



SERGIO BUSQUETS

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Barcelona's Unsung Hero

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Sergio Busquets Barcelona's Unsung Hero

by
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Sergio Busquets – The Barcelona unsung hero?

How important is Sergio Busquets to the Barcelona team? We all hear of the awards, plaudits and praise going to Messi, Xavi and Iniesta, and now on coaching courses, especially at youth level, players being encouraged to copy these 3 players, but how important is Busquets, the unsung hero of the team?

Busquets role in the team

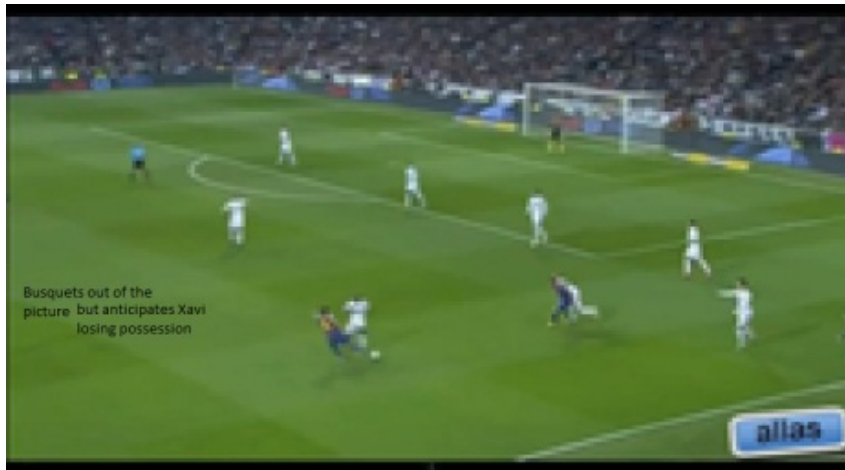
Busquets plays at the base of the midfield triangle of Barcelona's 4-3-3 formation, which could also be a 4-diamond-2 formation with 2 wide strikers as Messi plays in a 'False 9' position as an attacking midfielder more often now. The job Busquets does is to anchor his position in midfield, break up play and maintain possession of the ball, all of which he does very well – he had the 2nd highest pass completion percentage in Europe last season (93%) behind Xavi (94%) (Source fourfourtwo magazine Britain). Busquets also had the joint 3rd highest amount of Interceptions in Europe with 67, behind Javi Martinez of Athletic Bilbao (132), Marcelo of Real Madrid (75) and joint with Daniele De Rossi of Roma.

Xavi recently referred Busquets as the "Best 1 touch player in the world", a very big compliment from the best midfielder right now, and possibly ever. Vicente Del Bosque has said in the past "If I was to be a player again, the player I would want to be is Busquets".

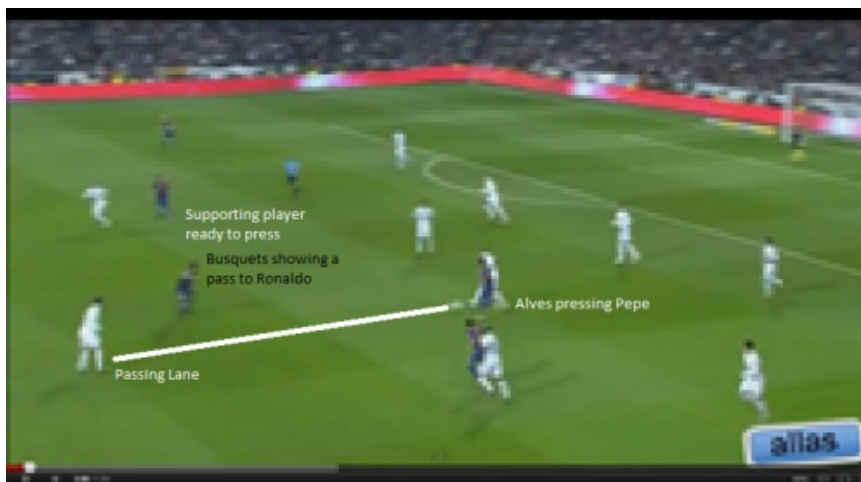
In the 1st clip, with pictures attached, I will look at certain things Busquets does well, anticipation of a loss of possession, his decision making of where and who to press, and what decision he makes when he wins possession. In the 1st clip, with pictures attached, I will look at certain things Busquets does well, anticipation of a loss of possession, his decision making of where and who to press, and what decision he makes when he wins possession.

7 seconds – Anticipation and Work Ethic.

Busquets is out of picture, but recognises that possession may be lost after a loose pass from Dani Alves to Xavi, Xavi gets a toe onto the ball but Pepe is there to intercept. Busquets sees that Alves is blocking a pass to the opposite side of the pitch and quickly moves to block off the pass he sees the pass that may be available - Pepe will play to Ronaldo - shows the line of the pass and intercepts. The touch of the interception isn't great but he shows his work ethic to get into the next challenge and this allows Barcelona to press as a group with Alves and Cesc to force play back to Casillas' goal.



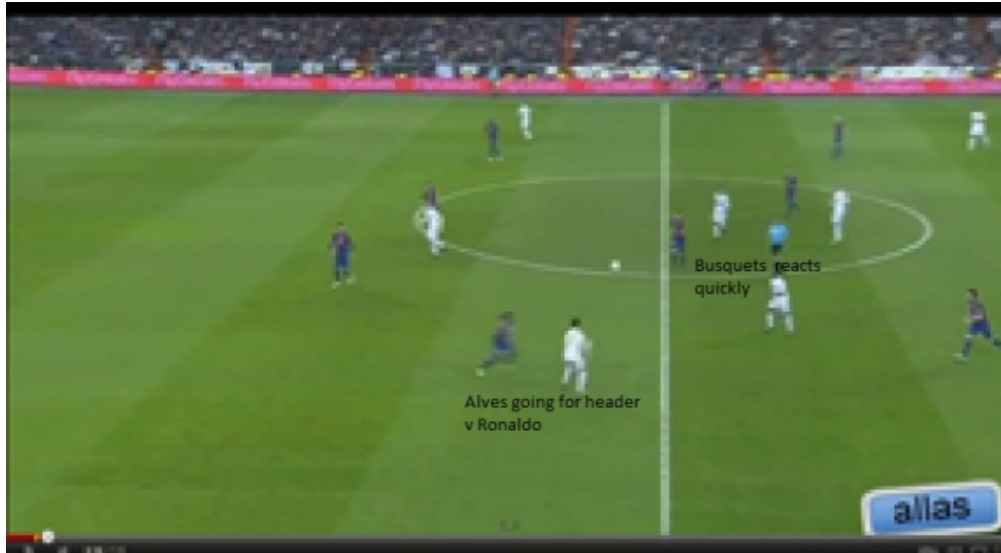
Busquets – out of picture – recognising break down of attack and quick mental transition to defensive phase of play.



(PIC 2 ^)Busquets Shows Passing Lane to intercept, then pressing and tackling after heavy 1st touch during interception.

15 Seconds – Reaction Speed and Play Recognition.

Busquets can see that Alves will win the header, but reacts quickly to move into a position to receive a headed pass, he also knows that Barcelona are at their best when building from Victor Valdes, and re-starts play with a back pass to Valdes.



Busquets reacting quickest, and then once Dani Alves heads down, Busquets receives the ball.

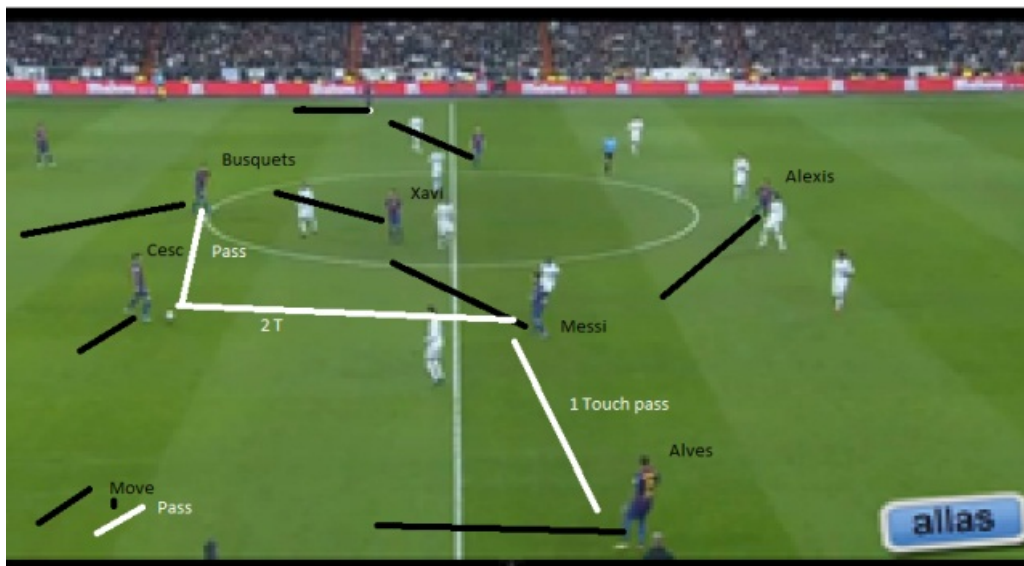
20 Seconds – The Quarterback – Barcelona and Busquets Trademark

The Barcelona trademark is the goal kick and wide Centre backs, with Busquets dropping into the hole to receive from either Pique or Puyol, then moving into midfield with possession.



The Trademark 3-3-3-1 Goal Kick set up.

Instead of forcing play, he see's Cesc dropping into the Xavi position (Right Side Centre Midfield) and plays a simple pass to continue the build of play into the space down the right. This pass seems simple and boring but as it is down Real Madrid's left, this forces Ronaldo to drop deeper to help defend with Marcelo v Messi and Alves, thus making it harder to allow Ronaldo to be effective near the Barcelona goal.



Cesc checking back to receive from Busquets.

43 Seconds – Speed of reaction and peripheral vision

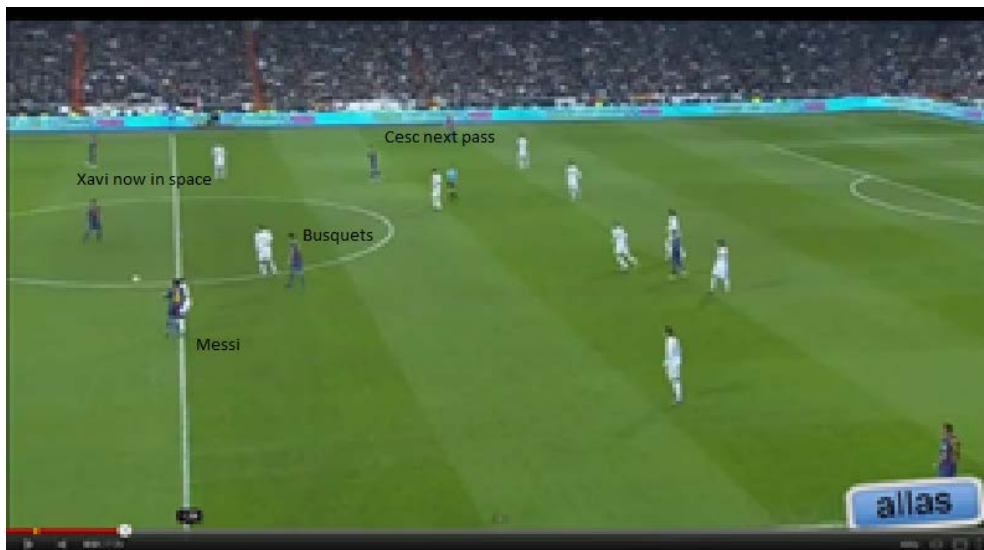
Busquets presses Altintop, and when play breaks loose, he reacts quickly to the loose ball, spots Xavi in space using his peripheral vision and plays a quick sliding pass to Xavi. The Key thing here is the slight turn of the neck as he reacts, to see Xavi and to know if he is in space.



The ball is passed ahead of Busquets, but he reacts and spots a pass quickly, passing to Xavi.

47 Seconds – Pass Selection and intelligent movement to help unbalance the opponent.

Busquets fakes a pass back and drifts past Ronaldo, as he does this; he has 2 clear options – Messi or Xavi. He uses Messi but knows Messi wants to use the far side space, to drags the opponent out of the space to create a passing lane for Messi to Xavi. Ronaldo follows him and Messi can play the pass to Xavi.

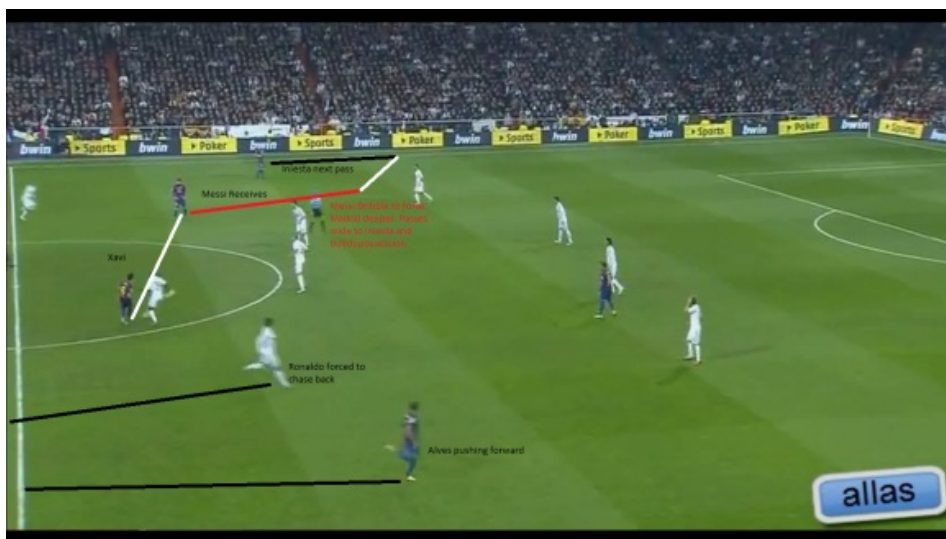
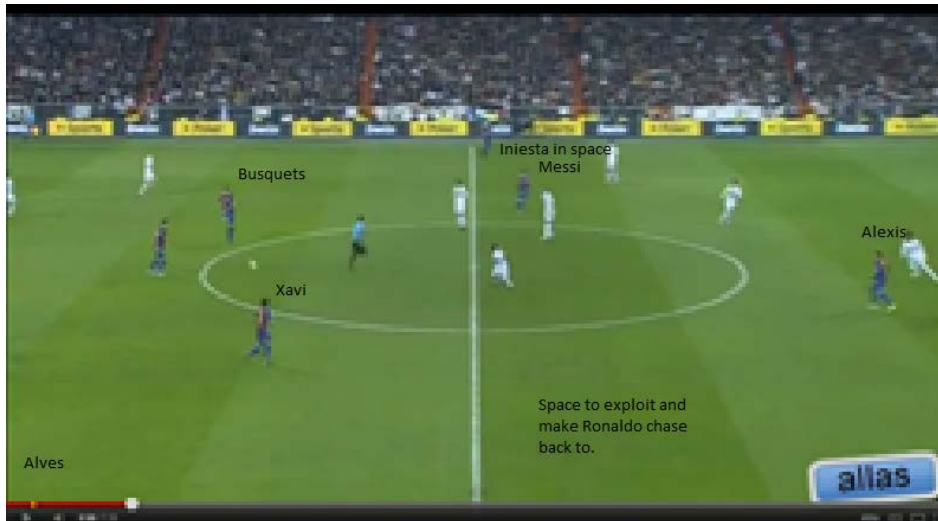


Busquets fakes the pass, turns and lays to Messi, then opens up the space for Messi to pass into Xavi who has become free after Busquets movement.

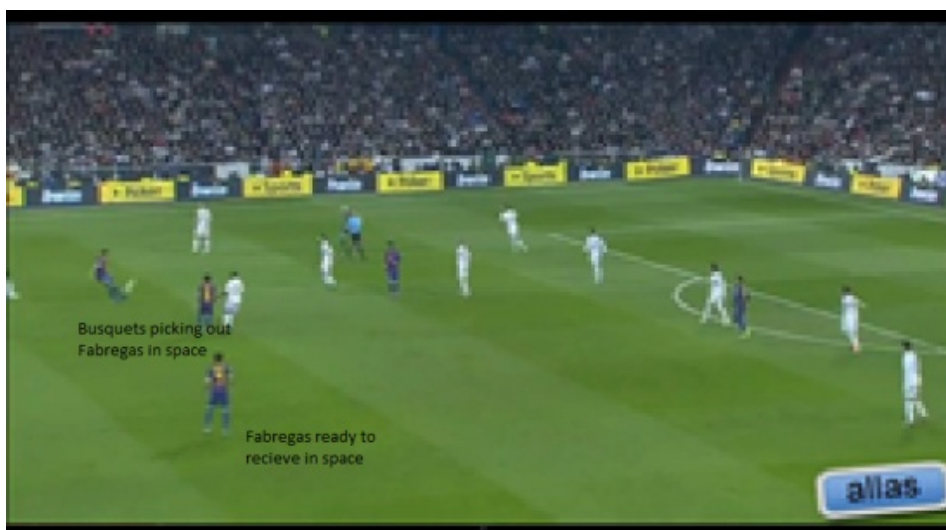
52 Seconds to 1. 24 – Transition Play, Pass selection and ball retention to force the opponent back.

I've highlighted this clip as I feel it shows a lot of the good things about Busquets game, his reaction speed, speed of thought, pass selections and movement off the ball. Ronaldo is on the counter attack with 1 available pass – 2 if Higuain makes a "Pedro Run" (a diagonal run to offer a through pass but mainly to open up space for the player behind him on the same side who will probably get the ball), then the Real Madrid counter attack may have been more dangerous.

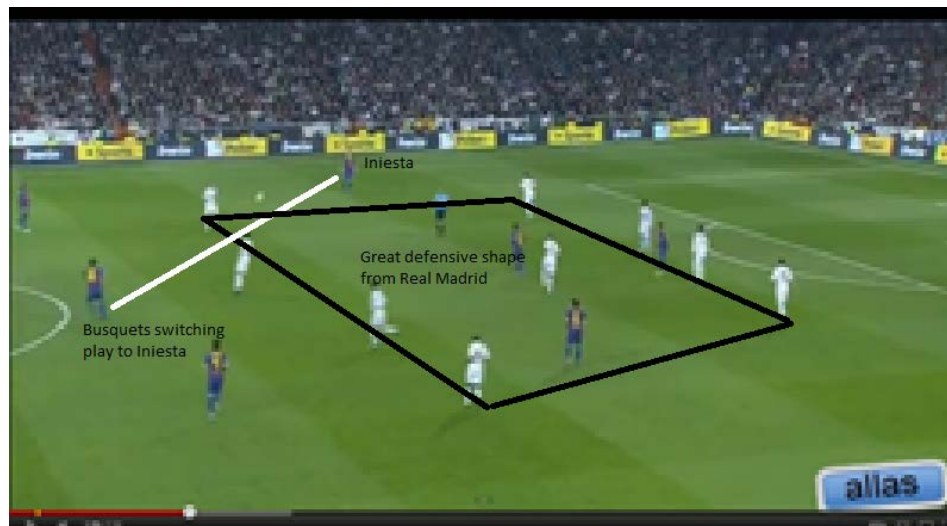
Busquets is the furthest player away on the Halfway Line, and chases back. The ball breaks loose and as he knows that Ronaldo has the ball in the centre, the space must be on his starting position. He scans the play on the dribble, picks out Xavi inside right, knowing that with Dani Alves on the overlap, Ronaldo must chase back.



Xavi picks out Messi who forces the defence to retreating – leaving more space in the middle of the park for Busquets, then passes to Iniesta. From here, possession is built and the Madrid defensive shape is continually moved around. The pass into Messi is made to play 1 touch, as Xavi hasn't been able to scan or switch play; Busquets offers a simple lay off and intelligently picks out Fabregas.



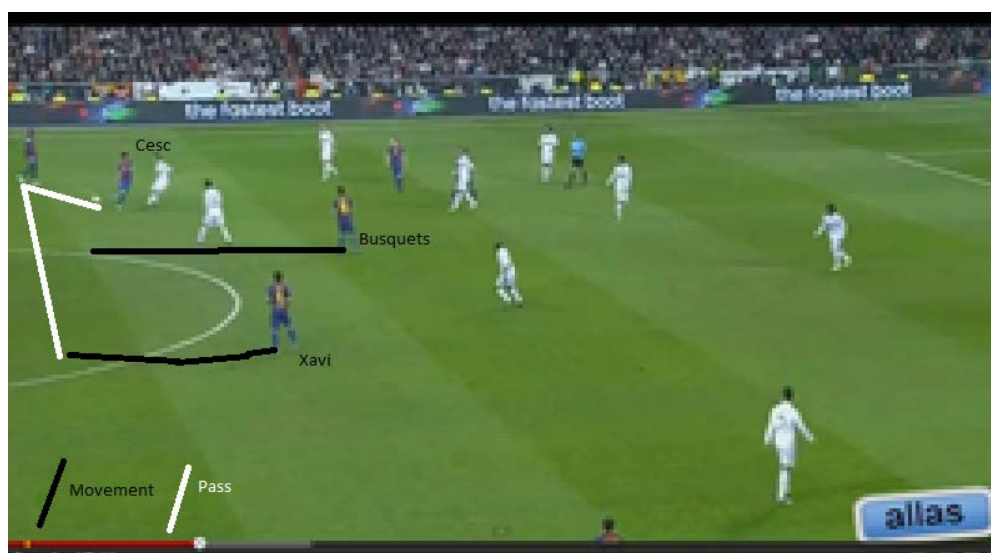
When the ball ends up over at Dani Alves, Xavi is given a difficult pass and deflects the ball into Busquets who reads the situation, jogs into the space and keeps the ball and the attack going. Real Madrid's 4-1-4-1 shape (1:22 on clip) is as good as it gets for a shape, but Busquets has spotted the pass whilst recovering the ball from Xavi, and plays a lovely pass out to Iniesta, penetrating the midfield line.

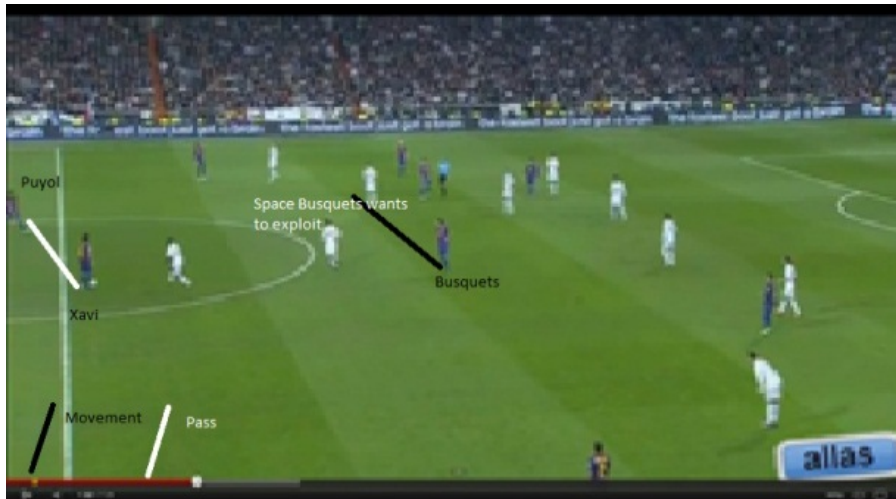


Xavi deflects the ball to Busquets, who turns and switches play out to Iniesta on the left touchline, penetrating the Midfield 4 of Real Madrid.

1. 26 – Creating Space for team mates and yourself in midfield

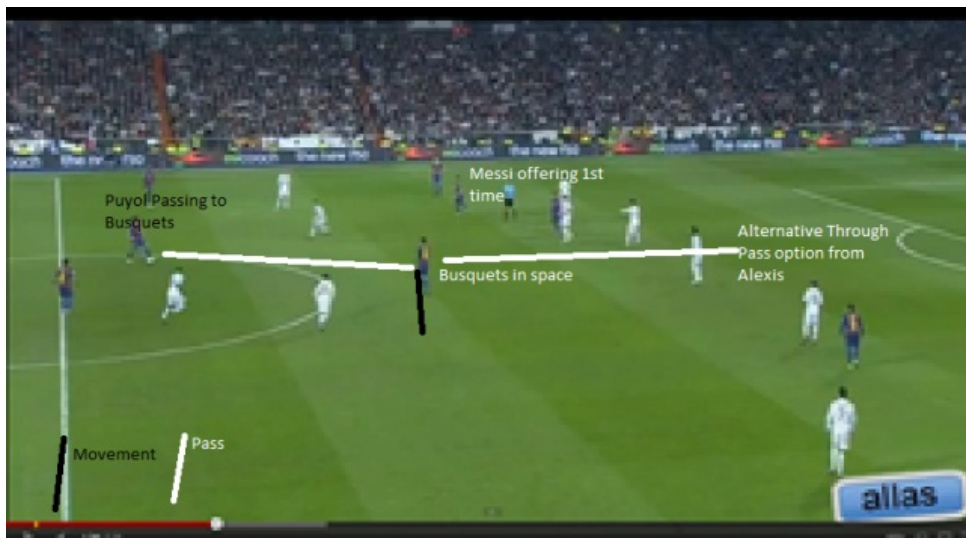
Busquets could receive a pass here, but the pass is slightly risky as there is a recovering defender, so he moves forward into the gap behind the players to unbalance the shape, as this happens, Xavi knows to drop off and receive a pass.



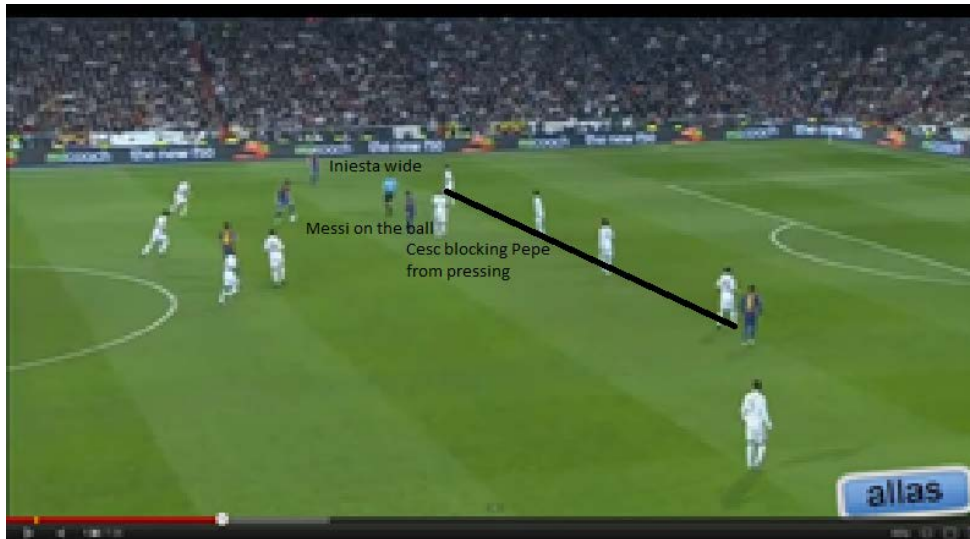


Busquets at the top of the Cesc-Xavi-Busquets triangle, then creating space by moving away from Puyol who will receive from Xavi. Busquets is in the middle of the picture.

Busquets continues to move round to effectively 'check his run' as he knows that a space will appear as Xavi passes to Puyol, Puyol knows where the space will be and knows that somebody – Busquets – will move back into that space to keep possession.



Busquets now demanding the ball in the space.



Messi receives after 1st time Busquets pass. The key to this is recognising you can't receive a pass but you can move to trigger another movement to keep the ball. As he receives, he has already scanned the play and played 1 touch to Messi. No sprinting at all here from Busquets, all movements seem to be done at a casual, light jog pace!

1. 39 – Drawing Fouls

Busquets is a clever player when being challenged – he knows that Pepe will come crashing in, and at 1 min 37 when the ball breaks loose, he quickly scans to see where his pass will be to, but stays where he is to allow Pepe to be booked for a rash challenge. Pepe now can't really go charging into tackles recklessly and this will hinder his aggressive play for the rest of the game, disrupting the Madrid game plan

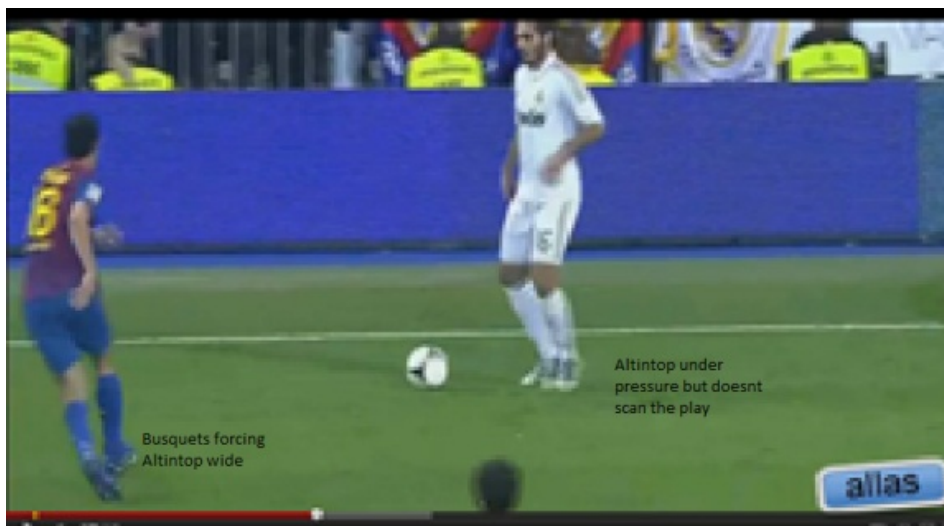


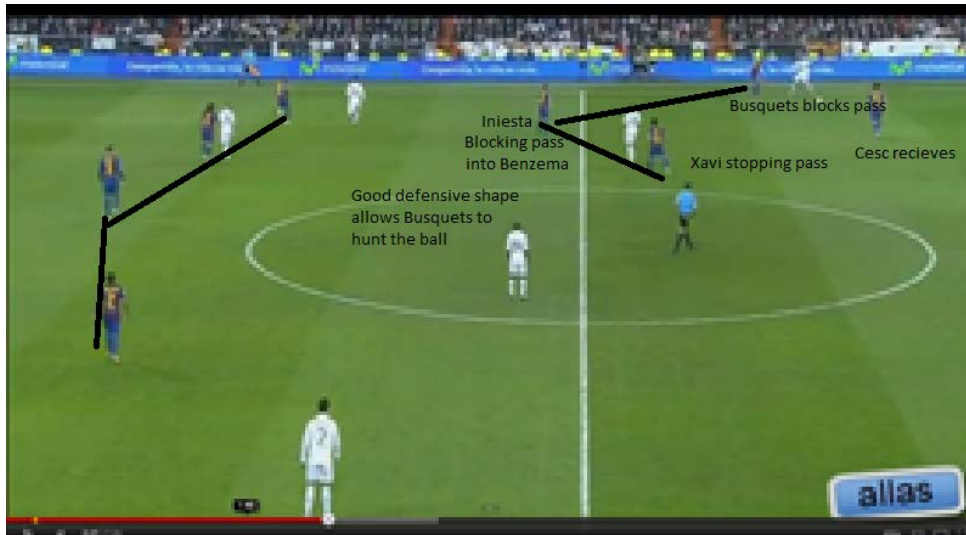


Ball breaks loose – Busquets spots Pepe charging in, lays off and draws the foul and Pepe a card.

2. 26 – Pressing

Busquets finds himself covering Iniesta's position on the left, as Iniesta has covered the inside passing lane to Benzema. Busquets stands in the way of Altintop and forces him to either kick the ball at him, or turn back, knowing that there's a good chance Altintop won't turn back as he may be pressed quickly from behind.



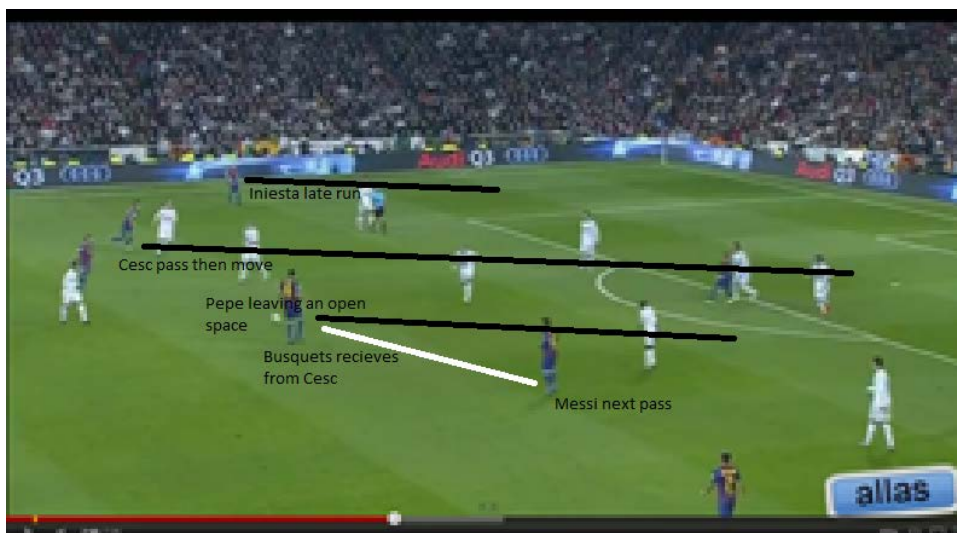


Busquets doing a great job pressing the ball, and when Altintop forces a pass, it rebounds over to Cesc.

2. 57 – Disrupting the defensive shape - Creating Space in the final 3rd

Real Madrid have a great shape again in the 4-1-4-1 formation. Cesc, Xavi and Busquets are all in a line, around 16 yards apart. Xavi moves out of the passing lane to Busquets for 2 reasons:

1 - So Busquets can receive from Cesc, 2 – So the nearest defender can make a decision, stay on Xavi or get back into shape. Xavi takes up the deep lying position and opens up a space as the central midfielder makes the decision to go out with him. Cesc makes a run into the hole behind that player with Iniesta behind him out wide. The “Pedro Runs” are made by both Cesc and Busquets, dragging opponents wide as Messi cuts infield, the runs both Cesc and Busquets make open up the space for a diagonal pass to Iniesta. Cesc is offside at the end of this but the runs made here open up a chance to score.





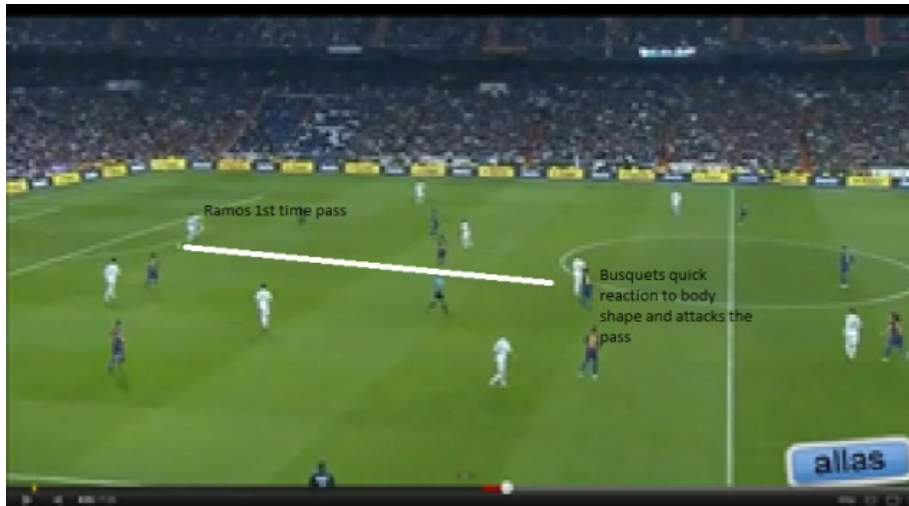
Busquets receives from Cesc, Cesc makes the 1st diagonal run, and knows that Iniesta can be open from this. After Busquets passes to Messi, he makes the 2nd diagonal run. Messi cuts inside and finds Iniesta open thanks to the spaces opened up by Cesc and Busquets.



Iniesta times his run perfectly to be found. Cesc is now free in the box ready to score if the pass is played perfectly.

3. 59 – Pressing on time and Intercepting in midfield, keeping possession and creating space.

The ball is passed into Alonso, so Busquets presses 10 yards onto the main danger option in the middle of the clip. The ball is passed across to Ramos from Carvalho. As Ramos approaches the ball, Busquets spots the body shape of Ramos and knows a 1st time pass could be played. He reacts and gets himself in front of Pepe, intercepts the pass and manages to lay off to Xavi in the same movement.



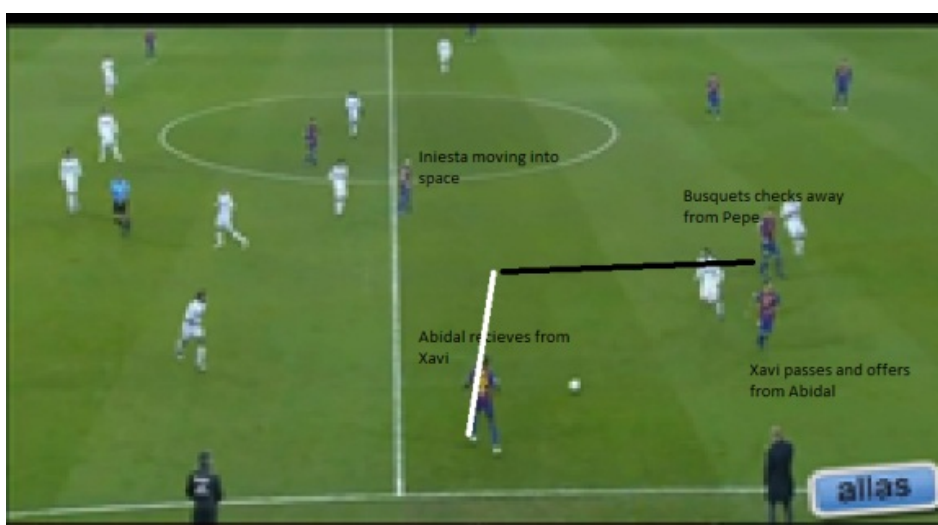
Ramos body shape shows a 1st time pass, Busquets anticipates this and reacts to win the interception.

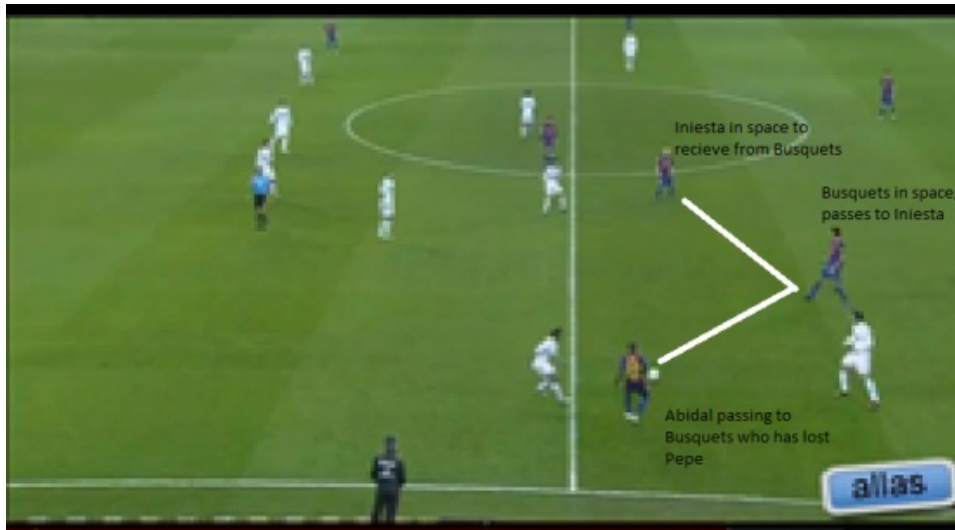
The key is he spots the danger, and doesn't want to allow Pepe an easy reception, when the ball doesn't go to Pepe initially; he drops off and looks to see if he can press Pepe again if the ball is played to him. His reactions and ability to think quickly and knock it off to Xavi make him a mainstay of the Barcelona machine. At 4.17 the ball breaks loose from a slack pass but Busquets is there again to regain possession and makes a simple but clever pass back to Xavi to restart the attack. At 4.23 he makes another clever move by dragging away an opponent for Xavi to pass wide to Abidal. At 4.28 he scans the play, again at 4.29 then again at 4.30, and as he receives the pass, he knows exactly what conditions he will receive in, turns and passes to Messi.

5.30 – Unpredictable Possession - Making Opponents Chase Shadows – Knowing surroundings

As explained before, Busquets have a simple role within the Barcelona team – Break up the opponents attacking play, keep the ball and always be available to receive. If Busquets was predictable, he would not have so many possessions in a game. Pepe chases him from behind, as Busquets doesn't see much on, except maybe a pass to Iniesta, he turns and goes back, Pepe can't tackle as he was booked previously, so he lays off to Xavi, and Pepe tries to predict his next move – drop deeper than Xavi. Busquets must know this and as the ball goes into Abidal, he checks back into

the space on his right, he scans at 5.36 (left) 5.37 (forward and right) 5.38 (behind left and forward), then receives, but because he has scanned the whole plan in less than 2 seconds, he knows Iniesta is free to receive 1st time. He then drops back into the space and Pepe is left on his own, having chased a shadow for 8 seconds.

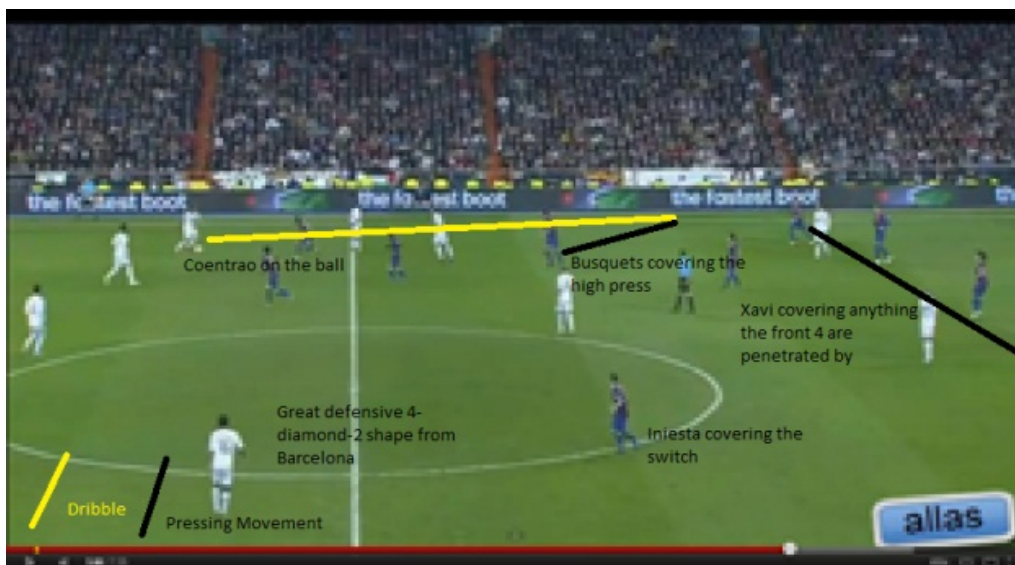




Top; Busquets being chased right shoulder. Next to top; Turns away to the right to pass to Xavi. Third pic; Xavi to Abidal, Busquets checks his run. Bottom; Scans and receives in space. Passes 1st time to Iniesta as Pepe approaches.

5.45 – Barcelona loses possession – Solid in a slide tackle and ball retention

Barcelona have a good shape here- 2 pressing with Messi behind, Iniesta wider than Xavi and Busquets, and the back 4 in shape.





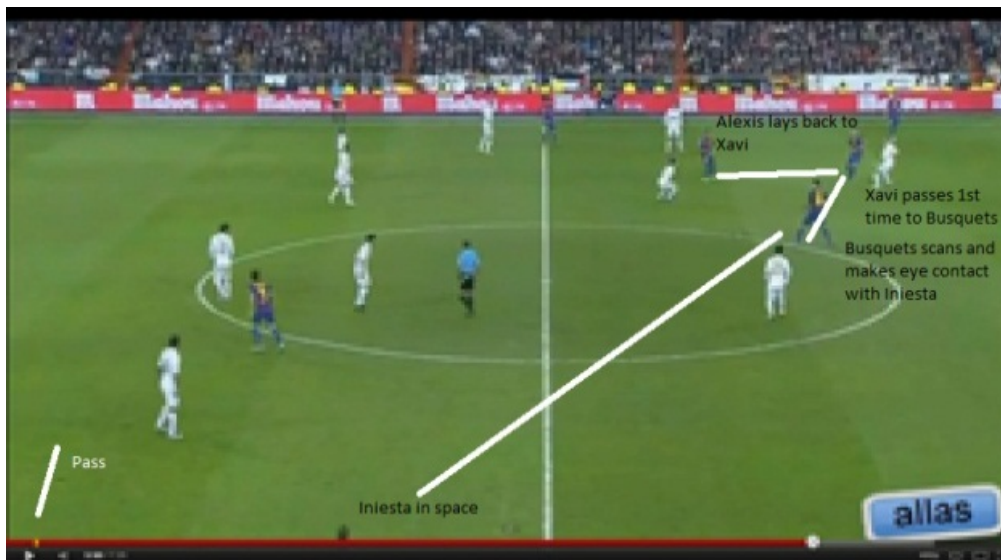
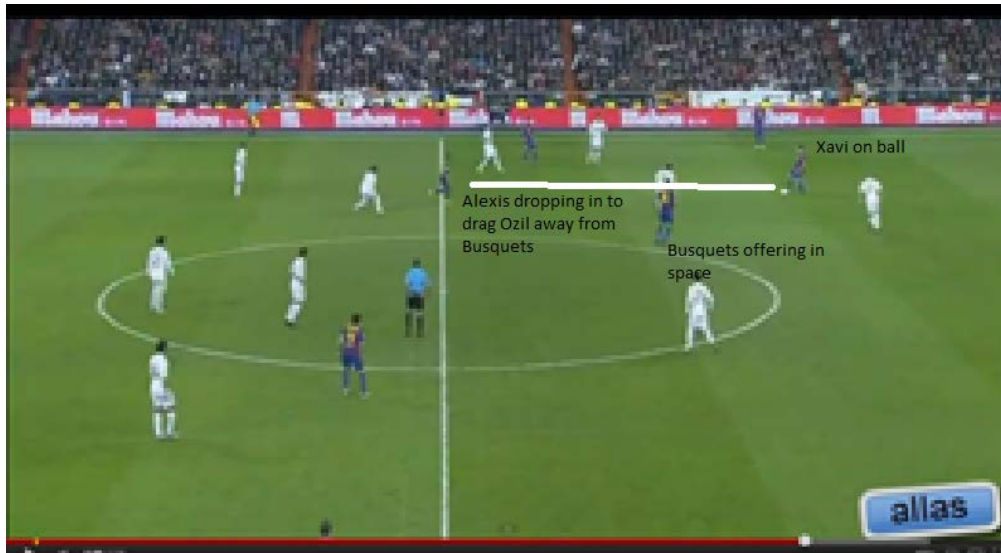
Having a good shape doesn't guarantee winning the ball and Busquets reads the dribble from Coentrao, he shifts across to help Alexis, and times his tackle to perfection. Instantly, his eyes are "eyes up" and he sees Xavi in his peripheral vision inside.



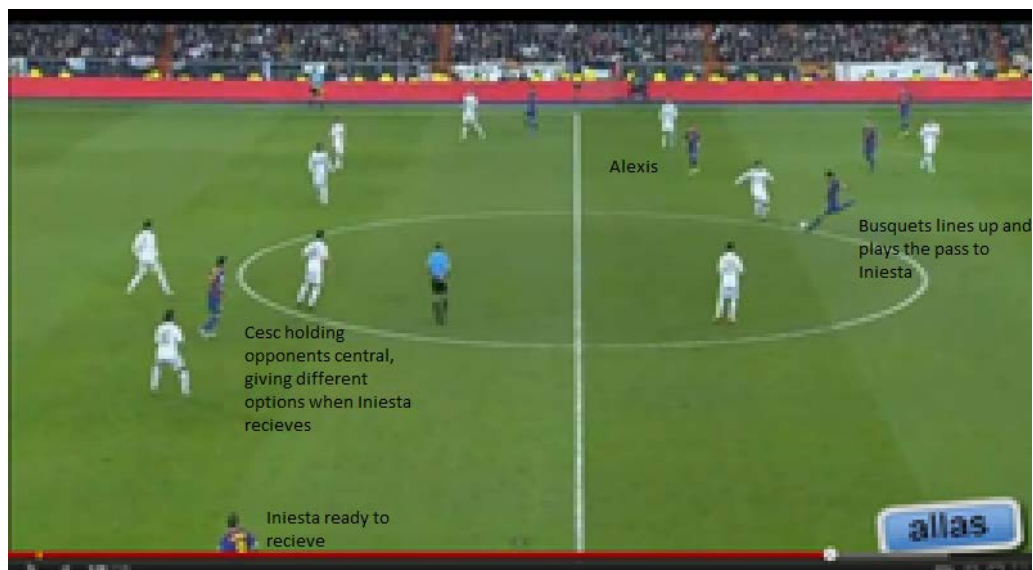
Xavi receives Busquets pass after a good tackle.

5.55 – Creating midfield triangles to switch play.

Busquets looks to ensure that he can always be found with the next pass, and in this clip, Alexis drops into the hole and receives from Xavi. Xavi plays this pass to make Ozil press Alexis, Alexis, Xavi and Busquets know why this pass is being played, and as a result, Alexis lays off to Xavi, who knows Busquets has moved into the passing lane vacated by Ozil pressing Alexis. Busquets has scanned the play and knows he can turn and pick out Iniesta on the left touchline. Iniesta dribbles infield and Busquets is again available, when he receives, he plays a 1st time pass into Xavi to keep the speed of the attack high.



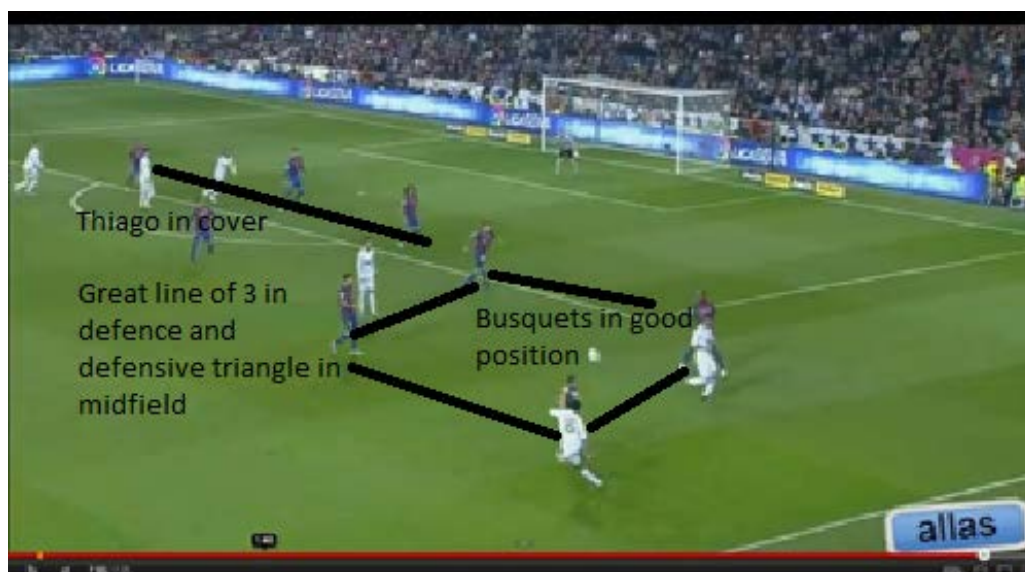
Alexis drops in to receive and ask Ozil to press, opening up the space for Busquets to receive from Xavi, after Alexis passes back to Xavi.



Busquets has scanned the play multiple times, and Iniesta knows to stand in space as he and Busquets know that the switch will be played.

7.03 – Covering spaces, long passes and use of both feet. Turning defence into Attack

Busquets takes up a good position just inside his box, anticipating the cross from Altintop.



Barcelona have a good shape – Abidal covering the crossers dribble and passing options, Iniesta pressing, Cesc covering inside and Thiago covering Cesc but supporting the back 3. Busquets fills the space to intercept the cross, or double up on any passes inside or wide from Altintop.



He intercepts the cross and scans play at 7.03 and spots Messi in space around 35 yards away. Instead of panicking and turning inside onto his preferred foot, he gets his body shape and approach right, and lofts a high pass to Messi, he knows a low pass may be cut out here so elects for the sensible option.



Messi shows excellent control from Busquets long pass, and Barcelona have a chance to score if Carvalho doesn't foul Messi from behind.

Busquets Stats for season 2010/2011

61 Games played, 1 Goal, 7 Assists.

2441 Passes Attempted, 2227 Completed, 92.4% Accuracy.

83 Fouls made, 138 Fouls Suffered, 11 Yellow Cards.

