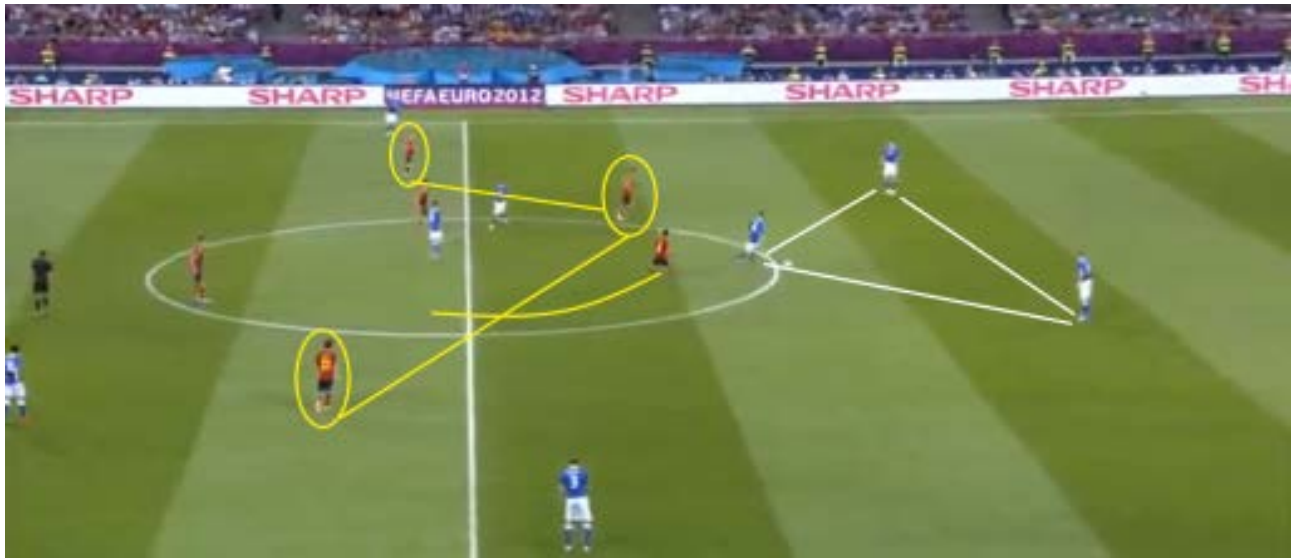
In this move, the Italian center back dribbles through Fabregas and David Silva; the three midfielders shaped a defensive triangle. The upper apex moved forward to close down the passing lanes to the ball carrier.



The center back was forced to play a quick pass to the center midfielder, who couldn't control the ball correctly, being under pressure of one of the holding midfielders, who tackled him with the right timing, winning the ball back.

The first pressing player didn't retreat, but he closed down the chances for a safer back pass to the center back, screening the space between them.

As we have already analyzed, the rotating false nines didn't move out to press the center backs, but they were tasked with passing lanes to the holding midfielder. One of the wide midfielders usually went out to counter the first phase of the opposition's building up phase.



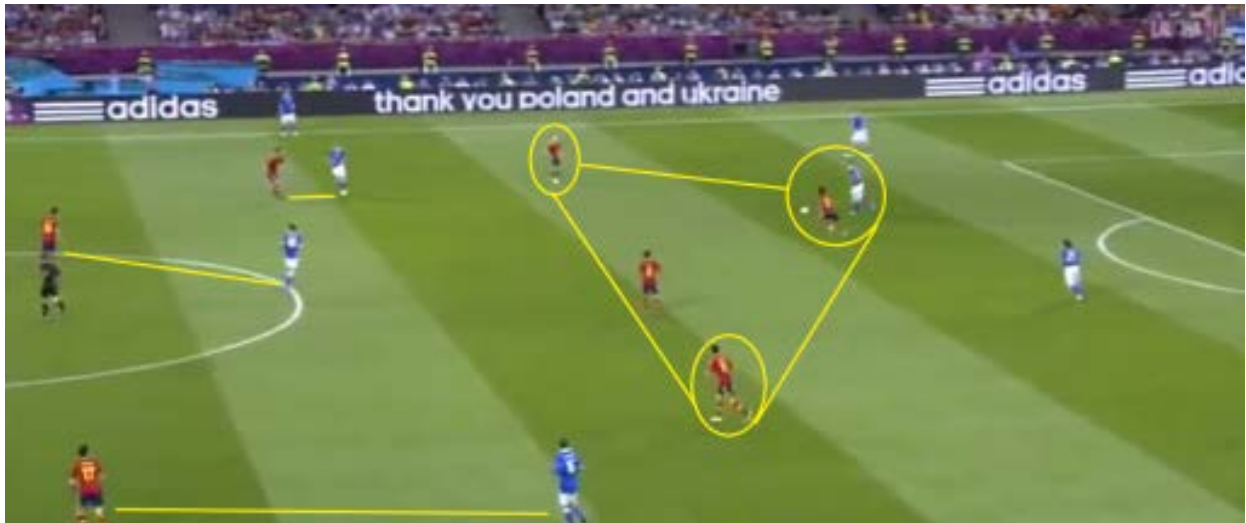
Xavi ran out to press the opposition's temporary midfielder, who was forced to dribble the ball back, David Silva stands between the fullback and the left-center midfielder, Fabregas screened the players in the middle of the center cycle, Iniesta stands wide at the left, to counter the left fullback.

The opposition's tactical answer was to give the center backs the tasks to play long passes, as the holding midfielder was pressed continuously.



The wide midfielder, Xavi, in this sequence, was always the player who ran out of his position in the middle to press the center back and force quick long passes. Fabregas and Iniesta closed the short passing lanes at the left, and David Silva covered the pressing teammate's position in the center.

When one of the rotating false nines pressed the center backs, tracking the ball's path, after a holding midfielder's pass, the wide midfielder ran up in the field to cover his position. The other two false nines stand in their positions.



David Silva pressed the center back with the ball, Fabregas stand between the holding midfielder who dropped back along the defensive line and the left fullback, Iniesta did the same between the other center back and the right fullback. As in all the previous defensive situations, the rotating midfielders maintained the defensive triangular shape between the final and middle thirds.

- This next sequence is an example of a defensive rotation among the false nines:



The wide midfielder forced the holding midfielder to dribble the ball backward (all the forward passing lanes were closed, and the potential receivers were marked 1 v 1). The false nines stand between the center back and the fullback (Iniesta at the left), double the mark against the holding midfielder, preventing him from switching the side, and stand close to the center midfielder and ready to counter the left fullback (David Silva at the right).



This scenario represents the defensive effectiveness of the rotating false nine at the highest tactical level possible, considering the defensive aims of the positional play that is the style of play the false nine comes from.



Xavi pressed the holding midfielder to drive him backward, preventing him from finding forward passing solutions. The three rotating false nines stand in their positions to patrol the channels in the center.



...As the Italian center back received at the right, Fabregas ran up in the field to press the center back, and the fullback, Xavi, retreated to cover the position and mark the opposition's right center back.

In this first part of the sequence, David Silva and Iniesta stand in their positions to cover the fullback and cover the space around the defensive shape's weaker side.

The other midfielders shifted out wide along the wide channel together with the fullback to create a strong defensive side and numerical superiority at the right.



As the opposition started to combine out wide, Fabregas and Iniesta shifted out wide to counter the holding midfielder and the center back; one midfielder shifted out wide also, to counter the direct opponent, as the center midfielder and the third one shifted out wide also with the fullback to create numerical superiority alongside the left flank.

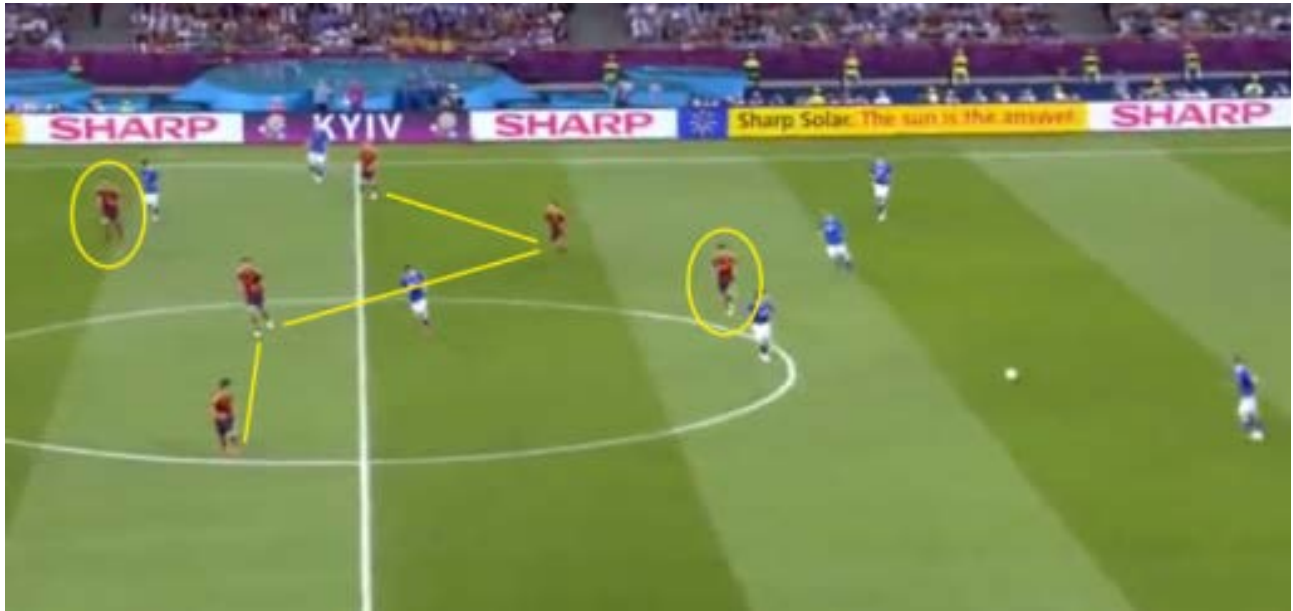


The fullback and the center midfielder created a 3 v 3 duel out wide along the half-line, Iniesta and the third midfielder created a 2 v 1 duel against the ball carrier, Fabregas was ready to counter the holding midfielder who dropped back and the right-center back, who was a potential receiver.

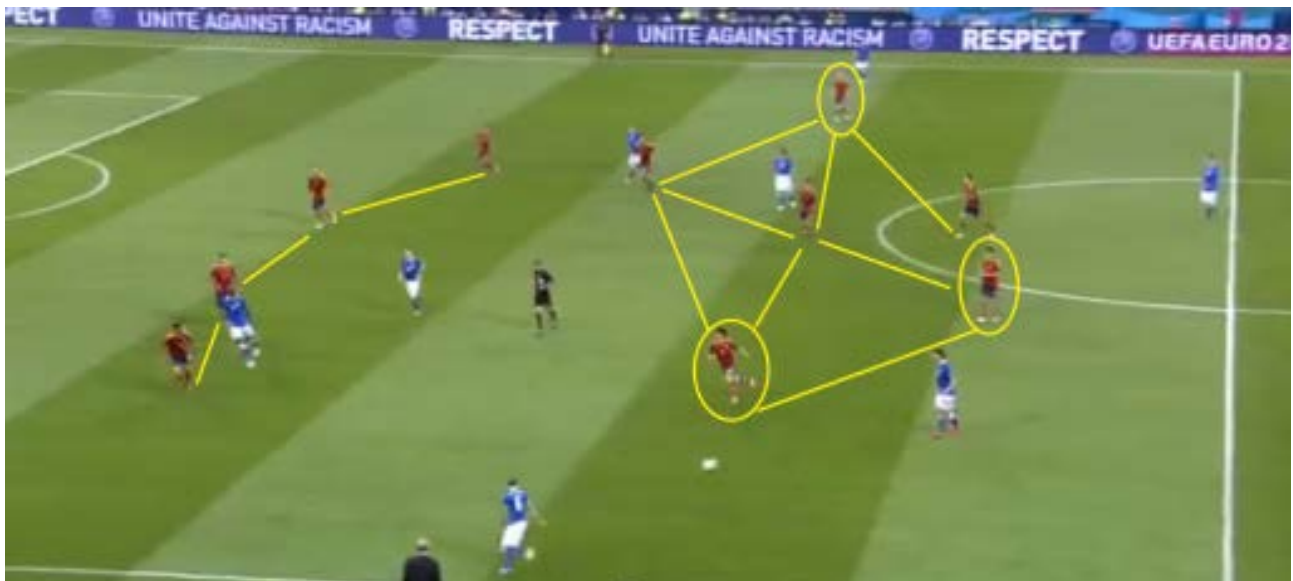
David Silva patrolled the weaker area of the defensive shape again.

After preventing the opposition from playing through passes in the center, the false nines rotations allowed Spain to create numerical superiorities along the channels and the flanks.

As we are next to realize, when the Italian team could play along the flanks, Spain left spaces out wide, shaping a narrow 1-4-6-0 shape in the center.



While the opponent was combining to switch the side, Spain shaped a 1-4-1 formation, with one holding midfielder and the false nine as the upper apex. The line of four in the middle shifted across to cover the switch of side and preventing through passes in the center.

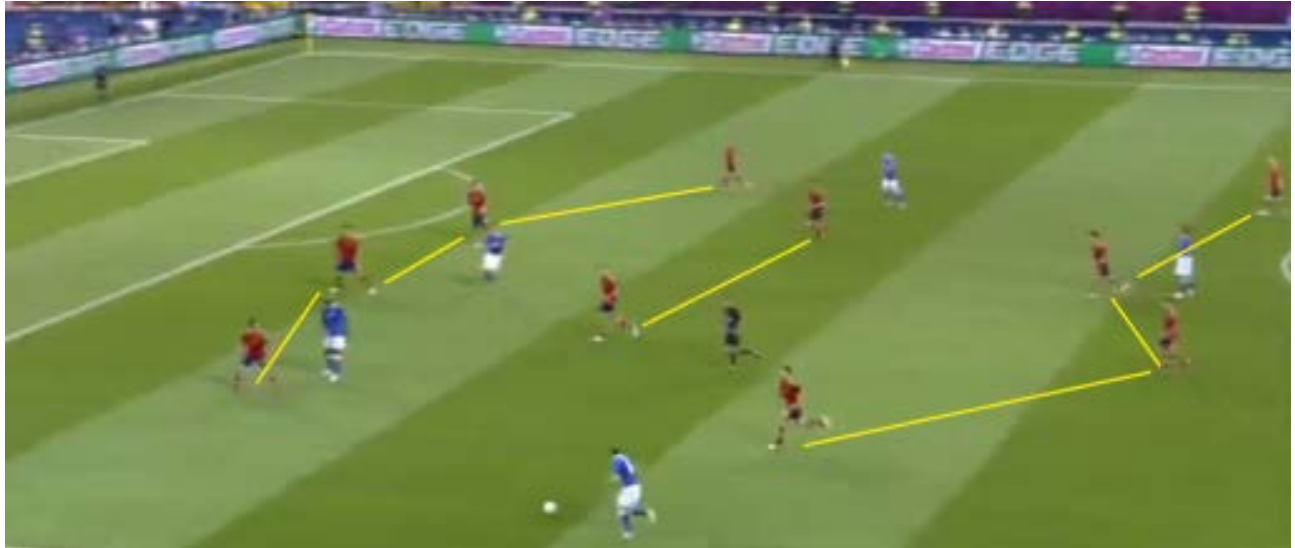


The back four stand narrow in the center to mark the center forward (the right fullback and the center back) and check the No.10 (the center back).

The 3 midfielders previously shaped a vertical line to mark the wider center and the holding midfielders.

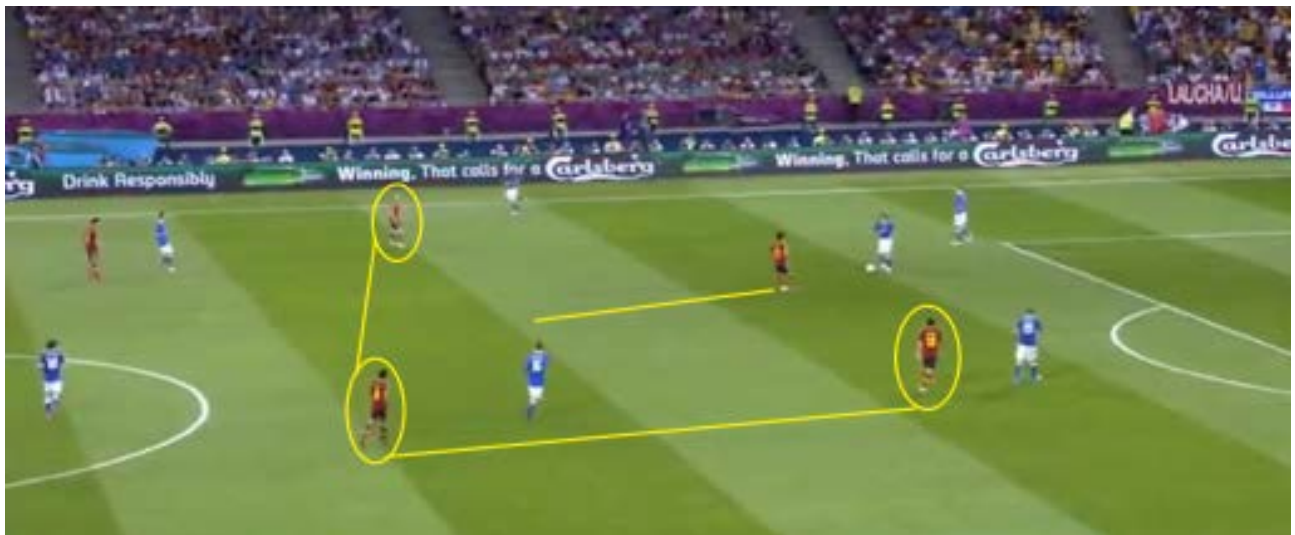
The three rotating false nines maintained their triangular shape; Iniesta stands along the weak side to control the opposition's fullback.





The opposition's fullback could dribble the ball along the flank, but the backline marked both the strikers; the midfielders shape a line of two in the center. The third one retreated to counter the fullback, allowing the false nines to stand higher up in the field to preventively cover the holding midfielder and be ready to counter-attack after the potential ball's recovery.

When possible, Spain's first defensive idea was to counter 1 v 1 the opponents in the middle third. Anyway, the first defensive phase in the final third was the same.



When one of the rotating false nines ran up in the field, one of the midfielders covered his position to maintain the defensive triangular shape; in this situation, David Silva marked the holding midfielder, Xavi marked the left midfielder, standing behind him, Iniesta marked the right center back, and Fabregas controlled the shortest and easiest passing lane to the left fullback.

Forcing the opposition's building up phase back or the ball's carrier to play long passes, Spain could defend 1 v 1 in the middle of the field.



In this second example, the center back dribbled the ball through the channel, the advanced midfielder ran out and shifted wide to close him down; Fabregas moved toward the holding midfielder to counter him, Iniesta screened the passing lanes to fullback, and David Silva stands along the weaker area of the middle third to potentially counter the fullback.

## Roberto Firmino and the defensive phase of a modern False Nine

Roberto Firmino has been one of the most crucial players of Liverpool's recent years, both for attacking and defending phases. Reds' classic defensive shape has always been the 1-4-3-3 under Jürgen Klopp, and Firmino was the center striker between the center backs or the remaining defenders at the back.



In this sequence, Liverpool shifted wide to track the ball path and counter the opposition's receiver down the touchline. The right fullback and midfielder forced the receiver to play backward, closing down all the passing lanes.



The left-center midfielder received, and Firmino dropped back to screen the passing lane to the nearest teammate, who could have received and switch the side. Firmino forced the ball carrier to look back to the passing options along the back four.



The opposition's ball carrier turned backward, but he lingered with the ball at his feet, and Firmino could attempt a defensive action to win the ball back.

The Brazilian player's attacking actions with his dropping back run in between the lines have been so crucial for Liverpool attacking phases and the recent successes. The defensive phase was so relevant as well.



The opposition's right midfielder won the ball inside the penalty area, heading a long pass away; Firmino dropped back and tracked him to prevent the left fullback from moving out of his position and opening a potential gap to counter-attack. This way, the fullback and the holding midfielder could cover the ball line and close the ball carrier's passing lanes.



Firmino is not the Reds' first pressing player, but he usually screens the opposition's holding midfielder.



Oxlade-Chamberlain dropped back to prevent the ball carrier from passing forward and the midfielders moving out of their positions. The ball carrier was forced to play a short side pass to the nearest teammate.



As he received, Firmino dropped back and pressed him while controlling the ball. He dispossessed the opponent, and he won the ball back with enough time and space to launch an offensive transition phase.



He combined 1-2 with the right fullback and received the return pass in behind.

The defensive support of the Brazilian was crucial even in the middle third.



In this sequence, Liverpool has just lost possession along the right flank in the middle third, and the winger received a pass along the touchline.

Firmino couldn't double-team the opponent initially, but the right fullback pushed up to close down the receiver.





Firmino took advantage of the fullback's defensive action, and Firmino had time and space to attack the ball carrier and win the ball back.

In this next sequence, two opponents try to win the ball in the middle third after a long pass from Liverpool's defensive line.



Firmino dropped back and stole time from his opponents, and he won the ball back; again, he allowed the three midfielders to stand deep and cover the space if the opponents around the ball had won the possession.



Firmino controlled the ball, and he passes out wide to the fullback, who received and dribbled the ball higher up along the left flank.

The defensive action of Firmino was not always direct, but his positions often helped the teammate press the opponents.



In this sequence, the opposition lost the possession because Firmino was screening the center backs, and the ball carrier couldn't play an effective back pass.

Furthermore, the short passing lanes close to the ball carrier could have been easily under the same midfielder pressure, who was already pressing the ball carrier.

The Brazilian dropping back defensive runs were often effective in switching the action from defensive to offensive and launching quick transitions to attack.



In this sequence, Salah attempted a pass in the middle of the penalty area for Firmino, who was anticipated; the opposition played out of the penalty area with a 2-passes quick combination to launch the counter-attacks.



Firmino quickly dropped back just out of the penalty area. He anticipated the receiver of the highlighted side pass; he took advantage of the wrong pass, as the opponent didn't progress the move, but he passed sideward to an incoming teammate who was already under Firmino's pressure.



He won the ball back, and he played quickly out of the condensed area, giving his team the chance to stay high up in the field.



He then exploited a quick passing combination out wide of the left midfielder and the left fullback, moving off the ball inside the box to receive as a third man.

This sequence is crucial to understand the big defensive contribution of Liverpool's false nine and his attacking contribution.

His real skill is to have the ability to create attacking chances after the recovery of the ball; it means "not defend just for the sake of breaking the opposition's possession phase, but defend to win the ball back and counter-attack."



Furthermore, Firmino is also crucial support for the defensive actions of the teammates.



Liverpool's left midfielder countered a long ball from the opposition's defense in the middle third; the defender headed it back due to Liverpool's midfielder's pressure.



Firmino dropped back into the middle third cycle to limit the numerical inferiority (3 v 4 from 2 v 4), standing on the other side of the opposition's defenders' line and winning the ball after the header of the opponent.

He dropped the ball for an incoming teammate, and he launched the counter-attacking action.



Firmino became the first pressing player when all the other strikers couldn't press in the final third.



In this sequence, he pressed the opposition's holding midfielder and the fullback, inviting the teammates to push higher up in the field.



He tracked the ball's path, pressed the fullback, won the ball back, and dribbled it along the flank.

Meanwhile, the other forwards also pushed up to support the transition to the Brazilian center's attack phase forward.



Eventually, he created a gap in the middle in front of the penalty area, creating a chance for his team.

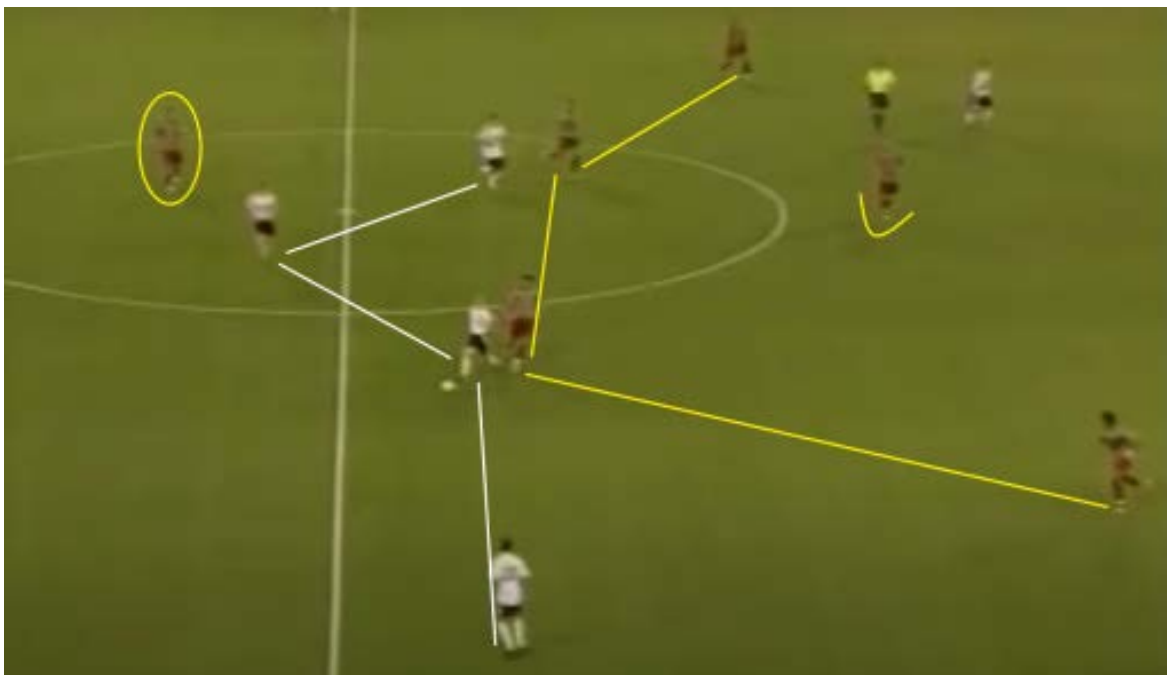
## Francesco Totti and the defensive phase of the first Luciano Spalletti's As Roma

Luciano Spalletti's Rome 2006/2007 version deployed a No.10 between the opposition's line before Guardiola's Barcelona. After many seasons, this player was Francesco Totti as a classic creative No.10 with Fabio Capello and a left striker or winger under Zdenek Zeman. In the end, he played as a False Nine, and Roma stands in the field in a 1-4-6-0 shape during offensive phases and a 1-4-1-4-1 formation during defensive phases. Roma was organized with 5 defensive players and 5 offensive ones during the phases off the ball, ready to attack the spaces when Totti gained it.



Totti hadn't proper defensive tasks, as he was the upper apex, not a target striker, of all Roma's transitions to attack.

Although Totti was a creative attacking midfielder with excellent abilities to score, he could be defined as a false nine among great runners rather than a dropping back striker.



The line of four behind him was made of pressing players (center midfielders and wingers), and he usually waited for the ball in between the lines.



When the opposition built-up, he usually stand in the center, between the center backs and the central midfielders, closing down passing lanes toward the center.



He usually tracked the ball's paths when the opposition center's backs combined, closing down the passing lanes to the center midfielders.



In this example, he forced the direction of play out wide to the defensive right side, inviting the center midfielder and the winger to push up and press the opponents.



Totti's defensive runs invited the backline of four to put pressure too.



In this move, he pressed the center bak, and the left midfielder pushed up in the field to preventively press the potential receiver of a wide pass (the fullback.)



After the long forced pass from the back, the real first defensive phase stand on four back players and the defensive midfielder.

Roma was shaped with a line of five advanced players and 5 defensive ones.



Here again, Totti was placed among four opponents in the middle of the square they shaped.



He was then always ready to play quick passes between the lines after the ball's recovery in the middle third. The defensive positions were a function of his attacking skills and tasks.

Totti was preventively marking the opposition right center back in this next sequence, inviting the center midfielder and winger to push up, pressing the second center back and fullback.



The center midfielder pressed the right center back and forced him to play backward to the goalkeeper, and tracking the ball's path, and he pressed the goalkeeper also.

Totti's previous position between the center backs invited the teammates' pressure. The ball's carrier's only solution was to pass the ball back to the goalkeeper or risk a through pass that could be intercepted in the middle third.

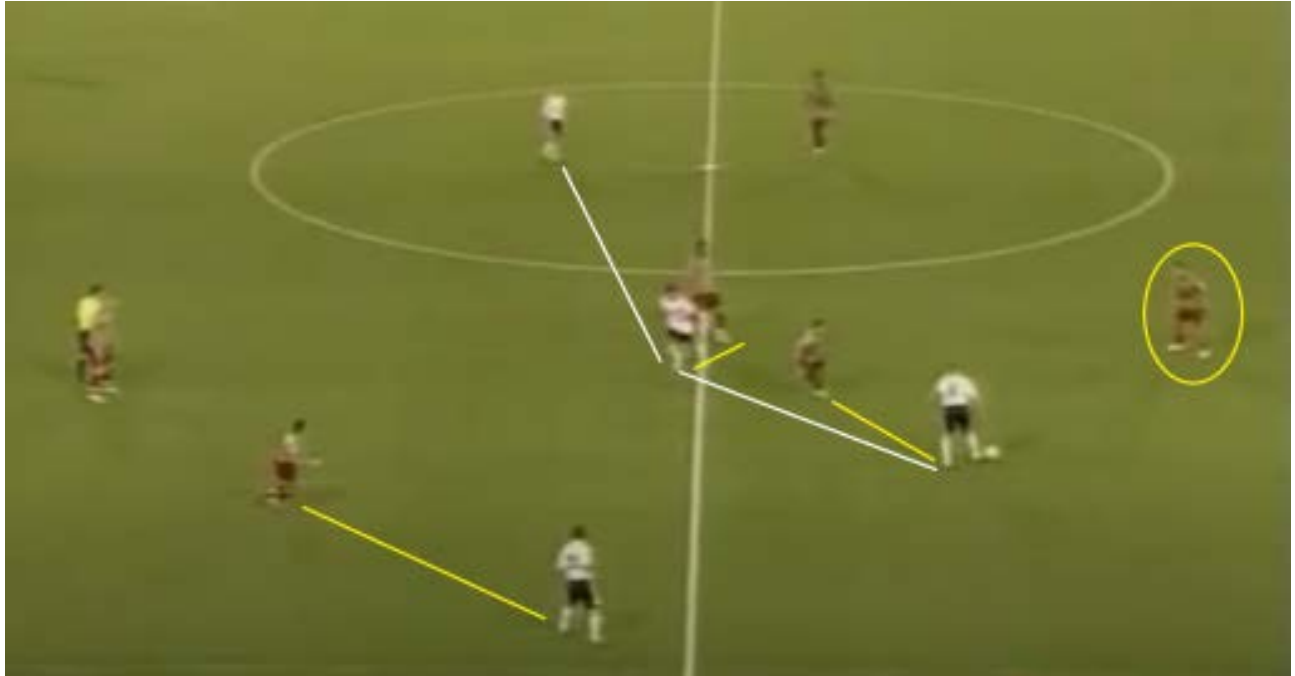
Totti was the first option after a potential ball's recovery, and he wasn't the first pressing player.



In this sequence, the line of four at the back is pressing the possession phase of the opponents with 1 v 1 duels; the right winger presses 1 v 1 the fullback, the right center midfielder is closed to the holding midfielder, the left winger is ready to counter the potential receiver of switch of side, the left center midfielder is tracking the potential receiver of a diagonal pass to the center.



The second task of the back four line was to screen the holding midfielder to prevent him from moving out of his position. The right winger and center midfielder, and the left center midfielder pressed 1 v 1 the opponents near the ball alongside the right flank, and the holding midfielder could stand and mark the player in between the line.



The opposition couldn't progress the move due to the previous pressing phase; the ball carrier was forced to turn backward to find a pocket of space. The midfielders' line created an horizontal 4 v 4 duel. The center midfielders created a 2 v 2 duels in the center, the right winger countered the opposition's winger, and the left one could had recover the space against the left winger after a potential ball's recovery.

Totti usually became defensively active if the opposition played backward to center backs or to the goalkeeper.



Totti pressed the center back when he received, and the left midfielder pushed up to counter the opposite one.





As the goalkeeper received from the center back, Totti pushed high up to counter him, the line of four and the fullback pressed all the potential receivers in the middle third. The opposition's goalkeeper could only play a long ball to the final third.

### **Gabriel Jesus and the False Nine who recovers the second times the ball**

Gabriel Jesus is replacing Aguero during the injuries times of this current seasons, and Manchester City is taking advantage of his positional awareness to win the second times of the ball.



First of all, the pressure phase is always crucial and the first task for a center midfielder. The opposition's wingers pressed the opposition's center backs, and Jesus screened the holding midfielder just out of the penalty area.



The goalkeeper played a long pass out wide alongside the flank, the left winger and the advanced midfielder dropped back and pushed high (shifting wide) to counter the receiver and they forced him to header the ball backward. Jesus also dropped deeper inside the right half-space toward the ball's direction.



Jesus attacked the ball, meeting his paths to the center back, and he intercepted the ball inside the attacking right half-space.

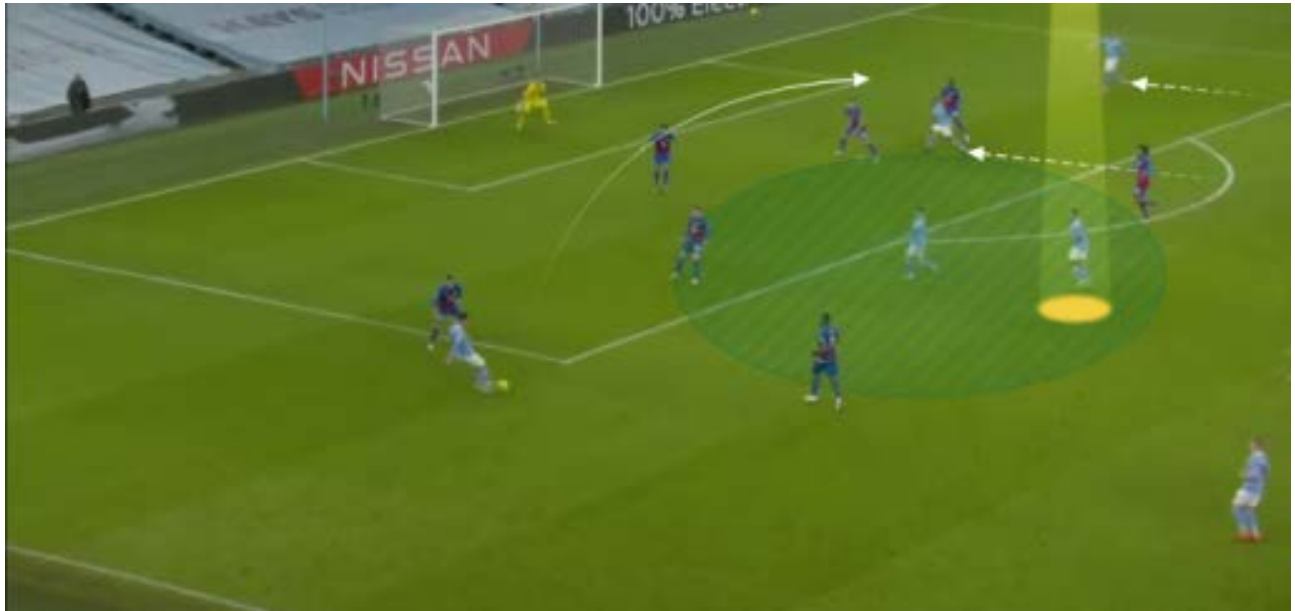


He dribbled the ball out wide toward the touchline without pressure, as the opponents decided to stand deeper inside the first third. Jesus then passed the ball back to the left advanced midfielder to maintain the possession high up in the field.

Jesus is used to drop much deeper than the teammate Aguero, and to support the attacking phase of the advanced midfielder.



As he didn't receive, but the left winger did, Jesus attacked the same space he has created with his previous dropping back movement.



The winger received, and played cross pass toward the opposition's box.

The opposite advanced midfielder and winger attacked the possession, and Jesus stand out of the penalty box because of his previous false nine position.



The opposition's defensive shape rebounded the ball from the line of the 6 yds. box, and Jesus could win the second time of the ball out of the penalty area.



He dribbled the ball toward the first and safe passing option to maintain the possession high up in the field...



...And he helped the creation of a strong side around the ball through the right half-space together with the right fullback, advanced midfielder, and winger, who was placed in the center, as Jesus shifted out wide before moving as a potential receive in behind.



This season, City has improved the defensive phase as the fewer number of conceded goals shows. When Citizens must defend close to the box, they shape a 1-5-4-1 formation, and Gabriel Jesus drops deep also to be an effective and safe passing option.



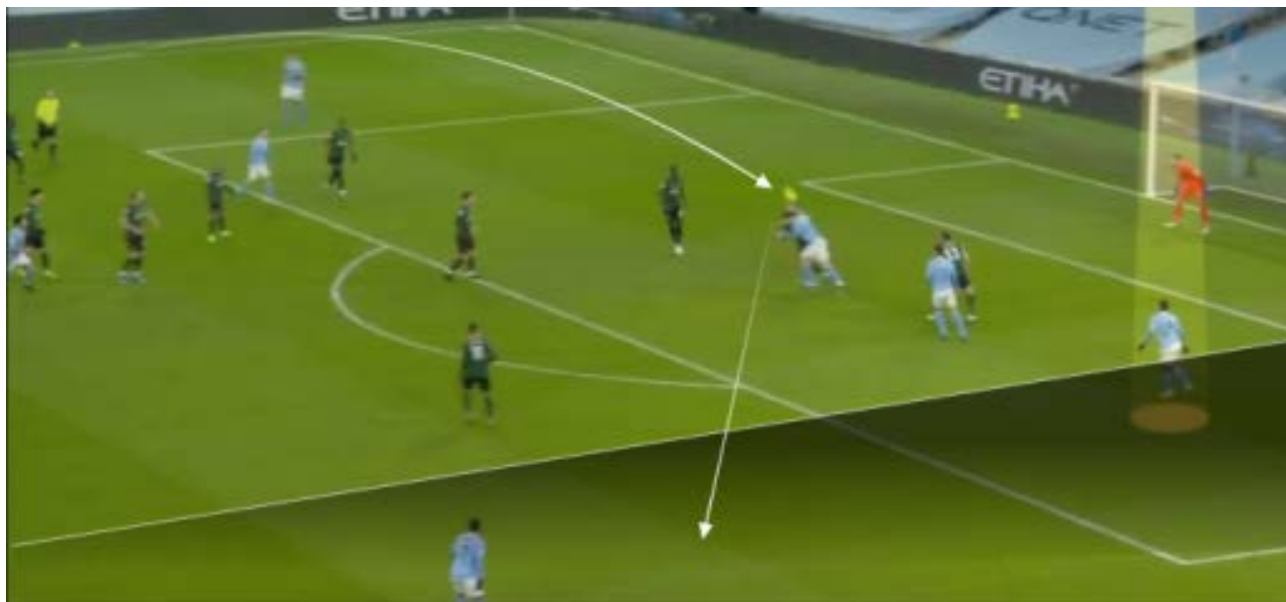
The advanced midfielders and wingers act as fullback also, to shape the lines of five and four.



In these situations, the line of four don't move out of position, and Jesus immediately attack the ball he can intercept.

In this example, he wins the ball dropping back, intercepting the back pass of an opposition center forward to the teammates along the midfield sector.

An offensive tactical solution for Man City is always to free a player along the weak side (down the touchline or the half-space.)



The winger and the advanced midfielder have attacked the center of the box, and Jesus stand inside the opposite right half-space.



The defenders rebound the ball out of the box, and Jesus is ready to attack the opponent who is dropping back to win the ball.

The goal is always to win the ball inside the half-space to attack the goal again.



When it's not possible, Jesus becomes the first pressing players, as he must win the ball back or stop the opposition's possession phase to prevent the teammates from moving out of their positions.

The stats of conceded goals by City this current seasons is much better than the previous one, as a final result of the team's and center striker's tactical behaviors:

Guardiola's team conceded 35 goals last 2019/2020 seasons, and 29 after 25 matches. During this current 2020/2021 season, City has conceded 15 goals, and only 7 in the last 19 matches (as of 21<sup>st</sup> February). The average of conceded goals per match has decreased to 0.6 from the 0.92 of the previous season. The result is absolutely remarkable.

## Summary

The defensive phase of a False Nine is strictly connected to the positional style of play, as the attacking phase is; this is true. Otherwise, the evolution of the role and of the position has unbind the original pressure tasks of a false nine from the modern defensive tasks that a player like this can have.

Messi was an effective pressing player, as the images of the match against Barcelona and Real Madrid show, after the famous first seven minutes. He forced the directions of play, he created overload in the center, and he created effective pressing trap.

A couple of seasons before, Luciano Spalletti deployed Totti as a center false nine but in a different way; he didn't have real defensive tasks, as the back line of four were the effective defenders which had to win the ball back; Totti was the first passing option after the recovery of the ball, and he usually only forced long balls from the goalkeeper that the line of midfielders and winger tried to win.

The rotating false nines tactic that Vicente del Bosque applied to win the Euro 2012 had the goal to counter the opposition holding midfielder giving the center backs the chance to play, directing the possession out wide and pressing the fullbacks and the receivers with the touchline as an extra defender.

Roberto Firmino and Gabriel Jesus are two examples of the evolution of the False Nine position. They could be defined as "Transitions' False Nines" thanks to their skills to counter the opponents in the center and inside the half-spaces, and create chances for the teammates after the ball's recovery.

The main points of this book are:

- The defensive phase with and without the False 9 the day when the role was born. Real Madrid – Barcelona (2–6) 2009, May the 2<sup>nd</sup>
- Rotating false nine against the opposition's holding midfielder, and the closure of passing lanes
- Roberto Firmino and the defensive phase of a modern False Nine
- Francesco Totti and the defensive phase of the first Luciano Spalletti's As Roma
- Gabriel Jesus and the False Nine who recovers the second times of the ball

I hope the readers will find this book as much complete as possible to fully understand the defensive phase of the False Nine.