

# ***SOCCER TACTICS AND STRATEGIES***



# **Soccer Tactics and Strategies**

A look at tactics at the highest level that  
you can apply to your own team

*Published by*

**WORLD CLASS COACHING**

First published June, 2016 by  
WORLD CLASS COACHING 12851 Flint St. Overland Park, KS 66213 (913) 402-0030

Copyright © WORLD CLASS COACHING 2016

All rights reserved. No parts of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission of the publisher.

Edited by Tom Mura



# **Table of Contents**

1. Attacking and Defending Free Kicks	4
2. Using their Strengths Against Them	9
3. Bayern Pressing and Direct Attacking	15
4. Arsenal's Terrible Defending v Anderlecht	21
5. Creativity to Create Goalscoring Chance	25
6. Lack of Defensive Cover in the Midfield	29
7. Bayern Munich's Positioning in Midfield	35
8. Playing with Inverted Full Backs	42
9. Bayern's Move from Fixed to Flexible	46
10. Using the Channel to Draw the Defense Over	51

# Attacking and Defending Free Kicks

In the recent match between Real Sociedad and Real Madrid, there were 6 goals, with 50% scored from corner kicks, with several other missed headers and 2<sup>nd</sup> balls which could've resulted in more goals.

Interestingly, both teams chose to leave the back post open with no player on there, which turned out to be a zone which was tried to be exploited by both teams.

## **Sociedad Corner Routine**

- **6 players forward, GK and 3 back, 1 at 35m**
- **Drilled, flat delivery to around 6m**
- **2 men at the front zone for the flick on**
- **2 men attack the back – 1 from a central starting position who loops around unmarked**
- **1 player on edge of the box for rebounds**

## **Near Post Flick on routine**



As the flat ball is drilled in, it has enough pace that a flick on will continue fast enough past the GK and central defensive players. Sociedad look to exploit the back post zone as there is nobody on the post to come off the post and cover any flick ons, so having 2 players here increases their chances.

Real Madrid set up with Kroos trying to block the low ball into the front zone, with 3 man-markers and 4 players across the 6m line, and 1v1 on the 18m line but little protection beyond the far post.



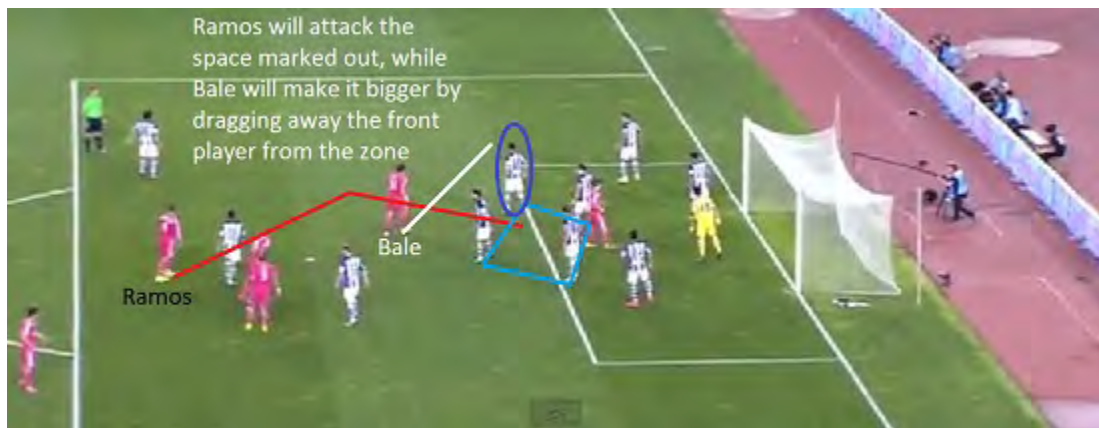
As the ball is flicked on, it is too high to catch, and follows into the flick on zone, which results in a tap in from inside 3m. If the scorer had stood inside the zone, he could've been offside.

### **Vela in the poacher position due to the player on the front post playing everyone onside**



Sociedad use the same routine – drilled ball at head height to the front zone, with a player arcing to the back post. Interestingly, as Real Madrid now have a player on the front post, this allows Vela to drift into the back post zone and stay onside from any flick on, which he scores from.

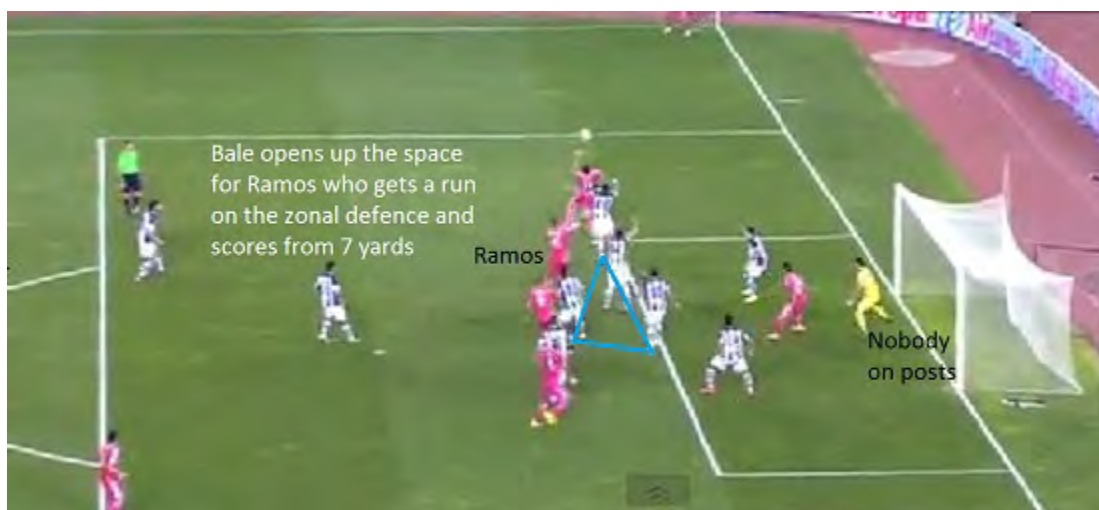
## Ramos goal – Front post zone with Bale creating space



Similar to Real Sociedad, Real Madrid have 2 players attack the front zone – Bale to create space for Ramos who attacks the zone between the 4 players in the diamond. Benzema will arc to the back post while Pepe attacks the space inside the back post at 6m.

Sociedad set up with 5 players staggered across the 6m line but not really in a cohesive shape to defend and inswing corner, with 1 player covering between the post and 6m.

The distance that Ramos and Pepe run from, will give them a huge power advantage when they go to meet the ball in the air, while Bale is explosive enough to accelerate and jump with a 5m run to the zone he will attack.



Ramos wins the header easily as Bale drags away the marker. The body shape of the Sociedad defenders doesn't allow them to match the running jump that the attackers

have advantage of due to the deep position and distance of the run, giving Ramos enough pace to out-jump everyone.

As there is nobody on the back post, Sociedad have nobody to clear off the line with the GK too close to the front post. Madrid have James in a deep position diagonal from the corner incase the ball is flicked out and away from goal.

### Ramos 2<sup>nd</sup> chance



Similar to the goal, Bale, Pepe and Ramos make the same runs, but Sociedad have adjusted the way they set up, now with 5 players across the 6m line, with a player covering the front zone who will protect the post and come out to win anything between 6m and goal line.



Similar to the goal scored by Ramos previously, he gets a clear run and jump on his opponent and narrowly misses to the far post. Sociedad have nobody with the correct



starting body position to challenge, while the run between 2 players results in confusion as to who takes responsibility for the marking.

For teams playing against Real Madrid, Ramos loves to attack the space front zone space and heading to the back post (ie Champions League final) , so to prevent scoring opportunities Ramos needs to be tracked and blocked from getting within 8m of goal, while keeping a player in position to clear anything towards the back post.

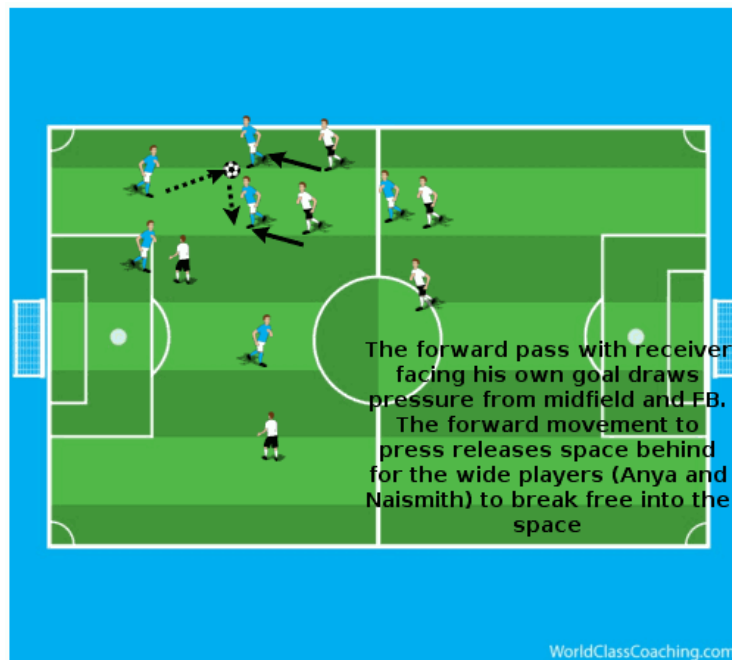
For Real Madrid, the warning signs existed from the 1<sup>st</sup> corner, they should've adapted to ensure coverage of the back post zone where the 2<sup>nd</sup> ball was the target for Sociedad.

# Scotland Game Plan vs Germany

Scotland went into the game against newly crowned World Champions, Germany on the back of a 6 game unbeaten run. New coach Gordon Strachan has assembled a team with a solid work ethic who can follow out his tactical instructions against stronger opposition and win, as shown by home and away victories over Croatia. The set up of the Scotland team has changed drastically over the past 18 months, with the re-introduction of high pressing, a more offensive game plan and the use of Steven Naismith as a CF, who likes to drop off and roam, leaving space for more movement across the front line from midfielders and wingers.

In this match v Germany, we saw another side to the 'new Scotland'; a clear coherent game plan designed to use Germany's ideals against them. Scotland wanted to direct the game to Germany's left and Scotland's right, trying to keep the 'space invader' Thomas Muller from being able to have an impact from the right, while trying to win the ball on the right and leaving a 2v1 on the far side in Scotland's favour if it was switched, to release the rapid Ikecha Anya down the left in transition while maintaining defensive balance with Whittaker covering behind at left back.

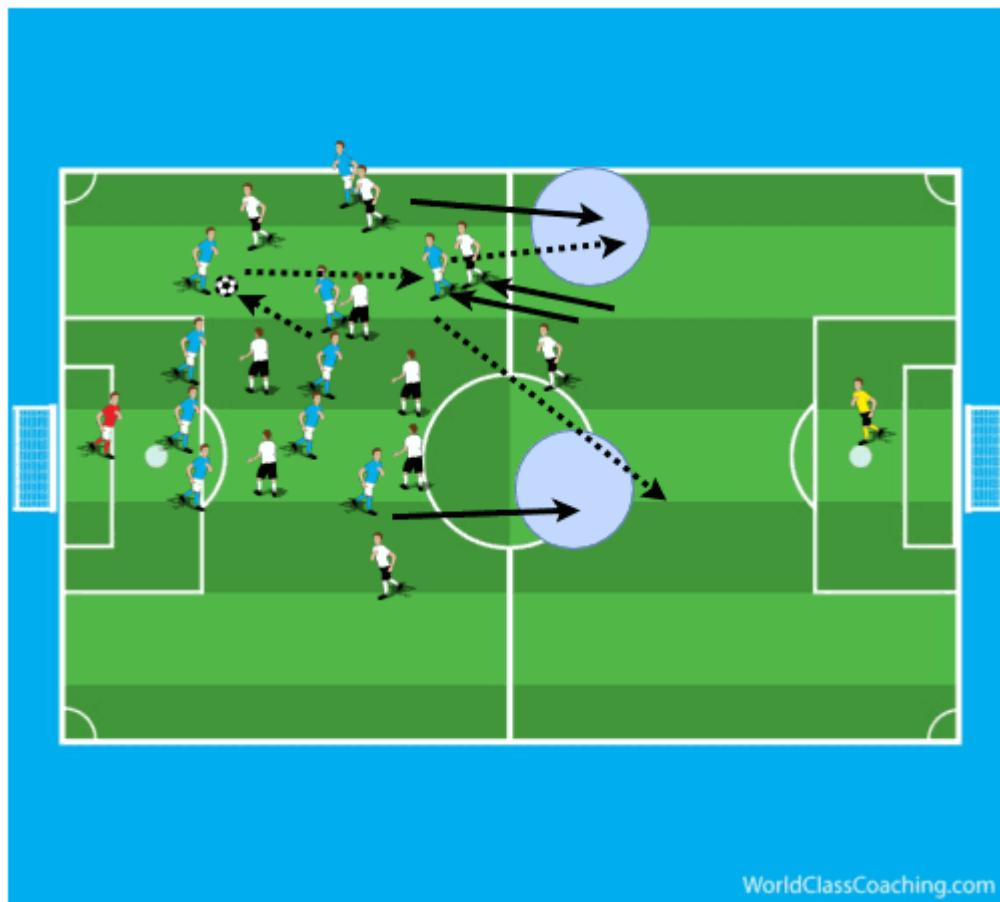
## **Scotland using Germany's pressing against them**



When the ball was won, Scotland would often try to play 2 or 3 quick passes before going forward. Traditionally, Scotland would regain the ball and instantly go forward, but this wouldn't work very often against Germany. Why? Germany are better than Scotland at defensive transitions than Scotland are in attacking transitions from 'base' positions.

To get away from Germany in attacking transition, Scotland needed to draw Germany away from the 'base' position to press (as they usually do) then find a way to attack the spaces they leave to press.

### **Using a rondo to evade pressure and counter attack**

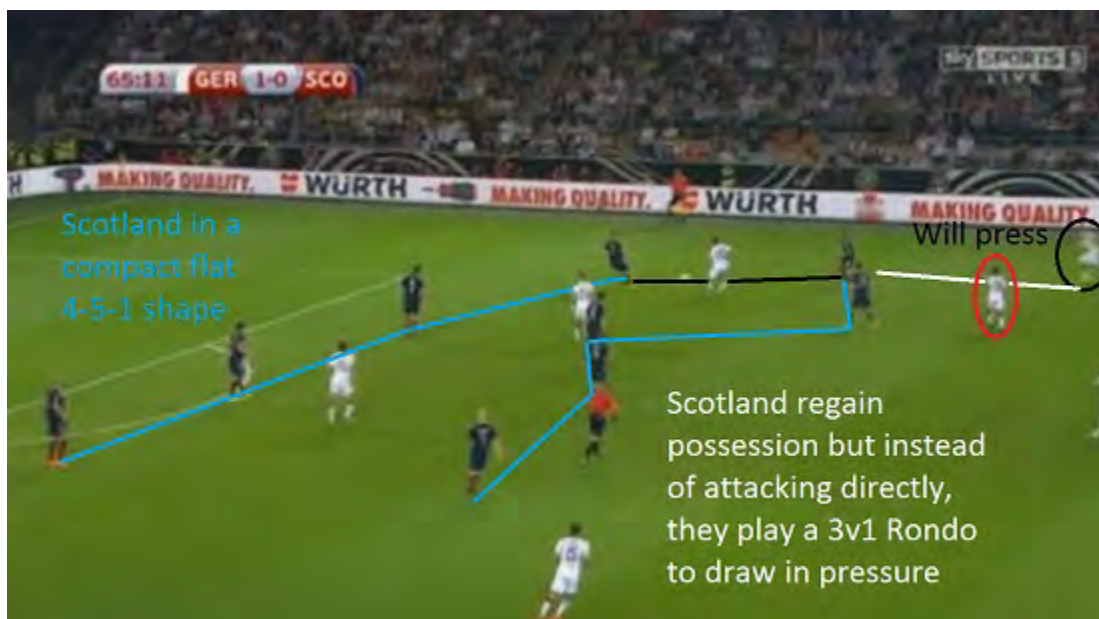


Scotland would often play 2-3 passes before attempting to go forward. In the 1st half it broke down as Naismith isn't a natural back-to-goal player, so in the 2nd half, with the introduction of Steven Fletcher, Scotland now had a player who is comfortable in receiving with pressure from behind as a target man, and is creative enough to find runners behind the defence.

As the ball was to be played forward, he would drop in, dragging the man-marking CB with him, leaving a huge space either side of the covering CB as the FB went to press and other is advanced.

If Anya could get away from his marker after he was pressed, he could have a chance at getting behind the Germany defence and be through on goal, while Naismith could support from the right.

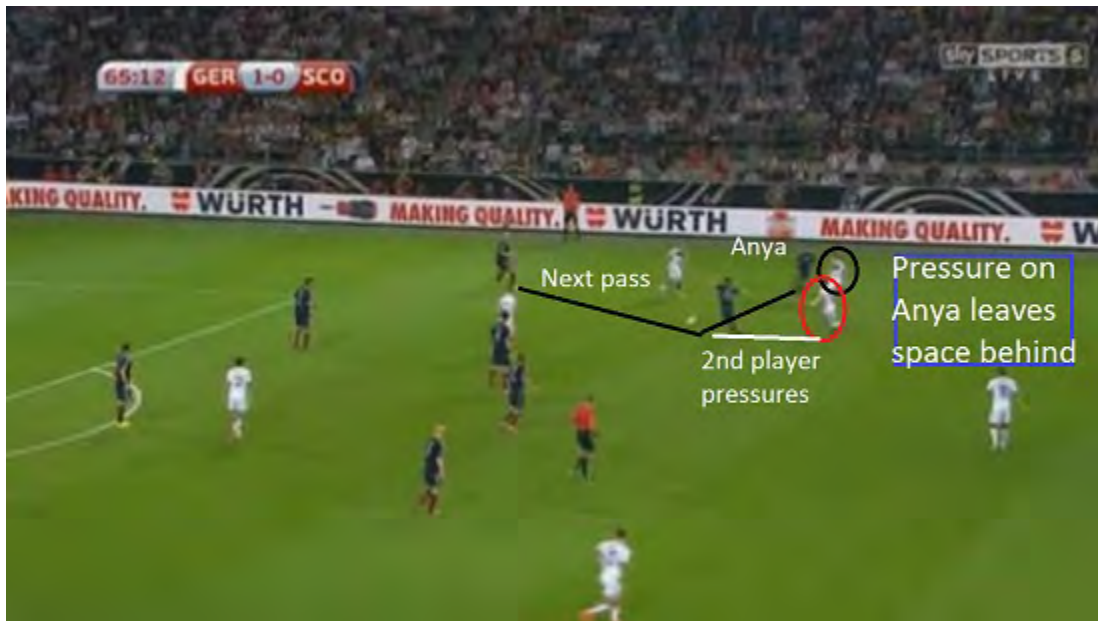
### Scotland's equalizing goal; Anya via Fletcher



The ball is regained by Scotland, and they quickly are under pressure from Germany. As the 2 receivers have their back to goal, Germany have a pressing trigger to close them down quickly. Scotland use this to their advantage as the FB stays spare for the eventual pass back.

The key to this attack is that the FB (Black Circle) presses Anya as he receives, leaving space behind. The 2nd player (red circle), will press anything central, again leaving space behind.

## Scotland create the space to attack



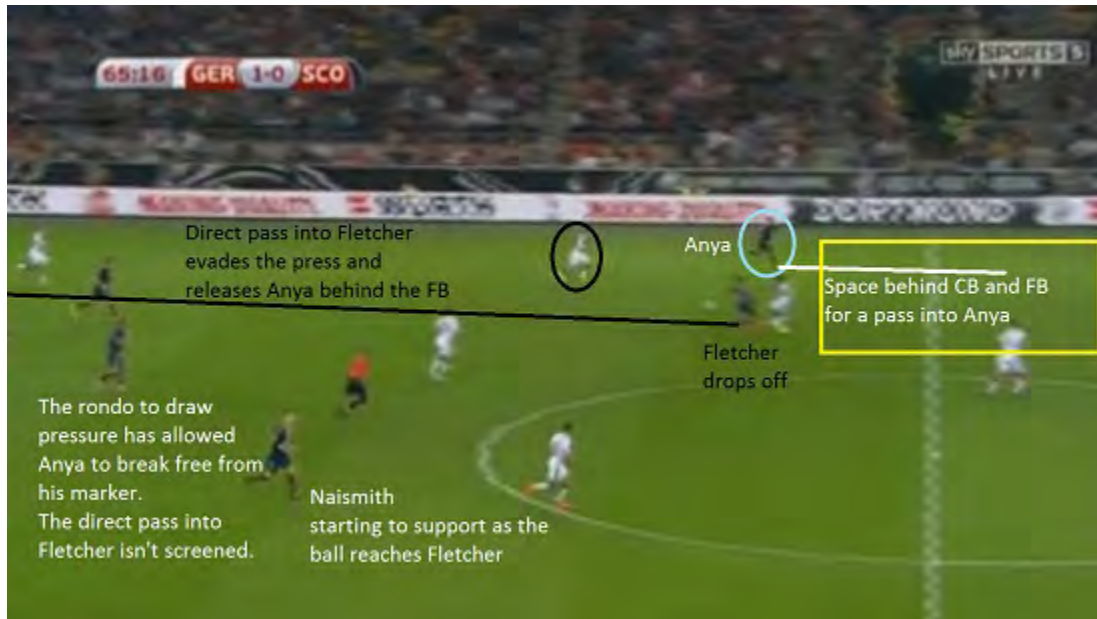
Now that both players who were covering positions are drawn forward, Scotland have more space to use to attack from – both pressing players aren't set to drop back and block the forward passes.

## Releasing the attackers after the pressure is drawn



With the 2nd pass, Goetze is drawn in to press. This opens up space that he covered which screened the forward pass to Fletcher. Now that the FB has moved inside and possibly trying to cover the pass into Fletcher, Anya is free from him and able to break ahead of Fletcher. Naismith is ready.

### **Fletcher draws out the CB and releases more space for Anya to attack behind FB & CB**



As Fletcher drops off and receives, he is marked, which is what he wants; the space left behind is for Anya to attack, while Fletcher tries to find the pass into him on the left.

Naismith is trying to get forward but won't win the race to attack the other side, so will arrive late.

## Anya goes to goal



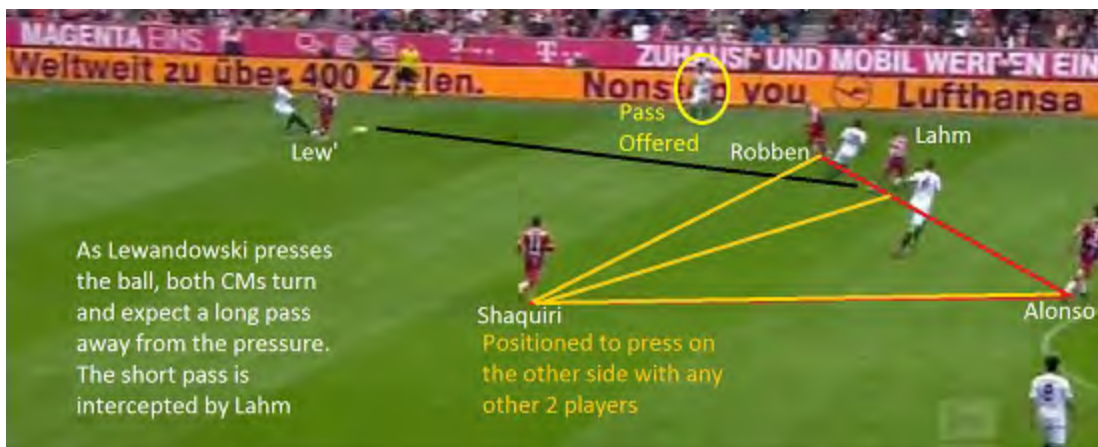
Fletcher takes a good touch away from his marker then releases the pass that Scotland have been looking for all game – Anya behind the advanced FB and run to goal, which he scores from.

Scotland's game plan in the game was undone by 2 pieces of instinctive finishing from Thomas Muller, but the overall game process was excellent and show signs that Scotland may be a force in Euro 2016 qualifying.

# Bayern Pressing and Direct Attacking

Bayern Munich under Guardiola have changed significantly since the treble winning team under Jupp Heynckes, but one thing which has returned this season is the direct passes over the top of a defence in attacking transition. This was an aspect missing last season but with Xabi Alonso, David Alaba, Xherdan Shaquiri able to play accurate passes over 40m, and players able to run behind a defence in Robert Lewandowski, Arjen Robben and Mario Goetze, they have the ability to do so.

## **Pressing results in regain and instant forward pass resulting in a goal**



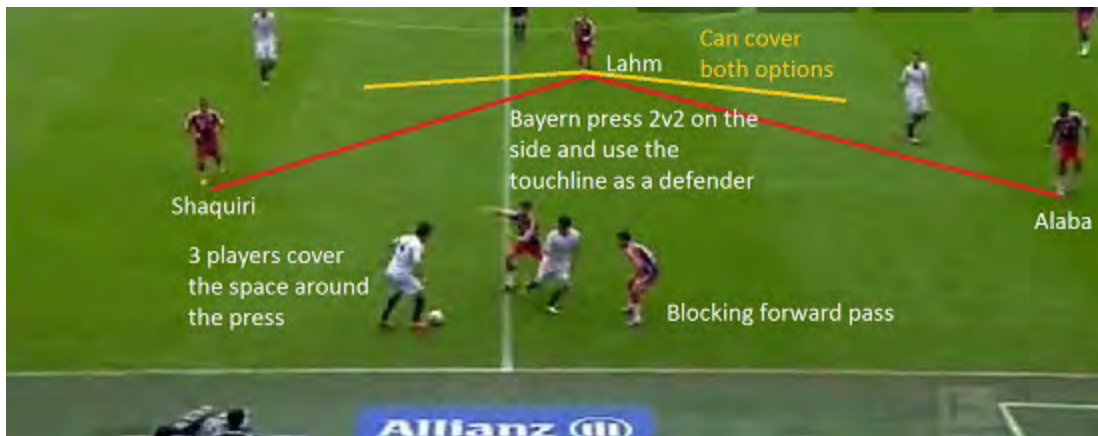
As Bayern press from the front, Bayern like to make play predictable. Here they leave the pass to the full back available but as the CB is under pressure, both CM's turn and move away to recover the expected loose ball. Instead, the CB recognises the offered pass, but makes a bad decision to pass short into the Bayern press.

Shaquiri is in position to treble up with any of Robben and Lahm or Lahm and Alonso for any loose balls played into the line of Robben, Lahm and Alonso. This can block any exits to the far side.

The ball is recovered by Lahm from the CB's pass, resulting in a goal for Lewandowski.



## Pressing on the side results in loose ball recovery and direct switch to attack the full back

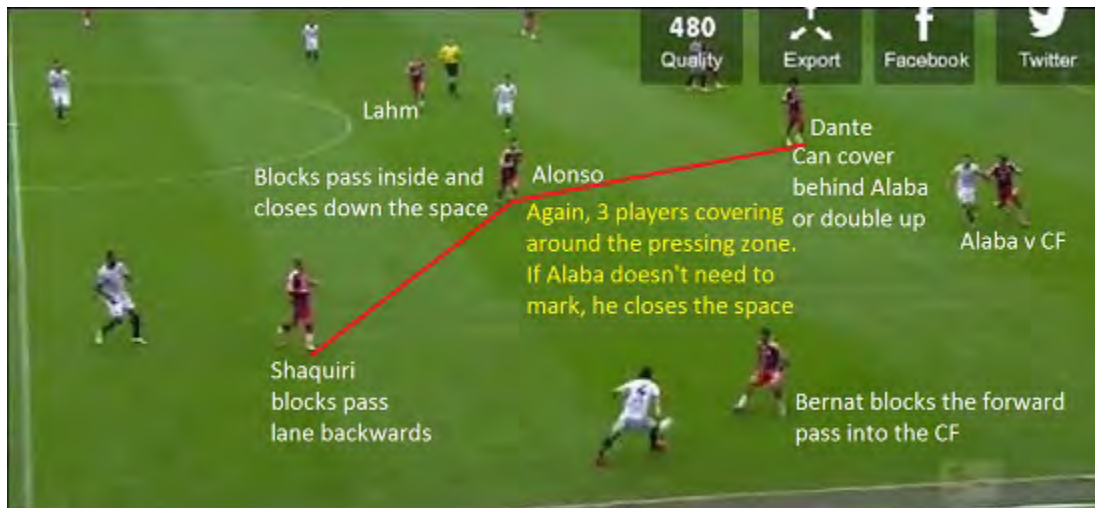


Around the pressure area, Bayern always cover around the zone with at least 3 players, covering all exits and giving a good chance at recovering the ball. Here, the pass inside is intercepted by Lahm.



Lahm turns after intercepting the ball and instantly looks for the diagonal long pass over the defence and into the run of Robben on the far side, resulting in a shot at goal.

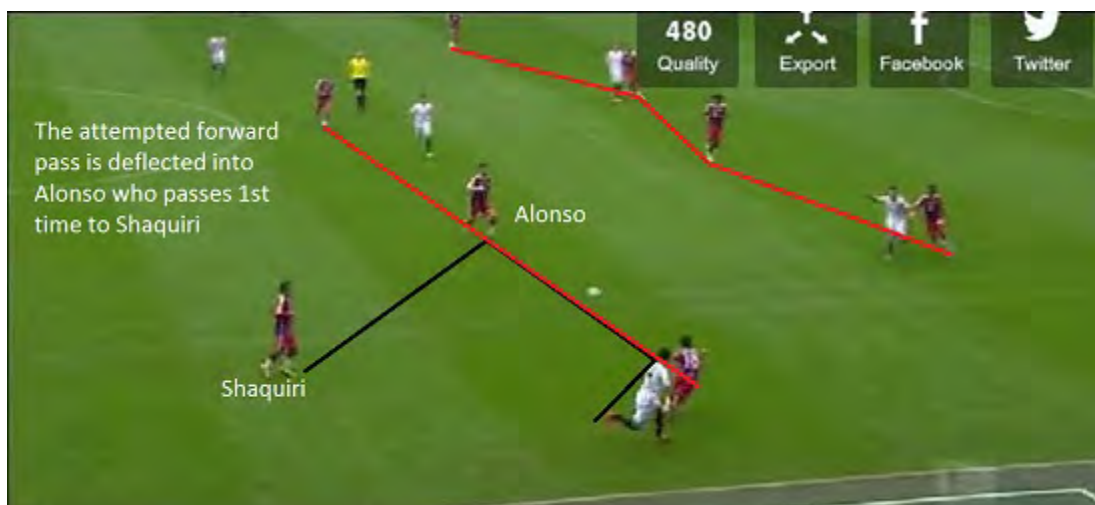
## Space coverage around the 1v1 results in goal from direct pass over the defence



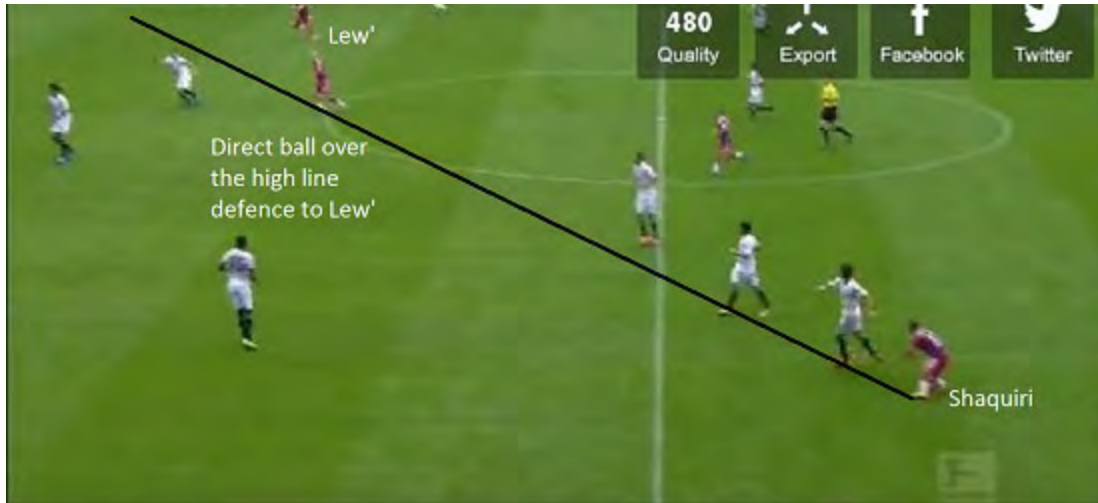
Bernat presses the ball and gives little space, forcing the FB into a fast decision – he tries to pass through Bernat and into the CF who is marked by Alaba.

As Bernat and Alaba are marking, Bayern have 3 players spare around the ball who are spare and can recover loose balls – Dante can double press anything on the blind side of the CF or cover Alaba if he is dragged away into the corner. Alonso blocks the central pass while closing down the space to cut inside to, while Shaquiri blocks the backwards passing lane, and can close down the space.

### Alonso recovers the ball to give to Shaquiri



The forward pass is blocked, and bounces to Alonso, who is the only player who can recover the ball. He gives Shaquiri more time to make the forward pass by releasing 1st time.



Shaquiri has enough time to take a touch then drill a pass over the top of the defence for Lewandowski who is already on the move. He takes a touch to control before scoring.

### **Positioning in counter-pressing results in goal from space of displaced centre back**



Robben in a wide area will regularly play 1v1 diagonally to attack the goal and shoot, or he often looks to pass horizontally into the half space where an opponent player is tempted to leave position to press.

As the player presses, they leave a space in their defensive unit, allowing Bayern to counter-press and attack the space created by using the pressure against the opposition.

To set up the counter-press, a player must directly be in position of where the ball will be lost and then double press to regain v that player; here, Pizarro (yellow circle).

### Using the counter-press to set up a scoring chance



As Rode covers behind Pizarro who has decided to move, Rode is the recovery player who will pass 1st time forward to Pizarro. From here, Bayern want to attack the half space where the CB has pressed from.



As the ball is recovered, Rode passes forward quickly and Bayern go to goal and exploit the space.

## Pizarro creates the space needed for Robben to score



As Robben attacks the FB and displaced CB, Pizarro makes extra space by making a diagonal run to offer a pass through the pressing players. This would result in a pass across goal, so the CB goes with him, leaving a huge space in front of goal which Robben uses and scores.

I feel that Bayern using more direct passes over the defence, especially in transition from the midfield zone will result in more scoring chances, and in this game they showed that Robert Lewandowski is a player who will benefit from a more direct style of play, similar to Dortmund.

# Arsenal's Terrible Defending v Anderlecht

Arsenal have been notoriously bad defensively for several years, but this looked to be changing in the past 18 months, Laurent Koscielny and Per Mertesacker becoming a solid partnership at the back as both players strengths complement each other's weaknesses. In this game v Anderlecht, recognised 2nd choice left full back Nacho Monreal played at Centre Back with Per Mertesacker, in what was always destined to be a horror pairing, and so it turned out to be.

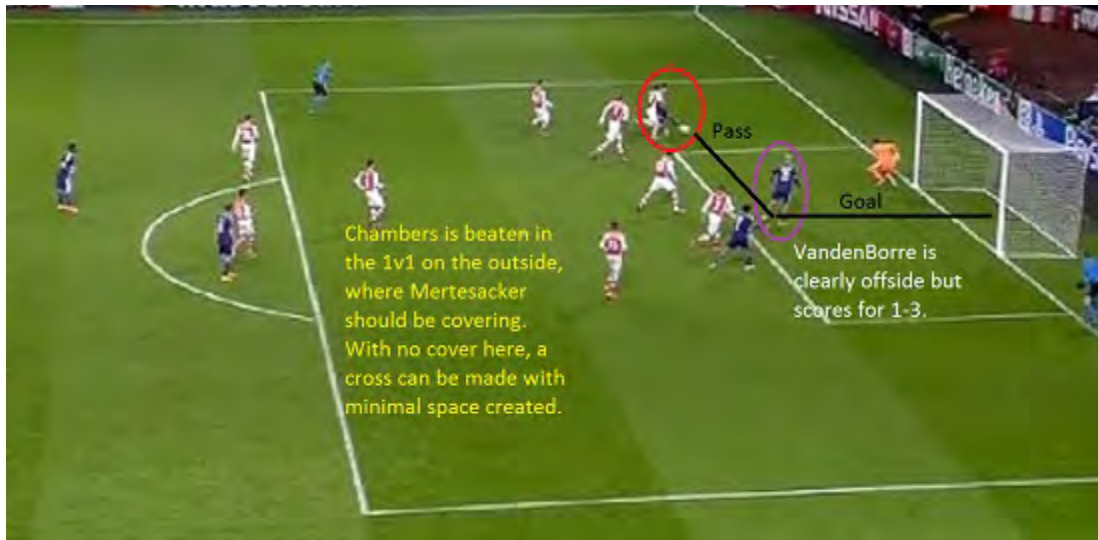
From the 1st whistle, neither player looked comfortable with the pairing, and in the 1st half, Anderlecht could've easily scored 3 goals, while Arsenal tore into a 2-0 HT lead.

In the 2nd half, Arsenal made it 3 through some excellent pressure in the Anderlecht half, but no more than 3 minutes later, it was 3-1 then 3-2, before the game ended 3-3 with an 89th minute goal.

## **Anderlecht 1st goal; Chambers 1v1 with no cover around him leads to offside goal conversion**

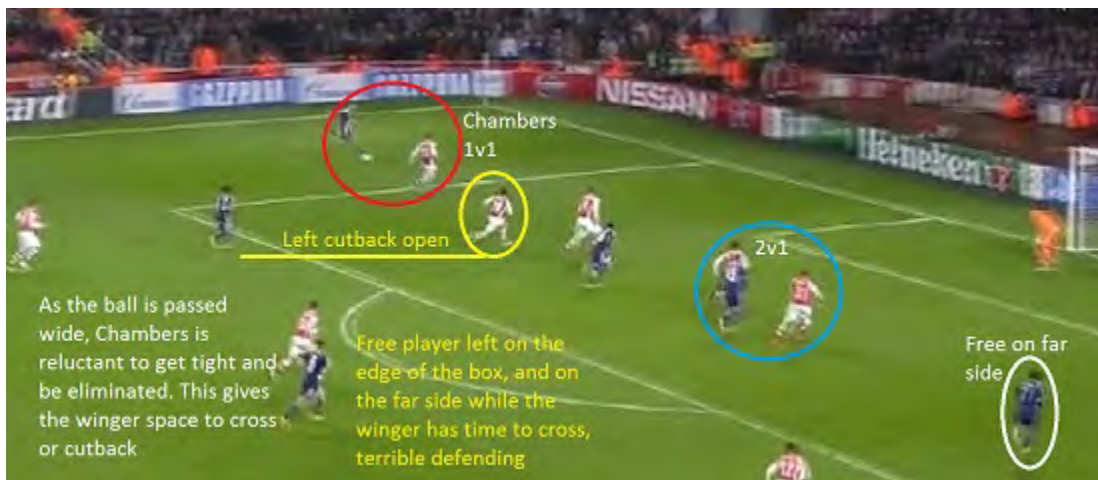


Calum Chambers is a decent centre back, and almost definitely a better centre back than right back. One of the reasons for this is that he is a poor 1v1 defender and lacks pace to recover when the attacker slips away from him. In this situation, Mertesacker (white rectangle) needs to drop off 1m-2m and give some cover to the expected dribble outside to cross. If this happens, the cross can be stopped or cut out before the front post.



As Mertesacker doesn't provide cover behind Chambers, the cross is allowed to be made. Despite the goal scorer being clearly offside, the attack should have been stopped before the ball reaches that position. If VandenBorre is not in this position, I think that the ball would've reached the far post and been scored as Gibbs does not know where his man is.

### **Anderlecht cutback chance – no midfield protection**

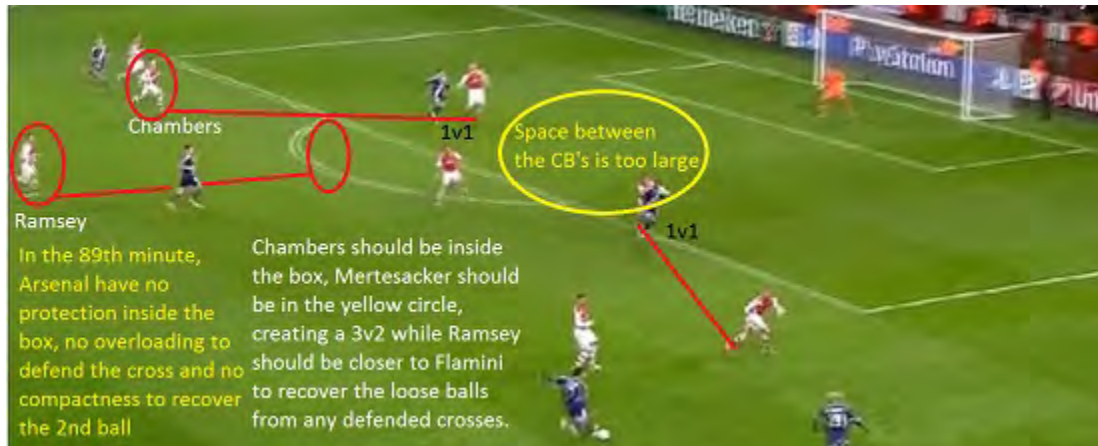


Aside from the lack of positional accuracy and organisation inside the box, the midfield didn't give the defence much protection, and this was evident throughout the match. In this example, Flamini runs needlessly into a position between Mertesacker and Chambers, while Chambers doesn't want to get too tight as he is liable to be eliminated.

As the winger has time on the ball, and Flamini is in a terrible position to defend against a pass, there are 2 options; cross to the far post or to cut-back to the edge of the box. If

Mertesacker was in a narrower position, closer to the front zone, this would free up Gibbs to play in the far post zone, able to attack a cross into 2 players.

### Anderlecht 3rd goal



In the 89th minute, when you have lost a 3 goal lead, the game needs to be closed up. The back 4 stay compact and connected, the midfield provide protection and you force the opposition to break you down or play low percentage passes into the defence where you have a high chance of a regain to stop the attack (Jose Mourinho style).

Instead, Arsenal don't do this, they stay open, and leave spaces all over the field. Here, there is no pressure on the player in possession, no protection of the goal – you need overloads here – and the far side FB is so far away from the 2nd CB that this means the whole back 4 is disconnected, resulting in 1v1s against the CBs. Ramsey needs to be closer to Flamini to help him cover more of the space between the CB's and to track the runner into the box. Anything loose is easier to be recovered if there are two players rather than one.





As the cross comes into the space between Mertesacker and Monreal, Mitrovic wins the header and scores as Szczesny comes off of his line – reducing his reaction time to save the header – as Monreal is nowhere near close enough to have dealt with the cross as the 1st CB as the 2nd CB deals with the attacker 1v1.

This is a common trait of Arsenal in the past few years and is largely what stops them from getting close to winning the league or progressing to the last 8 or last 4 of the Champions League.

# Creativity to Create Goalscoring Chance

One element in tactical development is the ability of players to do the unexpected to open up scoring chances. Tactics allow for the team to have a structured playing style which leads into a game process to find a way to win a game, but often a game is won by players in attacking areas making a chance to score from a piece of inspired play, often in tight situations.

## **Origi creates a chance for Chadli**



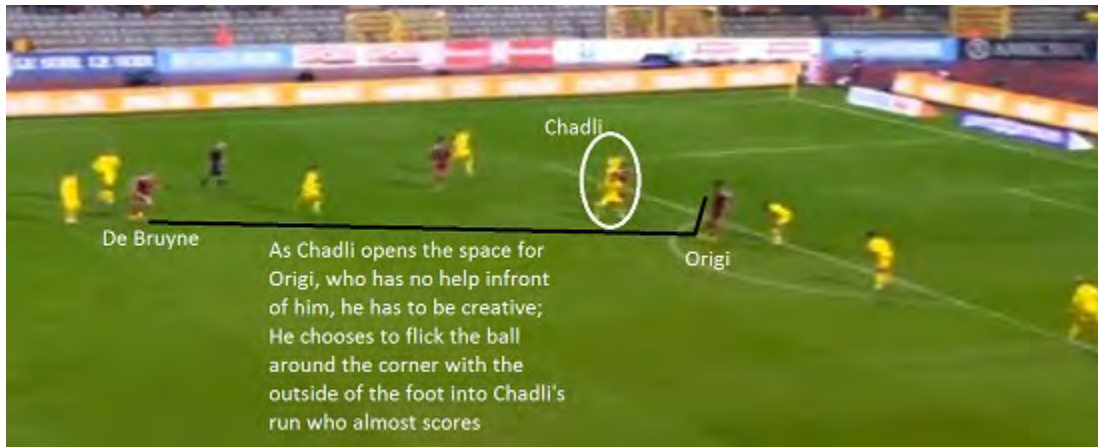
De Bruyne dribbles inside to look for a diagonal pass into the feet of a player between the lines or into the last line of the defence. As he has Fellaini and Chadli in front but marked or screened, space needs to be created.

## **Chadli makes the space for Origi to receive**



Chadli is marked between the lines, so drifts to the side of the ball, with his marker, creating a passing lane into the feet of the striker, Origi. As Origi drops in, Chadli will look to go behind.

### **Origi's creativity finds the final pass to create a scoring chance**



As Origi drops, Chadli is on the run beyond the defence. He expects that he has pressure from behind so passes quickly with an outside of the foot flick to add spin onto the ball to roll in front of Chadli behind the defence. The CB stays away as he must be expecting Origi to take a touch, then force him back and away from goal, then get the defensive line higher up.

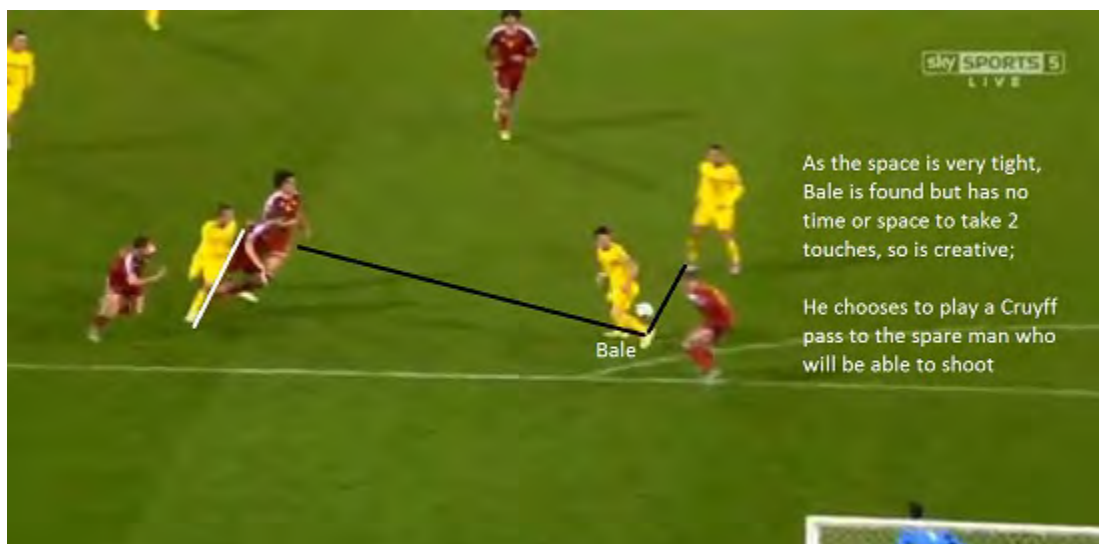
Instead, Origi's 1st touch is perfect and takes out the defence, but Chadli' misses his chance to score.

## Bale creativity to create a scoring chance



From a long ball, Bale knocks it down then peels away from his marker, his team mate recovers the ball but is in a tight 3v1 situation, and must release the ball. How can a scoring chance be made?

## Bale finds the spare man in a shooting position with a Cruyff Pass



As the pass is made, Bale has to release the ball with one touch, as he has no time for 2. He reacts quickly and uses his high technical level to find a Cruyff pass to the spare man who has a chance to shoot from 20m, which results in a good shot on target which Courtois does well to save.

In this 0-0 against 2 well organised defences, the way through the defence was coming from a piece of unexpected flair to create a scoring chance, from both Origi and Bale.

In tactical development, coaches should embrace the players who have flair and can do the unexpected as these are the players who can win a game for the team from nothing.

## Lack of Defensive Cover in the Midfield

In the last few seasons, Arsenal have tried to play a possession and pressing system, but often with massive instability, mainly through Mikel Arteta's bad decision making at the bottom of the midfield triangle when deciding to press (and often foul) or drop off.

As he was always more of a controlling central midfielder than a deep playmaker in the #6 position, adjusting to this position in an attacking sense has been a lot easier than the defensive aspects needed for the role, such as pressing, covering, screening passes into strikers, tracking runners and offering protection to centre backs.

In the recent game against Manchester United, the lack of stability in the Arsenal midfield out of possession was again evident, particularly when pressing, and often with no stability around or behind the pressing zone.

**Example; Rooney's goal for 2-0 in the 86th minute**



In this image, the ball is rebounded to the central midfielder. Above the dotted line, there is only 1 player able to confront the ball carrier and delay play, and not from a weak side position. This dictates that the press is not possible and the deepest players in the vicinity should simply retreat into deep positions and not allow the ball into the gaps behind the players in the pressing vicinity.

Ideally, the team in defensive transition (black) will drop off and track the runners, and get as many people into a defensive shape 40m-30m from goal then become organised.



Instead, Arsenal presses with no stability behind the press. If there was an opportunity to press, there would be 2 covering players along the dotted red line, covering the exit routes away from pressure. As there are no players covering, the pass behind the press results in a 2v1.

This has been a common feature for the best part of 3 seasons and until Arsenal can become co-ordinated in the pressing actions, they will not get anywhere near winning the Premier League or Champions League.

## Positioning Behind the Ball in Attacking Phases



When attacking a low block, there needs to be small distances to retain possession and provoke the defence to come out and press to leave space. This also applied to when the ball is lost, particularly against a team with fast players on the sides, players like Angel Di Maria.

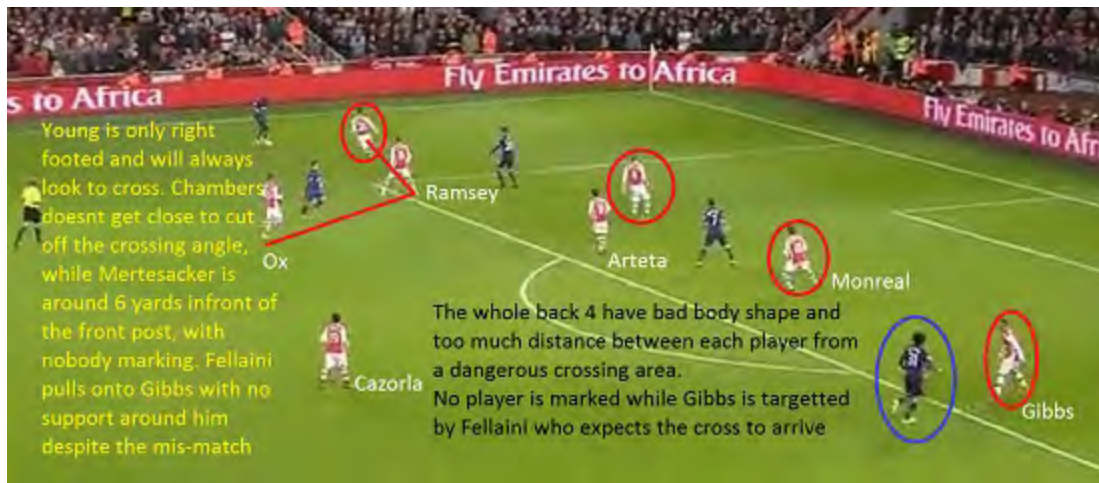


Here, Arsenal lose the ball and have 4 players forward, both full backs high and wide, and no cover in central midfield. As the ball is thrown wide, Arsenal have no protection in central midfield, Di Maria is in the space of the advanced full back so as the long throw is made, Gibbs cannot recover and Arteta is well out of position. As Di Maria receives, he can dribble 1v1 or pass inside and have a clear run through the centre at Arsenal's exposed centre backs – neither of whom are comfortable with a high line.



In the offensive phase, Arteta should be covering behind the ball and be able to anticipate when he will be needed 2 passes ahead of time, and be able to see where the danger will come from if the ball is lost. He doesn't, and as a result Manchester United have a clear counter attack.

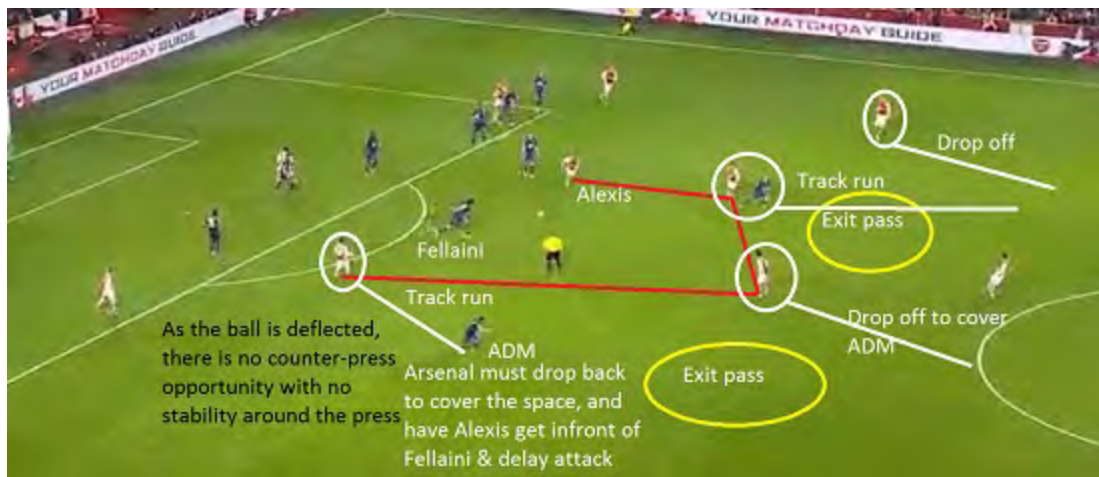
### No Marking or prioritization of danger when dealing with wide attacks



Arsenal know that Ashley Young is only going to cut back and cross, and will likely look for Fellaini. As no Arsenal player has the correct body shape to see the movements of each attacker or each other, they have no idea that Gibbs is left with Fellaini and no help around him.

Arteta's position is between the CB's who are too far apart; Mertesacker is worried about the reverse pass to Van Persie and wants to get over and press – this should be Ramseys job – while neither Arteta or Monreal mark Di Maria. Monreal really needs to be closer to Gibbs, so Arteta should take Di Maria while Ox can cover the edge of the box with Cazorla. As this happens, the cross to the back post is made, Szczesny comes out to attack the ball and can only make a small punch, Valencia arrives untracked and blasts the ball across goal which Gibbs turns in. This would often be regarded as 'unlucky' but this is the sort of soft goal Arsenal lose regularly through a lack of defensive positioning and organisation between players.

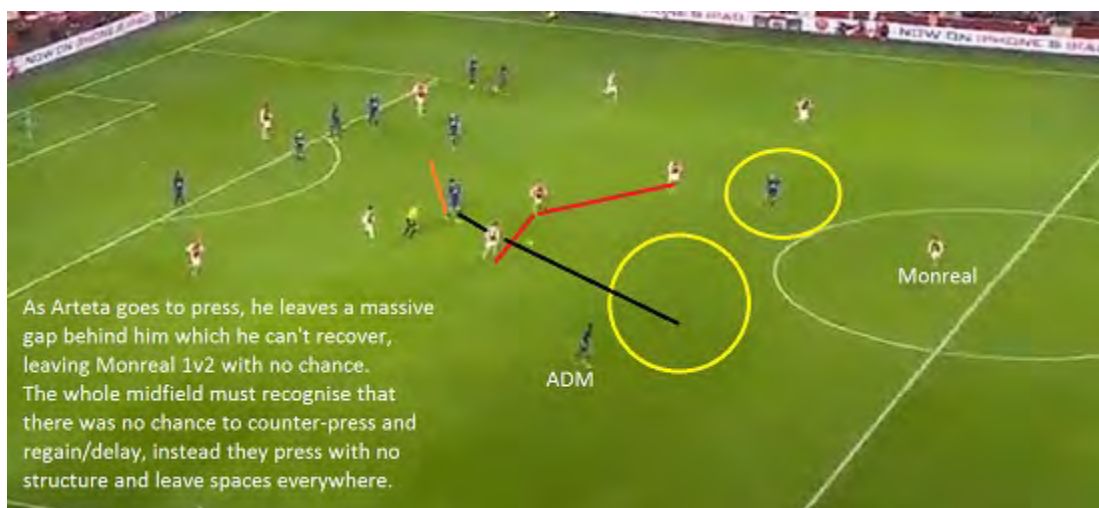
## Pressing when unstable around the pressing zone



As the image at the top shows, there is no way that an effective counter-press can be made here, with 2 clear exit routes for Fellaini. As Fellaini regains the ball, he can wait to see the defensive action of each Arsenal player before choosing his pass.

If they all press; he will release behind short and to feet, an easy pass. If they drop off; he has a more difficult ball over the top which may have more pressure when receiving on the side and with cover inside from Arsenal.

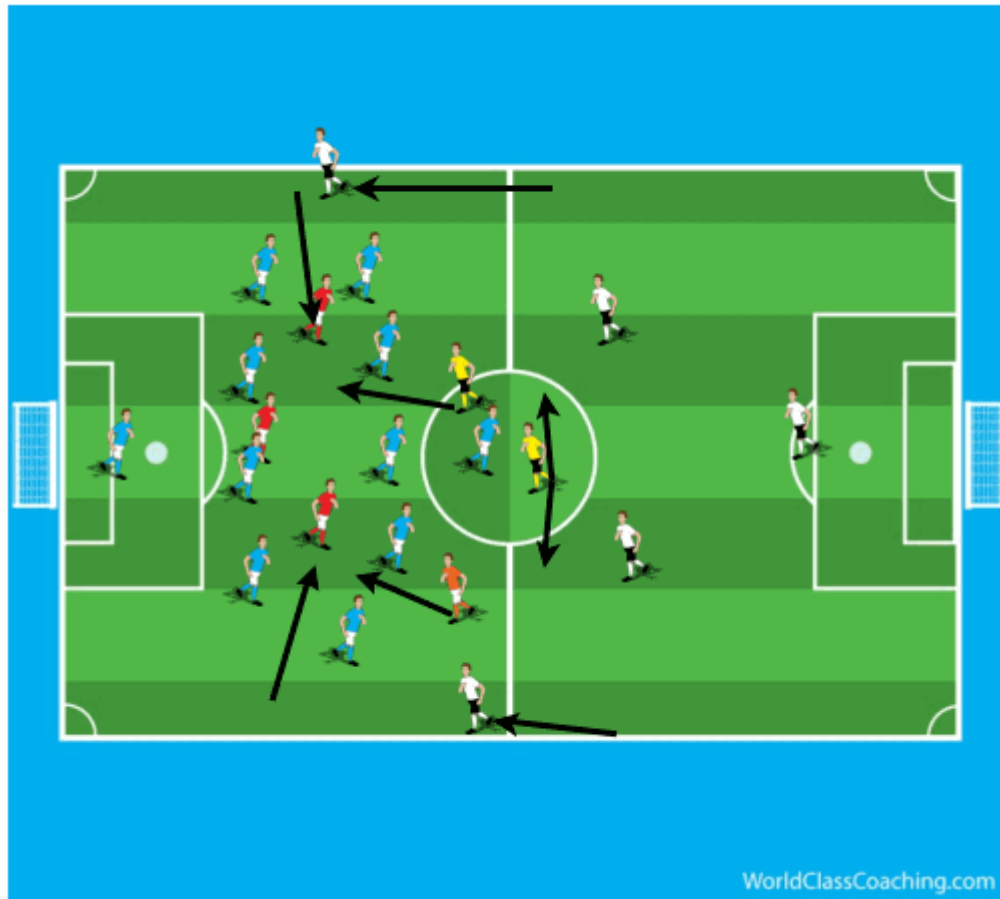
Arsenal press with no stability around or behind the press, leaving themselves open to a 2v1.



Overall, Mikel Arteta may have a high pass completion rate but his decision making when to press or to drop off is a large reason why Arsenal have looked so poor out of

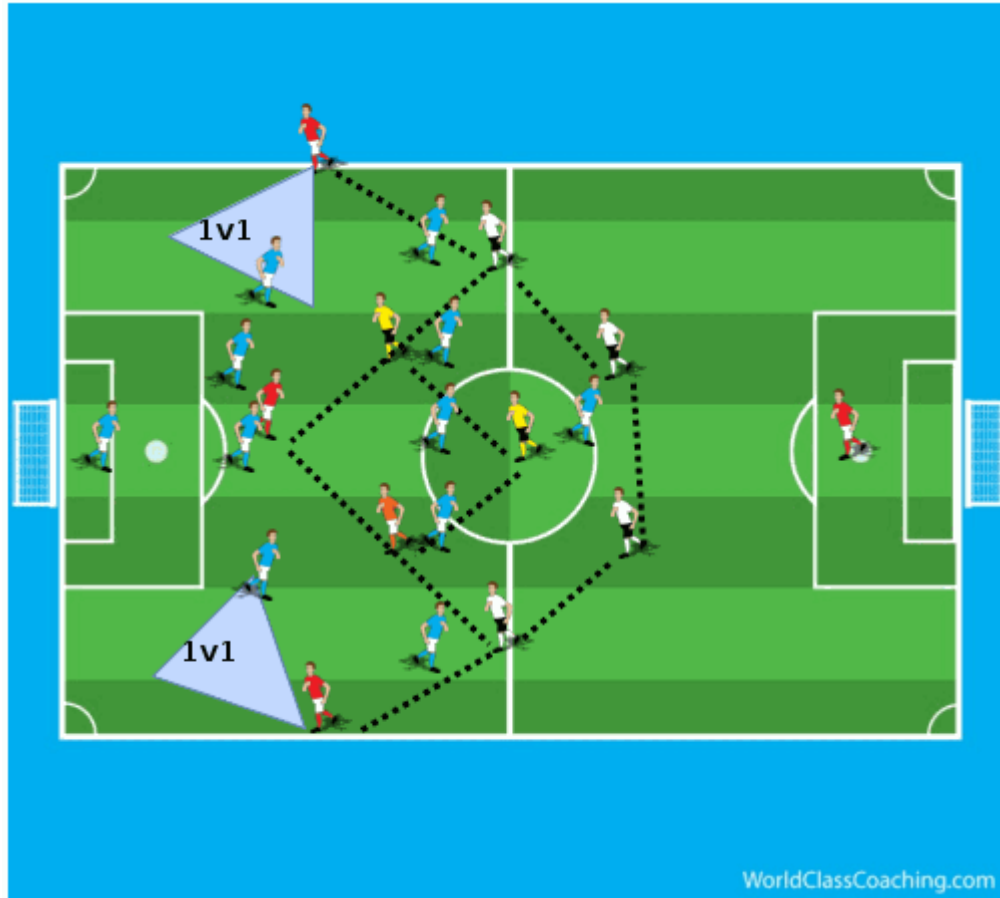
possession for a long time, and until the tactical system is adapted to protect the defence better, Arsenal will struggle in big games.

# Bayern Munich's Positioning in Midfield



## **Bayern initial set up – 4-2-3-1/4-3-3 hybrid**

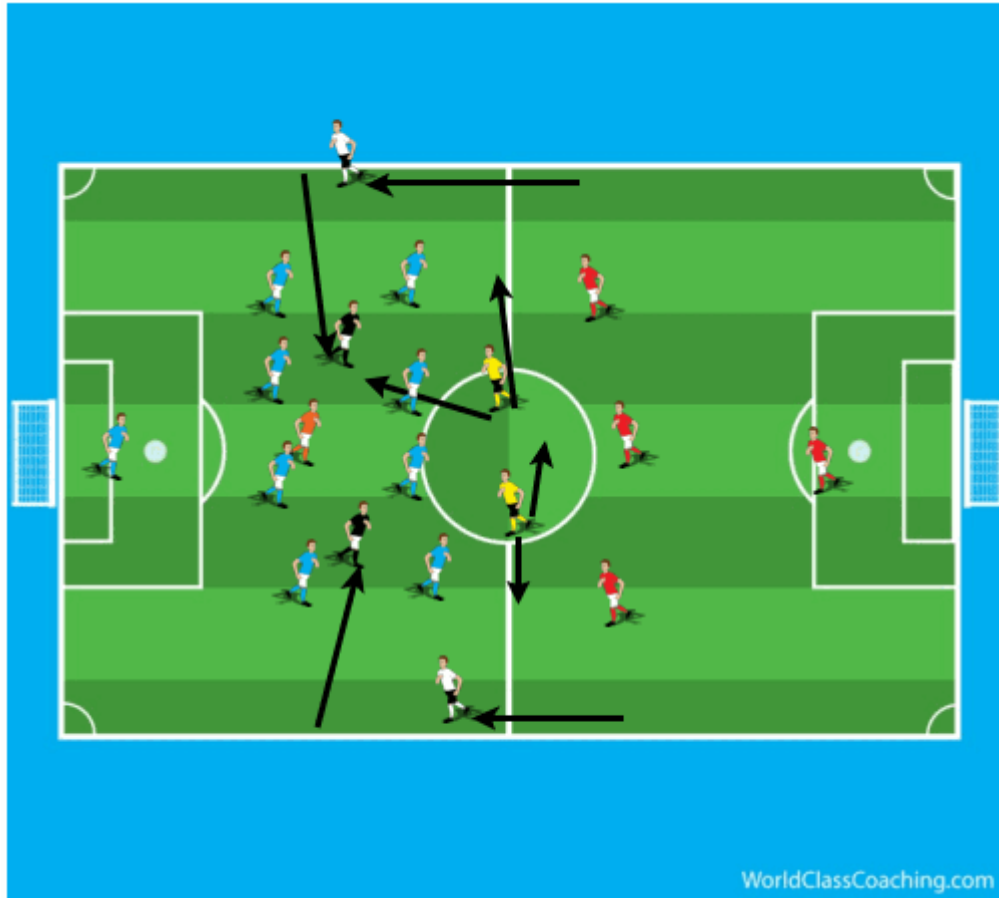
With Alonso (yellow) screening in front of the defence and playing laterally, this allows Rode (yellow) and Hojbjerg (orange) to be free to drift between the lines and support if Robben or Ribery (Red) stay wide. If they stay wide, Bernat/Rafinha stay deeper and tuck inside as inverted FB's and help overload centrally to look for forward passes through the defence.



### **Bayern 4-3-3 with 1v1 zones on the side and inverted full backs**

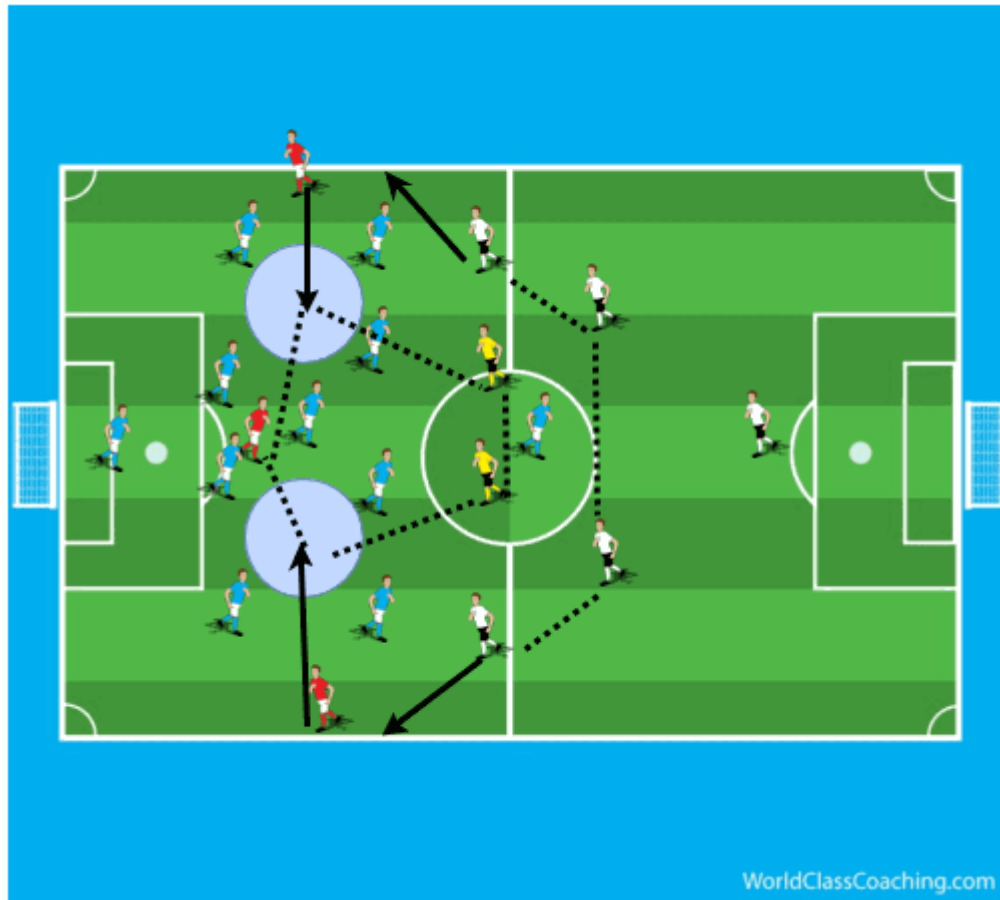
As Robben and Ribery are excellent 1v1 players, staying wide opens up a lot of space in

the centre, allowing Hojbjerg and Rode free to drift between the lines on the far side and offer supporting runs in the half spaces. As Bernat and Rafinha stay narrow, the back 4 are in set transition areas to counter-press or drop deep. Alonso can cover in front or between the CB's to make a back 3, 4 or 5.



If Alonso (red centre) dropped between the CBs as both FB's were high (white), then Rode and Hojbjerg would play in central midfield with Robben and Ribery (black) drifting between the lines as Lewandowski (orange) stays high, with the FBs on different lines – Bernat deeper on the left than Rafinha on the right.

## Bayern down to 10 men – 4-4-1 defence, 2-4-3 attack



When Bayern lost Benatia, Dante came on for Rode, so Bayern made a pentagonal central shape when the FBs could push high, and become a 2-2-4-1/2-4-3 formation, specifically looking to hit the spaces circled with Ribery and Robben asked to dribble and eliminate players using the outside players as a safety net to keep possession.

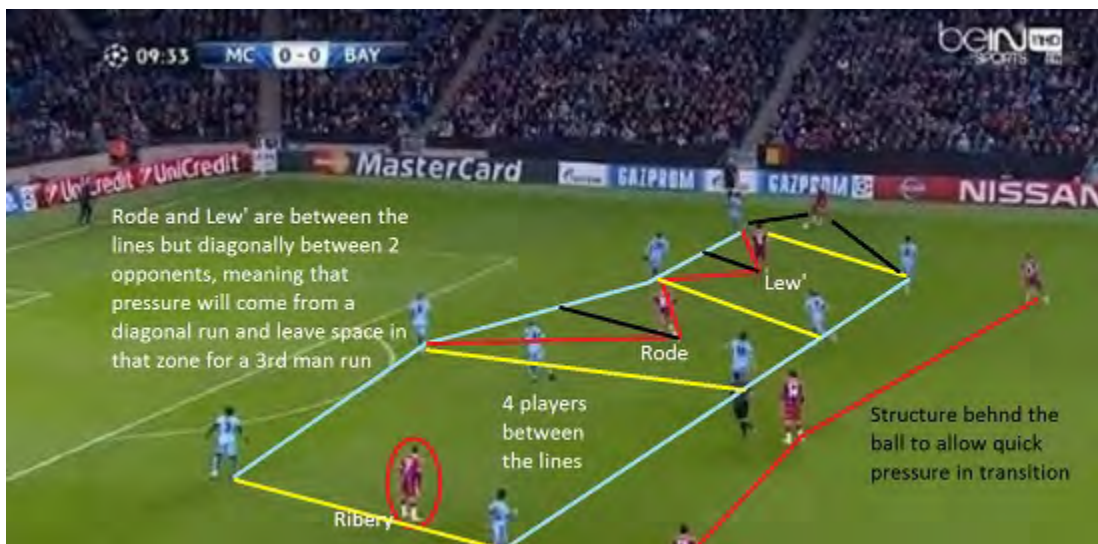
## Positioning between the lines



With the ball in the back line, we have Alonso dropping deep to receive in the central space, with Rode pulling wider to offer a pass into the half space in the channel to go direct to Robben with a straight pass. Hojbjerg offers a diagonal pass from the centre in the half space in the central zone.

Robben has a good partnership with Rafinha, and will offer a diagonal pass from Alonso with Rafinha likely to run behind to stretch the defence and given Robben time to dribble inside or pass behind.

## Players between the lines, diagonally between opponents

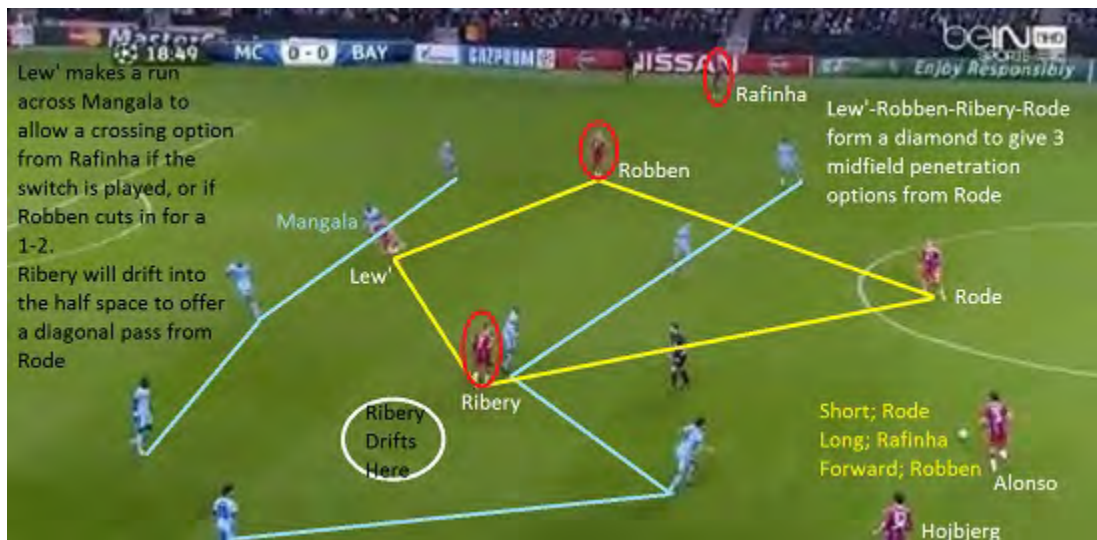




As Rafinha is in possession, he has 3 other team mates between the lines, all diagonally between opponents. This means that pressure comes from a diagonal run, leaving space which can be easily exploited with quick passes that evade pressure and particularly from blindside, 3rd man runs.

The 3 players behind the ball provide structure to allow for a counter-press, while being technically capable of playing in possession this close to the opponents, who will likely drop back as Rafinha passes inside.

### **Diamond structure from the centre of the field while offering penetration between the lines**

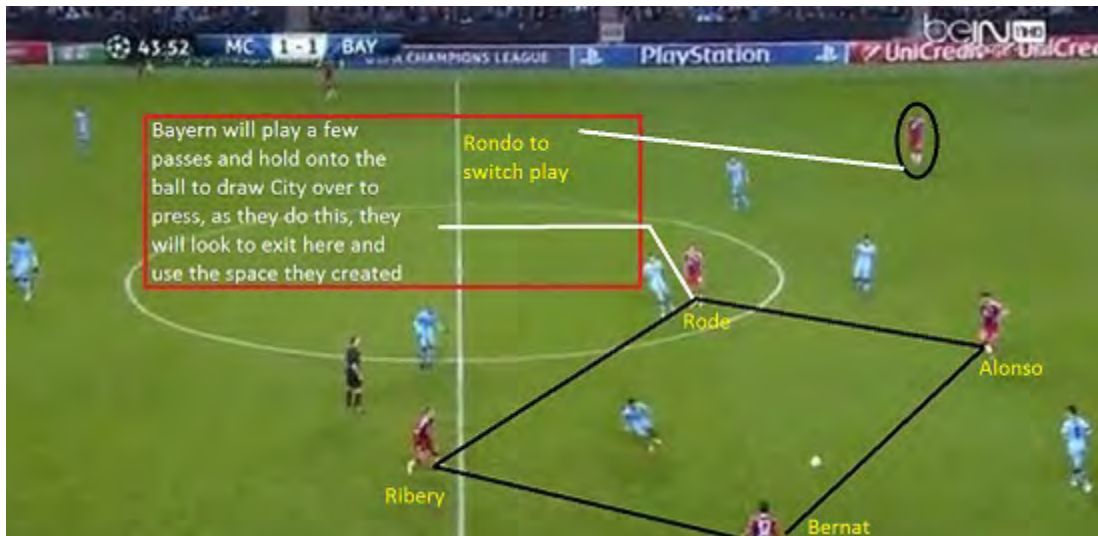


As Alonso is in possession in the channel, Rode occupies the centre with the best range of attacking passes available to him. Alonso has 3 clear options; a short pass to Rode, Long to Rafinha or forward to Robben via a chipped pass or between the central midfielders if he drifts inside a little more.

If the ball is switched, Lewandowski is already on the move to play on the blindside, leaving space for a 1-2 from Robben or if Rafinha receives, to give Robben more room to dribble into diagonally, or to offer a crossing option from Rafinha.

Ribery is already marked but if the ball is passed to Rode, he will drift into the gap circled, leaving a new passing angle into an area where Ribery's 1v1 ability can prove decisive.

## Lewandowski goal – Rondo to switch



With Benatia sent off, Bayern need to eliminate the extra man that City have while in possession. Here, they move the ball wide and play extra passes to draw over pressure, then switch to the far side. Here, Rode drifts away as the 3v2 is made, with Rode between the lines, City drop deeper. This leaves space for the switch to Boateng who receives and crosses for Lewandowski v Sagna who scores.

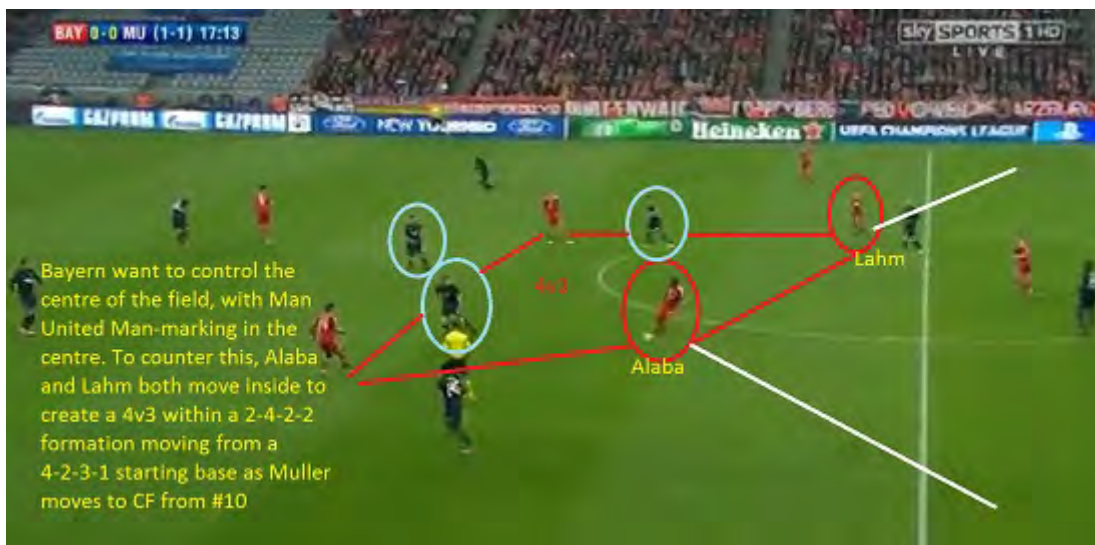
A key feature of Bayern's play is the positioning in the channels to receive and penetrate via the half spaces, while every player knows which zones need to be occupied to provide overloads centrally, while the distribution of Alonso and Boateng from deep, particularly into Ribery and Robben who has excellent dribbling abilities, which often prove decisive against tight defences.

Against Man City, their control of possession with 11v11 was to be expected, but with 10v11 it shows the level of bravery of Guardiola to continue looking for solutions and a way to score more goals.

## Playing with Inverted Full Backs

Positioning in modern football is a massive part of the success of a team, particularly in the development of an attacking game but also in ball conservation to defend, while defensive positioning has always been an important factor in a successful defensive unit. With Pep Guardiola (of whom regular blog readers will know I analyse his teams on a regular basis), his tactical innovations are changing the way the game is played and coached across all levels.

### **Inverted Full Backs to overload the centre and cover several zones with one player**



The full backs of Bayern – Alaba and Lahm – can both be played in central midfield and at full back in both attacking and defensive phases. This gives Guardiola so many more options but instead of being a traditional coach and using players in traditional roles, he has created a hybrid position for these players – an ‘inverted Full Back’ role, where in defensive phases, they retreat to defend the sides like regular full backs, but can also stay centrally to cover behind the counter-press, able to cover more zones from a position in the ‘channel’ as opposed to from the touchline.

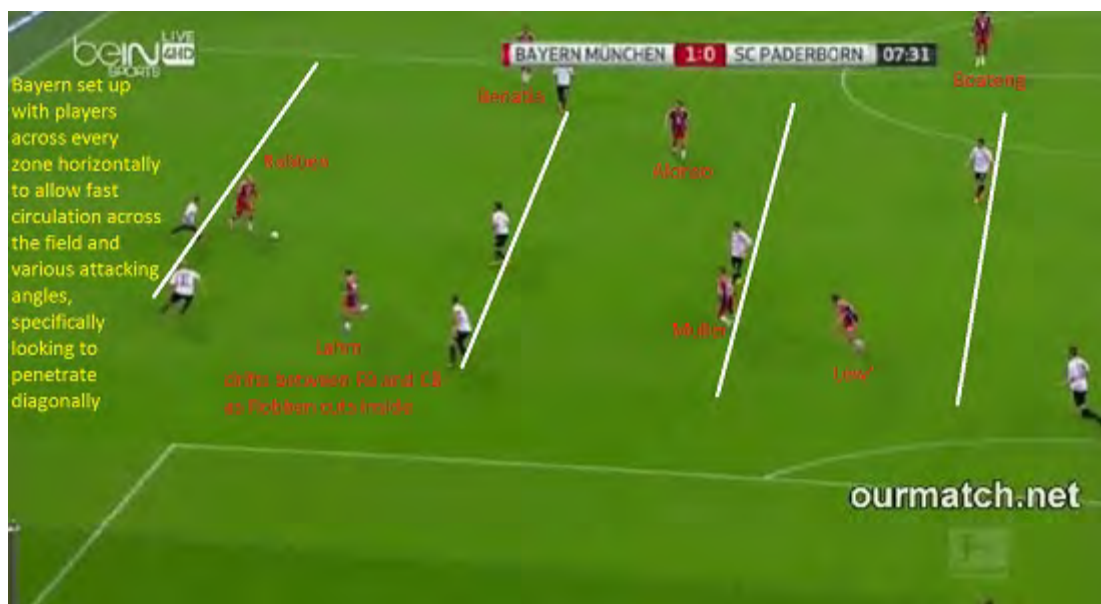
This works on the basis that you have less attacking and defensive movement areas from the touchline. Instead, playing these players in the channel as hybrid central midfielders and full backs where they can move inside and impact the game in all 4 phases, while

being able to cover both the middle and sides with a quick 15m sprint gives Bayern many more movement options.

In this example, Alaba and Lahm help overload the centre 4v3 as Bayern move from a 4-2-3-1 to a 2-4-2-2/2-2-4-2 means that Bayern can cover more zones and keep the team compact in both attack and defensive phases.

When the ball is lost, Bayern counter-press leaving Alaba and Lahm to cover behind the press as it is forced into the centre, but if play escapes the press to the side, they are mobile enough to shift over and cover the spaces on the sides.

### Positioning Across The Field – Covering each Vertical Zone, Horizontally

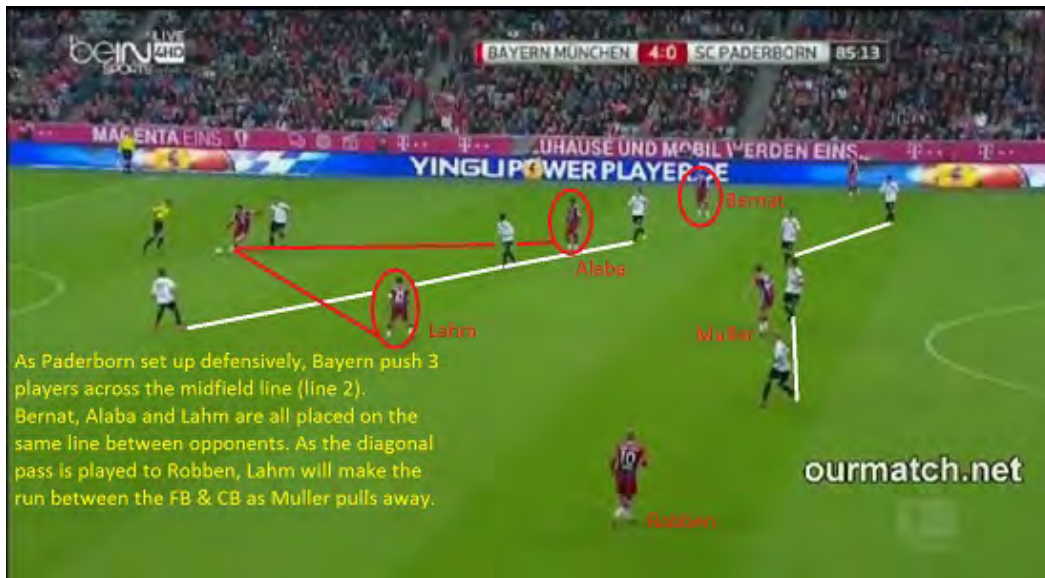


When in possession, each player has a 'playing group' of 2-4 players.

For example; Robben, Rafinha, Lahm on the right, Alonso, Lahm, Alaba in the centre and Alaba, Goetze and Bernat on the left.

- Across the field, there are 2 'wall players' – Rafinha and Bernat
- There are 2 'hybrid players' - Lahm and Alaba who can cover multiple zones
- There are 2 'penetrating players' - Robben and Goetze who can dribble and position inside between the lines
- The Holding player; Alonso, covers laterally behind the play to continually offer passing angles

## Positioning to penetrate to attack the back 4 from midfield



As Alonso is deepest of the midfield triangle, both Lahm and Alaba are between opponents on line 2, with Bernat on the outside of the midfield line. The positioning of these 3 players is key to breaking through the midfield line, as any pass which is received on the half turn can allow for the next pass to go through the back 4 if the movement ahead is on time, while if a switch of play is made, Lahm and Alaba are in good supporting positions to run ahead of or around the defensive line.

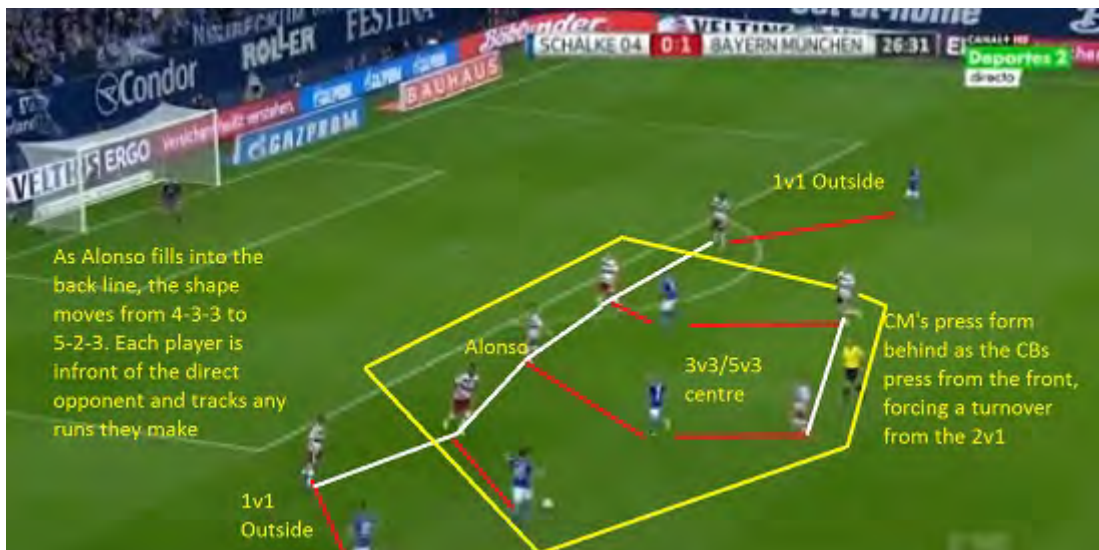
## Movement to offer and attack a cutback



Crossing is often unsuccessful and leaves you open to a quick counter attack if the GK is quick in releasing the ball after a catch. A good way to score without the risk of the counter attack is to make cutbacks while the back 4 are running back, facing their own goal.

Here, Goetze recognises that Robben likely won't cross to the space at the back post as Muller is on his way to the front post, while the cutback angle is available between the centre backs as the near post defender covers the front zone. We can see by Goetze's body shape that he is already on the run and expects Robben to make a cutback.

### Bayern Defensive shape in a 4-3-3 or situational 5-2-3 variant



Alonso is the deep player in the midfield triangle of the 4-3-3, or even when there is a 3-3-3-1, he will often fill into the back 4 or fill in to create a back 3, or even make a back 5 when needed. In this instance, Schalke have gained ground and picked up good positions between the lines in front of the defence. As there are 3 players between the lines in the central zone, Alonso fills in the defensive line and forms a situational back 5.

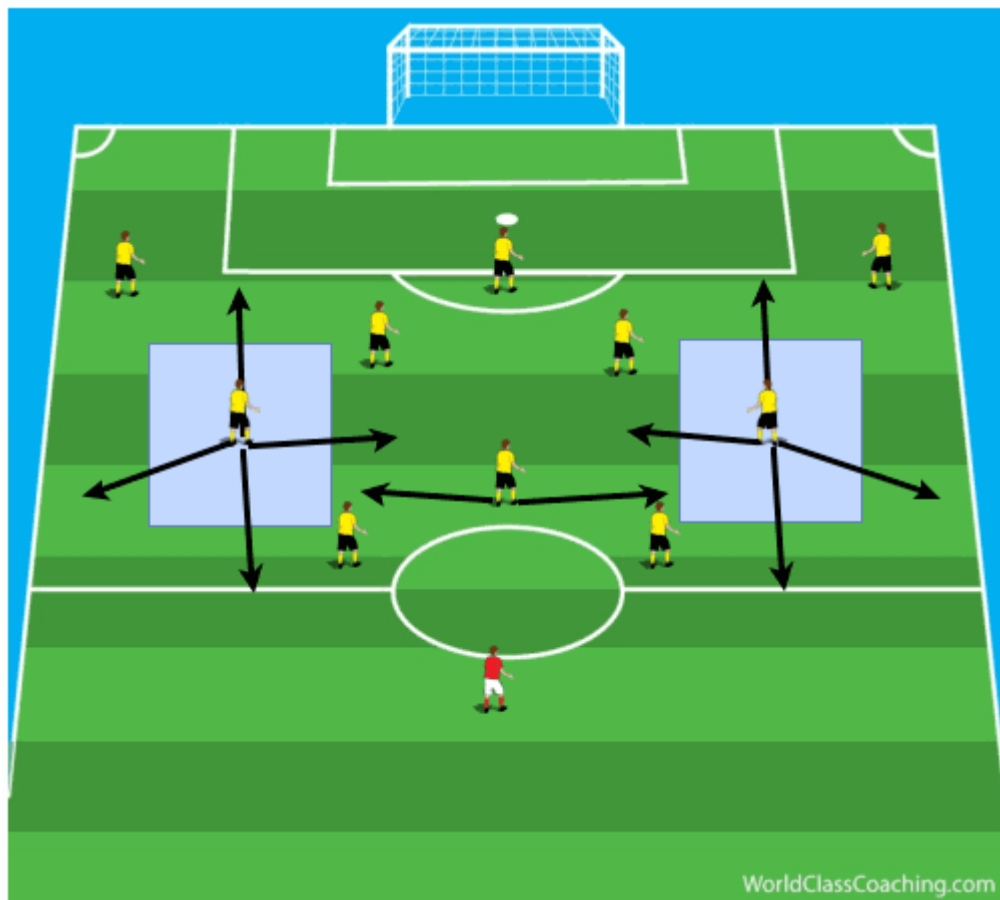
The key to this is that each player has an opposition player of whom they have to play against 1v1, 3v3/5v3 in the centre and 1v1 on the outsides. The CMs who are deep have to press from behind and cover the space in front of the player in possession, while blocking any penetration opportunities whilst maintaining a clear defensive line to ensure the team can hold positions to halt the progress of the runners who can be caught offside.

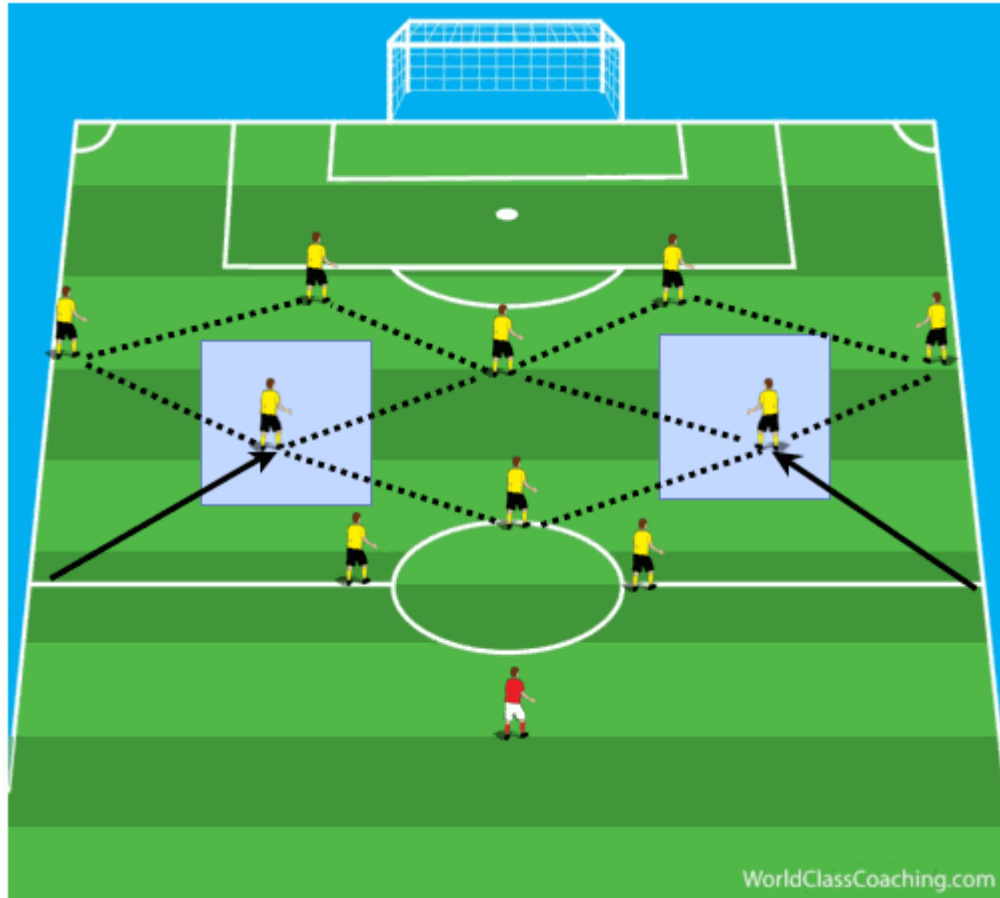
## **Bayern's Move from Fixed to Flexible**

Pep Guardiola has evolved the Bayern Munich team over the 18 months he has been in charge so it is almost unrecognisable from the treble winning team and style Jupp Heynckes left behind. The system has changed so much that the fairly rigid positions of each player has been replaced with a solutions to problems based style, and one major change has been the implementation of 'inverted full backs' in the manner that they cover 4 positions from 1 zone, almost like an old fashioned 'halfback' from the 1930s.

The positioning of this player allows the team to be flexible in the centre and wide areas, in both attack and defence, and in transition phases where the 'halfbacks' can drop off to form a back 4, or press high to counter-press with the 2-1 triangle covering behind them (DM & CBs).

### **Position of the 'inverted Full Backs / Halfbacks in a 4-3-3**



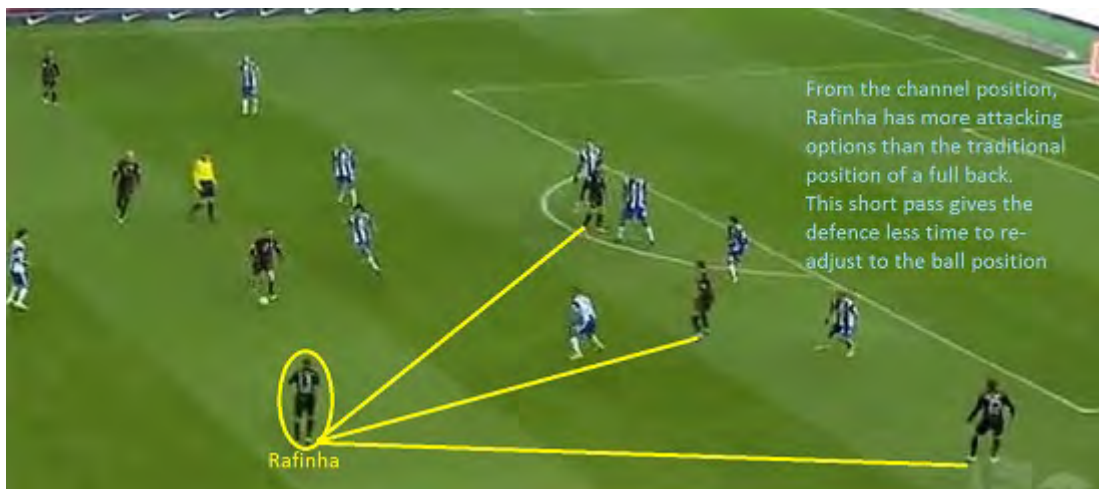


As we can see, the 'halfback' is in the position between centre and wide (the channel) between midfield and defence, providing positional flexibility while other positions appear to be 'fixed'.

In reality, the Guardiola system provides incredible flexibility and movement between players, working on the premise of looking for overloads and creating diamonds between players. The narrower positioning of the fullbacks/halfbacks provides this.

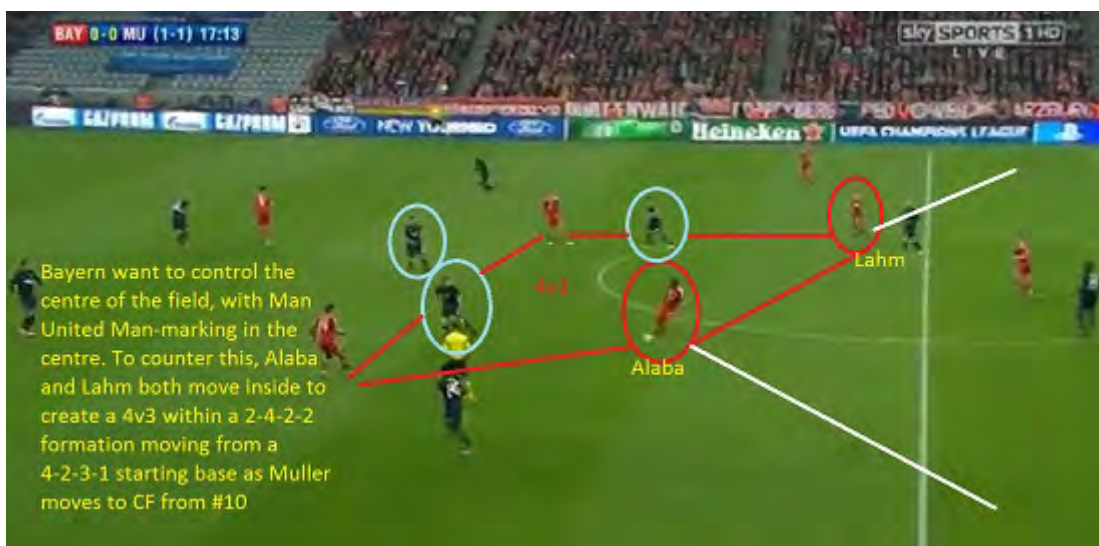


## Angles of attack form the channel position



As Rafinha is in the 'channel', he can receive and attack closer to the goal with an outball to a 1v1 with options inside the box. The key here is that in a 'normal' FB position, the pass is longer and the defence have more time to adjust while the player has 2 or 3 touches. Here, he can attack 1st time.

## Overloading the centre

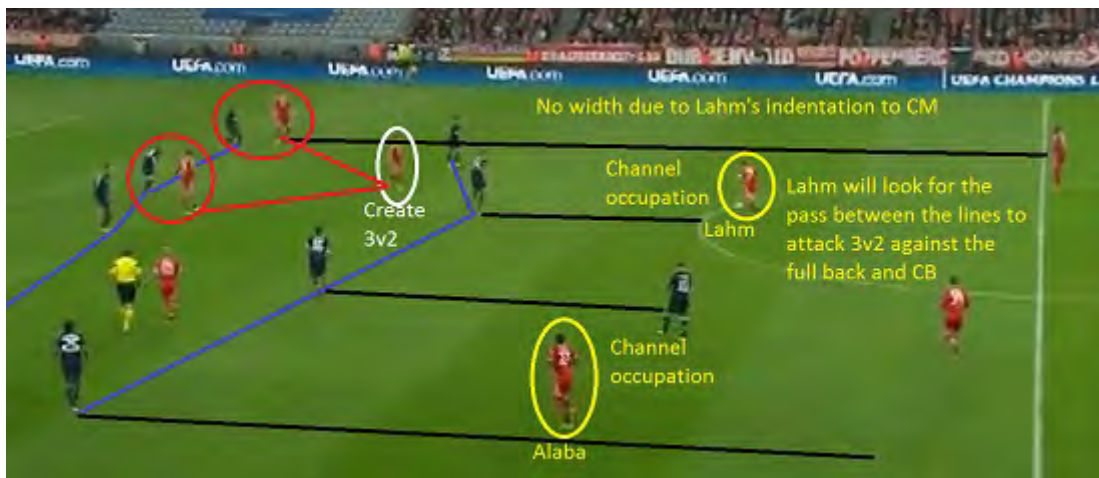


Against a team playing in a 4-4-2, a 3v2 in central midfield is a common way to gain control in a 4-3-3 or 4-2-3-1. If a team plays a 4-4-1-1, the 3v3 in midfield means that

lots of circulation and rotation is needed to gain control, so to find a way around this, a team may use a wide midfielder in a more narrow position to gain control 4v3. This can draw the opposition narrower than the attack would like, so the Guardiola solution is to push both FB's into the centre, leaving the wide midfielders to play on the same line as the opposition backs 4, either wide or central, offering more penetration choices. This also causes the wide midfielders of the opposition a problem – who do they mark? Do they track wide to the wide attacker and create a situational back 5 or back 6?

Normally as they would be narrow to play compact, they would defend 1v1 with the FB in the wide zone, but the flexible positioning of the full backs makes this a more difficult job than normal.

### Looking for penetration opportunities



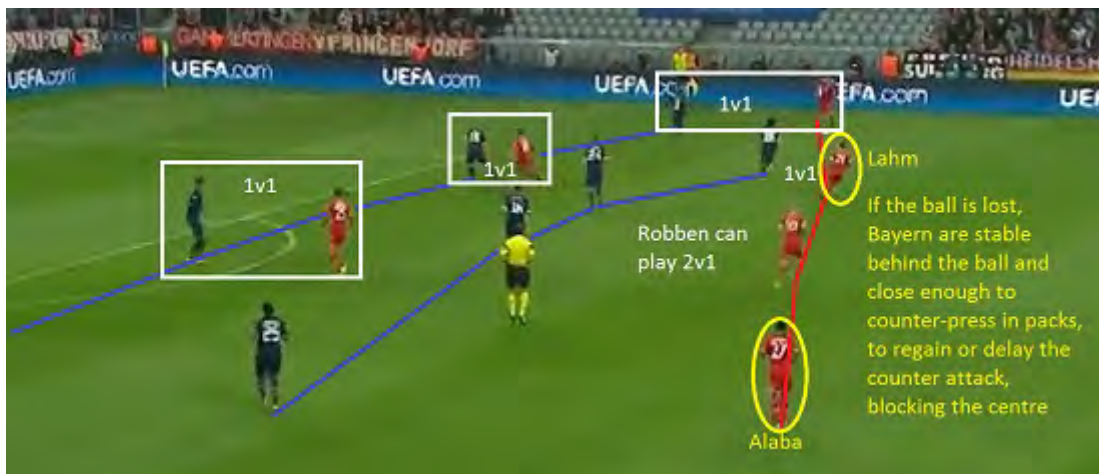
Lahm and Alaba's positioning is very deliberate here; they play in the channel which can provide a straight pass into the halfspace to penetrate the midfield on line 2 (between players on the midfield line) or line 3 (between the lines of defence and midfield). In this example, Lahm wants to find the pass into line 3 where a 3v2 can occur due to the positioning of the attackers on line 4 (against the defence).

## Forcing the opponent to lose shape and open up spaces



Isolating the winger who is excellent in 1v1 play by drawing the wide midfielder inside is a difficult task if the full back stays wide as the direct opponent will drop back to help the full back. Instead, by moving inside and drawing the wide midfielder with him, this narrows the midfield and leaves the winger 1v1 against the opposing full back.

## Covering positions ahead of defensive transition



With the movement to indent to play centrally, this reduces the distances between players, covering the width of the field in transition to allow the team to counter-press from a stable position. If the far side full back was wider, there would be a gap between players and leave a space which could be exposed centrally. Instead, with the central positioning, this can block forward passes and force the attack to go around the press, making the route to goal potentially slower and in-direct.

# **Using the Channel to Draw the Defense Over**

Traditionally in football, the field was separated into 3 clear areas – wide-centre-wide, meaning the specific positional play in possession was fairly static. With a field around 60m wide, this means that each zone is 20m wide, often resulting in large distances between players, particularly in a traditional 4-4-2 formation.

If we split the field into 5 clear channels, this distances of width of each zone becomes 15m and the 5m reduction of distances help layers cover more ground collectively and individually, so the ‘channel’ has become a key zone in terms of build-up play and in how to penetrate through defences.

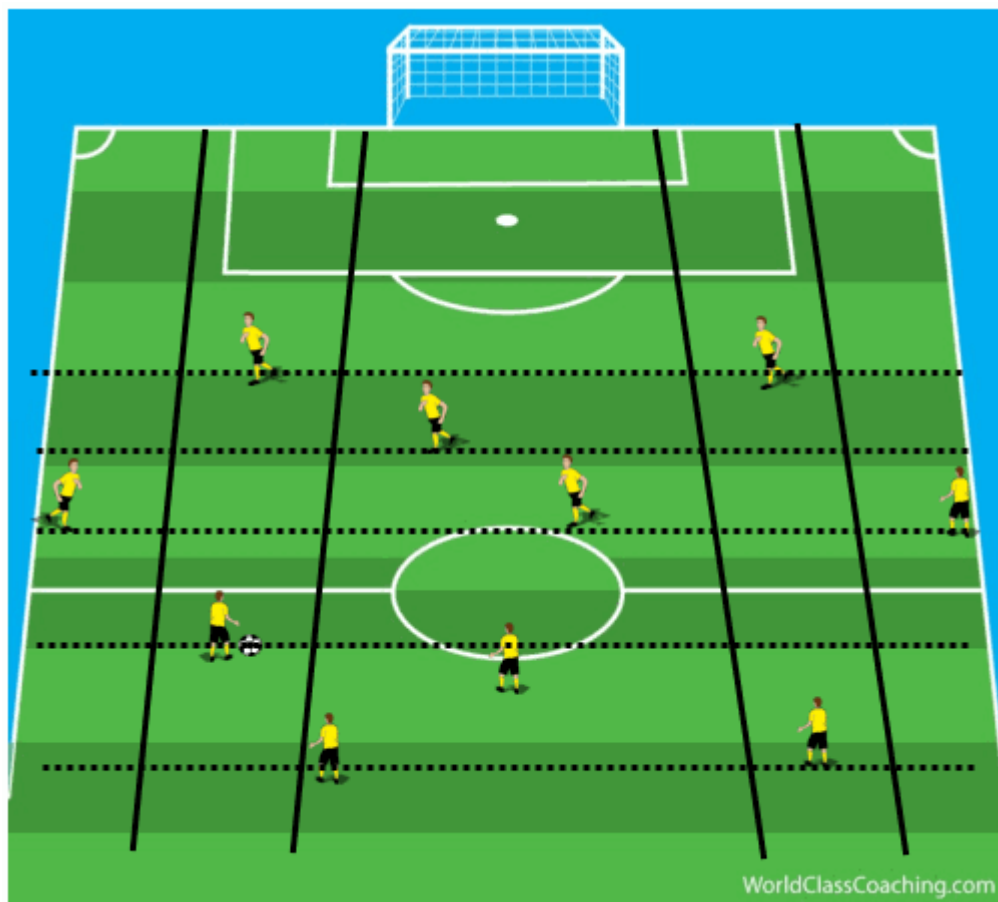
Using the channel draws over players to press diagonally, and normally results in space being opened up either behind the inside central midfielder or the wide midfielder, and often a defensive midfielder will come higher up to cover the space, leaving the zone between the lines free to be exploited, often temporarily hurting the vertical compactness of the defensive block.

To me, there has been a debate among British coaches and European coaches around the term ‘halfspace’, which is derived from the word ‘haufbraum’ used in Germany from the 1930s to describe ‘the channel’ as it was the area usually occupied by a ‘halfback’, hence the term, ‘halfspace’

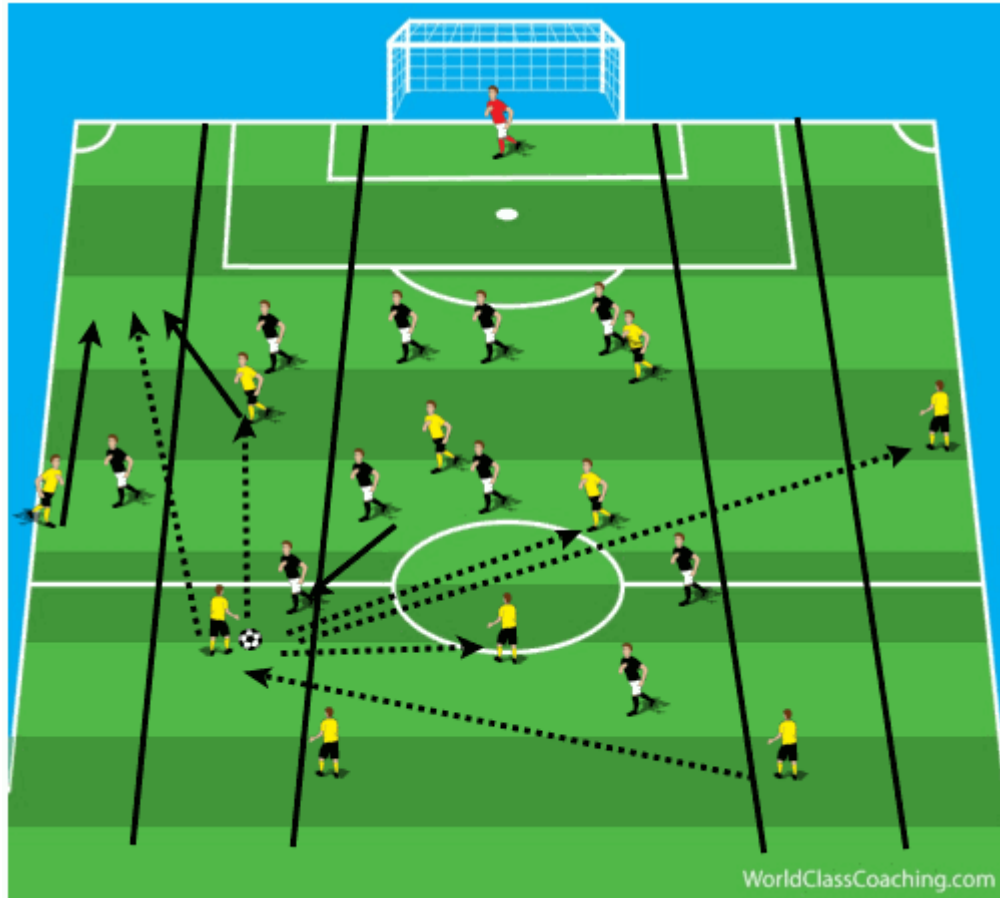
For me, there is a difference between the channel and the halfspace;

- The channel is a set strip of field down the field, like the wing or the centre
- The halfspace is a movable space between 2 specific opposition players – wide and centre.

If a player presses out of position to the channel, they press diagonally leaving a space which can be exploited, particularly if the player in possession has 3 clear lines of play ahead of him.

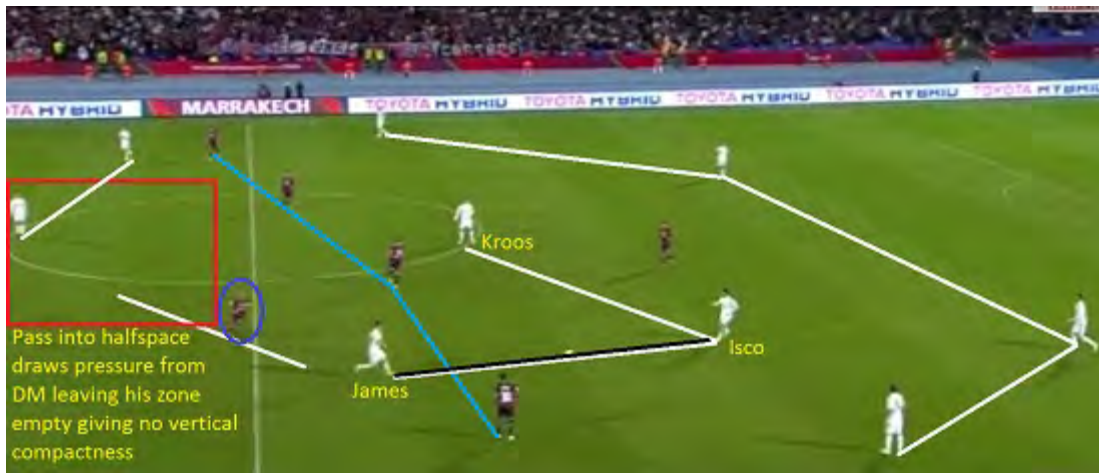


As the ball is switched from channel to channel, the defensive block would need to quickly shift over and stay compact, while moving diagonally to press. There will always be a space available to pass the ball again to. The key is that the player receiving will know where the player he passes to will go next, with either a pass with the back to goal on line 4, a player able to turn and attack the back 4 on line 3, a player on the half turn to penetrate on line 2 or a player to take possession and pass forward on the same line. Often with Real Madrid, Isco or Modric play in the channel, draw pressure then use Kroos inside the centre circle to attack next.

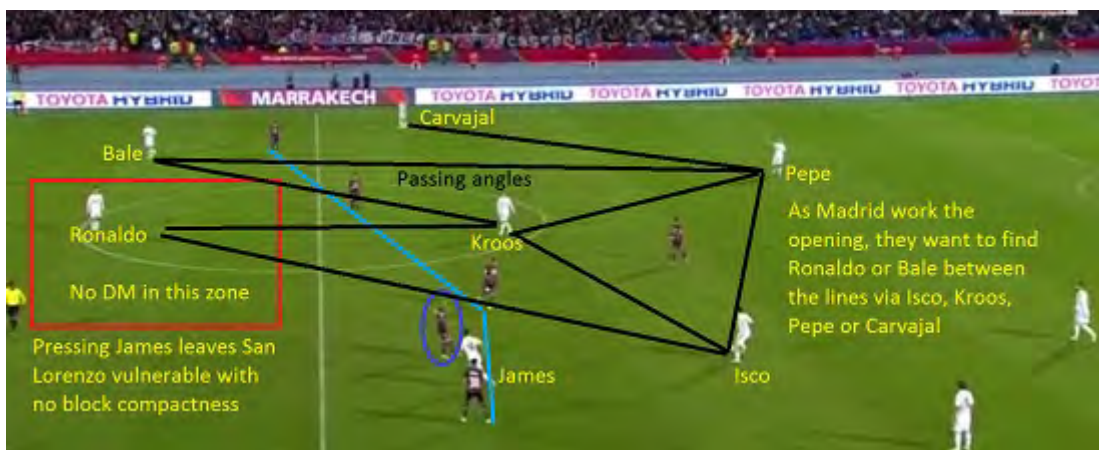


As we can see, the player in the channel has 5 passing options, with a switch to the far side open for the far side full back to have a 3v2 on the side, a pass into the centre via the right central midfielder on line 2, a pass to feet of the left attacking midfielder on line 4 or 3 if he drops in, a pass behind the fullback into the corner, or a possibility to dribble into line 3 himself. If none of the forward options are available for him to give the next player a chance to continue forward, he might pass inside to the player on the same line that has a whole field to use and play forward.

## Building from midfield into attack

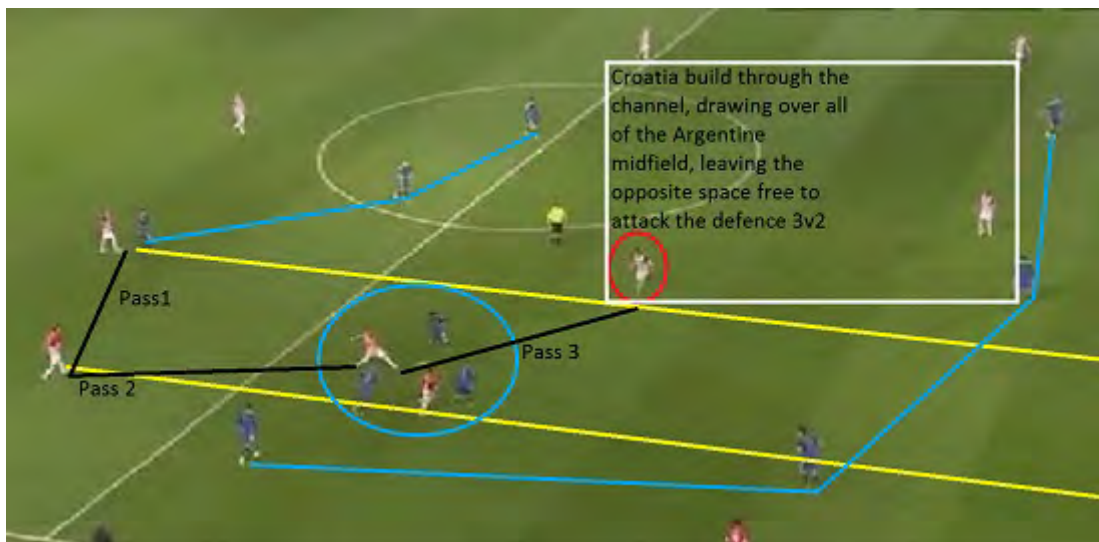


Once play has been consolidated the midfield look to find a way into the attacking phase against the back 4. Isco passes to James who has drawn diagonal pressure from the DM, who leaves his zone to press James. As James makes a simple pass back to Isco, the ball is where it started 3 seconds ago but now with a hole between defence and midfield, with minimal horizontal compactness across the opposition midfield line, which Real Madrid should be able to penetrate.

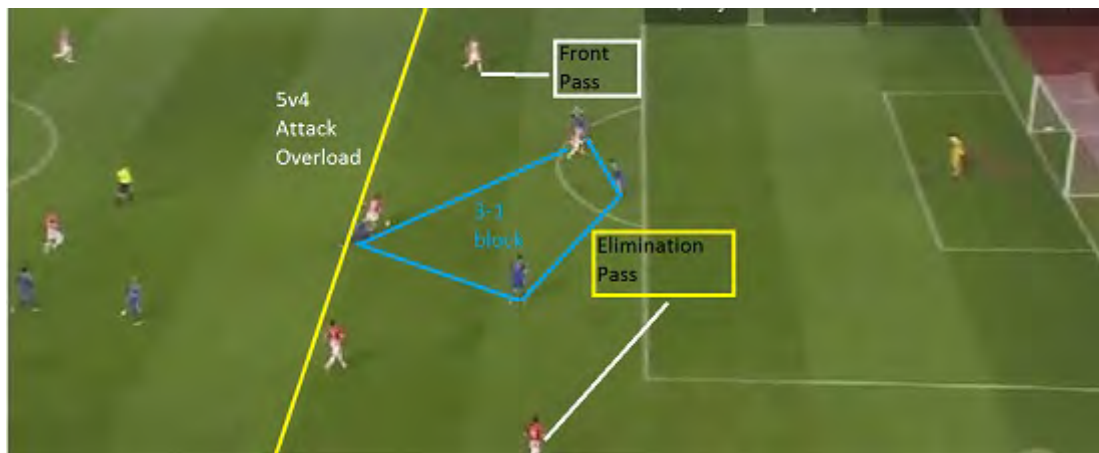


As Isco receives the 2nd pass, we can see Ronaldo now has the whole of the #10 zone to himself, with no vertical compactness of the defensive block to be seen. The position of Toni Kroos is excellent, he is in front of the defensive line able to turn and play through to Ronaldo in the #10 zone or Bale in the channel. He could make an easy wide pass to Carvajal who would be expected to push up if Kroos receives and the wide midfielder would tuck in to mark Bale; if he does not, he passes to Bale.

## Drawing pressure to play diagonally between the lines



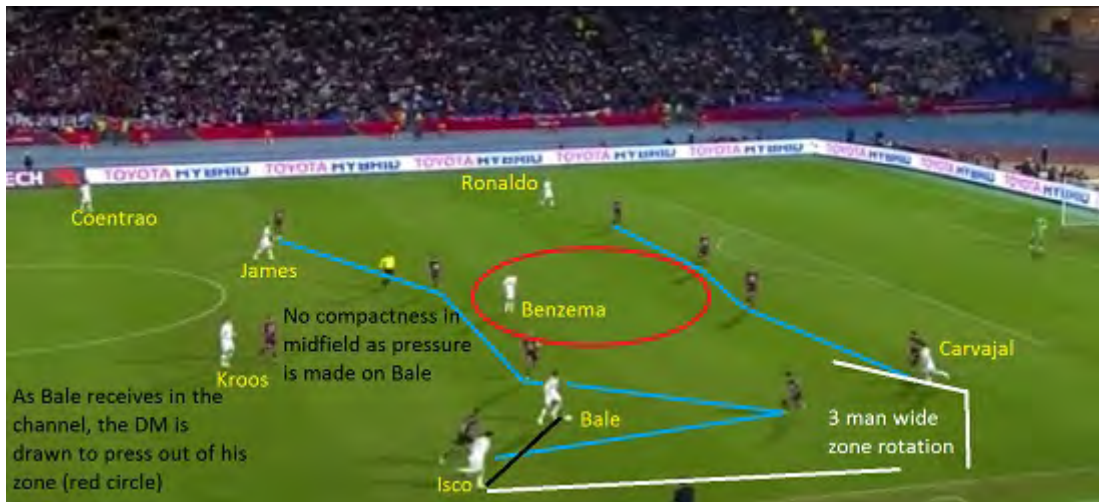
The build-up away from pressure into the channel draws over all 3 of Argentina's central midfielders, leaving them exposed in front of the back 4. If the ball can be played diagonally into the player between the lines, Argentina will struggle to recover as the attack could possibly overload.



In the final 30m, Croatia have a 5v4, with Argentina trying to form a narrow 3-1 block to force play wide. As the wide runners are from close to the ball – the near side wide player is in the channel and has less running distance, he can be dangerous with a pass around the defence, while a reverse pass against the body shape of the defence into the yellow box would result in a 2v1 on the GK with the RW and CF.



## Three man wide zone rotation via the channel



As we can see, Bale is in the zone expected of Isco, Carvajal in the zone expected of Bale and Isco in the zone of Carvajal, as all 3 have rotated to fine Bale in the channel.

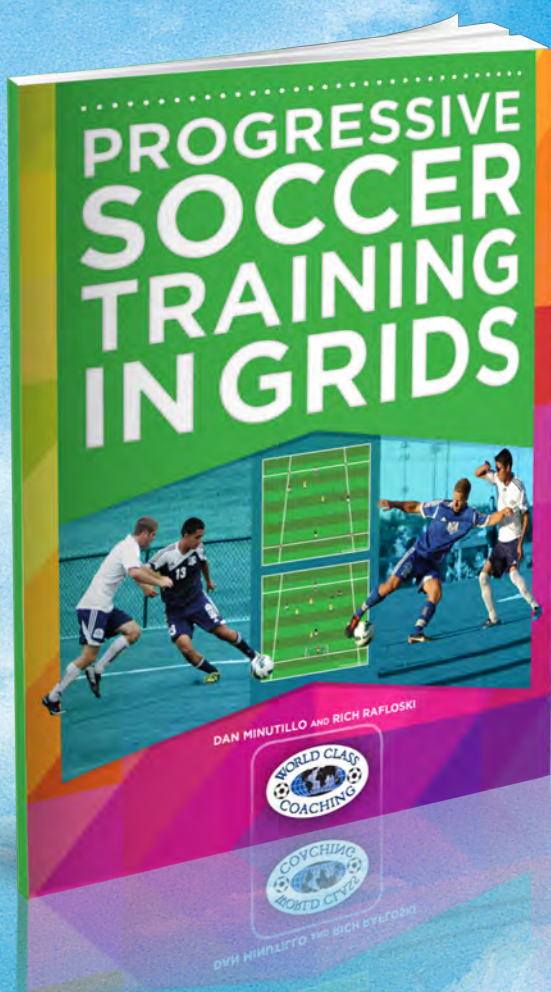
As the DM again is forced to move over and out of position to press Bale, Benzema is free between the lines to offer a quick diagonal pass from the outside of Bale's left foot, which would expose the back 4 with Ronaldo on the blindside and Bale running form deep with Carvajal occupying the full back.

Instead, Carvajal moves inside to create the wide space Isco will overlap into.

As Bale is pressed, he can pass inside but with the wide zone free and possibly less risky a pass, especially with 6 players taken out if the ball is lost and in a more dangerous position centrally for a counter attack, the wide pass to Isco on the overlap is the sensible pass with Isco having the ability to make a final pass.

We can see the importance of building through the channel to open up the defence and how we can penetrate if the team is well organised in their position vertically and horizontally.

# *Another Great Book from Dan Minutillo and Rich Rafloski*



Do you waste a lot of time in training setting up grid drills? Do your players stand around getting bored while you reconfigure the practice area, when all they want to do is play? Well, now you can say goodbye to wasted time and bored players because Progressive Soccer Training in Grids provides a complete guide to getting more out of every session by using a single grid to transform one exercise to the next revolving around your training theme for that day, without changing that grid, but still using multiple progressive small sided games and drills in a single training session. This new concept harnesses progressive small sided games and drills in a single grid to minimize setup time while maximizing the time your players can practice, leading to quicker improvement in every session.

To order books, magazines or Videos  
visit [WorldClassCoaching.com](http://WorldClassCoaching.com)



WORLD CLASS COACHING

# COACHING SOCCER WEEKLY



**This podcast give you an in-depth look at the methods, strategies and techniques used by a youth soccer coach working full time with youth soccer players of every age and skill level. This includes training plans, team management and planning ideas, latest trends in coaching soccer and soccer training, as well as interviews with other coaches and trainers that are on the cutting edge of soccer development.**

Visit [www.CoachingSoccerWeekly.com](http://www.CoachingSoccerWeekly.com)

