

TACTICAL



SERIES

ANTONIO CONTE



by Jonny Carter & Michael J Louter

WORLD CLASS COACHING
Tactical Series

Antonio Conte

By

Jonny Carter

And

Michael J Louter

Published by
WORLD CLASS COACHING

First published February, 2017 by
WORLD CLASS COACHING 12851 Flint Street Overland Park, KS 66213 (913) 402-0030

Copyright © WORLD CLASS COACHING 2017

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.

Authors – Jonny Carter and Michael J Louter
Editor - Tom Mura
Cover Art By - Barrie Smith



Table of Contents

Tactical Series - Antonio Conte	
Authors	Page 4
Jonny Carter	5
Michael J Louter	5
World Class Coaching Published Resources	6

Tactical Series - Antonio Conte	
Introduction	Page 7
The Conte Change To 3-4-3 Why?	9
Traditions & Conventions of the 3-4-3	14
Traditions & Conventions of the 3-4-3 Franz Beckenbauer	15
Traditions & Conventions of the 3-4-3 Johan Cruyff	16
Traditions & Conventions of the 3-4-3 Defensive Philosophy	22
The Shape Of The Play	35
The Shape Of The Play Defense	39
The Shape Of The Play Midfield	45
The Shape Of The Play Attack	51
Weaknesses of 3-4-3 Tottenham Hotspur FC 2 – 0 Chelsea FC	54

Tactical Series
Antonio Conte

Authors



Authors

Jonny has travelled far in search of coaching wisdom including the 1st Team Head Coach at the prestigious Kowloon Cricket Club located in the vibrant heart of Hong Kong, Vitesse Soccer based in Tennessee and as Technical Coordinator of the u13 & u15 Academy Generations | 1st Team Assistant Coach at Phnom Penh Crown FC.



Jonny Carter is an ‘A’ license coach who has written and delivered the football program for the Nike Soccer Camp in Hong Kong that offers elite youth player’s opportunity to experience his contemporary training methods. Jonny was the guest Head Coach for the Yau Yee League Select Team who participated with esteem at the respected HKFC Citibank Soccer 7’s event in 2014, where the native team were pitted against local professional clubs and Premier League heavyweights.



Michael J Louter originates from the Netherlands and brought with him a strong football heritage when he concluded his playing career in Holland and embarked on his academic



coaching career in the US. Following his academic pursuit Michael turned attentions to coaching, marrying a keen interest in psychology with the technical and tactical components of the game. Alongside his college coaching experience Michael has excelled in the collection of coaching certificates boasting both a USSF ‘A’ License and the NSCAA Premier Diploma.



Mafro Sports

Proud supporters of Jonny Carter and his
World Class Coaching Publications



Coaching Possession with a Purpose / Volume I

A complete guide to making maximum use of possession so you also pose maximum danger. Packed with detailed diagrams, setup instructions and coaching points, its drills will give your players a bigger advantage every time you win possession.



Coaching Possession with a Purpose / Volume II

The game has wised up. Today's clued in coaches know it's not how much of the ball you have but what you do with it that counts. They've realized that chasing crazy high possession stats isn't going to win you games. It's playing with maximum productivity that will.



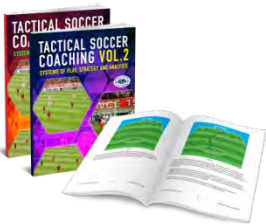
Coaching the Principles of Soccer Attack & Defense

This manual breaks down how the game is played into digestible chunks. Drills are provided which highlight to players what they need to do, when and why in a variety of offensive and defensive situations. Every drill is clearly explained with setup instructions, detailed diagrams and coaching points for maximum benefit.



Conquering Your Next Coaching Course

If you want to advance your career this manual is essential reading. It's a unique guide on exactly what to expect at every stage and what to do to impress the assessors. With these valuable insights, you know exactly what's expected of you before you arrive. Instead of massive pressure and stress, you'll feel confident and ready to pass.



Tactical Soccer Coaching Volume I & II

Tactical Soccer Coaching – Systems of Play, Strategy and Analysis, is a two volume set featuring the same kind of course material found in accredited academic courses. This makes it perfect for developing your knowledge of key concepts and continuing to grow your coaching knowledge.

Tactical Series
Antonio Conte

Introduction



Introduction

The 2016/17 Premier League season has been an epic endeavor with some of the best players and best coaches in world soccer gracing the very best clubs. Not only has the off-season off-field drama been most exciting and the on-field excellence a joy to watch, but there has been an undercurrent of tactical intrigue laced throughout the season this far. With some of the most strategic minds meddling with tradition and conformity the tactical chalkboard has been as refreshing as the soccer.

The story of Chelsea FC has been one of the most fascinating of them all. From running away league champions in 2014/15 to manager-less mid-table mediocrity in 2015/16 to renewed title winning favorites again. Along that tumultuous journey a change of leadership and a change in formation have seen Chelsea FC revive a traditional system of play with almost record-breaking success. Antonio Conte's 3-4-3 system of play is rocking the Premier League with Chelsea FC sitting handsomely at the top of the table after 22 games played.

Premier League Table | Monday 23rd January 2017 | www.premierleague.com/tables

Premier League											Form					Next
More	Position	Club	Played	Won	Drawn	Lost	GF	GA	GD	Points						
▼	1	Chelsea	22	18	1	3	47	15	-32	55	W	W	L	W	W	
▼	2	Arsenal	22	14	5	3	50	23	-27	47	W	W	D	W	W	
▼	3	Tottenham Hotspur	22	13	7	2	45	16	-29	46	W	W	W	W	D	
▼	4	Liverpool	22	13	6	3	51	27	-24	45	W	W	D	D	L	
▼	5	Manchester City	22	13	4	5	43	28	-15	43	W	L	W	L	D	
▼	6	Manchester United	22	11	8	3	33	21	-12	41	W	W	W	D	D	
▼	7	Everton	22	10	6	6	33	23	-10	36	W	D	W	W	W	

Tactical Series

Antonio Conte

The Conte Change To 3-4-3 | Why?



The Conte Change To 3-4-3 | Why?

Antonio Conte has enjoyed an illustrious playing career and is now enjoying an illustrious journey into coaching as well. As the head coach at Italian giants Juventus FC Conte was very successful, winning triple back-to-back domestic league titles and a couple of other notable trophies as well.

As head coach of the Italian national team Conte also earned respect rather than success when he very much made the most of an average squad of players.

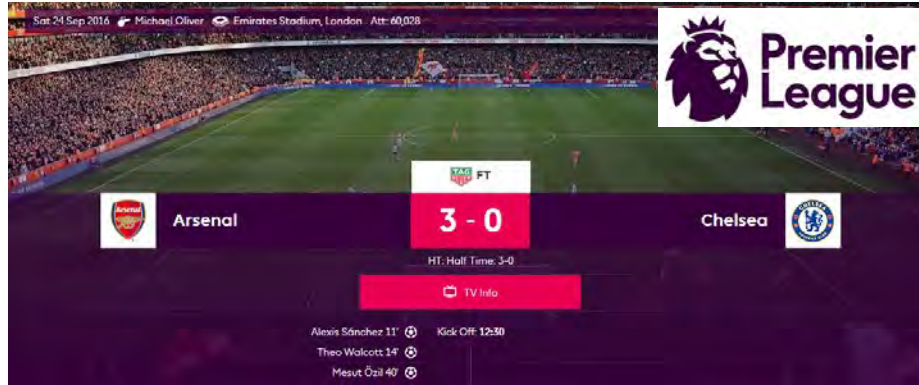
For the vast majority of his coaching time with Juventus FC and with the Italy national team Conte would play with a three man defensive group. Often more in a 3-5-2 system of play, but a three man defensive group all the same.



It was somewhat of a surprise that Conte didn't implement this strategy straight away when he took over at Chelsea FC after the Euro 2016 summer tournament, instead rather choosing to keep continuity with the old regime and persist with the old style Chelsea FC of 4-2-3-1. Early fortunes were mixed despite a rather helpful fixture list of games. Then back-to-back defeats at Liverpool FC and Arsenal FC spelled a necessity for change.

On Saturday 24th September 2016 Chelsea FC traveled to the Emirates Stadium to play a Premier League game against a potential title rivals, Arsenal FC. As had been the norm under Conte so far in the season, Chelsea FC set up with the same mixed success, 4-2-3-1 formation. By halftime Arsenal FC had destroyed Chelsea FC, scoring three goals and dismissing them with contempt. The final score of 3-0 was fair reflection of Arsenal FC's dominance and this event was a catalyst for Chelsea FC change that was almost unprecedented.

In fact, the change came in the second half of this game, though the result remained as decisive.



During the second half, Conte chose that this was his moment to forget the past Chelsea FC regime and introduce the new Chelsea FC. Conte reverted to a three man defensive group after 55 minutes of this game, signaling a significant shift in his future strategy. On to the field came Marcos Alonso, a summer signing from Italian club ACF Fiorentina, a player who Conte would have had good knowledge of. However, most importantly, this change finally permitted a left-footed player to operate on the left side of the Chelsea FC team, either as fullback, wingback or a midfielder. The switch shifted the right foot dominant César Azpilicueta out from the left fullback role and into a more familiar position on the right side of the Chelsea FC team. This reclaiming of balance in the formation was the catalyst for a Chelsea FC revival.



The shift to a 3-4-3 system of play with left footed and right footed wingbacks appropriately positioned to their natural side of the field proved a turning point for Conte and his Chelsea FC team. The 0 - 0 second half could not stop the inevitable defeat but the tide of change had been cast.

Conte's post match words following the debacle also suggested that change to the Chelsea FC system of play was imminent.

"After today we are thinking we must work a lot because we are a great team only on paper. It is always a team problem rather than individuals, when nothing works it is very hard for a player to play well..."

If someone thinks this team is ready to fight, I think we must wait to improve a lot to come back a great team on the pitch, not just on paper..."

We have not got the balance and now is the moment to consider everything. It is incredible to concede three goals..."

We must reflect a lot to find very soon the right way."

Antonio Conte | www.premierleague.com/match/14090

In the next Premier League game, away versus Hull City FC a week later, a revised Chelsea FC was witnessed. The now familiar Chelsea FC lineup of formation and of personnel was unveiled. Marcos Alonso started in the #8 Left Midfield position and the perennially out-of-favor Victor Moses came into the #6 Right Midfield position. Branislav Ivanović was dropped from the team altogether, with César Azpilicueta assuming the #2 Right Central Defender role.

For the first time the new look Conte's 3-4-3 Chelsea FC was seen. The game was far from a classic as the new system of play took time to settle and the radically new players to the first team grew into their status. Chelsea FC ran out 0 – 2 winners with Victor Moses claiming a man-of-the-match performance.

This new Chelsea FC 3-4-3 formation, and pretty much these exact players, would carry the club on a near record breaking winning streak of 13 Premier League victories. The triumphant run only recently halted by a fantastic Tottenham Hotspur FC team when they beat Chelsea FC 2 – 0 at White Hart Lane on Wednesday evening 4th January 2017.

Perhaps the biggest irony was that Tottenham Hotspur FC had only recently changed their own system of play to copycat Chelsea FC's all-conquering 3-4-3. We'll analyze how they did that a little later.

Hull City Positions 4-5-1

- David Marshall (Goalkeeper) 23
- David Meyler (Defender) 7
- Jake Livermore (Defender) 14
- Curtis Davies (Defender) 6
- Andrew Robertson (Defender) 3
- 72' Markus Henriksen (Midfielder) 22
- 81' Sam Clucas (Midfielder) 11
- Ryan Mason (Midfielder) 25
- Robert Snodgrass (Midfielder) 10
- 63' Adama Diomande (Midfielder) 20
- Dieumerci Mbokani (Forward) 18

Chelsea Positions 3-4-3

- Thibaut Courtois (Goalkeeper) 13
- César Azpilicueta (Defender) 28
- David Luiz (Defender) 30
- Gary Cahill (Defender) 24
- Victor Moses (Midfielder) 15
- Nemanja Matic (Midfielder) 21
- N'Golo Kanté (Midfielder) 7
- Marcos Alonso (Midfielder) 3
- Willian (Forward) 22
- Diego Costa (Forward) 19
- Eden Hazard (Forward) 10

Hull City FC vs. Chelsea FC | www.premierleague.com/match/14102

Tactical Series
Antonio Conte

Traditions & Conventions of the 3-4-3



Traditions & Conventions of the 3-4-3

While the Premier League has seen pretty much every formation and system of play at some time or another, there really has not been that much strategic attention given by coaches to a three man defensive group. And when three man defensive groups have been deployed it has most often been with a 3-5-2 formation; very few coaches have been brave enough to set up their teams to play with a 3-4-3 formation against such a competitive league.

While Chelsea FC's recent introduction of the 3-4-3 formation might be regarded as new to the contemporary soccer fan watching the Premier League, there has been quite a tradition of teams earning great success and acclaim with the 3-4-3, we explore some of the most salient examples of soccer history.

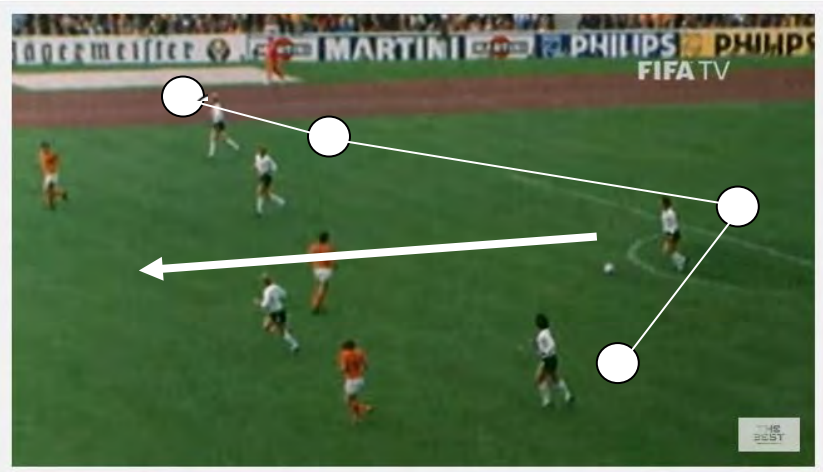
Chelsea FC 2016/17 | 3-4-3 System of Play
Traditions & Conventions of the 3-4-3 | Franz Beckenbauer

World Cup winning captain and coach, and all round soccer legend, Franz Beckenbauer initiated many developments and re-developments of the modern tactical game. Through the late 1960's & '70's Franz Beckenbauer pioneered many tactical nuances particularly with his ubiquitous connection to the '*libero*'. Beckenbauer possessed a unique talent and unprecedented game-play understanding which allowed him to bring the ball out from a sweeper position in a recognizable four man defensive group.

Beckenbauer could join into the midfield and dictate the tempo of the game from there leaving a three man defensive group behind him.

Nicknamed '*Der Kaiser*' (The Emperor), Franz Beckenbauer

was able to influence an entire generation of soccer strategy with his elegant ball-playing ability, tactical understanding and a leadership that would carry him through captaincy and into World Cup winning coaching.

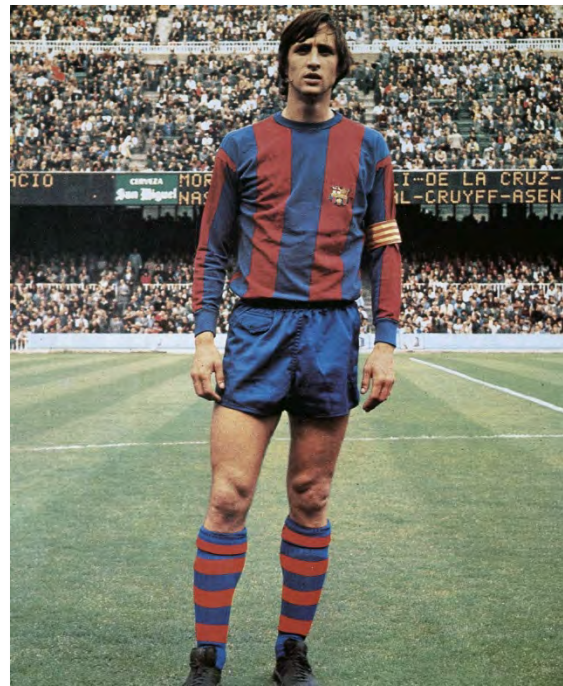


Traditions & Conventions of the 3-4-3 | Johan Cruyff

Johan Cruyff is another true soccer legend who has transcended mere playing excellence but is also recognized as one of the most ingenious tactical minds. With a playing heritage unparalleled, Cruyff was truly a product of a strategy-centric environment. Under the schooling of the much fabled Rinus Michels; voted FIFA Coach of the Century in 1999; and a product of the revered AFC Ajax development conveyor belt, Cruyff was a true master of the playing field and the chalkboard.

Cruyff's playing days were refined within the revolutionary Dutch national team of the late 1960's & '70's under the guidance of Michels and with his time as an FC Barcelona icon as a player and as a coach. Cruyff was the on-field brains and the physical incarnation of much of the Michels master plan conceived in the mind of a genuine tactical genius. This relationship between playing pupil and strategic mentor would be replicated further down the road as Pep Guardiola and Cruyff embarked on their own FC Barcelona legacy of the 1990's.

Johan Cruyff's return to FC Barcelona as head coach brought almost immediate success. After such a strong apprenticeship as a player and with some durable coaching education learned back at AFC Ajax, Cruyff was ready to take on the FC Barcelona job.



Cruyff's strategy was to implement his much admired aggressive attacking style wrapped up in the 3-4-3 system of play. The success was almost instant.

However, when comparing the detail of the 3-4-3 deployed by Johan Cruyff during his FC Barcelona days with that of the 2016/17 Chelsea FC team, there are differences. Both utilize the 3-4-3 formation on paper, but on the field there is a large variance.

The similarities are that the number of players within each group is the same; 3 defenders, 4 midfielders and 3 forwards.



The three defenders deployed in a recognizable fashion; #2 Right Central Defender, #3 Left Central Defender & #5 Central Defender. The three forwards are also deployed in a recognizable fashion; #7 Right Forward, #11 Left Forward & #9 Center Forward. Of course there is a #1 Goalkeeper.



However, the differences come with the deployment of the midfield four. Johan Cruyff recognized that almost every opposition was setting up with the rather predictable 4-4-2 system of play against them. With only two central forwards in opposition it was thought that FC Barcelona didn't need four players in their defensive group to cope with them. Three defenders versus the two opposition central forwards were easily enough to man-mark and leave a free player to provide cover. This opened up opportunity to add an additional player to the midfield group without compromising the very attack-minded front three, a signature of Cruyff's relentless pursuit of aggressive offensive soccer.



It might be assumed that the player coming out of the defensive group and into the midfield might be a robust, destructive player designed to screen and protect the now back three. But this was not Johan Cruyff's method. Instead of merely pushing a defender forward into midfield he decided to use a true passer of the ball and monopolize possession.

Pep Guardiola was that chosen player. Diminutive in size but cultured in technique, Guardiola assumed that #4 or 'pivot' role with great distinction. Able to collect the ball from the goalkeeper or from the defensive group the 'pivot' can initiate the tempo of the game and build the attacking phases. Playing very central down the spine of the field with positional discipline; and with intelligent, subtle movement creating endless angles of support, Guardiola was able to deliver the game plan that Cruyff had devised.



The other deployment of the midfielders is also different under Cruyff's mid 1990's FC Barcelona team compared to the 2016/17 Chelsea FC; while Chelsea FC stretch their wing-backs/wide midfielders the full width of the field, FC Barcelona played with a very narrow midfield diamond.

The Left Central Midfielder #8 and the Right Central Midfielder #6 played very much inside and connected to the midfield group. Ahead and at the point of the diamond the #10 Attacking Central Midfielder could link midfield with the forward group who could provide great width as a front three.

The close proximity of the midfield group ensured that passing options were always near and available, and the quality of the player's technique good enough to thrive in this demanding part of the field.

The connectedness of the midfield four also helped on the rare occasions when possession was relinquished; large clusters of players could quickly go hunting for lost possession before the opposition could build their attacking principles.

This super-positive style of play was very much predicated on the retention of possession, depriving the opposition of the ball rendering defense less of a necessity. If you have the ball then it's tough to be scored on. And with Pep Guardiola masterminding the #4 'pivot' from the base of the diamond the FC Barcelona 3-4-3 won plenty of games and plenty of trophies.

It is worth noting that these field plans are diagrammatical representations designed to provide a clear picture by simplifying the tactical concepts. In reality the distances between the groups would be much closer, something like 30 – 35yds between the deepest defender and the highest forward.

The goalkeeper assuming a very high and aggressive starting position with a sweeper-keeper philosophy ready to clean up any longer, direct balls behind the defensive group.



Tactical Series
Antonio Conte

Traditions & Conventions of the 3-4-3 Defensive Philosophy



Traditions & Conventions of the 3-4-3 | Defensive Philosophy

The way the 2016/17 version of Chelsea FC defends opposition build-up play in the 3-4-3 is also somewhat different from tradition and is a very modern way to defend as a team. The front three in the 3-4-3 allows for high pressure very early in the phase as the opposition attempt to build possession out of the back. When defending against an opposition goal kick or early build-up phase Chelsea FC can cover the full width of the field with their front three and press early on an opponent attempting to play out of the back or better still, causing the opposition to abandon their tactics all together and playing out longer.

However, these pressing tactics were not so aggressive in traditional examples of the 3-4-3 deployment, instead many proponents of the 3-4-3 choosing to defend a little more cautiously.

In the example, the defending team in Black can spread their front three across the width of the field. The Yellow team has the option to attempt to play out of the back from the goal kick through the #2 Right Fullback.



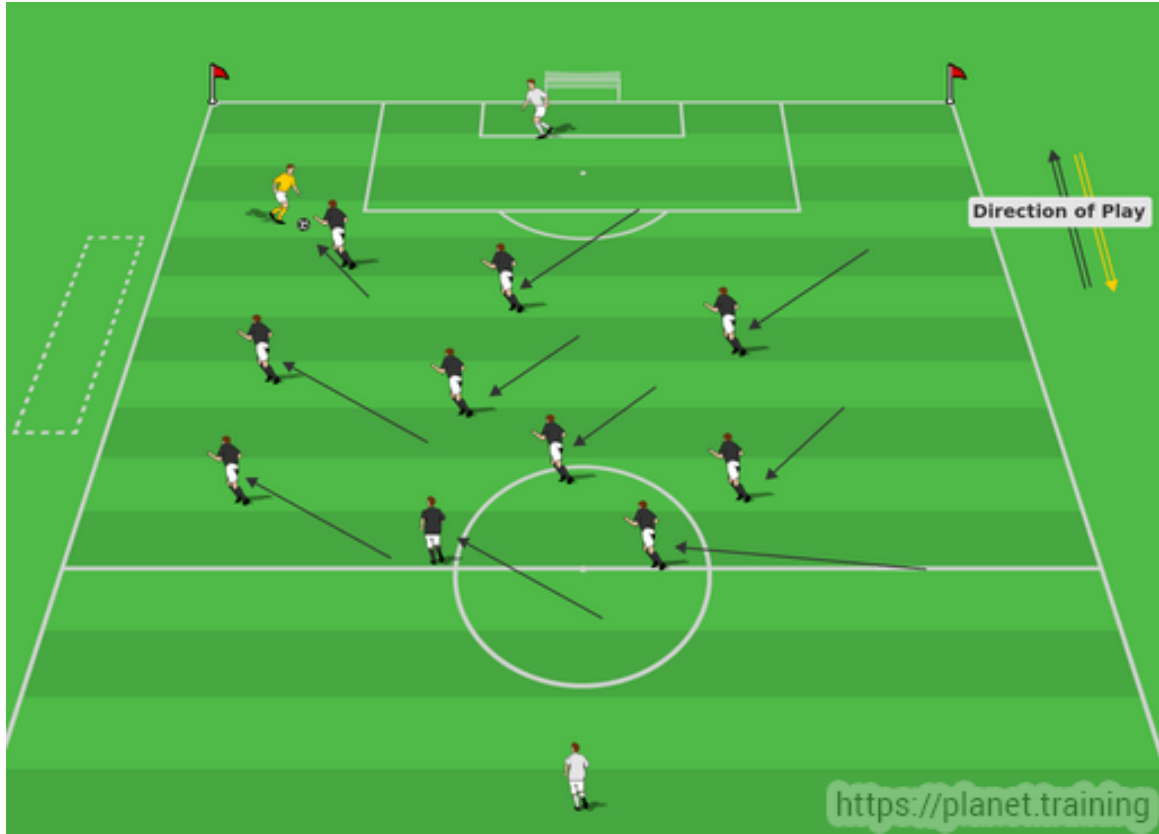
As the ball is played into the Yellow #2 Right Fullback the entire Black team begins to adjust their positioning based on the ball-side position of the Yellow player in position, the 1st Attacker.



The nearest goal-side player applies immediate pressure to stop the ball being played forward. In this example it is the #11 Left Forward who assumes the role of the 1st Defender, '*deny the penetration*'.

The #9 Center Forward and the weak-side #7 Right Forward drop and slide over to the ball-side providing cover and balance to the 1st Defender.

Below this front line pressure the midfield compact and condense the space behind as the ball-side players slide and push up behind the front line pressure while the weak-side players drop and slide over to the ball-side providing defensive support behind the play, denying space for the opposition and screening passes forward and searching for counter attack opportunities on the transition.



Below this midfield line the three man defensive group responds similarly by compacting and condensing the space behind the midfield as they slide over to the ball-side providing defensive support behind the play. The three defenders now looking more like a conventional four man defensive group with a ball-side fullback supported with two central defenders providing cover and balance behind.

Of course, unlike with a four man defensive group, the right fullback berth is not assigned, this role provided by the weak-side midfielder dropping in and attaching himself to the weak-side defensive responsibility as necessary.

The early pressing tactics and the condensed distances of the defending team mean that large numbers of players are compact into a small area of the field leaving the opportunity for longer more direct balls to be played into the vacant space left behind the defensive group. The role of the goalkeeper is even more evident at this moment of the structure as his high starting position and aggressive attitude as sweeper-keeper allows him to patrol this vacant area in-behind ready to eliminate danger.



This defensive setup sees three very evident lines of Pressure > Cover > Balance overloaded onto the ball-side of the field with the groups compact and condensed behind. Even the goalkeeper's starting position is relevant in this defensive organization and requires excellent coordination and full team commitment in order to be successful.

But as earlier referenced, this is a rather outdated deployment of this defensive strategy. Even though this is a very assertive and proactive way to defend with the early press, the way that Chelsea FC tends to do things is with an even more aggressive attitude to their pressing tactics.

Given the same example of the Yellow team looking to build-up play out of the back from the goal kick into the #2 Right Fullback, there are some subtle changes.



The pressure on the ball is required, and the compacting and condensing of the field is required, and the high starting position of the goalkeeper sweeper-keeper is all very evident. But instead of just dropping into three Pressure > Cover > Balance lines as traditionally seen, Chelsea FC tend to look to cut off more angles of support and go hunting for the ball with large groups of players in a very, very hostile manner.

This more aggressive attitude to pressing tactics means that the front three have a very focused defensive responsibility, they are not asked to work large areas of the field or to take on a large defensive role. The space in which the front three work defensively and the opposition players that they are assigned to defend against is clear and limited.

The area of the field in which the front three are asked to press also provides great incentive. If the ball is won back early and high on the field then the potential success for an immediate counter attack, direct to goal, is massively increased.

These refined defensive responsibilities, secured by the defensive structure behind, has revived the fortunes for an ailing front three for Chelsea FC since reverting to the 3-4-3 formation. Eden Hazard went from player of the season to hapless nobody overnight. Diego Costa travelled a similar journey falling from the Premier League's best #9 Center Forward to a grumpy yellow card addict. Both players have rediscovered their imperious best form through the 2016/17 season and these revivals have corresponded, not coincidentally, with a change in Chelsea FC formation to a 3-4-3 system of play.

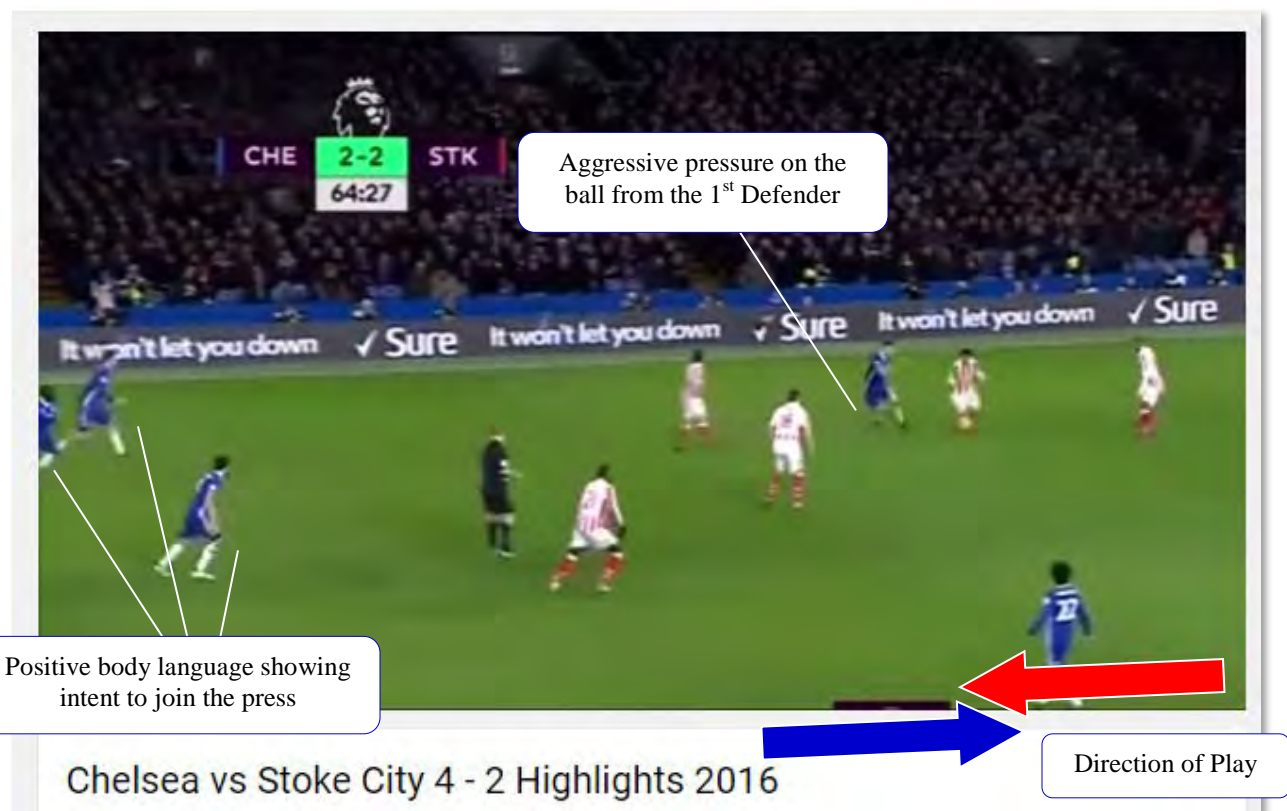


To demonstrate an excellent in-the-game example of Chelsea FC's pressing tactics within their 3-4-3 system of play we have an example taken from their recent Premier League game versus Stoke City FC played at Chelsea FC's home stadium Stamford Bridge on Saturday 31st December 2016; a game Chelsea won 4 – 2.

On screenshot #1 we can see Stoke City FC in possession of the ball. There is an equal number of Stoke City FC players and Chelsea FC players involved in the immediate play. Most Chelsea FC players are in a defensive position goal-side of the play.

The body language of the Chelsea FC players suggests that they are moving forward as a collective to apply pressure to the ball rather than retreat to a more passive defensive shape.

The 1st Defender is applying excellent pressure to the ball.



On screenshot #2 we can see Chelsea FC players applying pressure not just from a goal-side position but from all angles onto the ball.

Eden Hazard, the #11 Left Forward of the Chelsea FC front three is blocking any potential angles of support and blocking any potential passing lanes backwards to supporting Stoke City FC players or to the goalkeeper.

Willian, the #7 Right Forward of the Chelsea FC front three has come all the way over from the weak-side of the field to join the press.



On screenshot #3 we can now see more Chelsea FC players than Stoke City FC players, not just more players in the vicinity, but more Chelsea FC players aggressively pressing the ball. Four Chelsea FC players surround the 1st Attacker denying passing angles in every direction, with a second wave of Chelsea FC players compacting and condensing the space.



There is less of a visible structure to these pressing tactics, we do not see anything like the organization of the Pressure > Cover > Balance lines referenced earlier. The success of these pressing tactics is built more on pure aggression towards the ball and mass invasion of the space.

Diego Costa the #9 Center Forward is also involved in the press from an offensive position; he too is blocking any escape angles of support and aggressively pressing the 1st Attacker.

All three of the Chelsea FC forward group are involved in the press, two players from an offensive position. All of them are within 10 – 12yds of each other and all on the same ball-side of the field.

On screenshot #4 we can see the amount of pressure and the sheer numbers of Chelsea FC players has created a moment of transition and forced a turnover.

We can see by the field markings how high up the field the transition has occurred and how positive the Chelsea FC players are to counter attack quickly to the Stoke City FC goal in search of a reward for their hard work pressing the ball.



The Stoke City FC players are unbalanced and out of defensive shape due to the speed of the counter attack, they struggle to reclaim their defensive principles. Stoke City FC are under massive pressure again, only this time, Chelsea FC have the ball 25yrd from their goal.

On screenshot #5, we can see from the wider angle how exposed the Stoke City FC defenders are. We can also see how close to the Stoke City FC goal that the turnover of possession is; and how quickly Chelsea FC can add numbers and width to their counter attack.

Within a handful of touches and within two quick passes Chelsea FC have created a 2-v-1 situation on top of the Stoke City FC penalty area; the outcome inevitable.



On screenshot #6 we see Willian in-behind the Stoke City FC defensive line with an immediate and direct counter attack; the exposed goalkeeper has little chance.

Willian scores to make it 3 - 2; Chelsea FC go on further to win this game 4 – 2.



The 3-4-3 formation allows a large number of players to play in advanced areas of the field; in this example we can see perfectly how the front three of Chelsea FC have been super aggressive in their field positioning and in their attitude to press the ball. The risks are high if an opposition can break the press and play out, but the rewards are evident if executed correctly.

This high pressure defending often displayed by Chelsea FC also suits the playing profile of their players. Skillful and busy players don't want to track backwards and don't want to have large defensive responsibilities; which was definitely a feature of past coaching regimes at Chelsea FC. However, if these same skillful and busy players are only asked to defend in small amounts early in the opposition build-up, with security of help behind, then they can cope with that arrangement. And in the case of Eden Hazard, these players can flourish defensively with the incentive of goal threatening counter attacks as a reward.

Tactical Series
Antonio Conte

The Shape Of The Play



The Shape Of The Play

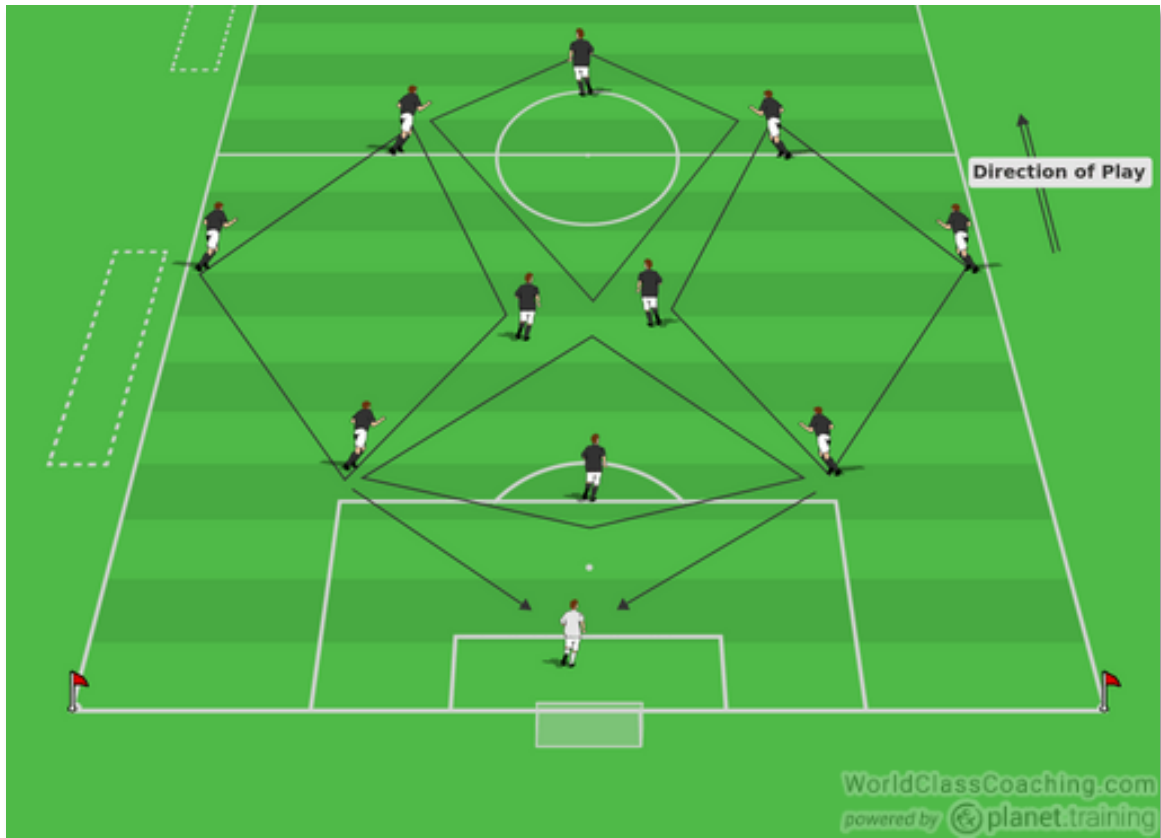
The Chelsea FC 3-4-3 system of play has an overall shape to their play that is very expansive and very positive. The four man midfield group set up much differently from the narrow midfield diamond that we discussed with the FC Barcelona style of the mid 1990's; rather the 2016/17 Chelsea FC set up with a midfield four spread the entire width of the field. The wide midfielders, usually Marcos Alonso the #8 Left Midfielder and Victor Moses the #6 Right Midfielder; playing on the touchlines more like conventional wingers.



This width in midfield allows the defensive group behind to stay narrower and more compact without the fear of fullbacks being caught up field which might be the case in a conventional four man defensive group.

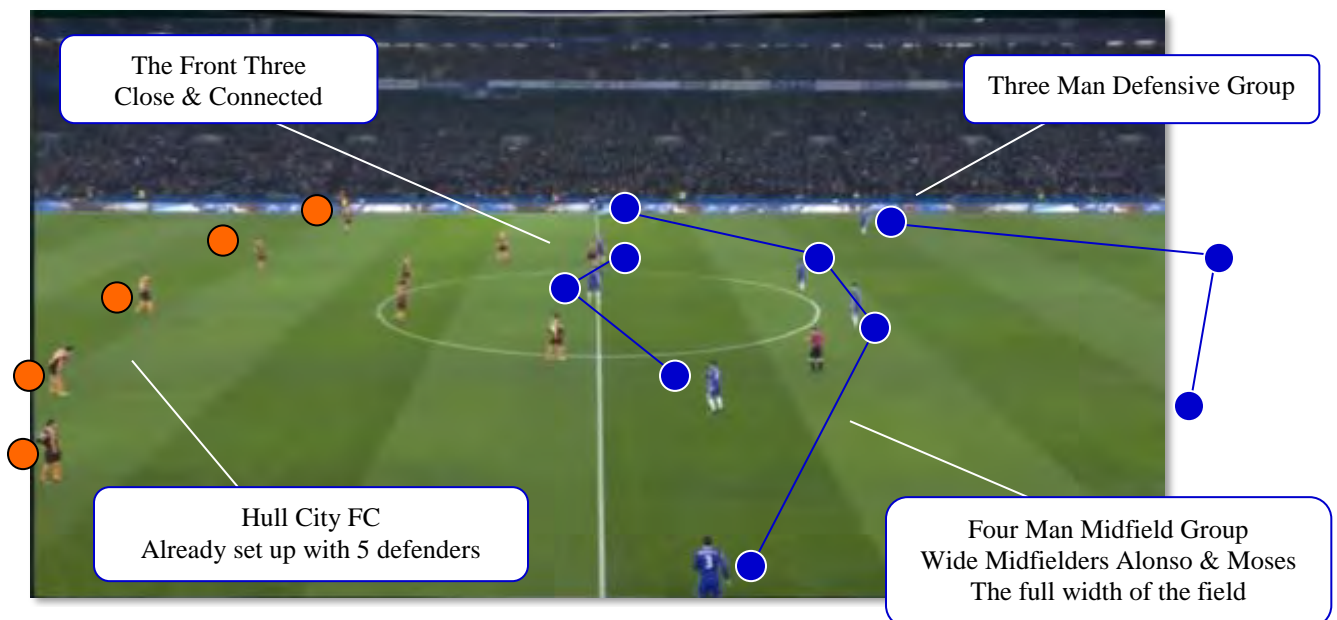
The additional benefit to the width being in the midfield is that the forward three can play very connected together. Yes, the front three can spread the width of the field when desired, but most of the time Chelsea FC keep the front three of Eden Hazard #11 Left Forward, Diego Costa #9 Center Forward and either Willian or more recently Pedro as the #7 Right Forward very much connected.

The starting positions of this 3-4-3 system of play make for very natural angles of support and passing lanes in multiple directions with balanced coverage across the field.



On screenshot #7, taken at the kickoff, from Chelsea FC's recent Premier League home game against Hull City FC played Sunday 22nd January 2017; we can see the clear 3-4-3 shape with the wide midfielders hugging the touchlines.

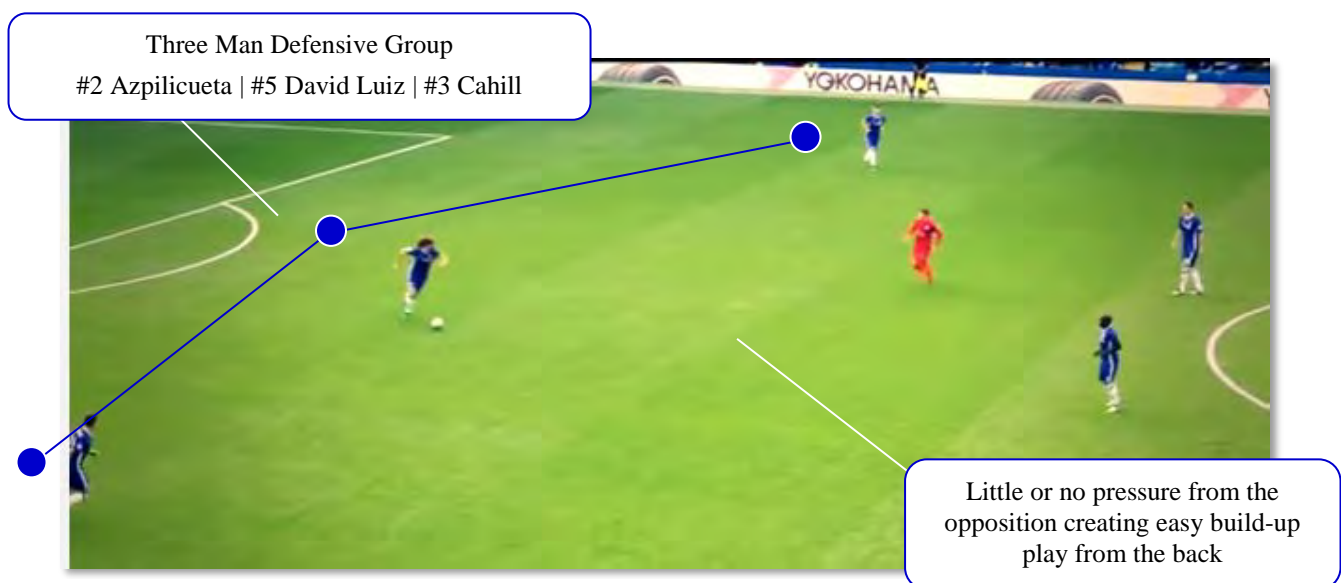
We can also see the mindset of Hull City FC's strategic response to the 3-4-3 of Chelsea FC. Already Chelsea FC have imposed their strategic will over the perceived inferior opposition.



The Shape Of The Play | Defense

The tree man defensive group has a number of benefits. The added security of covering players in the vital central areas of the field in front of goal provides the team with security and a platform to be able to attack with confidence.

Most Premier League opposition teams playing against Chelsea FC will only play with one designated forward and then a combination of supporting forwards or attacking midfield lines behind. This lack of numbers in opposition to Chelsea FC's three man defensive group permits them to be able to play out of the back in the comfort of numerical supremacy and stage attacking phases of play relatively untroubled as seen with the screenshot #8.



This build-up play from the back can be patient and intricate; at other times it can be extremely direct and equally devastating. One of the vital components of a three man defensive group is that, at minimum, one of the three is required to be a cultured passer of the ball, as comfortable in possession as any midfielder, even under the duress of the precarious field position close to goal.

When Conte was head coach at Juventus FC and later the Italy national team where he played with a three man defensive group, he was blessed with one such typical cultured #5 Central Defender. Leonardo Bonucci was that fulcrum of the three man defensive group who was able to dictate the tempo, build-up the attacking phases of play and hit those elegant longer passes direct to the front.

In the Johan Cruyff 3-4-3 FC Barcelona team of the 1990's there too we could see the classic example of a cultured ball playing #5 Central Defender; Ronald Koeman. Dutch international Koeman played near 200 games for FC Barcelona, winning countless trophies and scoring a disproportionate number of goals given his field position; even a European Cup winning goal. Koeman's cultured passing from the back set the platform for the FC Barcelona dominance with the 3-4-3 system of play.

Chelsea FC's Premier League domestic rivals and fellow proponents of the 3-4-3 Tottenham Hotspur FC also have a world-class ball-playing #5 Central Defender, Belgium international Toby Alderweireld. Tottenham Hotspur FC's recent defeat of Chelsea FC while mirroring their 3-4-3 formation was no accident and much of the Spurs success can be attributed to the range of passing from Alderweireld.



Toby Alderweireld
Tottenham Hotspur FC



Ronald Koeman
FC Barcelona



Leonardo Bonucci
Juventus FC

Conte is all too aware of the need for a Chelsea FC player with this type of playing profile.

Chelsea FC have one such player, David Luiz. Another 2016 summer signing, Luiz is making his return to Chelsea FC from Paris Saint-Germain FC. Luiz's first spell at Chelsea FC was a mixed affair, with relentless question marks posed about his natural defending capabilities. A relentless question not answered by a mindboggling display as captain of the Brazil national team during the 1 – 7 Fifa World Cup semifinal defeat in 2014. However, on return to Chelsea FC, and under a different system of play, Luiz is thriving; a genuine world-class ball-playing #5 Central Defender.

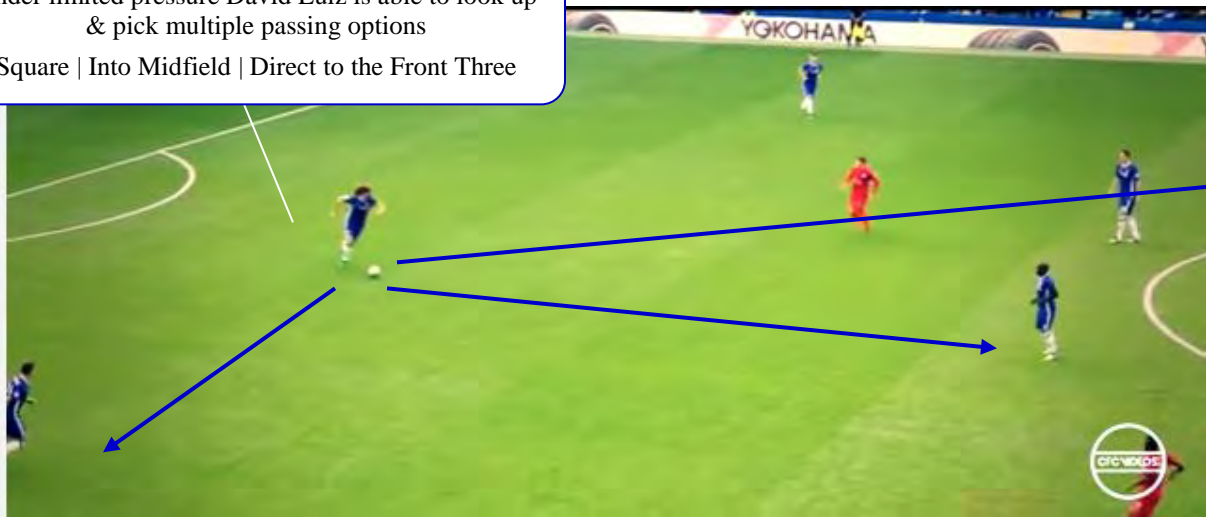
As we see from screenshot #9, #10 & #11, the combination of low pressure on the Chelsea FC early possession and build-up play, combined with the talented range of passing from David Luiz in the #5 Central Defender role, creates a very positive attacking alchemy.

David Luiz goes from back to front in a very direct manner, very direct but also very accurate. Under little or no pressure, Luiz is able to look up and spot the positive movement from the front three in very threatening areas of the field. Luiz picks up possession on the edge of his own 18yrd box, approximately 80 - 90yds from the opposition goal and with all eleven opponents defending goal-side.

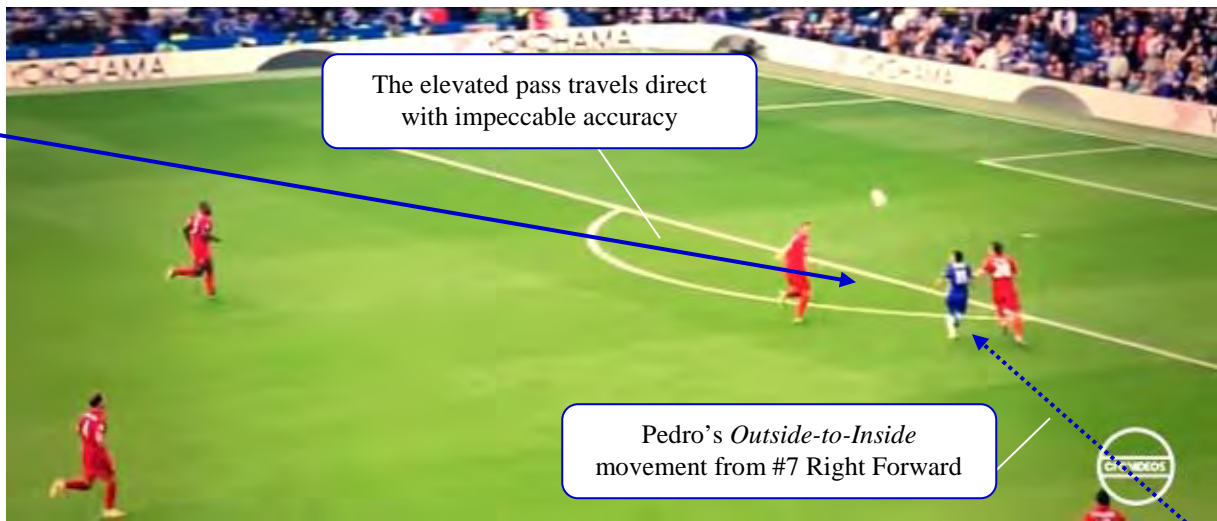
The elevated pass is very straight but also very accurate into the path of the outside-to-inside movement of #7 Right Forward, Pedro (shirt number #11). The lofted ball bypasses the entire opposition team and travels to the edge of the opposition 18yrd box with pinpoint precision.

Pedro is able to collect the amazing pass, organize the controlling touch quickly and create a goal scoring opportunity with 80yds of territory covered in two seconds.

Under limited pressure David Luiz is able to look up & pick multiple passing options
Square | Into Midfield | Direct to the Front Three



The elevated pass travels direct with impeccable accuracy



Pedro's *Outside-to-Inside* movement from #7 Right Forward



David Luiz is also a world-class #5 Central Defender on the transition; the changeover of possession. Luiz is confident enough in his talents to be able to bring the ball out of the moment of transition and quickly build a counter attack. Most robust defenders are happy to just clear their danger zone when halting an opposition attack. Chelsea FC with David Luiz as their #5 Central Defender recognize this moment of transition as an opportunity to counter. This attacking philosophy combined with technical execution to match is daunting to defend against as an opposition.

On the screenshots #12 - #17 we can see David Luiz and teammates Create > Recognize > Execute a moment of transition. The positive changeover of possession to Chelsea FC is the catalyst for a Luiz-inspired counter attack.



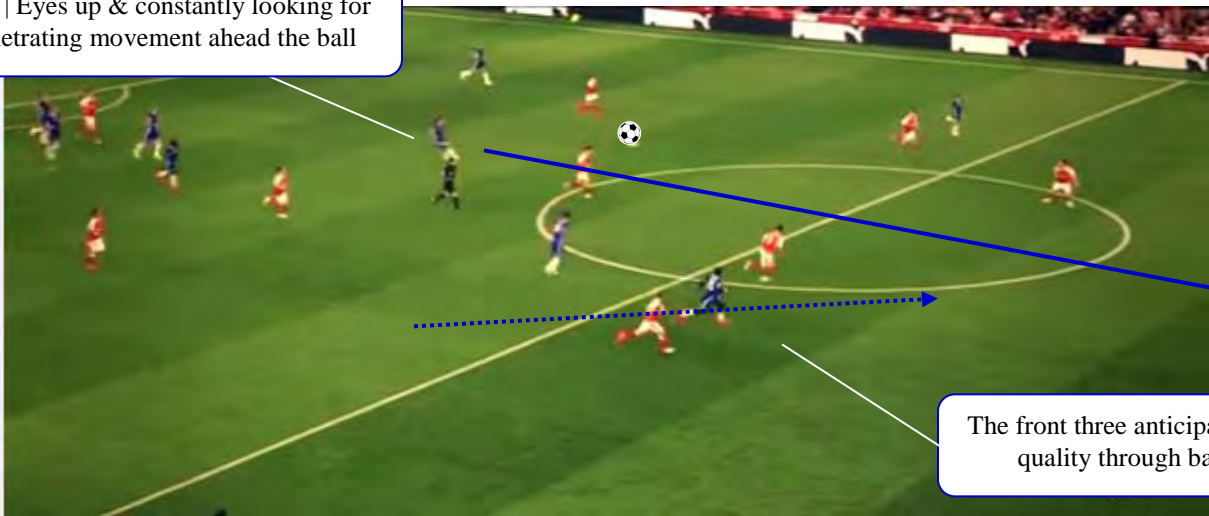
Luiz carries the ball out of the defensive zone and confidently into the midfield. With his eyes up and constantly looking for penetrating movement ahead the ball Luiz is able to initiate a rapid counter attack. The front three of Chelsea FC are certainly willing runners anticipating a quality through ball from a pass-master.



Luiz carries the ball out of the defensive zone and confidently into the midfield

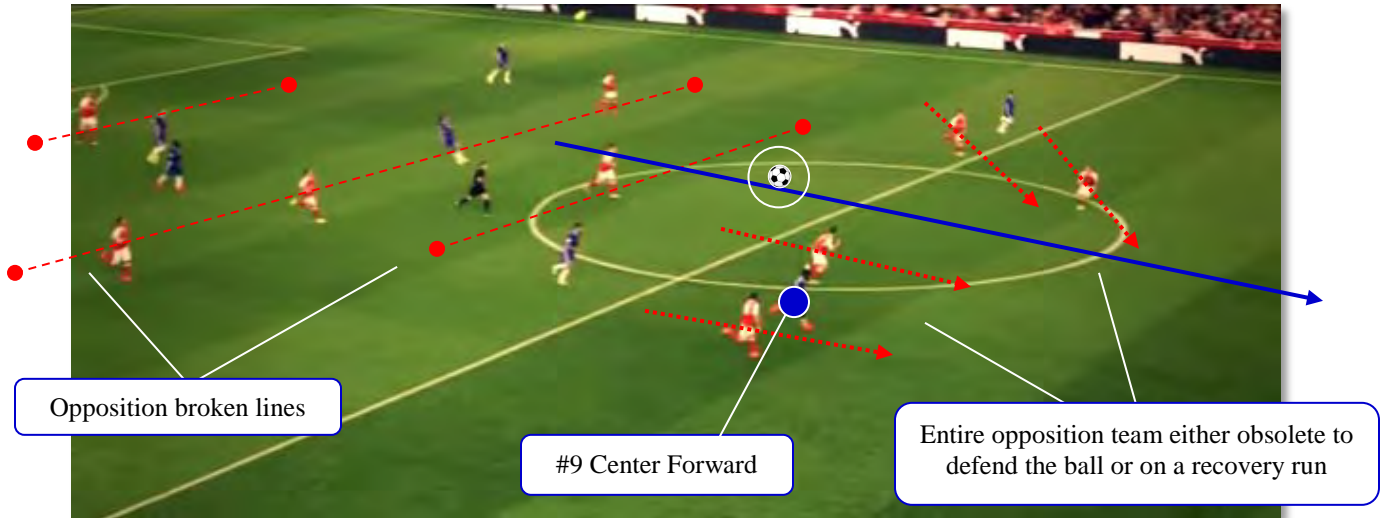
The change to widescreen angle of the next screenshot shows the vision of Luiz to pick out the generous attacking movement of the Chelsea FC forward line.

Luiz | Eyes up & constantly looking for penetrating movement ahead the ball



The front three anticipating a quality through ball

Through the recognition and speed of the counter attack Luiz has already broken multiple opposition lines on the dribble, rendering those potential recovery runners as obsolete. The awareness to identify the forward movement is sensational. The quality of the penetrating pass, perhaps 40 or 50yds with pinpoint precision, is also sensational, and similarly, breaks yet more opposition defensive lines.



Within seconds Michy Batshuayi who is running the #9 Center Forward channel is in on goal with only the keeper to beat. A devastating counter attack that requires great composure and the complementary skill set to make happen.



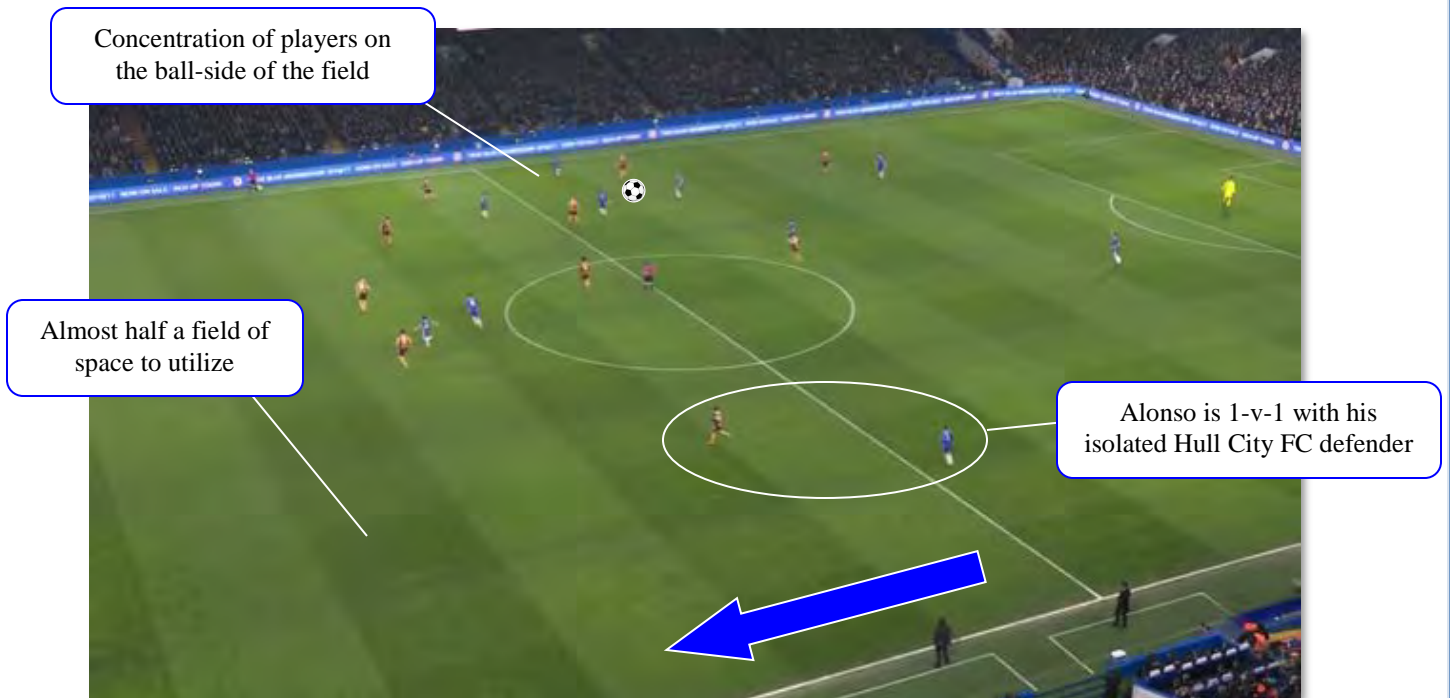


The Shape Of The Play | Midfield

The midfield of Chelsea FC's 3-4-3 is quite remarkable and unlike what we have discussed previously with the FC Barcelona 3-4-3 model of the 1990's. Instead, Chelsea FC in their 2016/17 version of the 3-4-3 run their midfield four the full width of the field. Victor Moses and Marcos Alonso fulfilling the wide midfield berths, #6 Right Midfield and #8 Left Midfield, really do stretch to the touch lines. This holding of the width causes huge problems for the opposition marking players as they want to remain connected to their teammates in a compact unit.

The weak-side wide midfielder holds their width anticipating a rapid change to the point of attack with a quick switch of play. Often the rapid cross field pass can find the weak-side midfielder in huge amounts of space and with an isolated opposition defender ripe for challenging 1-v-1.

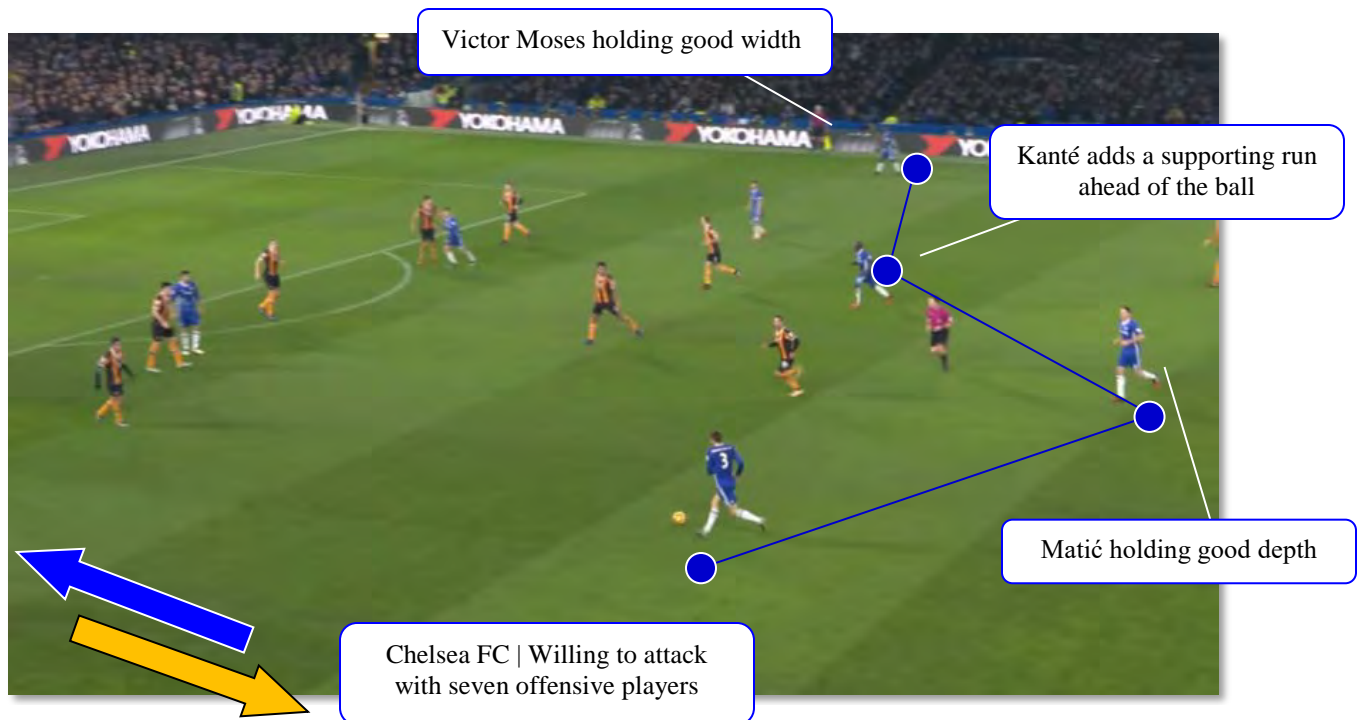
On screenshot #18 taken from the Chelsea FC home game versus Hull City FC we can see a concentration of players on the ball-side of the field. However, Marcos Alonso playing the #8 Left Midfielder is holding his width on the weak-side of the field. Alonso is 1-v-1 with his isolated Hull City FC defender with almost half a field of space to utilize. One quick switch ball to change the point of attack can create a very dangerous platform for Chelsea FC's offensive play.



In the center of the midfield Chelsea FC have two players of amazing talent N'Golo Kanté, another summer signing from surprise Premier League champions Leicester City FC and the reformed Nemanja Matic work in tandem at the heart of the Chelsea FC midfield. Kanté has an abundance of energy that allows him to genuinely play box-to-box of field coverage; while his reading of the game is statistically immense when measured in breaking up opposition play. Matic is a monster of a man with a cultured left foot, the perfect hybrid of brains and brawn to boss the midfield.

Both Kanté and Matic, #10 & #4 Center Midfield, seem able to contribute to the attacking phases of Chelsea FC play and fulfill their midfield defensive duties of screening the back three. The right foot left foot mix of the central midfield pair adds another subtle dynamic to their combination.

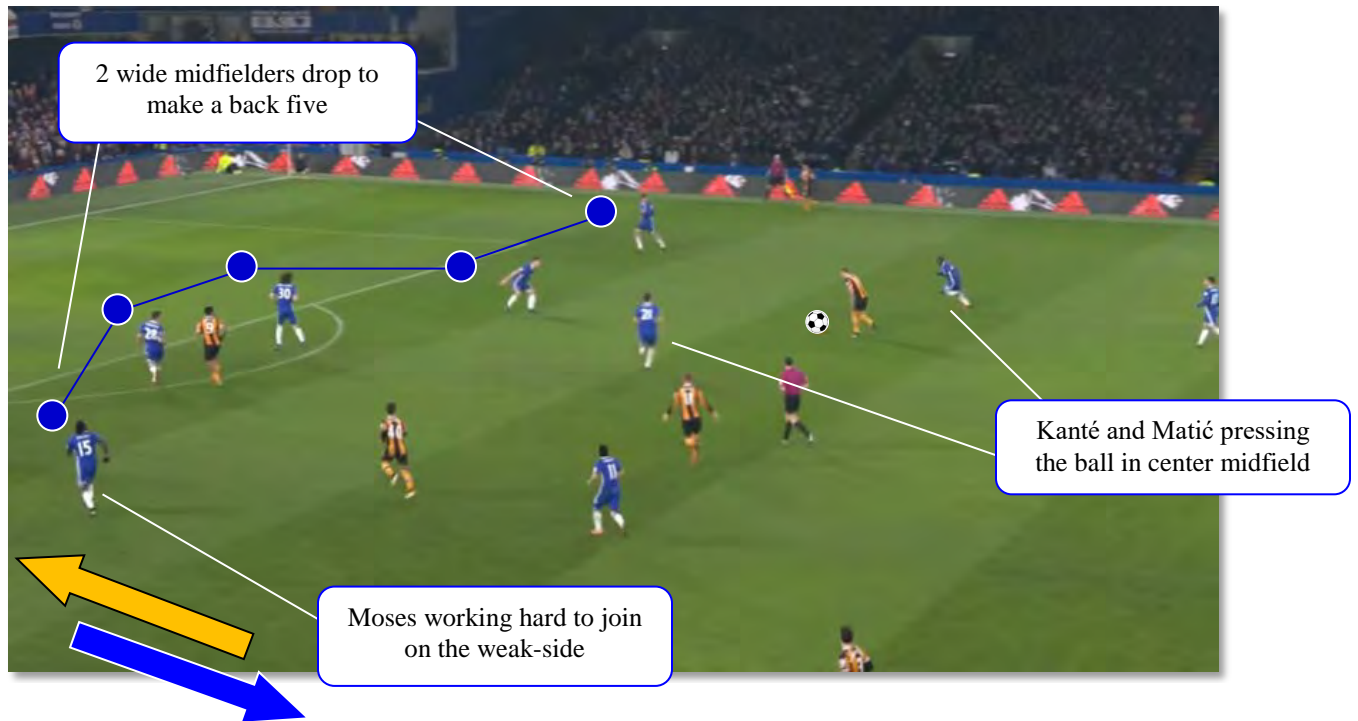
On the screenshot #19 we can see the four midfielders stretched wide across the field holding good width with both Kanté and Matic contributing to the attacking phases of play from center midfield, but working different supporting lines. Kanté is showing good mobility to add a supporting run into a #10 'playmaker' role ahead of the ball; and Matic holding good depth with support behind the ball. Chelsea FC are willing to attack with seven offensive players.



Defensively, the four man midfield is equally as impressive. The wide midfielders, #8 Alonso and #6 Moses, are asked to do a defensive job similar to that of a ‘wingback’. When defending these wide midfielders drop all the way into the defensive group to change it from a back three into a back five. This discipline is particularly required on the weak-side as the defensive group slides over to the ball-side.

This discipline also requires great attitude and matching energy. The task is not suited to all players as much is asked of them to be both offensive and defensive midfielders when certain scenarios dictate. One conundrum that the coach has in this situation is selecting the profile of the player to perform the task. Some coaches will select recognized fullbacks to do the job, natural defenders and encourage them to attack. Other coaches will select recognized wingers, natural attackers and coach them to defend. Tottenham Hotspur FC in their version of the 3-4-3 system of play use recognized fullbacks in the form of #3 Danny Rose and #2 Kyle Walker.

On screenshot #20 Chelsea FC are defending in the second half of the same game versus Hull City FC. Here we can see the two wide midfielders have dropped into the defensive group to make a back five. Victor Moses working hard to join the defensive group on the weak-side. Kanté and Matic pressing the ball with urgency in the center of midfield. Chelsea FC are required to defend with seven players.



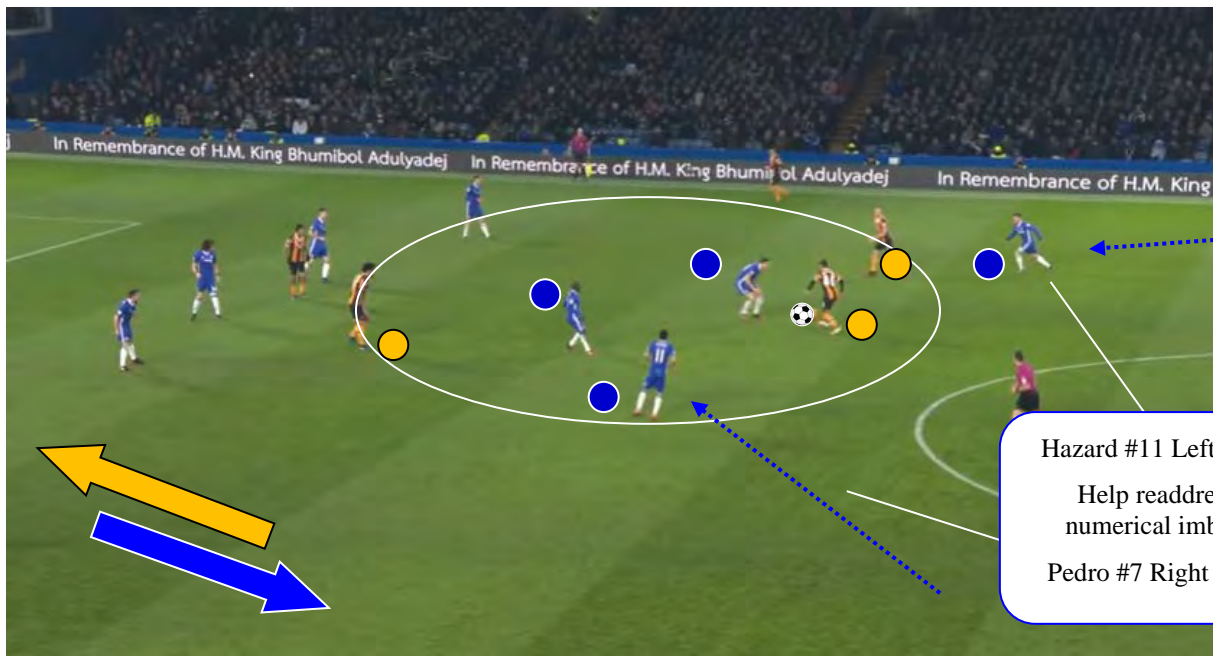
One of the apparent disadvantages for having the wide midfielders drop into a back five is the numerical imbalance in the center of midfield when playing against certain other formations. For example, if an opposing team were setting up with a three man central midfield in a 4-3-3 system of play then the two man central midfield of Chelsea FC's 3-4-3, reverting to a 5-2-3 when out of possession, would appear outnumbered in a vital area of the field.



The work rate and team cohesion that Chelsea FC have fostered is currently so strong that they are able to slow down opposition build-up play even when appearing to be outnumbered in midfield. Often the desire to contribute to the team success is so great that members of the attacking three will drop back into midfield in defensive support of Kanté and Matic to readdress the numerical imbalance, often overloading this critical zone in their own favor.



On screenshot #21 we can see the wide forwards, Pedro #7 Right Forward & Hazard #11 Left Forward, dropping into the center of midfield to help readdress the numerical imbalance.



Hazard #11 Left Forward
 Help readdress the numerical imbalance
 Pedro #7 Right Forward

The Shape Of The Play | Attack

The Chelsea FC front three of the 3-4-3 are a wonderful example of attacking talent, even when fringe players such as Cesc Fàbregas, Pedro, Willian or Batshuayi are recycled into the team the attacking threat remains prolific.

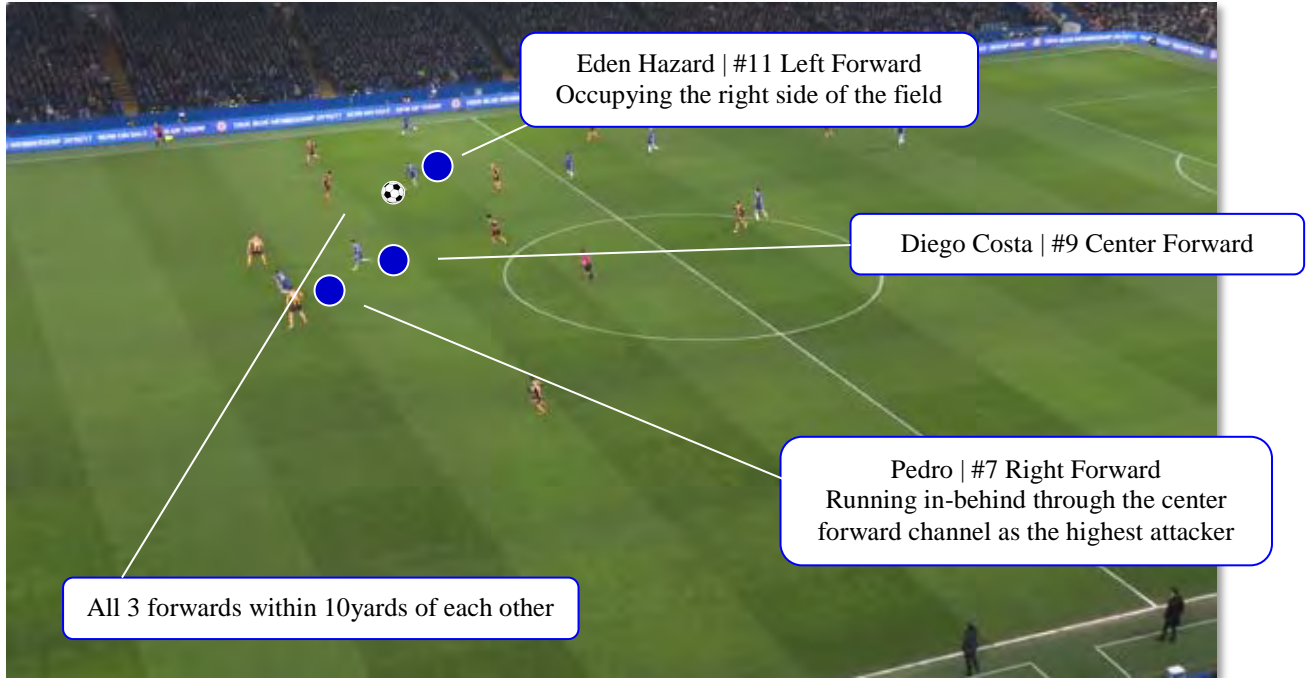
At the focus of the front three Chelsea FC have a wrecking ball of a #9 Center Forward who can marry great physicality with delicate interplay. Diego Costa provides the attack with a focal point from which they are able to bounce off longer, more direct balls. His back-to-goal hold up play and interaction with supporting teammates searching for the second ball knockdown or connection in-behind can be described as agricultural; it can also be seen to be most effective.

Costa brings more than just physicality from his #9 role; he is able to self-create goal scoring opportunities either for himself or more altruistically for teammates. He is able to withstand outrageous physical attention from defenders and yet still retain the composure to offload or to get the shot away. Playing through the #9 Center Forward Diego Costa is the primary attacking threat Chelsea FC possess.

Around the #9 Center Forward the supporting #7 Right Forward and #11 Left Forward offer a different threat. Regularly Eden Hazard playing #11 and either Pedro or Willian most often playing #7, these diminutive yet skillful players bring speed and subtle dribbling skills that commit and can unbalance opposition defenders. The #7 and #11 often play very close to each other and often away from a conventional field location. The players seem to be given freedom to roam where they wish, finding space and opportunity to operate.

The Chelsea FC front three often demonstrates excellent rotation of their attacking roles and positional interchange, see screenshot #22. Frequently overloading areas of the field in their favor, relentlessly offering support angles, combination plays and unexpected trickery. There seems a genuine coherence between the squad to want to play for each other; happy to create a goal for a friend as much as score themselves. This unstructured attacking formation is difficult to defend against as the defensive group in opposition would prefer greater clarity of who they are supposed to defend and when; their immediate opponent often changing and constantly out of position.

Chelsea FC are also very good at keeping the groups within the team connected, usually the distances between the defensive group and the midfield, and the midfield to the forward three are relatively close, 30 – 40yds. This connection between the lines creates multiple angles of support and facilitates quick speed of play.



Frequently attacking phases will be built-up using the wide midfield players, drawing the opposition defensive players away from the central protection of the goal. This excellent use of width becomes a recurrent staging platform for multiple Chelsea FC goals. We can see from screenshot #23, Chelsea FC's first goal scored in the home win versus Hull City FC, Victor Moses #6 Right Midfield, is very high up the field and in a very attacking situation. Similar, #8 Left Midfield Marcos Alonso is already inside the danger zone looking for goal scoring opportunities with a front post run.



Perhaps not surprisingly given the rather diminutive size of Chelsea FC's Right & Left Forwards, a large percentage of deliveries from wide areas are not played in the air. However, by flooding the danger zone with large numbers of players and through intelligent box organization of those many players Chelsea FC are able to score goals from wide deliveries.

We can see from screenshot #24, Chelsea FC's second goal versus Stoke City FC, the ball into the 18yrd box was delivered from wide, delivered from Moses and delivered on the floor. This repeated sequence allows five Chelsea FC players to take up dangerous positions immediately in front of goal; this is a very common theme for Chelsea FC.



However, with some strong, tall players such as David Luiz, Cahill, Matic and Costa, combined with the ability of multiple flair players to deliver with perfect accuracy, Chelsea FC are also a threat from set-piece deliveries.

Chelsea FC have a multifaceted and yet very effective set of tactics to their attack, they are able to score goals in numerous different ways. Some are direct and simple, others more considered and aesthetic, but all are prolific. Above all Premier League title contenders right now Chelsea FC has the greatest variety in attacking threat and makes them favorite to be 2016/17 champions.

Tactical Series
Antonio Conte

Weaknesses of 3-4-3

Tottenham Hotspur FC 2 – 0 Chelsea FC



Weaknesses of 3-4-3 | Tottenham Hotspur FC 2 – 0 Chelsea FC

On Wednesday 4th January 2017 Chelsea FC's amazing, near record breaking winning streak was snapped following an epic Premier League defeat to fellow title rivals Tottenham Hotspur FC. Spurs of course have some outstanding individual talents, but it was their team strategy to play their own version of a 3-4-3 formation in direct competition to Chelsea FC that perhaps had the most influence over the victory.

Through this game and the goals that Spurs scored we can identify some of the weaknesses of the 3-4-3 system and understand how this tactical detail was able to beat a highflying Chelsea FC.

The main weakness and the obvious target for the Spurs offence was to identify the space out wide of the three man defensive group and behind the wide midfielders; space where a conventional fullback would be positioned in a regulation four man defensive group.



Amongst many interesting duels throughout the strategy, the most influential to the game result would be who out of the opposing wide midfielders would be able to impose their ability on the game more than the other. In this particular duel, Tottenham Hotspur FC's Kyle Walker, who is a regular right fullback but playing as a right midfielder in the 3-4-3, was able to push Chelsea FC counterpart #8 Right Midfield Marcos Alonso back into a defensive role.

This was such a frequent event and a constant puzzle for the Chelsea FC defensive organization. This continued danger was an ever-present threat to the Spurs attack. So much so, that it began to effect and unbalance the Chelsea FC structure and shape.



In an effort to halt the Spurs constant threat in this vital area, Nemanja Matic would frequently be drawn out of his position and required to double up on Kyle Walker to help Alonso.

This relocation of Matic in turn freed up some space between the Chelsea FC midfield group and the now five man defensive group. Tottenham Hotspur FC's front three were also very aware of this unbalancing to the Chelsea FC structure and organized their attacking shape accordingly. Harry Kane the #9 Center Forward was able to remain high and central and occupy multiple Chelsea FC central defenders. Dele Alli playing the weak-side forward as the #11 Left Forward

would position in-between the weak-side Chelsea FC defenders, picking out Azpilicueta who was a physical mismatch and also challenging Moses to be honest with his defensive duties to pinch in from wide midfield. This resulted in #7 Right Forward Christian Eriksen free to occupy the space behind the play with his subtle late movement.



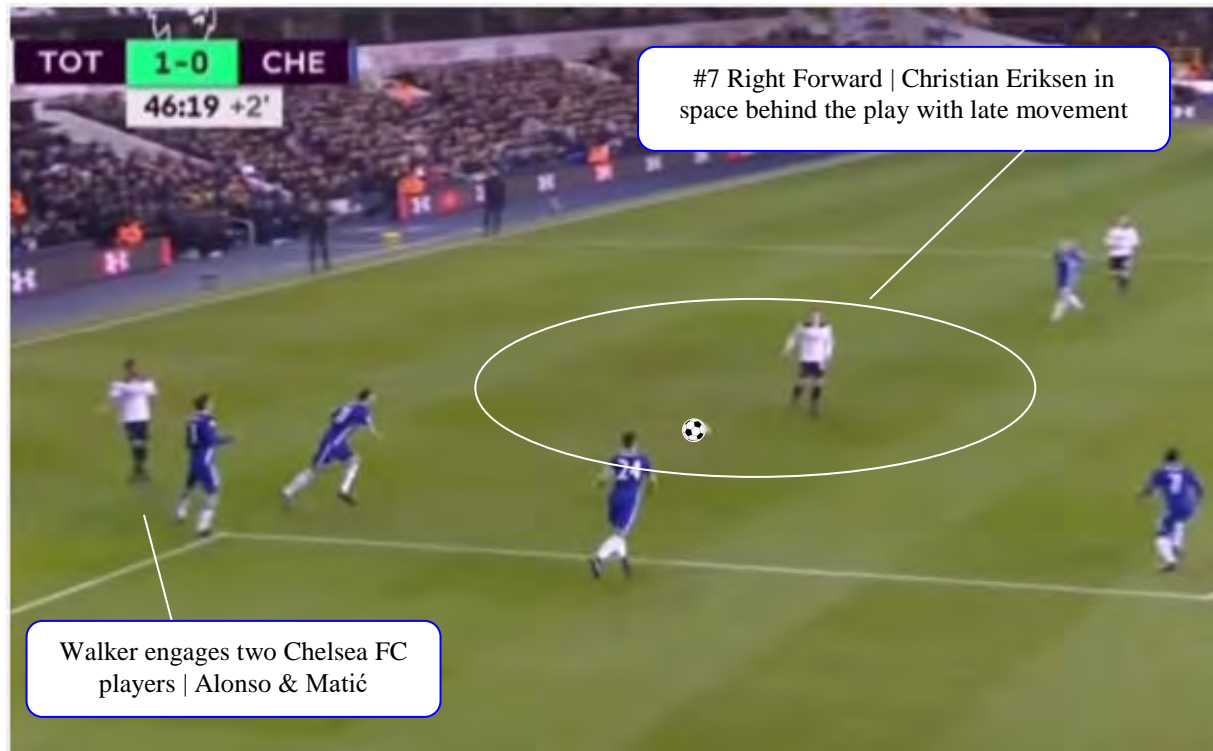
It was from this platform that Christian Eriksen was twice able to find the space and deliver perfectly weighted balls onto the head of Dele Alli. The execution of the tactics and the subtle variations of the two teams playing an almost identical system was most intriguing.

We can see from screenshots #25 - #28 how this strategy unfolded for the Tottenham Hotspur FC first and all important goal.



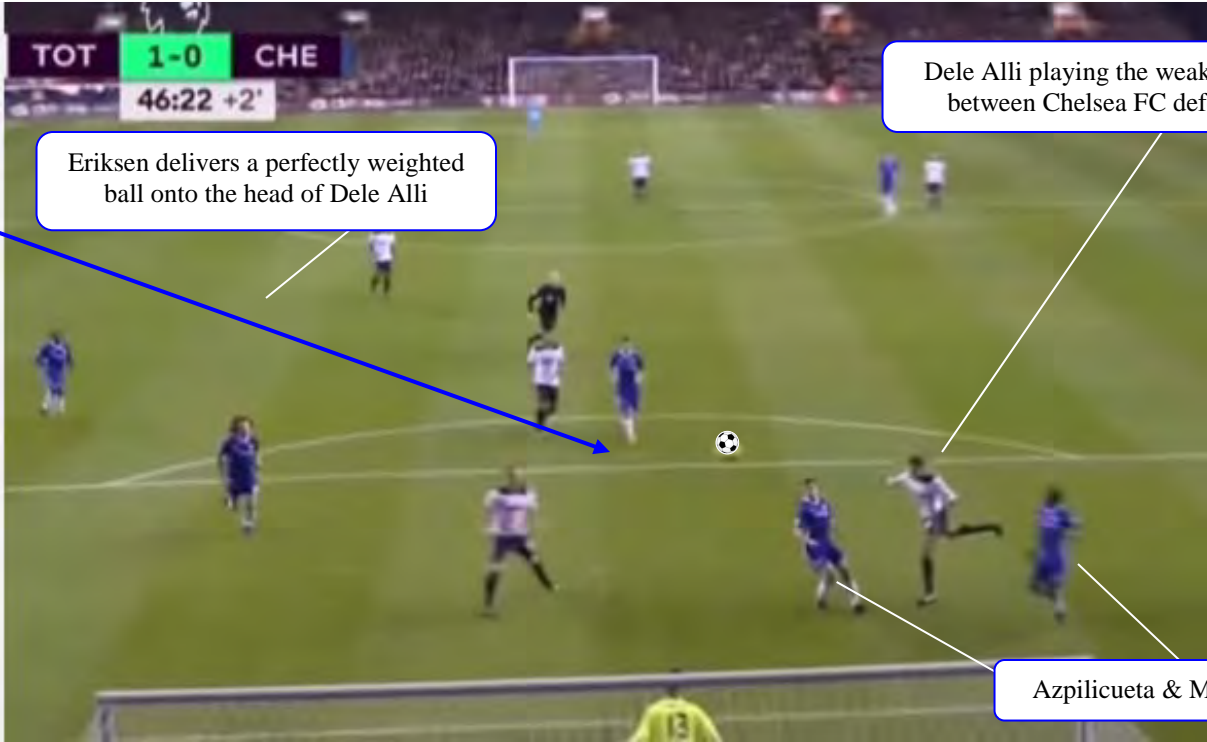
Nemanja Matić drawn out of position to double up & help Alonso

Spur's Kyle Walker pushing back Chelsea FC counterpart Marcos Alonso



#7 Right Forward | Christian Eriksen in space behind the play with late movement

Walker engages two Chelsea FC players | Alonso & Matić



Eriksen delivers a perfectly weighted ball onto the head of Dele Alli

Dele Alli playing the weak-side in-between Chelsea FC defenders

Azpilicueta & Moses



Reverse Angle | Dele Alli playing the weak-side in-between Chelsea FC defenders GOAL!

The main difference between the teams on this occasion was that Tottenham Hotspur FC were able to impose their game plan on Chelsea FC with more authority. Spurs played with a front three that denied the Chelsea FC capacity to build-up play from the back. The Spurs wide midfielders were able to push back the Chelsea FC wide midfielders changing Chelsea FC's

shape into more of a 5-2-3 formation. Spurs were able to advance with their wide midfielders, changing their shape to more of a 3-2-5. And the creative movement of the Tottenham Hotspur FC's forwards created space behind the play and recognized mismatches on the weak-side.

Chelsea FC and their 2016/17 3-4-3 system of play lost on this occasion, but there are plenty of reasons to admire this strategy at work.

Thank You

A Soccer Coaching Product from **Education Football**
www.EducationFootball.com



Coach Jonny Carter
info@EducationFootball.com
423 276 1827

In association with **Soccer Camps at Vitesse**
www.SoccerCampsatVitesse.org

