



The Method of SIMEONE

Leadership | Training methodology | Game model

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Training Methodology | Leadership | Game Model

By Hugo Dias & Pedro Mendonça

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Presentation

Simeone is one of the greats. “El Cholo” is currently one of the best coaches in the world. Besides being a strong leader, he has a deep knowledge of the game and, year after year, he manages to keep his Atlético de Madrid at the top, in Spain and in Europe. In this work, we want to present Simeone’s method. To do so, we will address topics such as his leadership, his training methodology and his game idea. We want to present our personal study about Diego Simeone’s game model and show how the Argentine coach, with the strong contribution of Professor Óscar Ortega, makes it operational through training.

Diego Simeone Charisma

We have no doubt that Argentina will win their third World Cup under Simeone. For now, he continues at Atlético de Madrid where, year after year, he proves that he is one of the greatest coaches in world football. His game style is often criticized, but his achievements are insurmountable. It is easy for outsiders to criticize. Hard is to have as main rivals the two biggest clubs in the world, with endless resources, and never find “excuses” to justify something that doesn’t go well.

A top coach is one who can put his game idea into the pitch. Simeone does it and, like it or not, he does it with results. There is a passion and a soul in Atlético that leaves no one indifferent. “El Cholo” arrived at the “colchoneros” in a difficult phase of the club’s life and, without a doubt, marked a historic turning point.

Leadership

At the age of 26/27, Simeone used to take a notepad to make tactical notes and form teams for training exercises. He liked that job. At the end of his career, while respecting his coach at all times, he realized that he talked to his teammates to convince them to do something inside the pitch. His point of view was that of a player, but he already looked at the objectives from a coach's perspective. For Simeone, there is no skill to lead, it is the others who choose the leader. From early on, still as a player, Simeone was naturally the leader or one of the leaders of his teams. If the leadership is not natural, it shows. The most important thing in leadership is competence, and competence is the passion with which we transmit our knowledge.

Competence and passion are essential tools for good leadership. For Simeone, there are no fears or weaknesses. There is, instead, preparation. To achieve our goals, we must be prepared and have knowledge.

Simeone is a leader focused on transmitting to his players the importance of the collective, during the match and in life: "playing football is like living. To live, we also have to connect the individual and the collective". About the importance of the collective in his game idea, Simeone says: "a player is like the piece of a machine, but the performance of the piece is useless if it is loose. Knowing what the others think and feel is particularly important when there is a collective goal, and this knowledge is a valuable tool for a coach". Speaking at the right time and in the right way is a fundamental characteristic in a leader: "in football, I have learned that there are always times to speak. You must have the right *timing*. If you don't say what there is to say at the right time, you lose that possibility and it doesn't come back. Those who are leaders see their authority being lost by missing the opportunity to speak. If we want to communicate with a group, we must be careful about the time, conditions and circumstances where we use the power of the word. Football is a sport of coexistence and relationships. That's why you have to know how to manage the times where we speak". It is also important, and Simeone is attentive to this, to know how to relate discipline with improvisation. Without this, there is no collective. It's fundamental, for Simeone, to find the right dose between freedom and responsibility. It's decisive to manage the work group to extract the maximum performance, solidarity and passion from each player. Simeone achieves this. For example, he listens to the players and lets them participate in the team's responsibilities, especially the leaders of the

group. The right to give their opinion and to show their concern is everyone's, the responsibility to decide is the coach's: "sincerity and spontaneity is the first principle in building my authority. The second is to talk a lot with the players, especially about things beyond football. Another especially important element is to transmit passion to them. "Leadership is being capable, it's intelligence, it's knowing what we're talking about".

Emotion

Fear is not part of the feelings that Simeone has during a football match. Before every game, Simeone deals with restlessness, but he likes that. After all, to achieve something, you must be tense. About this, he wrote: "before we were champions in 2014 against Barcelona at Camp Nou, I saw my players in a state of positive tension. They were nervous, immersed in the difficult situation they were about to experience. Not every match provokes that state of mind. When we face smaller opponents, things are more natural, and the nervousness is less. But it is in the biggest difficulties that the best of the player with character comes out. We will never be better, or perform as well, without that positive tension. There is a moment where you can find the best version of tension and let go of the one that blocks us". He continues, "there is a defining moment within the 90 minutes. That moment is emotional. Actually, in football, there are many matches within one game. That dynamic is the key to the match".

Respect

Diego Simeone is a professional who respects and wants to be respected. One of the attitudes that most gets on his nerves in a football player is underestimating an opponent. About this, he said: "I get angry when a player underestimates another, when one thinks he is better than the other and plays as if the match was already won. That makes me furious because games are only won when they are over. We must quash the collective underestimation. When one player underestimates, all the others quickly get the same attitude. Football is a sport of contagion".

The Player

Simeone is extremely competitive, he loves the adrenaline of competition and this began when he started playing football. “El Cholo” played only to achieve the final victory. For him, a football match was simply “us against them”. It is with this competitive attitude that we can overcome difficulties. However, Simeone took the competition a bit further. When he was still a child, he looked at others who occupied his position as “enemies”. He showed himself to be a competitive animal from an early age.

It’s important that we realize that the competitiveness that Simeone showed early on was, coupled with a collective approach to the game, is uncommon in a young player. Being competitive makes us strive to be better and that benefits us individually and, consequently, benefits the team. Competence makes us excel personally and this has consequences for the success of the whole. Any collective organization is made up of individualities. The best coaches know how to exploit the maximum potential of each player for the benefit of the whole. About this, Simeone wrote: “the line between who is part of the starting XI and who starts the match as a substitute is small. But there are players who are mentally stronger, more competitive, with more personality, and there are others who, although they may be better at the skill level, don’t have the other abilities, and therefore lose their place”.

Personality is one of the most important characteristics a player can have. After all, everyone has talent. In a moment when the team is out of control, skill will not solve the issue, unless that player combines skill with a strong character.

The Game

Simeone focuses on the importance of playing without the ball. A player spends a large part of the match without the ball. The minutes without the ball are of great importance, where the priority is to occupy the spaces correctly. The ball is not always the priority: “if the attention is placed on one side, the distraction is on the other”.

About the spaces and risks associated with the behaviors the team adopts in each, Simeone wrote: “we can imagine a pitch as a space divided into different places. There are places of difficulty and places of abyss.

Footballistically speaking, there are places of risk, places of preparation and places of movement. We don’t play the same way in all places. The risky places are those near our goal, mainly. My idea is to take as little risk as

possible within a game whose basis is opponent error. More than individual talent or the team display, goals come most of the time as a consequence of the opponent's mistakes. When we invite the opponent to make a mistake, because the rival's mistake can certainly be forced by us, a possibility to score a goal arises and usually that mistake appears near the boxes... A football match is not only about playing good football, but also trying to find situations within the pitch that allow us to understand that a match can be won through different paths".

"El Cholo" is a coach who has his game conception and doesn't give it up. He is not a coach who follows trends, he is a victorydriven manager. For him, for example, the build-up from the back is no longer a solution, but a problem when the team doesn't have players according to that idea. He doesn't want to take that risk just because it's pretty and he believes that football is a match of mistakes. Whoever makes fewer mistakes is closer to come out as winner.

About the "destruction" of the opponent's match, he wrote: "in my opinion, the best way to attack is to defend well. I can say that working on ball recovery is a preparation for attacking. It doesn't matter where the ball recovery happens, it arises where the situation allows it".

On the question of having or not having the initiative, he states honestly: "we are more comfortable playing against an opponent who has the creative initiative during the match, because we have the art of knowing how to press very well, steal the ball and enter the opposite half with the opponent off guard. Undoubtedly, it is always more difficult to have the initiative. Few teams truly have the initiative".

Simeone believes that organized football is a tactical tool to leverage the ability and talent of each player. However, in reality, all players, when they have the ball at their feet, play football. Without the ball, the logic of having creative freedom ends: "to recover the ball, we have to work as a team. That is my idea, which is sometimes misinterpreted and ends up in a senseless commotion. About this, people say that I deprive players of their talent because they must surrender to the collective effort of recovering the ball. For me, the player who doesn't have the ball is in his moment of responsibility, and when he has it, he is in his moment of freedom. There is no constant freedom, except in street football. When we lose the ball, the effort must be spread so that everyone runs less". He is an objective coach, who wants to triumph by scoring one more goal than the opponent. We know that the ways

to reach victory are many, but the method that matters for Simeone is to win. For this, he prepares his players to suffer together. As Simeone himself says, Simeone's ideal game is to overcome, to see his players overcome themselves individually. In a collective game, like football, the overcoming of each player improves the collective. Perfection doesn't exist. There is no ideal of perfection. Football is a game and it has both good and unfavorable situations. The key is to reduce the imperfections. To do this, the players must be totally focused on the game, because the margin for error will be reduced. Struggle is a key word for what Simeone wants the players to put on pitch. "Play with the knife between your teeth" was a statement Simeone used as a player and now, as we see with every match of his team, it is a requirement as a coach. Positive aggressiveness is commendable, football and its supporters thank him.

Competition

Simeone is a coach with an extremely positive attitude towards the game and everyone involved in it. Together with his staff, he reacts positively to his team during the match and, when his players make mistakes, he tries to ignore them so that the player quickly forgets about them. In most of the events during a match, he tries to use rely on staff to find the best solutions. He is a coach who is constantly asking his players and supporters for extra motivation. He usually celebrates goals with great enthusiasm, together with his staff and supporters. He motivates the supporters so that they are a positive stimulus for the players. His demeanor with the referees is also positive, as it is not usual to see him contest decisions with effusiveness.

Methodology

For Simeone, every training session must be faced with absolute commitment, intensity and focus on his game idea and the strategy for the next match. His staff work according to this idea, but there is one name that stands out on Simeone's staff: Óscar Ortega. Professor Ortega is a fitness coach recognized for his methods and praised for his results. The training methodology used by Simeone and his staff is the integrated

methodology, and Professor Ortega is undoubtedly the element that stands out in the implementation.

Integrated methodology is the study of different methods and the best combinations to achieve maximum training efficiency. The definition of integrated methodology is amazingly simple, what is difficult is applying it and choosing the methods that best complement each other to achieve the best results. This path has been taken in high-performance physical preparation. This methodology is based on integrating more and better directing what happens in a football match and all aspects of it. It integrates orthodox and analytical methods as a complement to the integrated method. The goal is to achieve a high fitness level, that is not ephemeral, with a high match pace, with great neuromuscular expressions, keeping it stable throughout the season to make the difference during the competition. The integrated methodology must be elaborated according to the way the game is played:

- the integrated methodology follows the team's game model;
- the game approach is driven by intensity;
- the goal is to withstand the intensity efficiently.

This methodology requires a complete vision of training, considering four pillars of sports performance:

- physical preparation;
- technical preparation;
- tactical preparation;
- psychological preparation.

If one pillar fails, all the others fail as well.

Periodization

For Professor Ortega, periodizing is the art of mastering the footballer's load/effort.

Planning should be managed considering the club's objectives and the season schedule. As such, to periodize is to create a plan that shows us a path throughout the season, but that is flexible to the time variables and the sport moment.

In the planning of Professor Ortega's methodology, everything has a function, including the introduction periods with physical conditioning exercises, up to the load phases, where general exercises mix with

individualized exercises and integrated exercises according to the game model.

In Professor Ortega's methodology, several periods are scheduled as part of the season (mesocycles) and generally an adaptation of the ATR method, Accumulation, Transformation, and Realization, is made.

The accumulation phase, for example, is where the workloads gradually build up, to later decrease in volume and increase in intensity in the transformation phase.

For the team to have a stable performance every week, Professor Ortega adapts these phases to the season calendar. The appropriate load depends on the upcoming match. For example, if the opponent is Barcelona or Real Madrid, the loads will be reduced for the players to be "fresher" in those matches.

Periodizing is simply finding the balance between adding load and reducing it considering the schedule and the opponent. Óscar Ortega's methodology is based on making the team achieve a certain level of fitness, maintaining it throughout the season on a regular basis, and always taking into account the competition schedule and the opponent to organize the workloads.

Pre-season

Pre-season stages for Prof. Ortega: Introduction and Accumulation.

1. Introduction Stage

-Adjustment Microcycle. It's the season's preliminary point, before the real accumulation work begins. It serves above all to avoid injuries in areas composed of soft and tendon muscles to ensure that footballers will not have encounter issues when they have to repeat the efforts in the future.

-I always consider the preservation of the footballers. I know that, in the following weeks, I will work with significant loads, so I need an adaptation.

Reasons that make adaptation necessary:

- ◆ Vacation periods are long.
- ◆ We know that active rest (which we recommend to

footballers), for some players, turns into absolute rest (i.e. footballers do nothing).

◆ Other footballers, due to publicity commitments, the possibility of transfer to another club, or playing for their respective national teams, will arrive at different levels compared to their teammates.

-The Introduction Stage is decisive. “Taking a week (7 days) to

adapt the footballers to the loads will be greatly beneficial for the footballers and the staff. We will increase the chances of having the footballers at our disposal during the entire season. However, we usually only manage to have 4 days available for this work.

-The footballer’s proprioceptive care, joint care, *core*, mid-zone work, re-adaptation of the whole body, capillarization through functional work, aerobic stimuli, low-intensity work – in short, recovering the footballers’ efficiency. Efficiency is to dominate the functional aspects.

-We need the complete footballer, with a high intelligence of the game, functional in all conditional capacities. For that, he must be efficient in those same abilities. Being efficient is not easy. Being efficient is important. Efficiency is fundamental!

-In this Introduction Stage, contact is made with the team, a diagnosis is made of it so that we know the squad we have in hands and how we will work the Accumulation Stage.

-Development of aerobic capacity through spirals (running at different speeds). The aerobic stimuli (stimuli, because in La Liga it is exceedingly difficult to develop a capacity. We can stimulate it, improve it, make it more efficient, but developing it is difficult. It should be developed in the youth setup years when there is time for development). The aerobic capacity with longer stimuli develops faster, so we rely on running exercises with different speeds as the first method.

-I work between 1200 and 1500 meters with different speeds, always according to the capacity ranges.

-In the Introduction Stage, the running technique and everything that is part of low-impact plyometrics and coordination work is used.

-Prophylactic compensation work - toning.

-The introductory strength work is crucial. We do exceedingly long, extensive circuits and dedicate ourselves to different muscle groups, to counteract the loads that will appear in the Accumulation Stage.

-Proprioceptive tasks (force in imbalance).

- Joint protection work, something exceedingly necessary (the imbalanced supports).
- Obviously, there is also ball work: extensive ball possession and coordinative ball work. Formal football games and high intensity scoring exercises should be avoided.
- It is a period when we convince the footballers to play according to our idea (from day one).

2. Accumulation Stage

- The work is carried according to the coach and a way of playing (this is fundamental). It is necessary to correctly interpret the coach's way of playing or way of thinking and understand his football concept. Diego Simeone's work needs rigor. For instance, with Diego Simeone, the team must press high in the offensive third and then stop pressing when that pressure is brought down, protecting the last defensive third to then work on wide counterattacks. The team applies different rhythms. We must prepare it for that.
- If we train according to what we can play, we can compete with the best teams.
- At this stage, intensity is not as important as volume, duration.
- Characteristics: use of two-a-day and three-a-day training sessions (a day where they use longer macropauses). In this phase, we pay a lot of attention to duration and volume. More duration causes more fatigue, but it is physical fatigue, not mental.
- A day of functional work (endurance) is alternated with a day more devoted to the neuromuscular element (strength). We don't combine the functional with the neuromuscular. There is no compatibility between the two in this stage (and in almost every other moment of the season).
- Collective tactical volume and reduced space applications with reduced complexity.
- Mid-week (Wednesday), we look for relief in the morning, to recover and conduct compensatory work (*core* and mid-zone work to avoid lower back pain).
- On the functional load day (endurance), a prophylactic strength circuit is started and then endurance is worked on. In the afternoon, before the tactical work and reduced space applications, we do a prophylactic circuit.
- This is a non-negotiable Stage, it is very important and beautiful!

-Types of work conducted: fractional work; intermittent work; prophylactics; strength in the gym; strength on the pitch; mobility, flexibility and coordination; Application on the pitch.

Examples of each work: <https://payhip.com/b/PsFR>















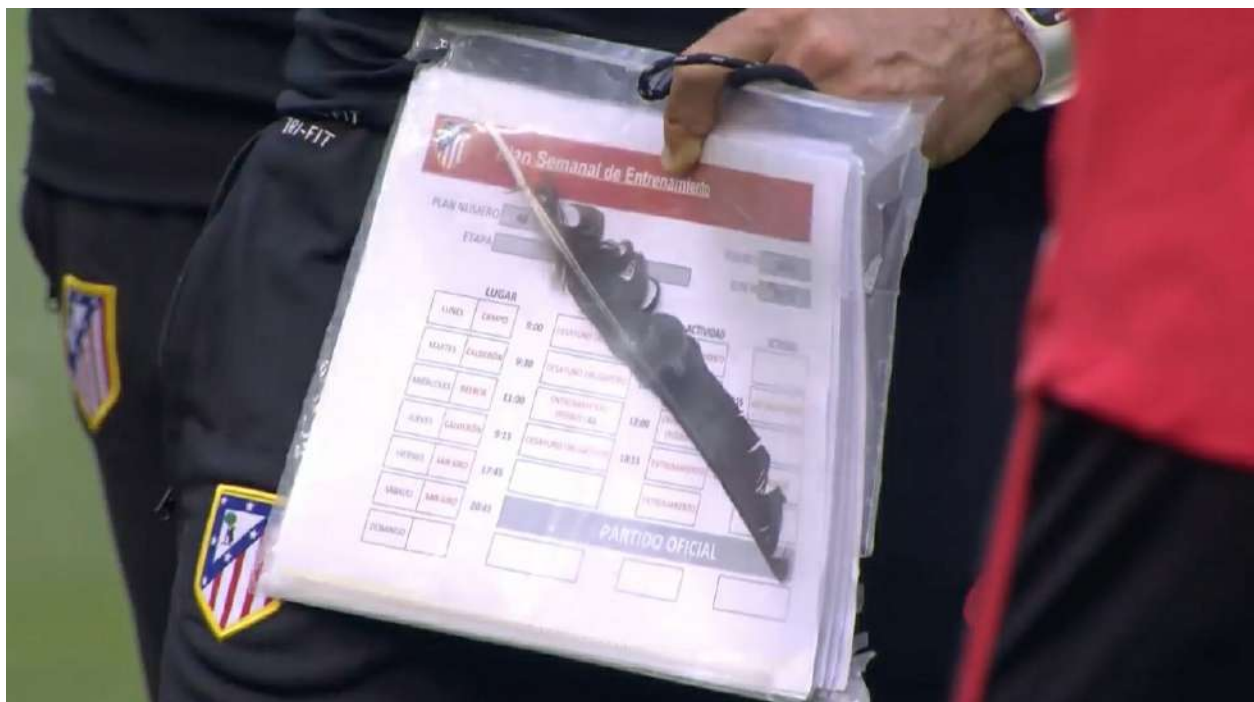
Tuning the machine

One of Professor Ortega's most interesting concepts is related to the methods he uses.

Professor Ortega schedules a load adapted to the team so that, through a general and integrated methodology, the physical capacities of the group are at the level of the game model that Simeone demands.

For him, exercises are tools to prevent the player's "leaks". In this case, if a player is not reaching the required levels of aerobic endurance or strength through general exercises, it is necessary to work with him individually, using the appropriate tool so that the player doesn't have "leaks" and is at the level of the whole group. The same goes for the players who are new to the team and need a progressive adaptation to the ideas of Simeone and his staff.

Microcycle(s)



Microcycle (one match per week)

Sunday: Match.

Monday: Rest.

Tuesday: Morning session with activation and physical conditioning

exercises. In the afternoon session, the predominant work is individualized strength-resistance work, usually in a circuit, and the session ends with exceptionally soft technicaltactical group work

Wednesday: Training session dedicated to individualized strength endurance training, to which more intense technical-tactical work is added in preparation for the next match. The volume and intensity are higher than the previous day's session.

Thursday: Technical and tactical training session where matches in full 11x11 pitch predominate, conditioned according to the strategy for the next match.

Friday: Morning training session focused on coordination and speed, with basic technical-tactical applications, such as shots on goal, passes/receptions or defensive clearances. During the afternoon, the more complete technical-tactical work takes place according to the next day's match.

Saturday: The main exercises in this session are strategic exercises and tactical reinforcement, which must be done by the players and prepared in advance by "El Cholo" Simeone's staff. The physical work must be based on speed and coordination

Training Session Example: <https://payhip.com/b/dXD1>













Sunday: In the morning session, the fitness coach does specific pre-match conditioning work. In the afternoon, there is competition.

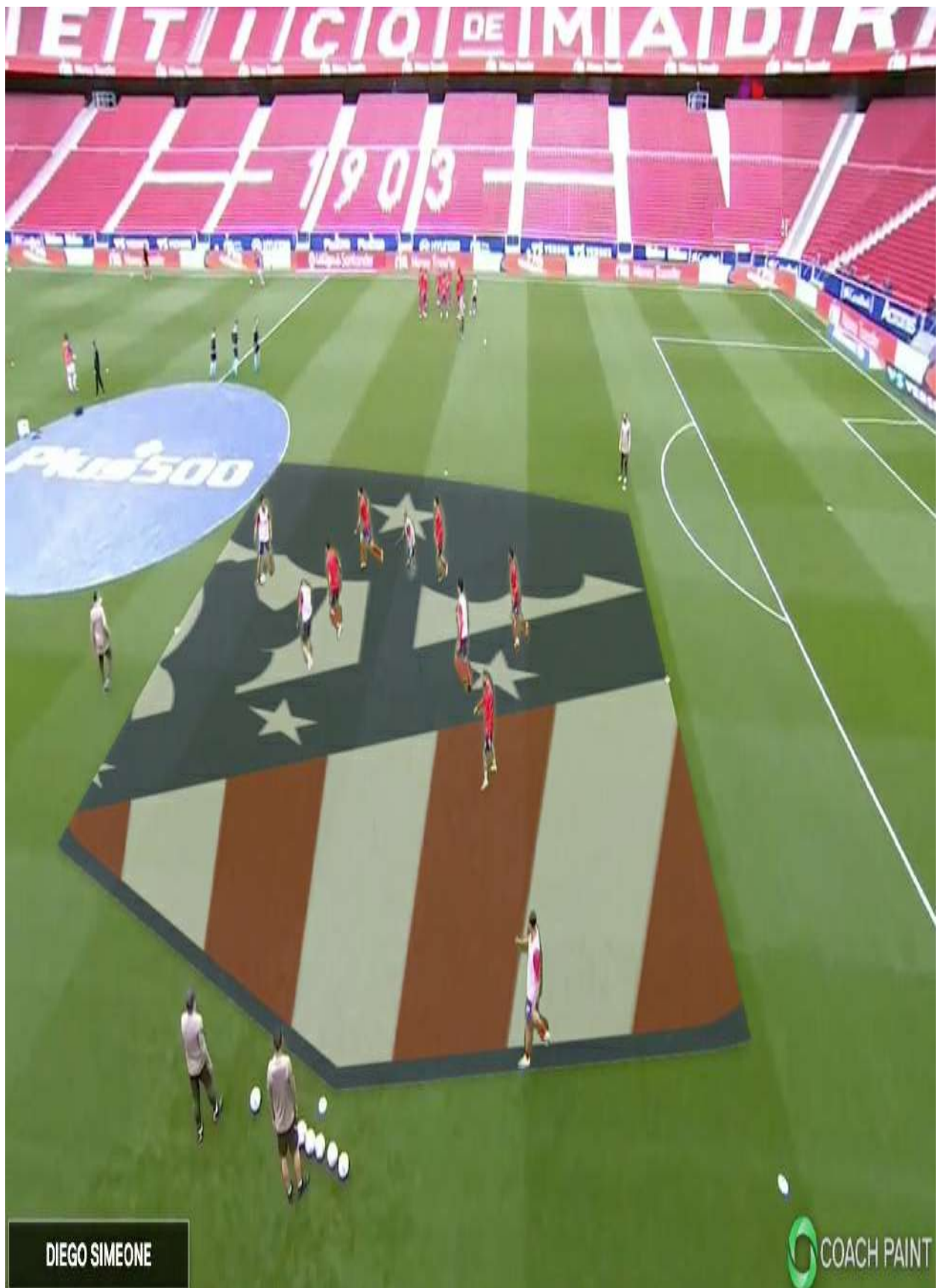
Pre-Match Warm-up: <https://payhip.com/b/k1Me>



DIEGO SIMEONE







DIEGO SIMEONE





In the chart below, we can see the loads in volume performed in the sessions planned by Diego Simeone's staff for this type of microcycle.

Volume
100
75

Microcycle (two matches per week)

Sunday: Match.

Monday: In the morning session, active recovery is done, where the exercises are mainly focused on reestablishing tranquility, with a soft volume and intensity. In the afternoon session, they start tactically preparing the next match; the physical work is introduced in the technical-tactical work.

Tuesday: Speed and coordination work is done, as well as technical and tactical work in preparation for the next day's match, consisting mainly of matches conditioned on a narrow pitch with a time of less than 5 minutes per match.

Wednesday: The morning session consists of tactical work and a pre-activation prepared by the fitness coach. The competition takes place in the afternoon.

Thursday: Active recovery training, where circle drills and footvolley predominate, as well as games that promote a good atmosphere.

Friday: In the morning session, a general load work is done to prepare all players for the afternoon work. In the afternoon session, the work is physical and individualized, with specific loads, ending with a technical-tactical work in preparation for Sunday's match.

Saturday: First, speed and coordination work is done, but the focus of this session is the technical-tactical work in preparation for the match, with a predominance of possession exercises conditioned according to the strategy for the next day's match.

Sunday: The morning session focuses on pre-match strategy and conditioning work. The competitive match takes place in the afternoon. In the following chart, we can see the loads in volume made in the sessions planned by Simeone's staff for a microcycle with two matches during the week.

Volume
90
67,5
45
22,5
0 Su M Tu W Th F Sa Su

Characteristics of training sessions

Duration: 90 minutes;

Number of Theoretical Sessions (Video Analysis): usually on the day of the match or the day before;

Comments: The players use a state-of-the-art GPS.

Training exercises

The exercises that Diego Simeone often uses during the training sessions are: stopping/correcting the game, play under pressure and play in narrow spaces.

Stopping/correcting the game: the coach signals to the players to immediately stop playing. Thus, the coach can highlight an aspect of the match that requires attention. From here, the coach can guide the players towards solutions that solve the problems identified in the situation, promoting the learning process by asking questions that force the players to think about the problem and present solutions. It is effective when used appropriately and at the appropriate time. Overuse can be detrimental.

Training Exercises Example: <https://payhip.com/b/Hvr9>































Diego Simeone's Game Model

Simeone's game model is based on two fundamental pillars: discipline and commitment. On the one hand, "El Cholo's" game idea is not consensual, but the results leave no room for doubt: he is a historic coach at Atlético de Madrid and, for sure, in world football.

Critics say that Atlético de Madrid is a team that doesn't take the initiative, nor dominates the match with the ball, but, strangely or not, Simeone manages to get his team to dominate and control the game, albeit without the ball. With this, we are not saying that Simeone's game model privileges defense over attack, nothing of the sort. Simeone's game model pays special attention to the part without the ball, in a high pressing, based on a compact block, which creates the ideal conditions for Atlético de Madrid to recover the ball near the opponent's goal and that, for us, is not being a defensive team. When they have the ball, Atlético de Madrid looks for the opponent's goal with great objectivity, either in the offensive transition - where Simeone usually causes huge damage in the opposing defense - or in a moment of offensive organization, which is based on a progressive and vertical possession.

In short, Simeone's team is extremely intense, with lines remarkably close together and a great ability to counter the opponent with unmarking moves and with the speed of transition by all his players.

When we analyze the defense, we realize that the team executes a suffocating pressure with great intensity. The defensive line is usually positioned near the midfield and the lines of the tactical system they use are always extremely close to each other. Sometimes, Simeone's team likes to have the possession of the ball and changes its way of playing depending on the rival team.

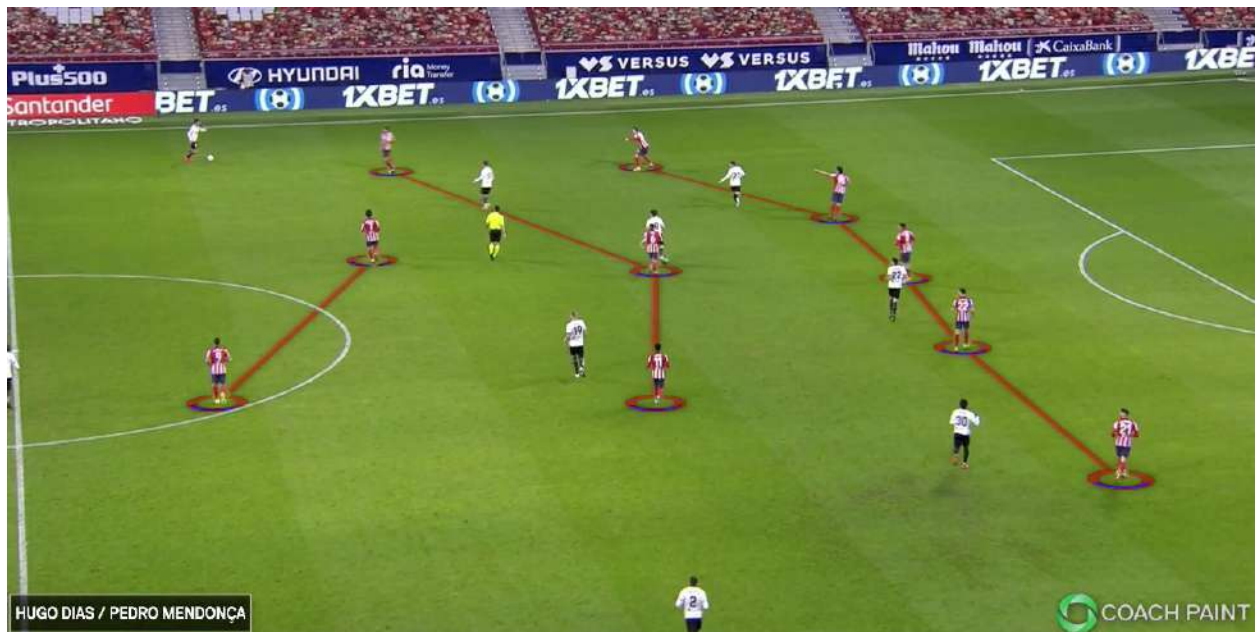
Team structural organization

Simeone's Atlético de Madrid this season has so far used the 1x4x4x2 as their usual tactic.

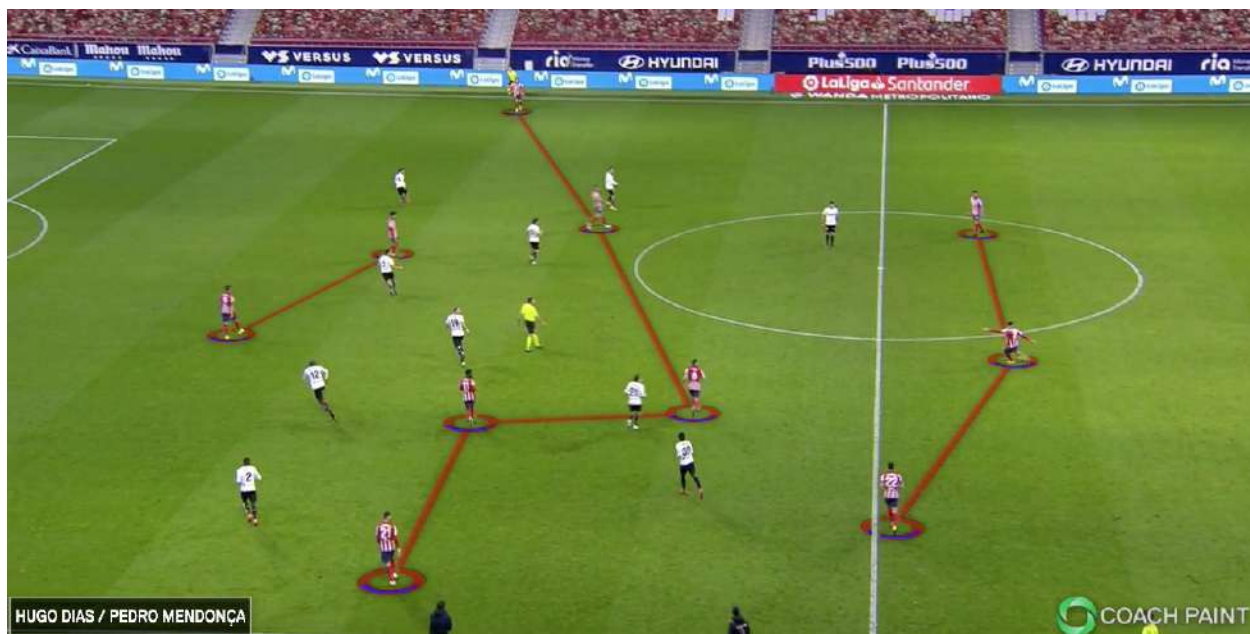


But, in 2020/2021, although the 1x4x4x2 is still one of Atlético de Madrid's

preferred tactical schemes, Simeone has chosen to structure his team in a 1x5x3x2 / 1x3x5x2. In the defensive organization, and when Atlético de Madrid is defending in areas further forward on the pitch, the team establishes without much detail a 1x5x2x3. However, when Atlético defends closer to its own goal, the team sets up a 1x5x3x2. Goalkeeper, a five-men defensive line - 3 center backs and 2 full-backs/side midfielders – 3 midfielders - 1 of them is a pivot and two are inside midfielders – and 2 forwards.



In the offensive organization, briefly put, the team has a 1x3x5x2 structure, but, when we analyze in more detail, we see that the structure used is 1x3x1x2x4. The goalkeeper, 3 center backs, 1 pivot, 2 inside midfielders and an offensive line with 4 players, composed by the two forwards and the two full-backs/side midfielders.



As we know, the structural organization of a team in the pitch is not rigid. The structure initially established for a match can easily be changed to another. For this reason, the match strategy and the dynamics that the players naturally impose on the match are the factors that most influence the various changes in the teams' tactics during a football match. In relation to Simeone's game model, the tactics cited by us are the ones that have more support to be presented.

Offensive Organization

Macro Principle: Progressive and vertical ball possession and circulation to overcome the opponent's defensive structure.

First Phase | Building the Offensive Game

The first phase of offensive organization usually comes through the goalkeeper and the defenders. The goal is to progress on the pitch, breaking down the opposing defensive lines. It takes place in the first third of the pitch, and the opposing team's forwards, who at that moment are in defensive organization, are the main opponents. Regarding the first phase of offensive organization (building the offensive game), this game model has the

following sub-principles:

Making the Pitch Wider

The players are distributed on the pitch taking advantage of the width. Regarding the center backs, one stays close to the goalkeeper to receive the pass and the other two are positioned outside the box. Full-backs are open and in an advanced position, almost over the midfield line, and the pivot is close to the midfield.



3-Men Build-up

A defensive line of 3 players to start the build-up from the back. With a build-up composed of 3 elements, numerical superiority in that zone of the pitch happens regularly. The 3-player line is composed of three center backs, the full-backs are an option to increase the width, and the pivot, along with the inside midfielders, are an option to play in the interior zones



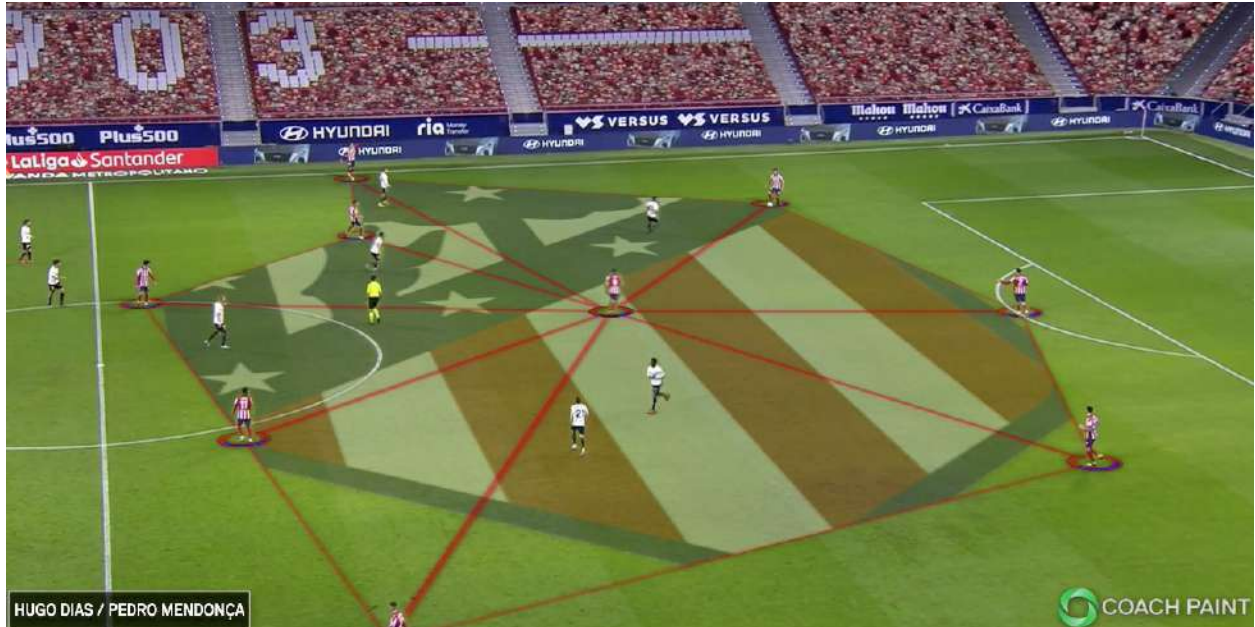
Playing Long to a Side

Atlético de Madrid consistently adopts a more conservative style when building their offensive game. Thus, the goalkeeper plays the ball directly forward, to one of the sides, attempting to win a second ball and be in a position to attack the opponent's last defensive line.



Having a Good Positional Balance

Three center backs, two open and one in the central zone, fullbacks increasing the width, a pivot and inside midfielders supporting from the inside guarantee a good positional balance in the offensive play construction phase.



Progressing with the Ball

To create a build-up from the back, it is important to have players with the characteristics to do so. Hermoso, for example, is strong in progressing with the ball, and brave enough to break through the opponent's lines with a vertical pass.



Preparing for Ball Loss

A team that prepares the loss of the ball when attacking is always a more balanced team in both moments of the game. By starting the build-up with a line of three players, composed of center backs, with one positioned in a central zone, the goal is protected in case the ball is lost in an extremely dangerous area.



Second Phase | Creation of the Offensive Game

The second phase of offensive organization takes place in the midfield zone and its main objective is to overcome the opponent's midlines to successfully reach the moment of the third offensive phase. For this phase, this game model has the following subprinciples:

Putting the Team Together

Creating an offensive unit when developing the offensive movement requires all players from all sectors to be close, but without hindering the creation of spaces, in width and depth, to facilitate progressive ball possession. Aggregating the team in the right dose facilitates not only the offensive game but also the moment of ball loss.



Privileging the Sides

Atlético de Madrid uses, with great relevance, the lure to quickly reach the last third of the pitch. To do so, it lures opponents to one side and quickly releases the ball to the other.



Making Vertical Exchanges

The quality offensive dynamic forces players to be able to play new positions on the pitch. The most often noticed pattern is the vertical exchange between the forward who plays more in support and one of the inside midfielders. The forward drops to the midfield line and one of the inside midfielders joins the forward who usually plays more fixedly in the attack.

Occupying the Space Between the Lines

One of the forwards is responsible for staying fixed between the opponent's center backs, and the other one drops down and tries to receive the ball positioned between the opponent's defensive and midfield line. To be successful in this sub principle, it is necessary to take advantage of the opponent's disorganization and the quality and "courage" of the defenders

and midfielders to make a pass that breaks the opponent's midfield line. After the pass, the receiver should have his body oriented towards the opponent's goal, to increase the probability of breaking through the opponent's defensive line.

Increasing Offensive Depth

The more fixed forward is responsible for making the team as deep in the pitch as possible and is also the main reference for attacking the back of the opposing defensive line. Relevant, disruptive moves are also made by the forward who plays more as a support and by the inside midfielders.

Mobility

We noticed that the most mobile forwards, especially João Félix when he is an option, play with plenty of quality as an element that drops in the pitch to connect the game, joins the full-backs on the sides to create numerical superiority, receives the ball between the lines and appears in scoring positions. Mobility and quality!



Progressing with the Ball

Running with the ball under control, overcoming opponents and staying close to the moment of the last pass or scoring chance – Atlético de Madrid does this and has João Félix, Carrasco, Correa and Llorente as the best examples.

Preparing for Ball Loss

When developing their offensive play, Atlético de Madrid always has 4 elements behind the ball line: 3 center backs and a pivot. As a result, the team is always balanced defensively.

Third Phase | Scoring

The third phase of offensive organization takes place in the last offensive third of the pitch and aims to successfully complete the offensive actions.

Making Quick Decisions

In the last third of the pitch, the goal is to cause damage: to score a goal. In the scoring phase, Atlético de Madrid is a determined team. Decisions are made quickly and without much hesitation. To cause damage to the opposing team, assisting and shooting are decided quickly.

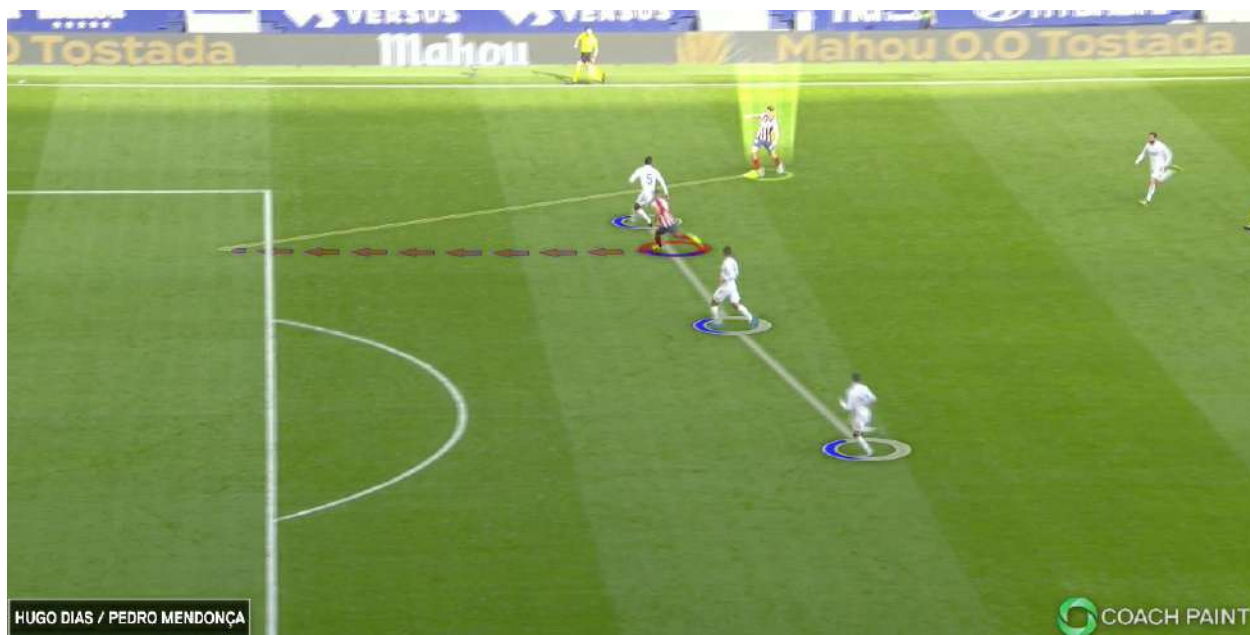
Prioritizing Crossings in Favorable Conditions

The cross targets the player with the best scoring position in front of the opponent's goal: first post, second post or a cross played backwards to the penalty area. When there are no players in the box, which hardly ever happens due to the speed Atlético de Madrid uses in offensive moments, the solution is to look for an offensive coverage until there are players in the box.



Attacking the Back of the Opposing Defensive Line

The two forwards, primarily, but also the inside midfielders must take advantage of the space in the back of the defense. When one of the forwards drops down in the pitch, he positions himself in the space between the opposing defensive and midfield lines and, with that movement, attracts the opponents' defenders. That space must be taken advantage of.



Defining Target Zones

To successfully complete the attacking motions, there must be offensive presence in the box. The first post, the second post, the penalty area and the entrance to the box must be occupied. The presence of midfielders at the entrance of the box is important to win second balls. The aggressiveness in attacking the zone where the ball falls is an extremely important characteristic in Atlético de Madrid's game model.



“Biting” Opponents

Aggressiveness is a crucial factor in Simeone's idea and model of play. Atlético de Madrid's players, in addition to having worldclass quality, also have impressive work rate and aggressiveness. Suárez, for example, is a forward who doesn't give up on any ball, fights as if it were the last, and drives opponents' defenders "crazy". He is a tough forward and lethal when it comes to scoring.



Preparing for Ball Loss

The 3 center backs and the pivot are responsible for balancing the team defensively in this phase of offensive organization and are also a solution as offensive coverage.



Offensive Transition

This moment of the match concerns the behaviors the team has after regaining possession.

Regarding the offensive transition, Atlético de Madrid's macroprinciple is to quickly take advantage of the opponent's defensive disorganization to try to create and successfully finish an attacking action. Atlético de Madrid focus is, through an aggressive approach, to quickly reach the opponent's goal. They rarely adopt a more passive posture, keeping the possession of the ball and opting for offensive organization. There are two reasons for this: the first is when Simeone's team is winning and can strategically benefit from the "loss" of time; the other happens when the opponent quickly fixes its defensive positioning and, that way, prevents Atlético from taking advantage of the ball recovery

Regarding offensive transition, Atlético de Madrid's sub-principles are:

Being Aggressive and Intense

Aggressiveness and intensity are two decisive words in the game model of Simeone's Atlético de Madrid. These two characteristics are fundamental to quickly change the mental attitude (defensive to offensive) that Atlético de Madrid's players manage to establish in the pitch. They know perfectly well that this is a key moment in their coach's game idea: recover the ball and try to create damage quickly.



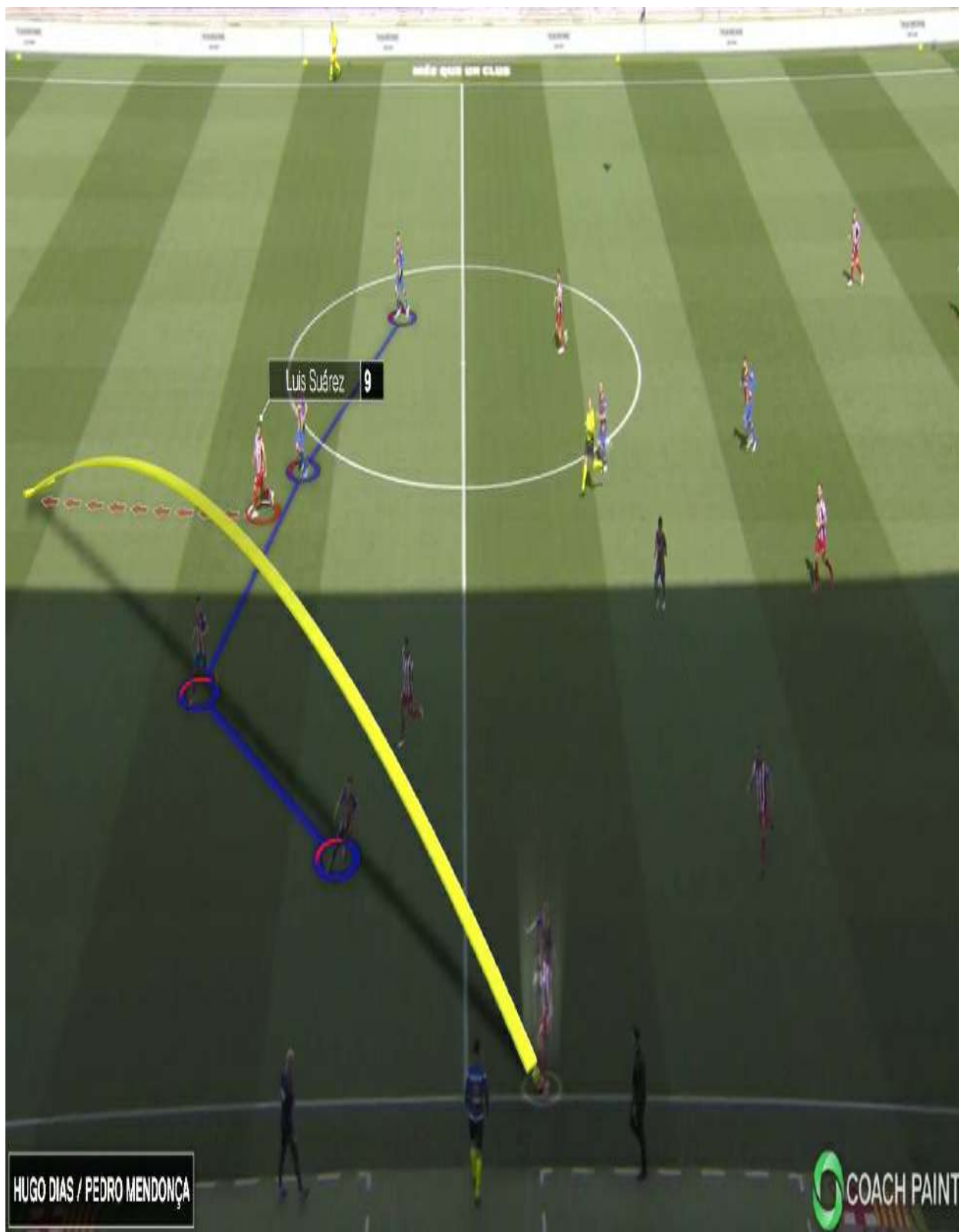
Be Objective and Quick

The speed of processes and objectivity are typical traits of Atlético de Madrid's offensive moment. In the particular case of the offensive transition, it is evident the players' intention to attack quickly and with great objectivity the opponent's goal. When the ball carrier doesn't have space to progress with the ball and fix the opponents to free their marking colleagues, the players make the transition supported, with two touches, one to receive the ball and one to pass it. They try to get ahead and create conditions to successfully complete the tackling actions.



Increase Width and Depth

The change in mental attitude, as we've already said, is fast. Starting from a cohesive and united defensive block, aiming to decrease the pitch narrow, Atlético de Madrid's players quickly create the necessary space to make high quality offensive transitions. The full-backs quickly increase the width of the pitch to the maximum and the forwards make the pitch as deep as possible.





Getting the Ball to the Front

When the ball is recovered, the goal is to create damage as quickly as possible. The ideal is to get the ball to the player farthest ahead on the pitch. In case it is the last pass, even better. Atlético de Madrid has Luis Suárez. The Uruguayan striker is a player who turns an innocuous ball into a goal and is the face of this subprinciple. He is a player who understands his position like no one else and has the acumen to respond to each pass in the best possible way, whether it's to seek support from teammates, keep the ball, or progress and complete the action and attack.

Attacking the Empty Space

Atlético de Madrid seeks to attack the empty space with great objectivity in the offensive moment. Thus, it is easy to identify this sub-principle in the offensive transition. Atlético Madrid prefers to play on the sides using their full-backs and, with that, to cross the ball in favorable conditions. In this phase, and as it happens in the offensive organization, Atlético attracts the opponents to one side of the pitch and quickly plays the ball to the zone where there is space, usually on the opposite side.



Progressing with the Ball

The player with the ball fixes the opponent on the inside, progresses with the ball under control, and creates space and conditions for his teammates to get the ball free from the opponent's marking.



Preparing for Ball Loss

In offensive transition, Atlético de Madrid's game model ensures defensive balance and offensive coverage via their three center backs and pivot.



Defensive Organization

Macro principle: pressing zone defense, in a medium/high block. However, depending on the strategy, Atlético de Madrid adopts a low block, trying, with great aggressiveness and concentration, to condition the opponent's offensive build-up and regain possession.

First Phase | Avoid the Offensive Build-up

The defensive organization happens when the team doesn't have the ball. The objective at this point is to maintain the organization and close the spaces to make it impossible for the opposing team to create scoring situations. Regarding the first phase of defensive organization (forestalling the offensive build-up), this game model has the following subprinciples:

Press, Press and Press

It is total pressure. A brave, strong, aggressive and suffocating pressure as high in the pitch as possible. The forwards are the first defensive line and, with the help of the midfielders (inside midfielders and side midfielders), form the first "war zone" to steal the ball from the opponent. The pressing is

done with 4 players at most and the first player to press is always the one closest to the ball.



Undo Inner Connections

It requires excellent coordination of the whole team when “full pressure” is applied. All interior connections should be annulled, forcing the opponent to try to start the build-up from the side or to play long balls forward.

Suffocating Opponents on the Side

The “full pressure” causes opponents to become “prisoners” on one side of the pitch. This eliminates the passing lines to the central zone. Thus, the opponent is forced to kick the ball forward.



Preparing the Goal

The proposal is simple: remain close to the opposing goal even while defending. Players should press together and high in the pitch, as this guarantees success the moment Atlético de Madrid regains the ball.



Creating the “Army Ranks”

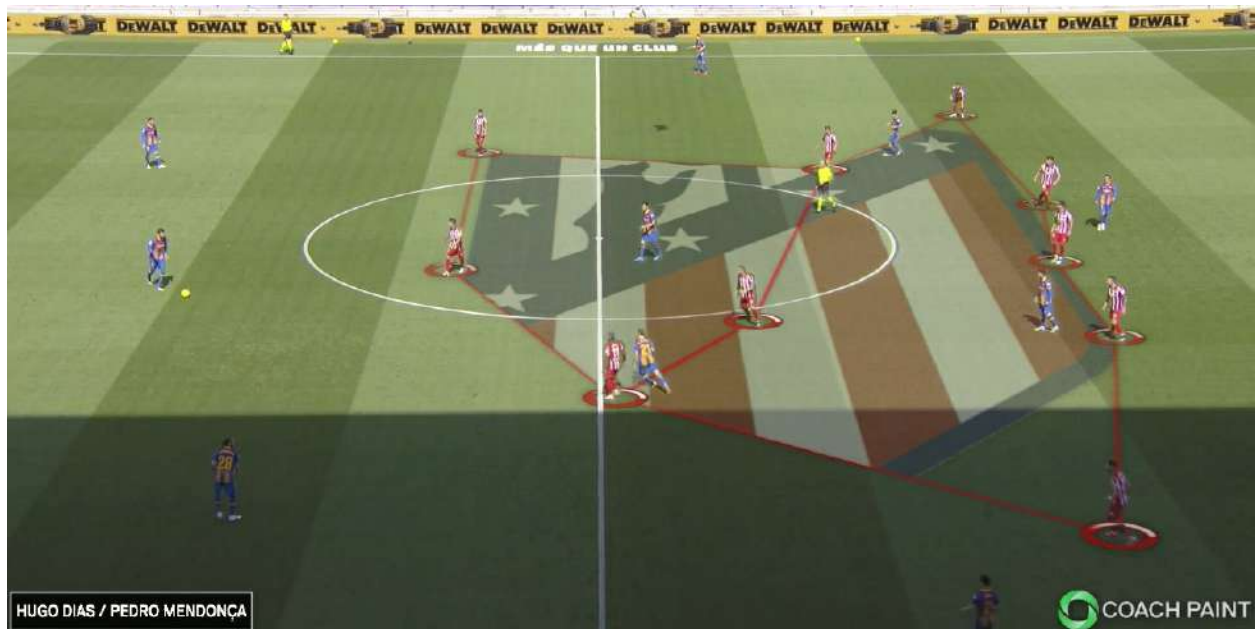
When, by strategic choice, the “full pressure” is put aside, Atlético de Madrid forms a cohesive and solid mid/low block, whose reference is the central zone of the field. The most used structures are: 1x4x4x2, 1x5x4x1, 1x5x3x2 and 1x5x3x1x1.

Second Phase | Avoid the Creation of the Scoring Situations

The second phase of defensive organization takes place in the midfield. In this phase, Atlético de Madrid’s game model has the following sub-principles:

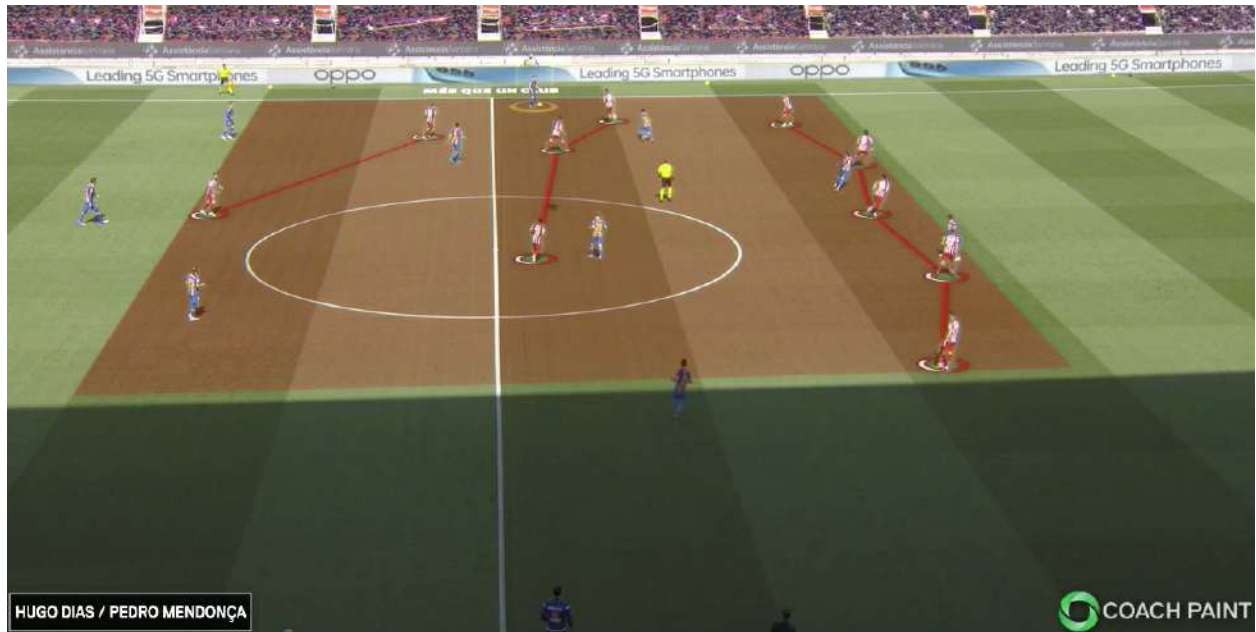
Winning the “Battle”

The pitch has to be small and the block has to be compact, and the mentality of the players has to be aggressive, intense, and prepared to “suffer”. This allows winning the “battle” for possession. The defensive coverages must be guaranteed and the passing lines must be cut, sometimes through an individual fit in the opponent.



Shifting

The team has the center of the pitch as a reference and, when the ball is played to a side, the whole team regroups in that area. The spaces between players must be small, avoiding the opponent's appearance.



Creating Numerical Superiority

The team defends together and thus favors the creation of numerical superiority in the center and sides. On the sides, for example, when the whole team regroups in that zone, the fullback, side midfielder and the inside midfielder guarantee superiority in that zone.



Successfully Mark the Defensive Line

The defensive line is oriented by the position of the ball. Thus, the defender who is closer to the ball is the one orienting the defensive line and the other elements line up around him. The defensive line also ensures a positioning that favors the elimination of the opponent's offensive depth and therefore has special attention to the "uncovered balls". All the elements of the defensive line are excellent at positioning themselves to run backwards and prevent an eventual ball played behind the defensive line.



Preparing the Offensive Transition

Atlético de Madrid, when defending, has its eyes set on the counterattack. Many players together, intense and aggressive at the moment they regain possession, create situations to get out of the “phone booth” with few touches on the ball, plenty of movements and great speed when looking for space to advance quickly on the pitch.



HUGO DIAS / PEDRO MENDONÇA





Third Phase | Avoiding the Opponent's Goal

The third phase of defensive organization takes place in the first third of Atlético de Madrid's defensive pitch. In this phase, Atlético de Madrid's game model has the following sub-principles:

Closing the “Army Ranks” Together

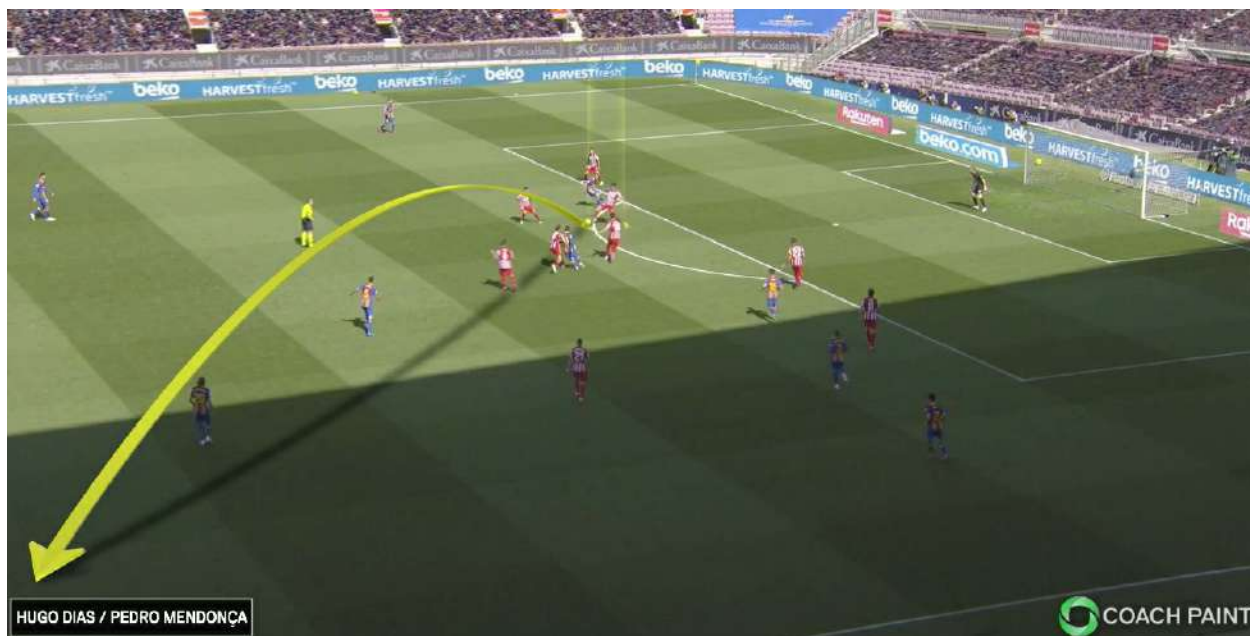
Players who look like warriors form a tight, position-oriented block of the ball, fitting individually into the opponent whenever the situation demands it. Highly supportive players cover and compensate their teammates, realizing that they must occupy the most favorable zones for the opponent's goal.

Protecting “The Wall”

The “wall” Jan Oblak is a master at saving shots. Jan Oblak is the goalkeeper who makes impossible saves, but even superheroes must be protected. Therefore, penetrations behind the defensive line and winning second balls are two factors where Atlético de Madrid usually does not fail in this area of the pitch. Regarding the protection of Jan Oblak, preventing crossings and shots in favorable conditions are also two situations where his teammates do not usually facilitate.

Kicking the Ball Forward

Atlético de Madrid never risks losing the ball in this area of the pitch, especially after recovering it. When unable to intercept the ball and keep it safely, the “war cry” orders it to be kicked forward.



Boosting the Transition

A forward, usually Luis Suárez, is always further forward on the pitch to be the reference at the moment the ball is recovered and the offensive transition begins.

Defensive Transition

Defensive transition concerns the behaviors the team has after losing the ball. In Atlético de Madrid's game model, the macro-principle associated with this game model is the quick recovery of the ball right after losing it. But the players' attitude and intelligence are fundamental to realize that it is not always possible to make "war" right after losing the ball. That's why, in many situations, Atlético de Madrid, when it loses the ball, quickly changes the defensive transition to defensive organization.

Regarding the defensive transition, Atlético de Madrid has the following sub-principles:

Recovering the Ball Quickly

Right after losing the possession of the ball, because of a quick change in

mental attitude, the team tries to create and win the “battle” for the ball. To do so, they are courageous in moving forward, decreasing the distance between the sectors, occupying the zone where the ball is, and creating an individual fit that allows them to prevent the opponent’s offensive transition.

Backing Off, Pressing and Closing Ranks

When the ball is not recovered quickly, Atlético de Madrid is able to effectively move to a defensive organization movement. First, the players try to keep pressing high. But, if there is a risk of failure, the block is lowered and tightened so as not to give the opponent any space



Avoiding Failure in a Defensive 1v1

It is essential not to be outplayed in the defensive transition and Atlético de Madrid’s players know it. They are safe and aggressive players in the defensive 1x1 and solid when covering.



Stopping Opponents

Smart fouling that prevents the opponent from getting dangerously close to the goal. With this “harshness”, the strategy is safer – opting for defensive set pieces. The best to avoid further damage. Who has never done this?!

Final Conclusions

The objective of this work was to present the method that Diego Simeone uses in his leadership, the way he organizes his training sessions and plans his team’s season. In this regard, the fully deserved highlight was given to Professor Ortega. However, an important chapter of this work is related to our personal vision of the game model that “El Cholo” uses at Atlético de Madrid. The Argentine coach is a remarkable professional. He is a man who, in the face of adversity, has enormous resilience, and this can be felt in the team he leads. He is a leader capable of motivating everyone around him. We end with something peculiar: he is especially fond of astrology. The day he was offered the job of coach at Atlético de Madrid, he researched the zodiac signs of all the players to know what he would find when he arrived at the club. It paid off.

This work is marked by the value of sharing. Sharing ideas and knowledge

allows us to raise the bar – to evolve. We hope that, just as we are proud of this work, it may also have lived up to your expectations.

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