

# WINNING TACTICS



# Winning Tactics

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Edited by Tom Mura



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## Introduction

This eBook is a collections of articles and training sessions that focus on tactical topics from WORLD CLASS COACHING. They include drills, exercises and small-sided games that you can use to teach your players concepts that range from 'Penetrating with a Killer Pass' to 'How to Exploit the Central Midfield of the 4-2-3-1'.

The articles include diagrams, descriptions and videos that will give you all the information you need to use this information at your next training session.

A number of highly qualified coaches share their expertise in this eBook. They include Stevie Grieve, Tony Englund, Jordi Pascual and Dan Minutillo who are all accomplished coaches and authors.

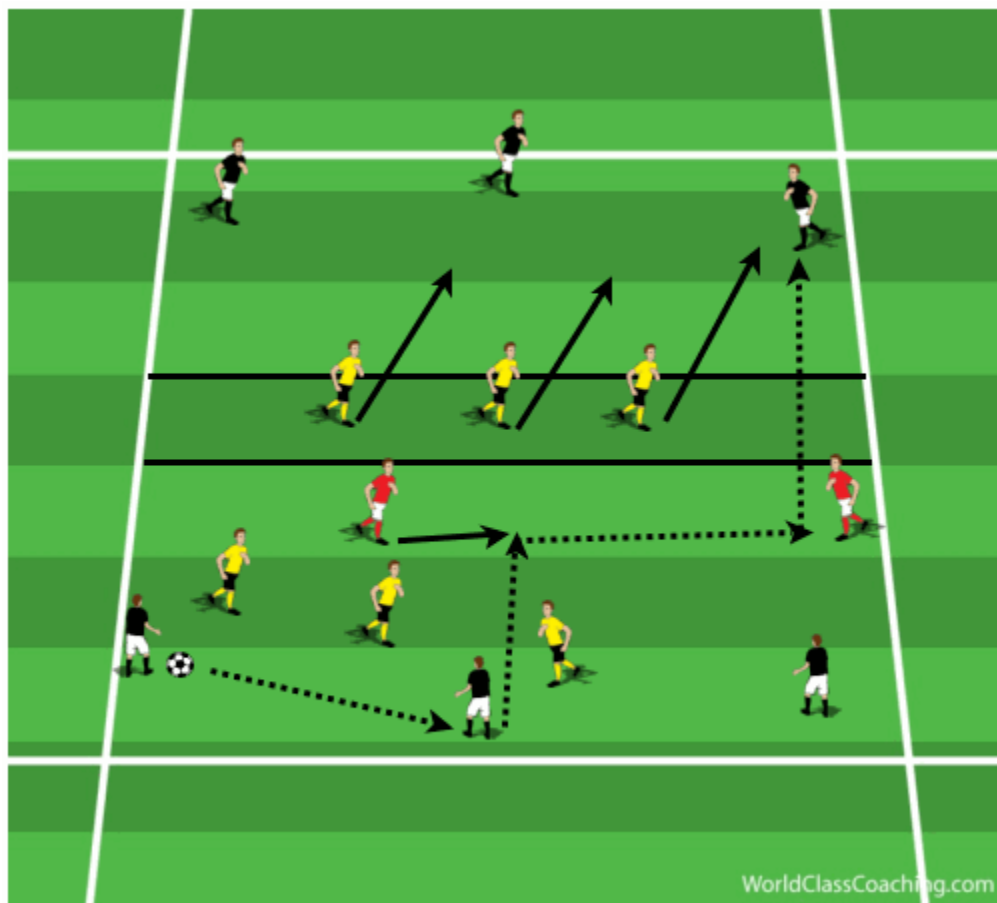
## Coaching the 4-2-3-1 Training Games

By Stevie Grieve, Author of [Coaching the 4-2-3-1](#), [Modern Soccer Tactics](#) and [Winning Soccer Tactics](#).

Grieve is the author of the "original" Coaching the 4-2-3-1 book and has now authored a book that focuses on the advanced tactics of the 4-2-3-1. This article is from the free eBook, Small-Sided Games to Train the 4-2-3-1. This eBook is given free with your purchase of the Advanced Tactics 4-2-3-1 book.

This is a small-sided game focusing on the technical development with an emphasis on pressing and covering and ball transition.

### 5v3 Pressing and covering with ball transition



The red are playmakers, and are always in the possession team.

The 3 yellows pressing the ball must try to win possession; the 3 yellows covering must try to intercept passes to the far side. If the ball reaches the far side, the yellow groups change roles, the reds move over to continue the 5v3. If possession is won, the blacks will move into defensive positions and the game restarts.

**Coaching Points:**

- Look for the spaces between the lines of pressure and covering
- Try to maintain triangulation and positional changes to make spaces and keep the ball
- Look forward for the switch pass and quick support
- Speed of pressure when the ball is switched

**Progressions/Variations:**

- 6 passes must be made before the ball can be switched
- Chipped passes can be made over the line of covering

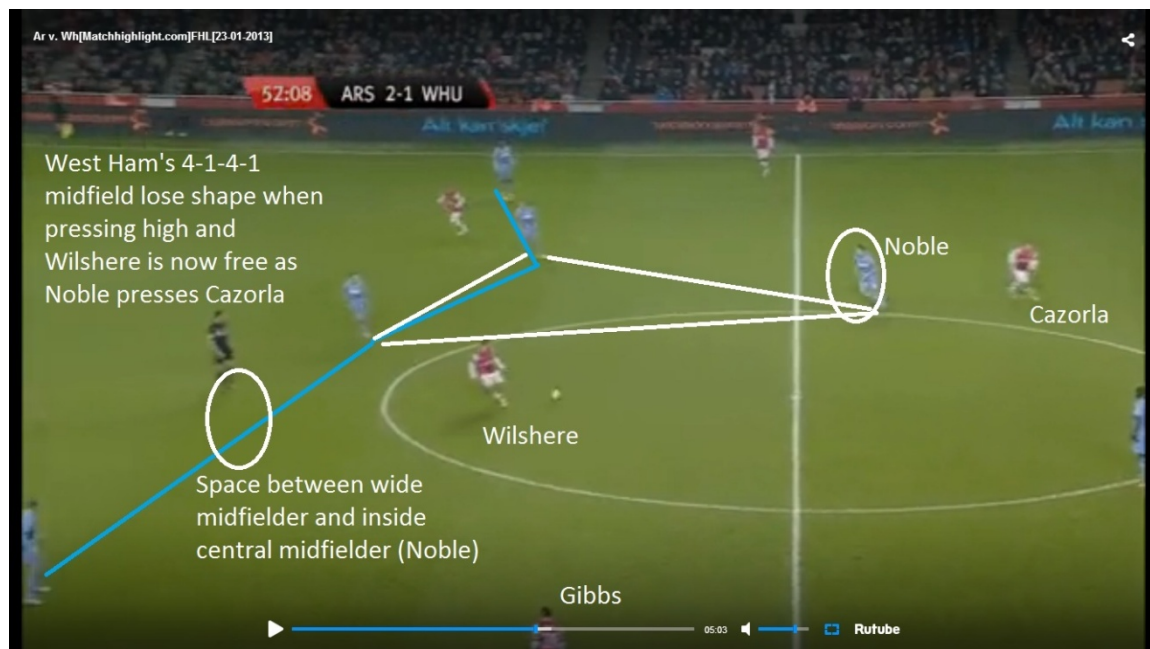


## Arsenal v West Ham – Good movement Disrupts the West Ham Defense to Score Four In the Second Half

By Stevie Grieve, Author of [Coaching the 4-2-3-1](#), [Modern Soccer Tactics](#) and [Winning Soccer Tactics](#).

In the recent Arsenal v West Ham United match, the score was 1-1 at half time. Santi Cazorla was playing at the top of the midfield triangle in a 4-2-3-1, and was being followed almost everywhere across the line between midfield and defence by Mark Noble. In the 2nd half, Arsenal changed shape slightly, with Cazorla dropping into a midfield 3 with Wilshere and Ramsey, in theory, allowing himself to drop deep and play without Noble. In effect, Noble continued to follow Cazorla as he moved even deeper, and this allowed lots of space to open between the lines and opened up passing lanes that Noble had previously covered playing in the defensive midfield role. In one instance, Cazorla's goal, Noble followed him around the field but once Cazorla passed and moved to the blindside, Noble never recovered into position, and Arsenal exploited this via good movement from Podolski, Gibbs, Giroud and Cazorla.

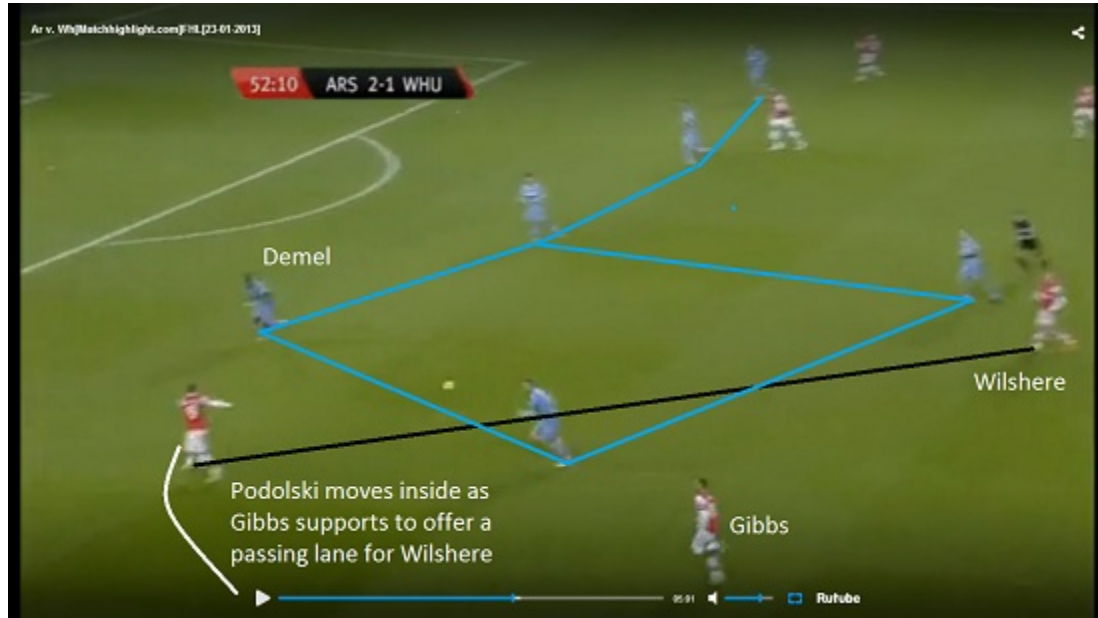
### Cazorla inside his own half in possession



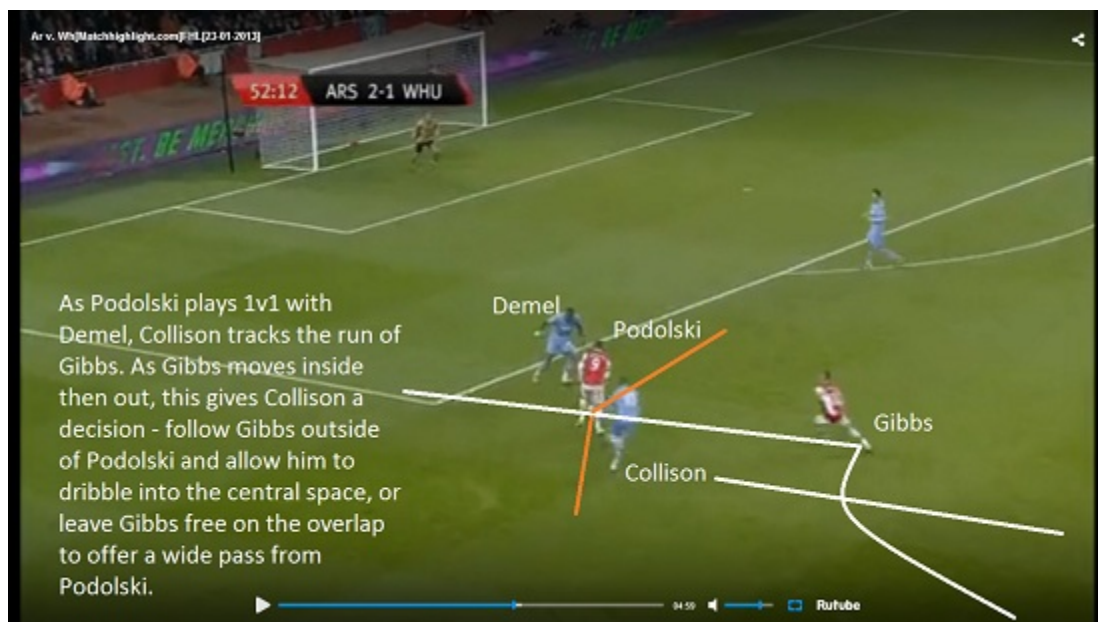
Cazorla has dropped almost into a defensive midfield position to receive and distribute, but Noble has followed him. His midfield team mates have not re-shaped quickly enough to fill in the spaces where previously Noble had been – close to Cazorla. When Wilshere receives, he has lots of space to move into and allow time for team mate movements before passing forward. Cazorla will cleverly move after the pass to the blindside and continue his run – will Noble?



## Wilshere finds Podolski with support from Gibbs

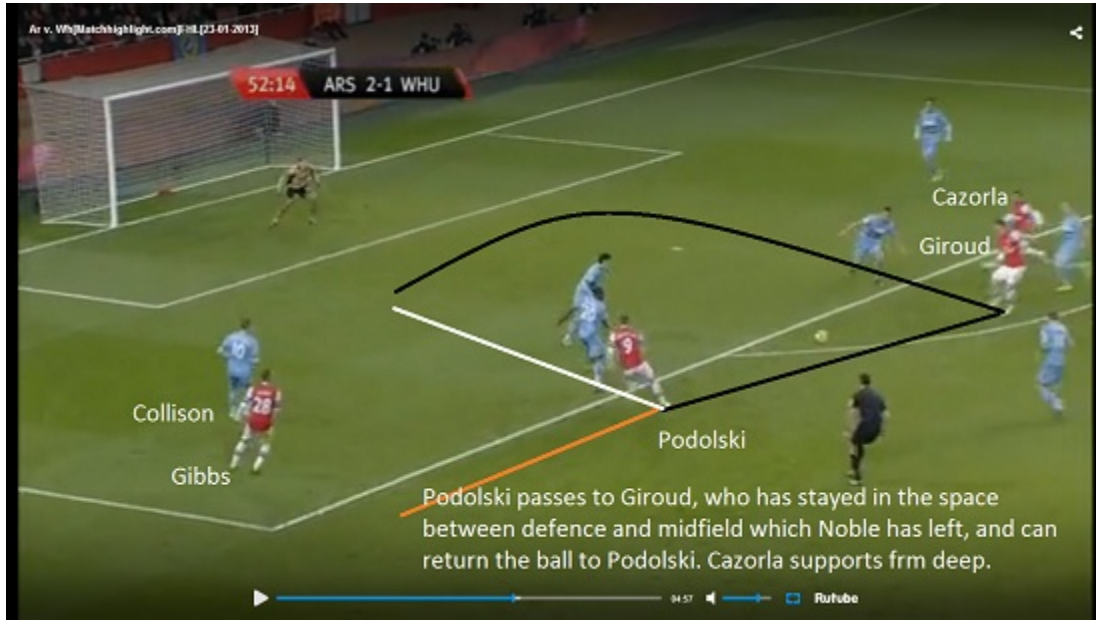


As the ball is passed to Podolski, Gibbs starts to move inside and offer a pass inside for Podolski as Collison moves with Demel to play 2v1.



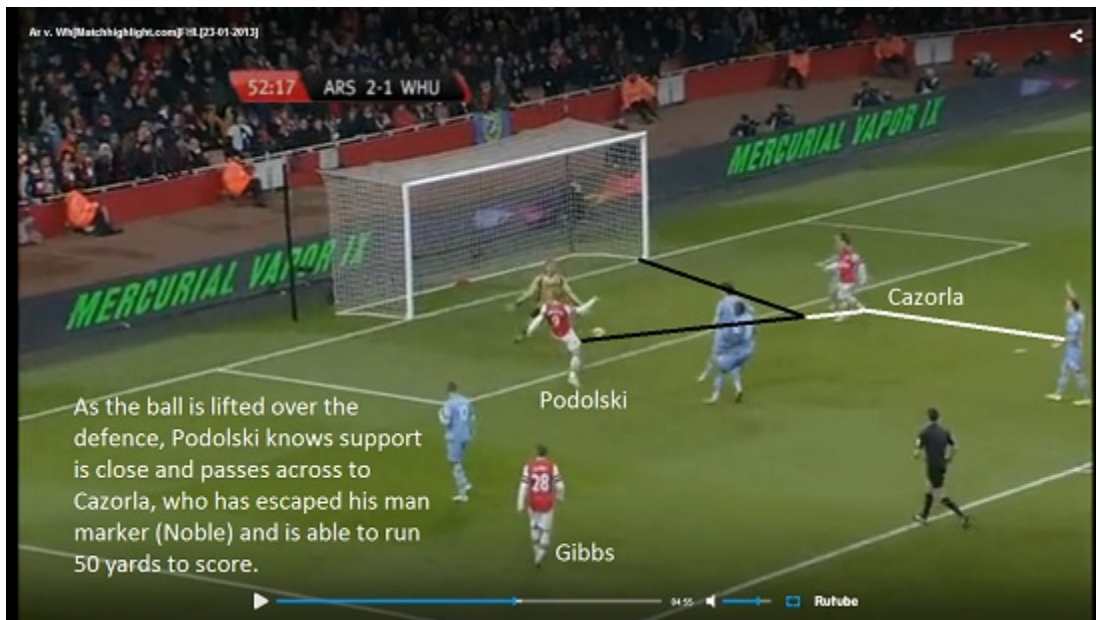
As Podolski delays the 1v1 with Demel, Collison tries to track the run inside of Gibbs. Instead of continuing inside, Gibbs gives Collison a decision to make by cutting outside – the problem for Collison is that Gibbs can be free on the overlap in a 2v1 if he continues to move inside, or he can leave the space inside Demel (onto Podolski's weaker right foot) and cover the pass to Gibbs.

## Demel doesn't defend – Giroud exploits the space left by Noble



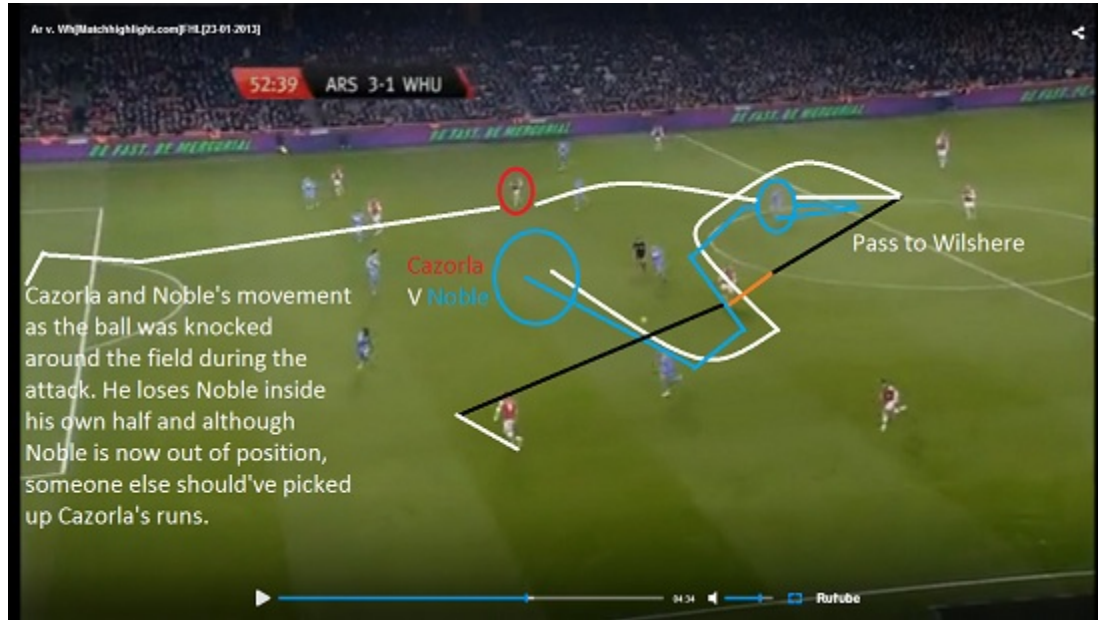
As Podolski cuts inside, Demel follows, leaving a space behind him for a difficult to make 1-2. As Giroud had watched Noble follow Cazorla out of position, he knows that he can stay in the space and draw an opponent out later. Podolski uses Giroud who is free and the pressure comes too late as Giroud makes a good return pass to Podolski.

**Note** Cazorla is still on the blindside and supports from deep and unmarked.



As Podolski brings the ball down, he knows he will have support close-by and passes to Cazorla who moves to the ball and protects it as it runs across his body before Cruyff-passing the ball with his left inside of the foot into the net under pressure.

## Tracking Cazorla's movement v Noble



### Cazorla – white movement

### Noble – Blue movement

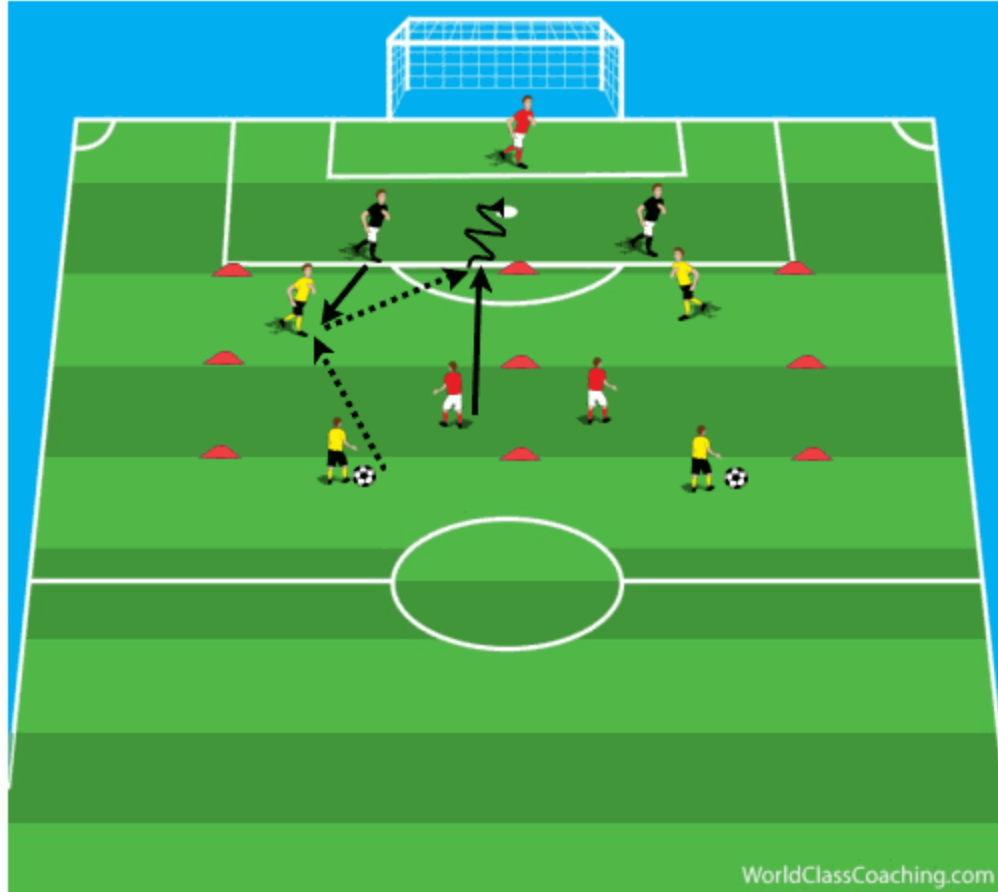
Noble followed Cazorla up to the point Cazorla passed to Wilshere, then never recovered into shape. Both players started inside the blue circle and this space was later utilised when Wilshere passed into Podolski who made the assist for the goal after cutting inside (the space which Noble covered in the 1st half before Cazorla was asked to play deeper) and finding Giroud for a 1-2 on the edge of the box.

Good movement from Gibbs made extra space for Podolski and good positioning throughout the attack by Giroud contributed to the success of this move to result in a goal for Arsenal via Cazorla.

*By Stevie Grieve, Author of [Coaching the 4-2-3-1](#), [Modern Soccer Tactics](#) and [Winning Soccer Tactics](#). Check out his new book, [Coaching the 4-2-3-1 Advanced Tactics here](#).*

## Attacking From the 2nd Line In the 4-2-3-1

By Stevie Grieve, Author of [Coaching the 4-2-3-1](#), [Modern Soccer Tactics](#) and [Winning Soccer Tactics](#).



In this exercise; the player in Red is the goal scorer from the 2nd line.

The defender can only press the striker once the ball is passed and on the way to the striker's feet. The striker must receive and lay off under pressure for his team mate to run through on goal and score.

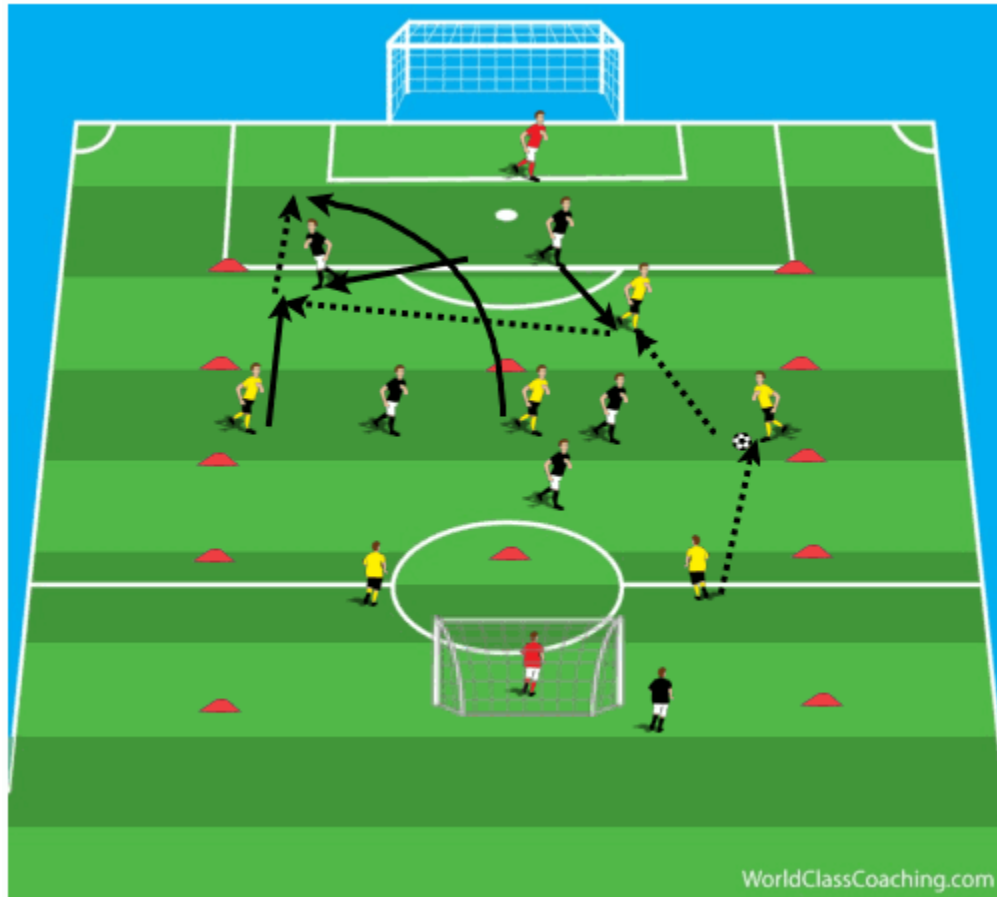
### Coaching Points:

- Play on the half turn
- Receive and protect with the 1st touch
- Allow the defender to get close to create space for 2nd line penetration



### Progressions/Variations:

- Allow the defender to man-mark the striker
- The 2nd line runner can make space for the striker to shoot
- Add in a midfield defender to play 2v2.



### Attacking from the 2nd line in a 2-3-1 formation

Similar to previously, the defender can only press the striker as the ball is on its way to him. He should receive on the half turn and look for support from the 2nd line. In the example above, the striker switches to the far side winger who has support from the 2nd line running beyond the defender to receive a through pass.

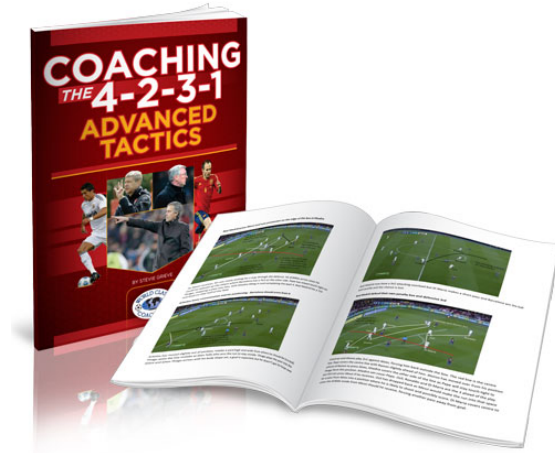
The zones are – 2v0, 3v3, 2v1. Above, the Black defend with the striker sitting off, when the Black attack, the Yellow striker exits the field to allow the defence to play 2v0.

### Coaching Points:

- Move to the ball to ensure the defender is pulled out of position more
- Fake passes to stall the defender and buy some time
- Play 1st touch passes under heavy opponent pressure

- Take a touch to draw in an opponent if possible
- Pass back to create more space for a 2nd line runner behind the defender
- Don't force the play – pass into space for diagonal runs or arced runs

*By Stevie Grieve, Author of [Coaching the 4-2-3-1](#), [Modern Soccer Tactics](#) and [Winning Soccer Tactics](#). Check out his new book, [Coaching the 4-2-3-1 Advanced Tactics](#) [here](#).*





## Coaching Soccer the Spanish Way

Today's article is an excerpt from our new book, [Coaching Spanish Soccer](#) by Jordi Pascual

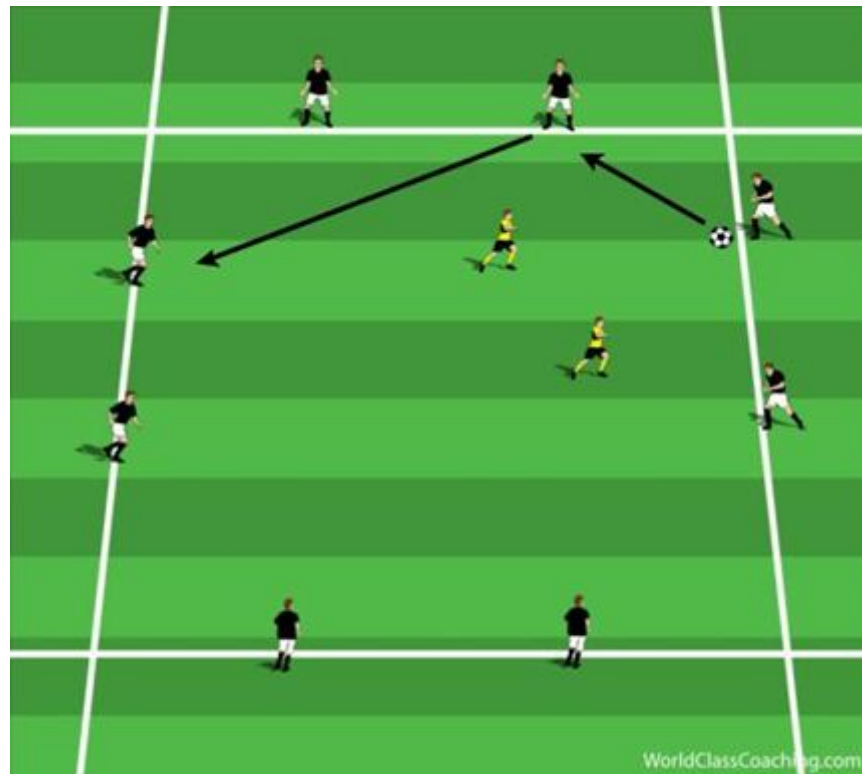
[Coaching Spanish Soccer](#) contains the player development and training methodology that has made Spain the #1 Soccer Nation in the World tells you everything you need to know about Spain's rise to dominance. With an in-depth look at the players, formation and the infrastructure that created a golden era of success, this comprehensive book is the ultimate guide to unlocking the secrets to Spain's success and how you can apply them to your own team.

This excerpt shows one of the training sessions introduced in Spain by Johan Cryuff when he was the manager at Barcelona in the '90s.

## Coaching Spanish Soccer

We talked before about how are the sessions organized in Spain and what is mainly the methodology. In this chapter, we'll see some of the most typical exercises used in Spain.

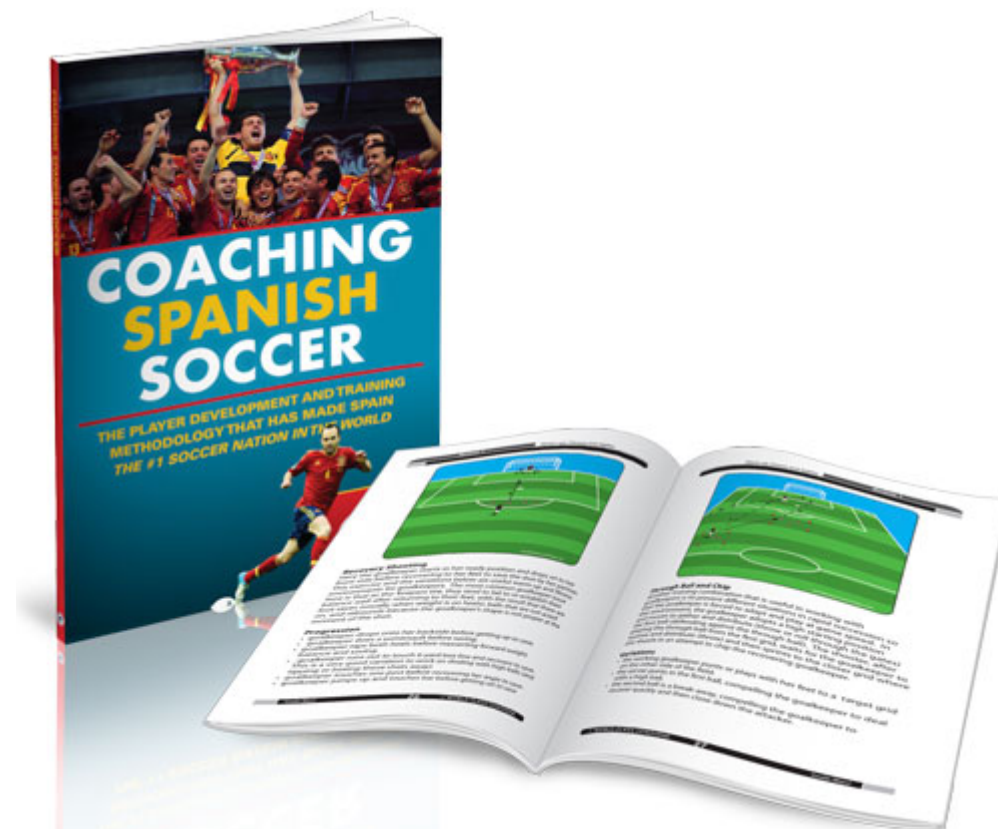
The first thing to notice is that these activities can be used (and they are used), at all levels and ages. "Rondos" and possession games are introduced at early stages of development. It won't be strange to find kids of 9-10 doing it. It's just a question about how to adapt the size of the grid or the number of players and coaches.



The first one is one of the most typical in warm-up, being used, first, by FC Barcelona (as far as I know, it was used in the 90s, when Cruyff was the manager; probably, it's one of the exercises he took from Ajax) and, actually for a lot of teams, included the National Team; it's a 8v2 in a grid of 10x10 meters.

At this level it's played with just one touch and, and the worst that can happen is that the defenders are nutmeg or split by the ball. The key point in this, and all the "positional" exercises is this: they are "positional"; this means that the players with the ball must stay just on the line; these are not games where players go dribbling inside or whatever; the idea is always look for the best pass; this implies a lot of awareness and decision making. The player is waiting for the ball, looking for the options to pass and knowing that there's no time to control the ball and pass it; when the ball arrives to the player, immediately is kicked to another player; if you are bad positioned, not ready, etc. you fail (passing or receiving, depending where you are) and, you must go to the middle to chase the ball.

[You can see more info on this new book here.](#)



## Attacking With Creativity

### **Take a virtual pitch side seat and watch how Chelsea Academy Coach, Chris Woodward trains players to move, think and react so they can be more creative in attack**

This special six-part video series runs you through a complete creative attacking session with **Chelsea Academy Coach Chris Woodward**. Watch how Woodward trains a group of players to be winners, with a progressive session that hones their thinking, movement and creativity in getting the ball across the line to score.

Check out the video below to see the first part in this six-part video series. And click here for more info on what is covered in [Creative Attacking Drills Video Series](#).

## Passing and Possession With Creativity

### **Watch Chelsea Academy Coach, Ben Mitchell in action and gain a blueprint for creating your own progressive passing drills**

Get your players passing like champions! [Creative Passing Drills](#) is a five-part video series that shows you how to run progressive passing and receiving sessions that give your players more touches than conventional sessions. Led by **Chelsea Academy coach Ben Mitchell**, see how the session helps a group of players quickly improve their passing skills.

Check out the video below to see the first part in this five-part video series. And click here for more info on what is covered in [Creative Passing Drills](#).

## The Secret to Training and Motivating Advanced Players

**This advanced soccer coaching program of 6 eBooks and 10 videos will give your players that extra 5-10% they need to develop them from being a ‘talented’ player to an ‘elite’ player**

The [Complete Guide to Coaching Advanced Players](#)’ by **Canadian U18 National Team Coach, Rob Gale** is a soccer training course specially designed to give players the extra challenge they need to take their skills to an advanced level.

If you coach a college, high school or competitive club team, this package of 10 videos and 6 eBook is tailor made for you. It will show you drills that will not only take your players to the next level, but will motivate them during your training sessions.

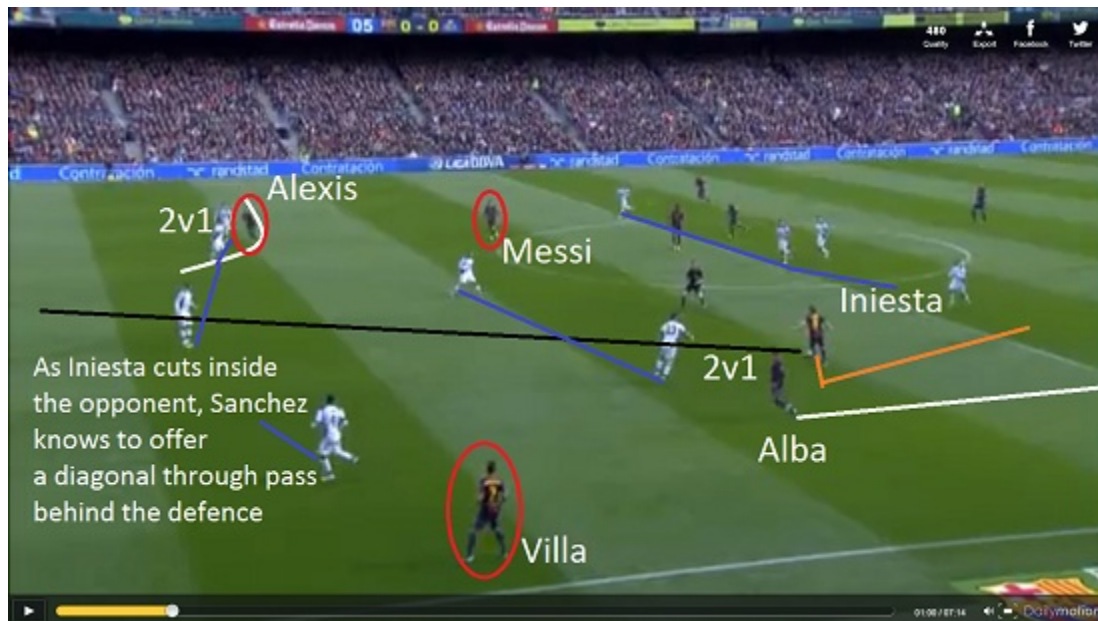
Check out the video below on 1v1 situations, which is just one of the 10-part video series. And click here for more info on what is covered in The [Complete Guide to Coaching Advanced Players](#)’ by **Canadian U18 National Team Coach, Rob Gale**.

## Penetrating With Killer Passes

By Stevie Grieve, Author of [\*Coaching the 4-2-3-1\*](#), [\*Coaching the 4-2-3-1 ADVANCED Tactics\*](#), [\*Modern Soccer Tactics\*](#) and [\*Winning Soccer Tactics\*](#).

Barcelona in the 2012/2013 season have been almost unplayable. Last season, they became slightly predictable, they suffered from no width or balance, especially on the left side, which Jordi Alba has fixed this season, and suffered from being too focused on playing centrally, and retaining possession when penetration opportunities have become available. This season, Alba has contributed to the width and balance issue on the left side, but more noticeable has been the massive amount of 'killer passes' being played from all over the field. In this game, Alexis, Messi and Villa all scored from a killer pass from different areas of the field.

**Alexis' goal – Iniesta plays a through ball 40 yards from goal between the center backs**

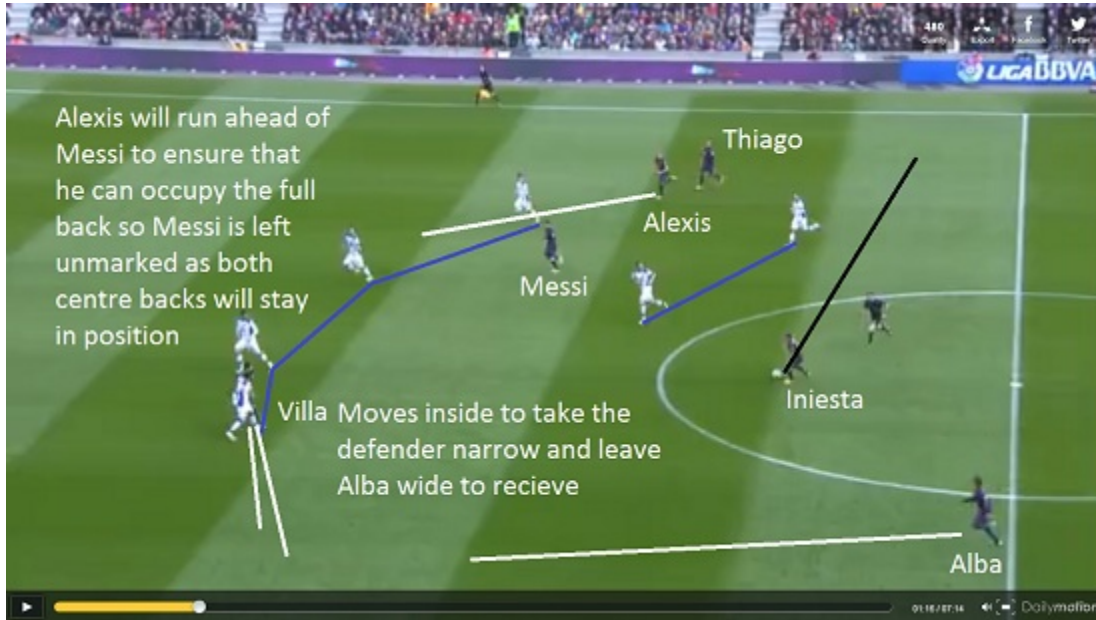


Iniesta dribbles forward with Alba in support on the left to make a 2v1. As Iniesta cuts inside, Alexis knows that a space between the full backs is open for a pass behind the defense. Alexis makes the run and Iniesta makes a perfect pass for Alexis to receive and pass around the GK for 1-0.

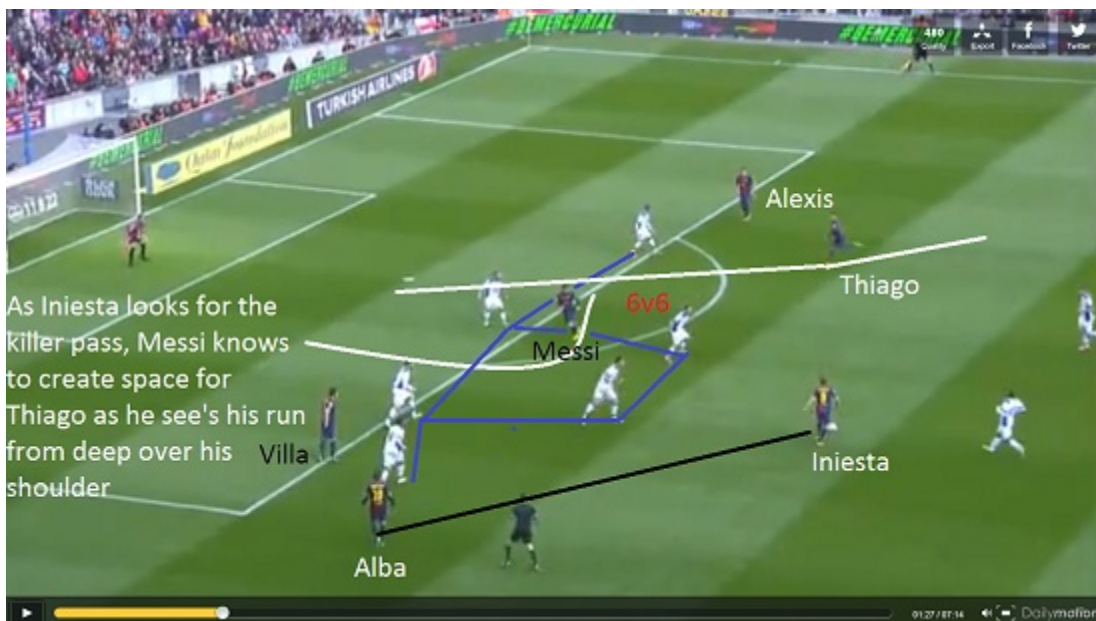
This goal is created because of the way Villa, Alexis and Messi have positioned themselves to leave spaces between the defense and use penetrating passes to get behind the back 4. Vital to this is the timing of the runs, and the triggers of when to make them – the cut inside triggers the run from the far side to offer a central through ball.



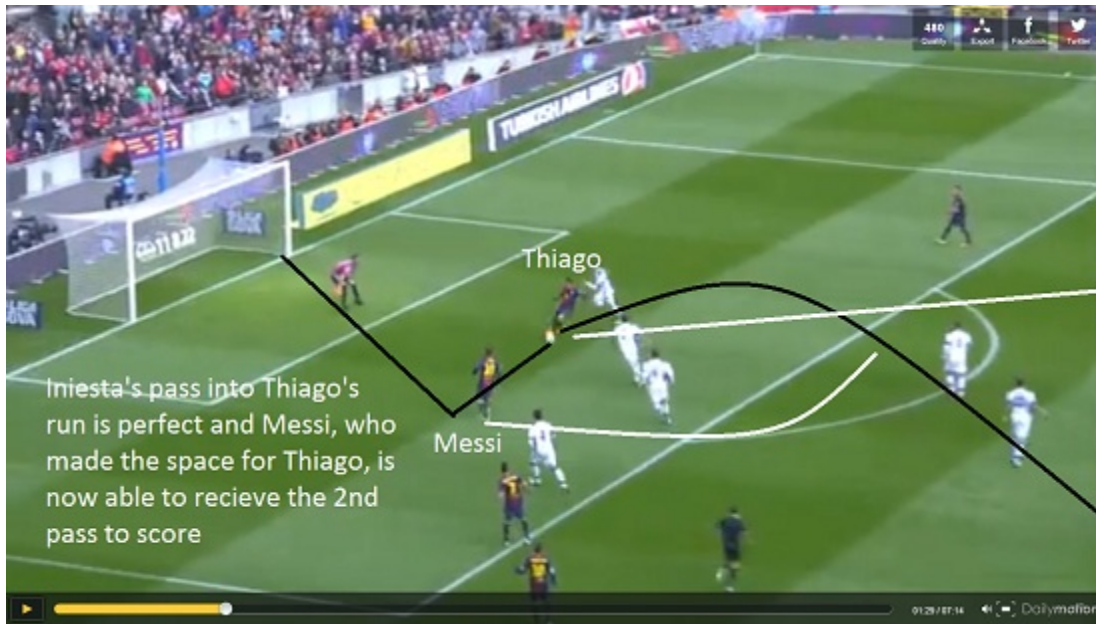
## Messi's goal – Iniesta chips a pass into the run of Thiago after Messi makes the space



As Iniesta receives, again he has Alba offering support on the left side, Villa moves inside to occupy the defender and leave Alba spare. Messi will hold position as Alexis runs past him, this allows Alexis to occupy the other full back and leave Messi free as both center backs will stay in position, hoping a defensive midfielder will mark him.

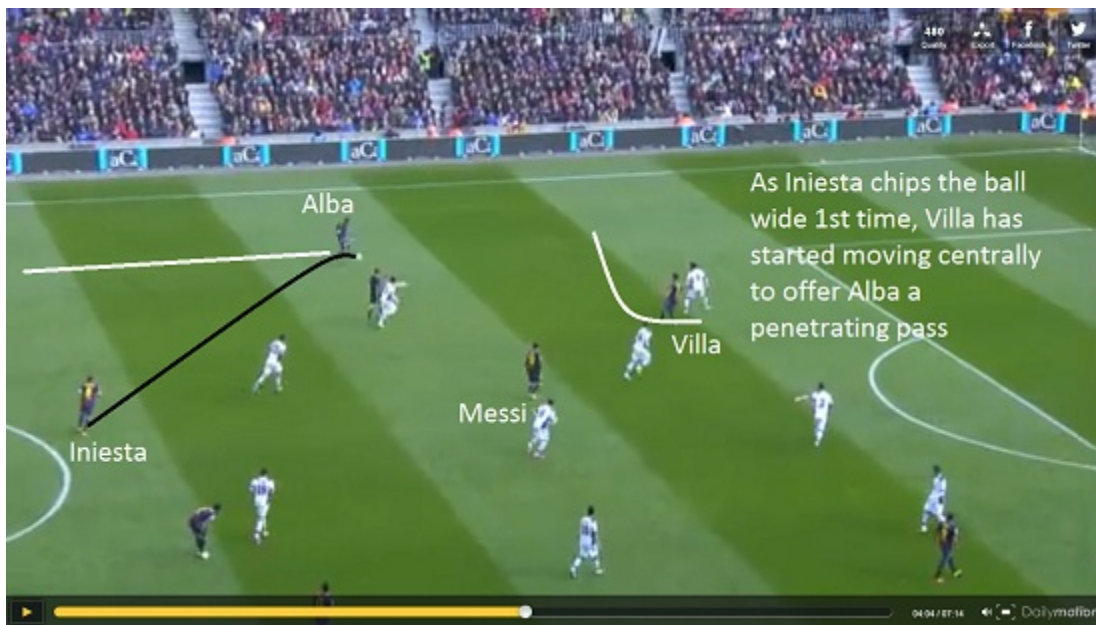


As Alba moves forward with the ball, Getafe re-set. Iniesta receives the pass away from the opposition and Barcelona have a 6v6. Messi see's Thiago making a run from deep as Alexis stays wide, so Messi drags away his marker and leaves the space for a chipped Pass into Thiago.

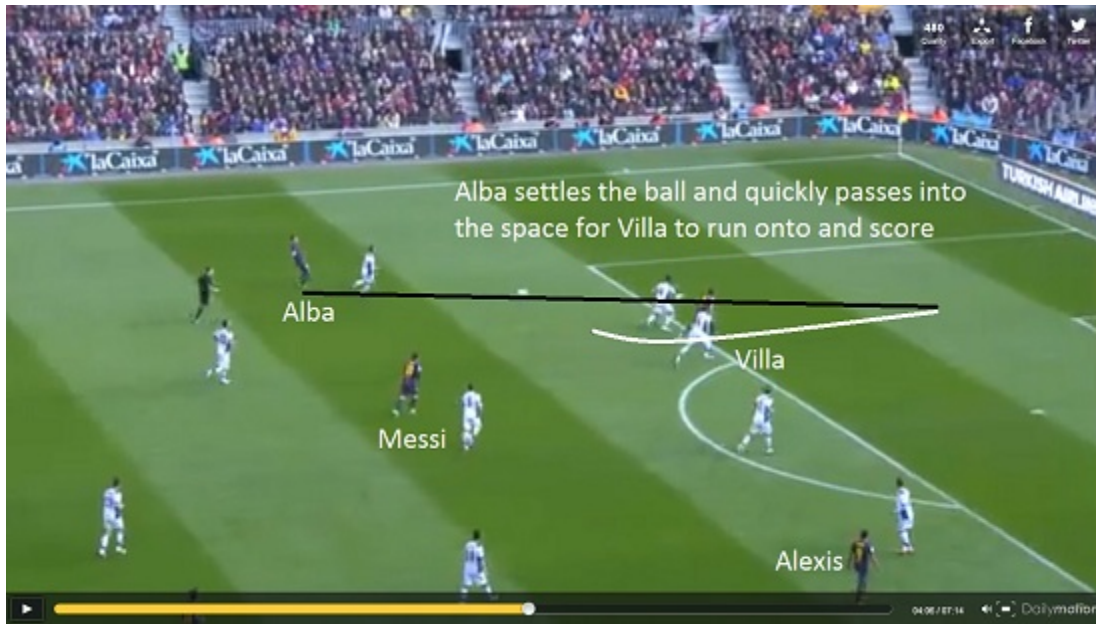


As Iniesta's pass over the defense is weighted perfectly, Thiago receives and touches it to Messi who is now in space as his marker doesn't know where he is, and he scores into the far post. 2-0.

#### **Villa's goal – Alba plays an early through pass for Villa behind the full back**



This time, Alba receives the ball from Iniesta, so Villa moves inside. As Villa is between the narrow full back and centre back, there is space on the outside for a pass behind the defence for Villa.



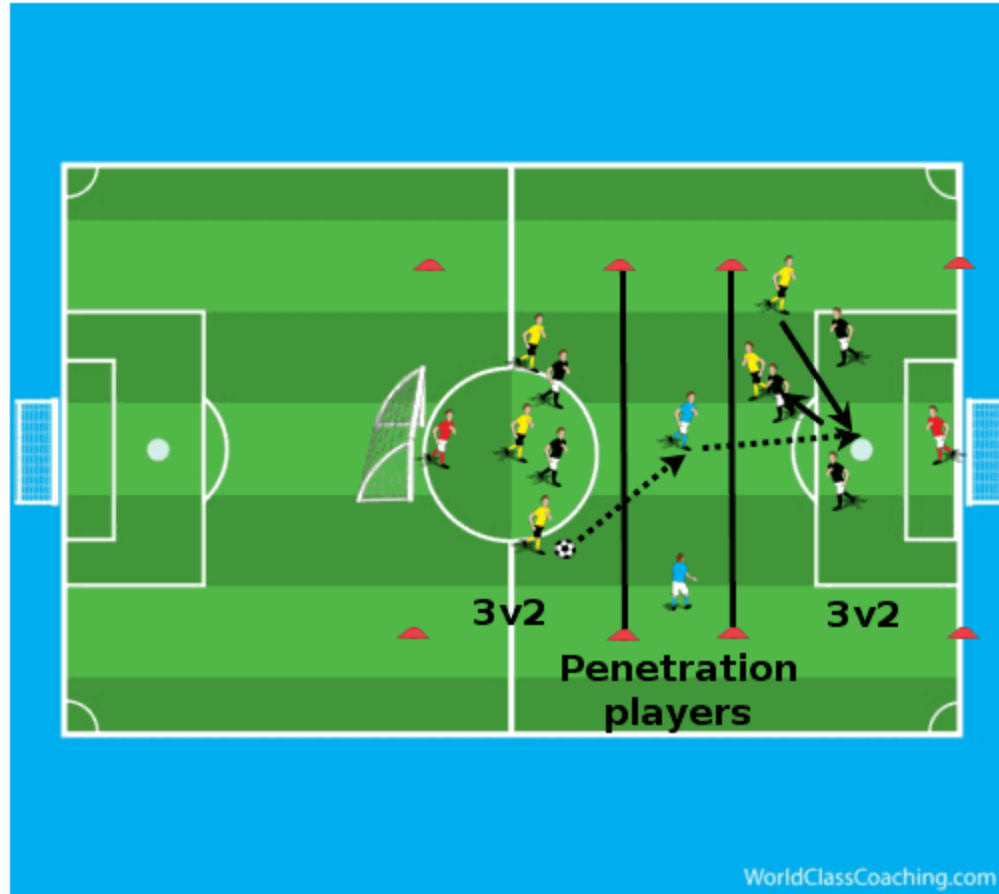
Alba looks for the early penetration as the ball is in flight to him, and he quickly settles the ball to pass into the run of Villa for another goal from a good killer pass with the movements made on time.

This game was an example of quick and regular penetrating forward passes from Barcelona, and this has been the case all season; players making runs to the right places at the right times, with perfectly played passes from different areas and angles from last season, making them much more dangerous and capable of scoring several goals against anyone.



## Penetration Training session

In this session, players will pass the ball into midfield and the attackers will look for combinations to penetrate the defense.



Penetration from midfield; 3v2 in the final 3rd.

Mark out a 70 yard long zone, by 50 yards wide. Mark out a 10 yard deep central zone with 30 yard deep zones on either side with goals at either end. Penetration players have 3 touches.

Above, the ball is passed into midfield, the penetration player turns and spots the wide to centre diagonal run, as the central striker moves to make space for a through ball.

If the defense intercept the pass, they pass into the other penetration player who looks to penetrate from a new position.

### Coaching Points:

- Players in attack should anticipate the pass into the central zone and make early moves to offer up penetration options
- If no early penetration is available, the penetration player can simply play a 1-2 with an

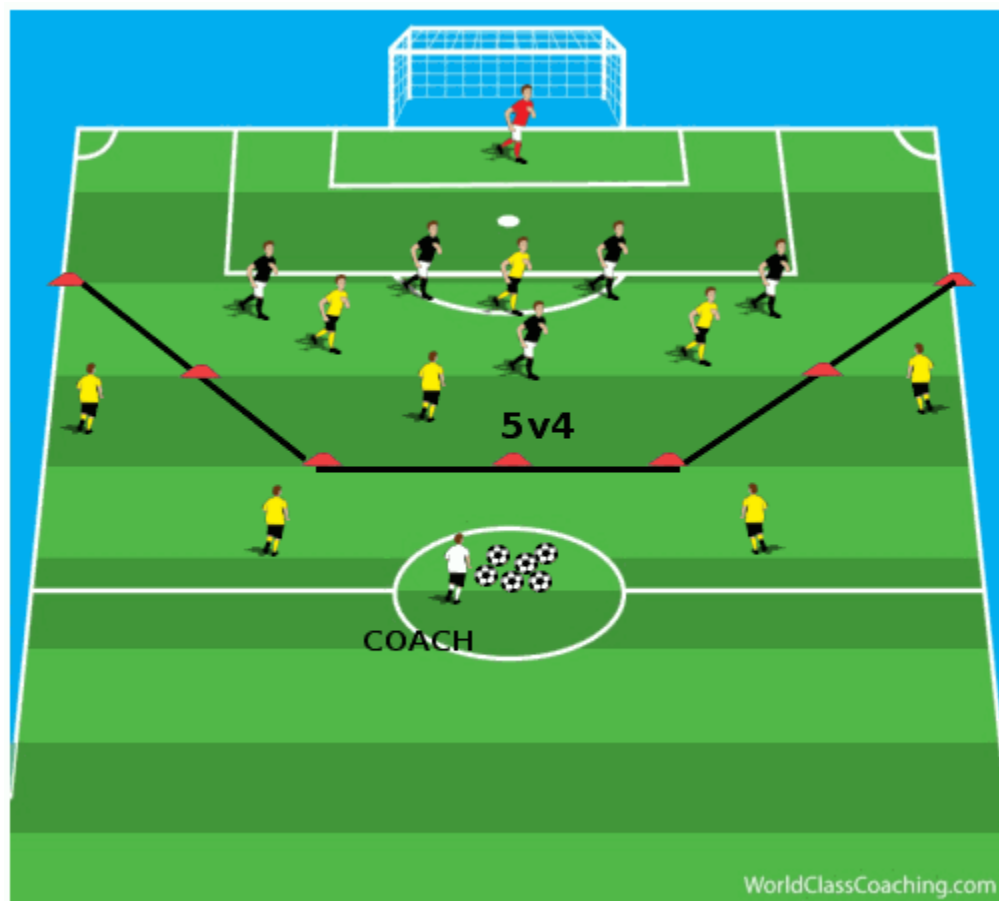
attacker and look to penetrate from a new angle in a 3v3

- Attackers should look to see where each other are moving to, communicating as they move to open up spaces for penetration
- Monitor the movements of the defenders, changing starting positions in each new attack to create different possibilities depending on the ball position

### **Progressions/Variations:**

- An attacker can enter the central zone to pressure the penetration players
- The other penetration player can enter the final 3rd to play 3v3

### **Defense v Attack – 10 Attacks Penetration Game**



Mark out a zone around the field where the attack can receive and retain possession from, but also look for penetrating passes into the attack or behind the defense. The ball can be passed into the 4 attackers who can look for intricate combinations to create an opportunity to pass behind the defense.

If the defense win possession, they must pass into one of the outside players who turn and play a 1-2 with a close team mate and move over the half way line – the coach will pass to a player on the outside and restart with the 2 spare outside players.

### Coaching Points:

- Anticipate early penetration opportunities from around the field
- Make runs to create space for others to receive
- When receiving with back to goal, look to lay off for a 3rd man runner behind the defence

### Progressions/Variations:

- Add in 3 small goals across the half way line – the counter attack can be passed into the wide players and must be finished by one of the wide external players or the defensive midfielder in a 3v2 counter attack
- Change the game to a normal match up to 60m with an offside line 25 yards from each goal to allow penetrating passes and runs behind the defensive offside line

*By Stevie Grieve, Author of [Coaching the 4-2-3-1](#), [Modern Soccer Tactics](#) and [Winning Soccer Tactics](#). Check out his new book, [Coaching the 4-2-3-1 Advanced Tactics](#) here.*





## Why the 4-2-3-1 Is the Formation of Choice

# Discover How to Harness the Exciting 4-2-3-1 Formation and Replicate the Devastating Attacking Power of the World's Most Successful Teams

If you've been looking for a way to coach your team how to play the 4-2-3-1, you've just found it. [Coaching the 4-2-3-1](#) is a special 12-part video series which provides a comprehensive tactical and training guide to this exciting formation. Utilized by **Real Madrid, Chelsea** and the most successful sides in the **Euro 2012** tournament, the 4-2-3-1's flexibility and attacking power is fast becoming the formation of choice for leading coaches all over the world.

Check out the video below to see the first part in this 12-part video series. And click here for more info on what is covered in [Coaching the 4-2-3-1 12-Part Video Set](#).

## **Barcelona Tactical Analysis Videos**

We have a great new video series called [Attacking the Barcelona Way](#). These are new style "Tactical Analysis" videos. You won't see usual "old school" type footage with players demonstrating drills and exercises.

These videos go much deeper and include actual real game footage, where the coach analyses the tactics, breaks down movement, sequences, combinations, goals, etc. and then describes training sessions you can do to help train your team to produce the same style of play. Also included is an eBook of all the training sessions covered in the video.

Here is a sample of the video series, [Attacking the Barcelona Way](#).

Coaches have been asking for these tactical analysis type videos for a long time so we hope you like them.

## Attacking the Barcelona Way - Passing Exercise

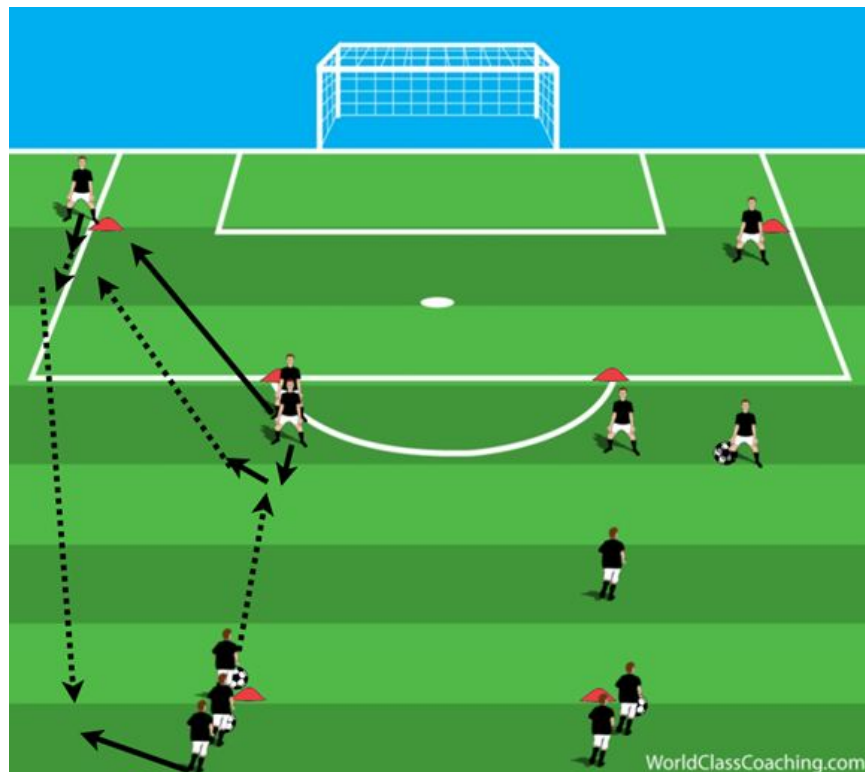
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These videos go much deeper and include actual real game footage, where the coach analyses the tactics, breaks down movement, sequences, combinations, goals, etc. and then describes training sessions you can do to help train your team to produce the same style of play. Also included is an eBook of all the training sessions covered in the video. Here is part of the eBook from the first video that takes a look at a passing exercise. The eBook shows more progressions of this exercise as well as lots more exercises that appear in the videos. For more info on the [Attacking the Barcelona Way videos and eBook, click this link](#).

## Attacking the Barcelona Way - Passing Exercise

In this exercise we look at a player with his back to goal receiving under pressure from a tight marker from behind.

The defender is passive, but must pressure the player so it is realistic.



- Player 1 passes to Player 2
- Player 2 moves towards the ball
- A passive defender Player 3 pressures from behind
- Player 2 turns and passes to Player 4
- Player 4 moves to the ball and passes Player 5
- Player 5 moves to the side to show for the ball

**Every component can be coached**

- Passing quality
- First touch
- The turn method
- The longer pass
- Timing of movement
- Body shape

## Balancing Attacking and Defending During Games

**By: Dan Minutillo - Author of [Formation Based Soccer Training](#)**

Coaches of great soccer teams like Barcelona, Real Madrid and Arsenal struggle to find and maintain a balance between game day offense and defense measured by goals for as compared to goals against. Arsene Wenger, longtime coach at Arsenal, said as late as April 2013, over 30 games into the EPL season that Arsenal had only now just found the proper balance between offense and defense during League games--too many goals against, not enough goals for. Numbers up on attack, high in the front third of the pitch but numbers down in the middle third of the pitch when defending on transition.

Offensive balance means that a team has not over committed players high up field going forward on attack during the run of play to expose it to quick transition if it loses the ball. Defensive balance means that a team has held shape and has committed enough players or the right players behind the ball as the team is attacking to slow transition in the event the ball is lost. Defensive balance promotes the freedom of movement of the attacking players during an attack but offensive balance does not likewise influence defensive balance. This will make more sense as the theme of this article is developed.

What is game day offensive and defensive balance and how is it attained by a team?

Game day offensive and defensive balance is a tactical maneuver, no matter what formation is used, to ensure that a team plays high enough up the pitch with enough numbers on offense to provide scoring opportunities but with players in a position behind the ball to ensure that an easy goal is not scored against the attacking team on transition, i.e., attacking with protection.

Using Arsenal as an example, television commentators and pundits had a field day in the early part of Arsenal's 2012-2013 season claiming that the team had a very leaky defense, not solid enough to make it into the top four in the EPL in order to qualify for Champions League. As Arsenal moved closer to 4th place in the EPL, the pundits said that the same Arsenal defenders had "stepped up" and played better to assume their responsibilities as backs. What really happened is that Wenger changed the system of play to create offensive and defensive balance in the later part of this EPL season.

Wenger realized that Arsenal's high line used on attack was easily exploited on quick transition because offensive and defensive balance during the run of play was off. Too many players in the front third of the pitch and not enough players, or, the wrong players supporting the attack but ready for transition.

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This offensive and defensive balancing act can be solved tactically a few ways, for example:

1. Add more speed in support of the attack by substituting faster players in deeper positions in the formation for slower players
2. Hold a lower (deeper) line of defense when attacking
3. Attack high but with fewer players, or
4. The Barcelona way, to immediately pressure the man with the ball, double up on him, and put players around the ball cutting all short passing lanes high up field in order to get the ball back quickly to avoid quick transition by the opponent.

How does each solution mentioned above help a team balance a high powered, numbers up offense with a solid defense during the run of play so that quick, potent transitional play by an opponent does not result in a goal against?

First let's consider game day strategy as it relates to:

1. Formation
2. System of play within a formation which can include:
  - A. Large group tactics (like tactical positioning for midfielders or backs for example)
  - B. Small group tactics (the players immediately around the ball) and
  - C. Individual tactical play, or as it relates to this article, changing player personnel (substituting) and changing individual defending tactics.

And then, explain how each of these elements promotes offensive and defensive balance.

## **BALANCED FORMATIONS**

This is the easiest and clearest part of the analysis to attempt to avoid a goal against on transition by providing balance. Not considering a system of play within a chosen formation (just looking at a formation on its face), a flat back 3-4-3 should be easier to gain an advantage against on transition than say a 4-3-2-1 because the 3-4-3 is more naturally top heavy leaving more space on the wings to get behind the line of defense leaving fewer players overall to contend with on transition than the 4-3-2-1. Again, absent a system of play countering this issue, the same can be said for the 4-3-3 and possibly the 3-5-2 when compared to a 4-3-2-1 or even a 4-2-3-1. More players are naturally more available to form a line of defense or interrupt the counter attack quicker, absent a system to the contrary, with the 4-3 (seven players available to handle transition) or 4-2 (six players available to handle transition) and this still leaves 3 or 4 players high enough to attack in either formation. Overlaying one formation to another, on its face, demonstrates this point.



## **BALANCED SYSTEMS OF PLAY WITHIN A FORMATION**

### **Large Group Tactics**

Various systems of play can be used within any formation to attain a balanced offense and defense to avoid a goal against on transition. Point 2A and B above, large and small group tactics are system oriented ways to play the game in any formation to balance offense and defense on attack.

Let's start with 2A, a large group tactic, holding a deeper line of defense on offense. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways. If the chosen formation calls for a flat back line of defense then merely drop the line a bit deeper on attack with more space between the midfield players and the backs and more distance from the line of defense to the ball. On transition, players will already be in position to mark attacking players without having to quickly drop. A deeper, flat back line serves as a safety net making it more difficult to penetrate and much easier to handle transition.

A deeper line of defense can also be accomplished in any formation by using a dedicated sweeper, deeper than the other backs, or by retracting an inside back a few yards behind the other backs to provide depth or cover on defense as soon as the line of defense is set during the run of play. This additional depth when defending also makes it more difficult to penetrate on transition.

### **Small Group Tactics**

In any formation, even the 4-3-3, using a high line of attack but with fewer numbers high up field is a small group tactic which will leave more players a bit deeper for quicker marking on transition. When the opponent takes the ball, less players in the front third of the pitch allows more players to mark deeper. This can be accomplished no matter what formation is used. As an example, in a 4-3-3, the wing forwards stay retracted leaving a striker/center forward up top, or, as Messi does over and over again, the striker could stay retracted, drifting deeper to space in the goal channel during the attack with the wing forwards higher, either way, there will be more players behind the ball on transition.

Another small group tactic used by Barcelona is the six second rule on transition. Once Barcelona loses the ball, a first defender immediately pressures it, another player double teams the first attacker, and all other Barcelona players near the ball either cut passing lanes or form a fortress around the ball so there is no escape without either an interception or a bad pass which either moves the ball backwards out of bounds attempting to do so within 6 seconds after losing the ball.

### **Individual Tactics**

This is one of the few times that a coach can truly influence the outcome of a game as it relates to transition, substitutions. Speed at the back and on the wings will always serve to counteract attack on transition. The outlet pass for most transitional play is wide, to a winger who moves the ball up field in space. There is usually more space in the outside channels during the run of play and wingers usually are the speed demons on a team. Moving a ball from pressure inside to a

wing and then quickly up field wide or moving the ball high to a lone striker or group of forwards is the essence of transitional play especially after a shot on goal.

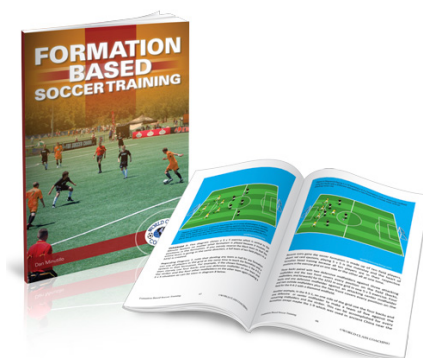
Why? By the very nature of attack, more of the attacking team's players are up field after a shot on goal. If this shot on goal by the attacking team is saved by the keeper, this usually creates a good opportunity for the keeper to quickly start transition out of the back either wide or with a long punt up field. Focusing first on the long punt, a deeper line of defense or a retracted sweeper will help thwart the attack. If the keeper attempts to play wide out of the back to start transition, deeper holding, fast wingers (forwards or midfielders) will serve the same purpose.

Another individual tactic to slow transition is substituting a speedy center back to keep up with that sole striker or substituting to provide more speed on the wings either in the forward or midfield position to thwart transition. Speed will allow the marking player to drop and mark quickly in order to delay the attack, one on one. It doesn't matter if the first attacker is delayed in the back or middle third of the pitch so long as he does not make it to his front third unmarked. Shepherding or steering wide is another individual defensive tactic that helps avoid transition. In most cases, coaches will encourage players to shepherd or steer a first attacker into help, to a teammate, so that the first attacker is pinned in and the ball can be taken 2 on 1. However, in the case of transition, it is best to shepherd the first attacker wide, away from the goal channel and toward an outside channel toward the closest sideline in order to delay an attack on transition because less players are usually available to defend on transition as mentioned earlier.

Shepherding wide to a sideline to slow an attack on transition requires less defending players because, eventually, the sideline can be used to block off the first attacker's movement with the ball, and, more obvious, outside passing lanes are cut by the sideline. Because less defending players are needed to slow an attack on transition by shepherding wide, more defending players are available to get behind the ball to cut passing lanes. Shepherding wide is another good individual tactic to slow an attack on transition.

## CONCLUSION

Offensive and defensive balance during an attack can be accomplished by choosing a back heavy formation, or by using the large group, small group, or individual tactics mention above as part of a system of play within any formation. But, in any event, if you have one team with a line of defense comprised of the likes of Vidic, Kompany, Maicon, and Thiago Silva, this article would be irrelevant.



## Exercises For the Triangle Midfield

Our new book, [The Triangle Midfield](#), includes a free eBook with an additional 10 exercises and small-sided games to train the core techniques and tactics required to play with a midfield triangle. I have shared the introduction below as well as the Exercise #1.

### Introduction

This is a collection of drills and exercises you can use to train in any triangle midfield formation. The exercises are designed to get the players moving the ball quickly in an organized and disciplined fashion, elements needed to be successful in the triangle midfield. Some of these exercises are generic enough that they can be used with all players as they will focus on all of the elements of technical training (preparation, skill and speed). Use them to develop a quicker technical mentality for your players while also developing them in the training exercises shown in the Triangle Midfield Book. It is important that you first focus on the technical aspects of the triangle midfield and making sure that the qualities you need for each position are present in the players you have in these positions. Here are some suggestions of qualities you should be looking for:

**Attacking Central Midfielder-** You need players that are very good technical players. They need to read the game very quickly and must be dangerous when going forward to attack the goal. The player should have good physical speed but, more importantly, explosive technical speed and the ability to receive and play with a soft touch. They must see the field very well and be able to distribute the ball to create attacking opportunities. This player is your playmaker and considered to be the HEART of the triangle midfield. They must also be very fit.

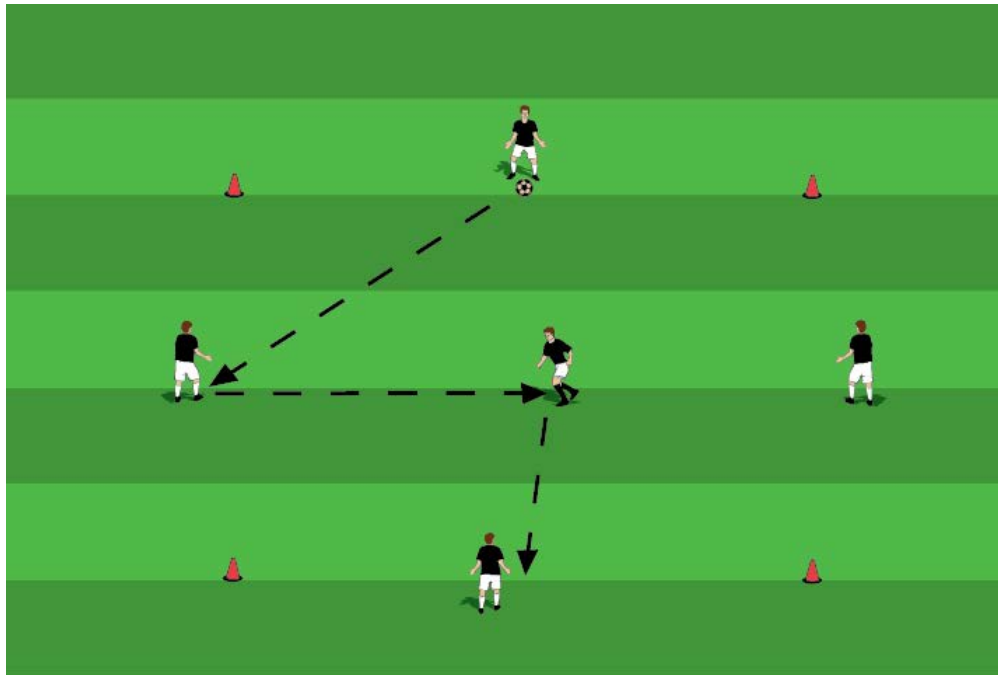
**Holding Central Midfielder-** This player or players must be the physical presence of your midfield. They will always challenge anyone who attempts to come inside the triangle or anyone attempting to bring the ball into the central part of the field. They must be strong at winning the ball in the air and in challenging 50/50 balls. They are usually the ones responsible for keeping the shape of the triangle, so they must be excellent communicators. In possession they must be 1-2 touch players as they are responsible for linking possession between the defense and the attack. They are often there to re-direct the flow of possession from either one side to the other or one point to another. They must also have a good level of fitness.

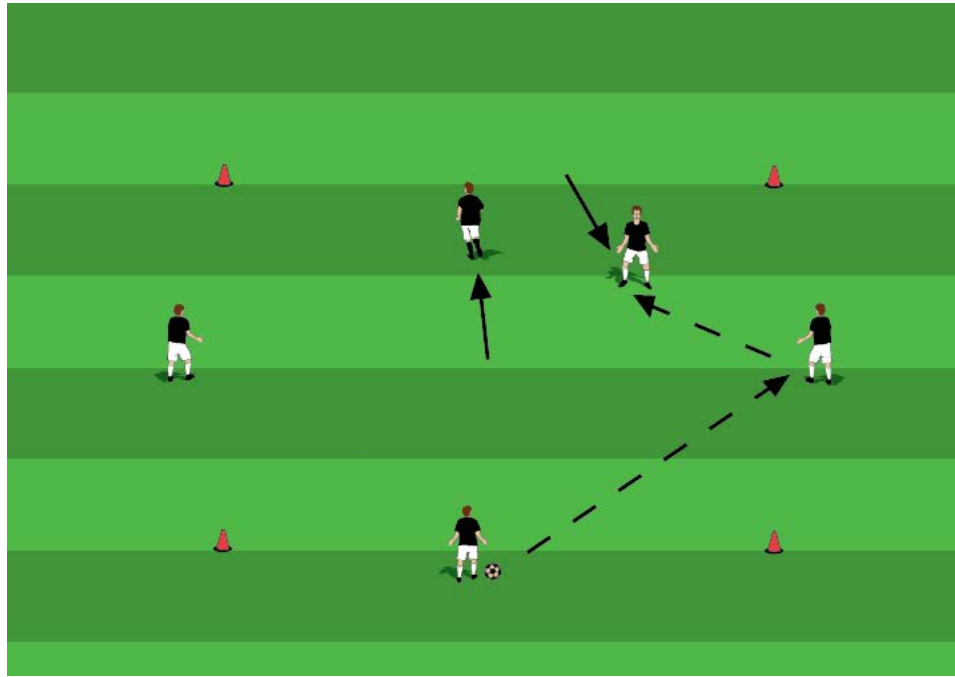
**Roving Central Midfielder-** If you employ one, they must have very similar qualities as the holding central midfielder with a couple of exceptions. First, they must have incredible fitness as they will always be moving and shifting side-to-side, more so than in a normal triangle midfield. They must also be very quick in physical speed as they are responsible for keeping the shape of the triangle. In possession they are there to link possession to the two central options (central attacker and attacking central midfielder). They must also be quick to react to opportunities for withdrawn runs as attacking options.

The following ten drills and exercises should help you to organize and train your triangle midfield. Good luck in your preparations.

## EXERCISE ONE - QUICK COMBINATION PASSING

**Drill Introduction:** This is a quick combination passing drill that focuses on building to one-touch play. Create a 25 yard by 25 yard box with cones or disks. In the middle of each of the four lines place a player and add a fifth player in the middle. One ball will be used for this exercise. Have the ball start with one of the outside players and begin the exercise by having that player pass the ball to one of the outside supporting players to either their right or left. The receiving player will then pass the ball inside to the middle player who receives and passes to one of the other outside players. Once the middle player passes to one of the outside players they immediately switch with one of the other three outside players. The player who receives the ball then passes it to one of the wide outside players supporting them. Keep in mind that they must be aware that they aren't passing the ball to the outside player who is switching with the middle player, they must pick one of the outside players who is remaining in their position. The player who is coming inside must now adjust to the player receiving the ball. The drill is continuous.





## COACHING POINTS

- Players should prepare to receive and pass the ball by being on their toes and having their hips open to the middle of the grid.
- Players should work on targeting their passes by looking to pass to a certain foot to help them prepare for one-touch play.
- Players need to stay focused so that they stay within the pattern of the drill.
- Players need to communicate clearly so that they are prepared for where possession is going in the drill.
- Players need to move at game speed throughout the drill.

## Equipment Needed: 4 Cones and soccer balls

**Recommended Duration:** It would depend upon your goals and objectives and what your plans are following this drill. This drill is not timed, but it is typically done as part of a progressive warm-up and would cover no more than 10-15 minutes before progressing. As with any drill or exercise you would not progress if the players have not succeeded in establishing the level of success you are looking for.



## Coaching the Barcelona 4-3-3 Attacking

*This article is an excerpt from our new eBook by Scott Allison - [Coaching the Barcelona 4-3-3](#)*

### Attacking in the Final Third

#### Exercise 1: Combination play in and around the box

##### Objective:

To develop good combinations in and around the box that lead to goal-scoring opportunities in the scoring zone from central positions.

##### Setup:

In this exercise you need a minimum of 8 players and a goalkeeper attacking a goal (For larger groups duplicate the exercise with another group going towards another goal. Use a penalty box area and have two groups working from either side of the goal. Players positioned on the goal line start the exercise with a ball. Three players are positioned in a triangle at the edge of the box (use markers as a guide for players). One Goalkeeper in the goal:

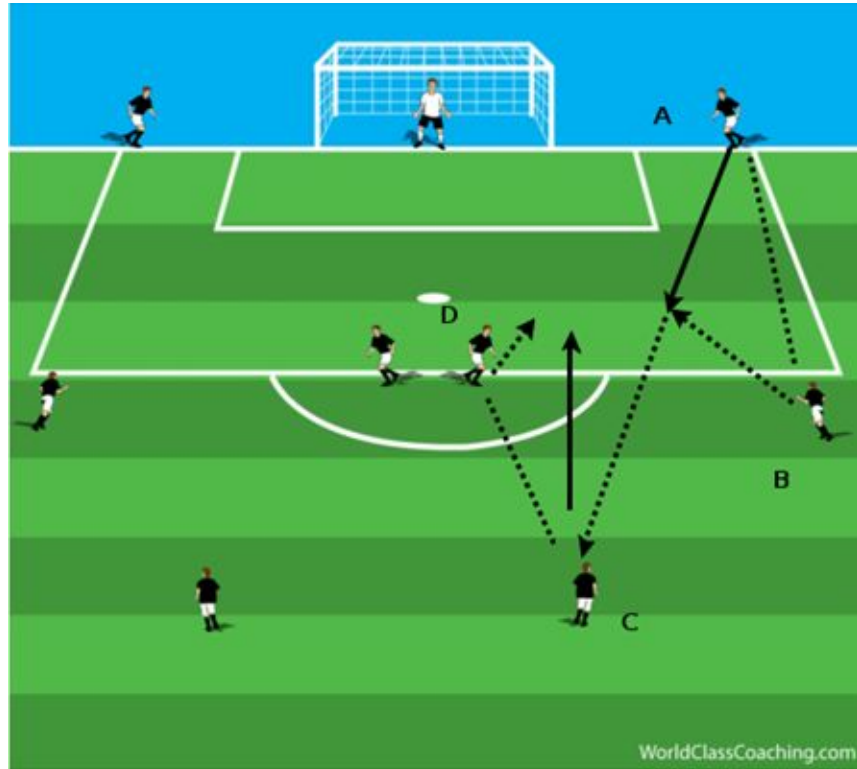


##### Instructions:

The exercise begins with player A passing the ball to player B. A then moves forward and player B plays a quick combination with A. A then passes to C. C plays a pass to D and makes a forward run. D then sets the ball for C and spins out leaving space for C's forward run. C drives

into the box and looks to finish with a goal. The players rotate positions A to B, B to C, C to D and D to A.

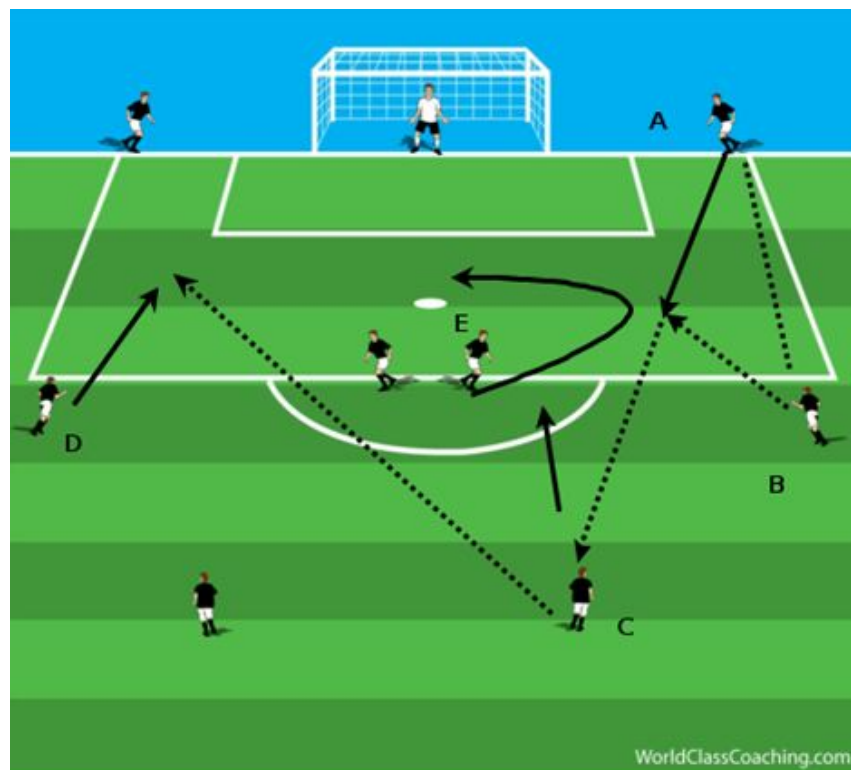
Once the first group has had a shot on goal the second group start the next move. Regularly rotate the players to either side of the goal (player D joins the opposite line) to ensure players are working on the move from both sides of the goal:



**Progression:**

The first simple progression is to add opposition with Player D becoming a defender when C gets the ball. C and B play a quick combination then C attacks the box with D defending.

The second progression involves changing the point of attack and encouraging a wider player to attack the box. This replicates Barcelona's play in and around the box when occasionally quick combinations on one side can lead to space being created on the other side and a player attacking the space in and around the box:



This time Player C drives the ball into the box for D. D either has a finish or can pass to E around the penalty spot for a finish – a very difficult area for the goalkeeper. The rotation is A to B to C to D to E. E gets the ball and joins the opposite line. Please note to do this progression you will need to add extra players at positions B and D if you want the exercise to flow from either side. A simpler option is to work with one group attacking the goal from one side then change sides after several attacks.

### Coaching Points:

**Passing** - Quality passes with no rotation on the ball, emphasis quick combinations with high levels of technical skill and concentration.

**Movement** – Before and after each pass encourage players to move to get into good positions for quality passing and finishing. They need to be in the correct position to receive the ball before it arrives.

**Angles** - Players need to make angles with the correct body position when receiving the ball. Create angles that form small triangles for combinations, players attacking the box also have to make the correct angles that allow their teammates to set them correctly for a finish.

**Timing** – The group need to work together to make sure the tempo is high and the timing of passes, movement off the ball and finishing is crucial. The coach must observe and correct any occasions where the timing of passes or runs lead to an unsuccessful move.

**Finishing** – Look for composed finishes on target working the goalkeeper. As always encourage players to aim for the corners away from the goalkeeper. If the keeper is nearpost aim for farpost, if he is central aim for either corner.

As always, remember to limit the amount of coaching points in each exercise. The points above are a guide. Try to limit your points to some key areas you are looking to develop and don't overload players with too much information at any one time.

*This article is an excerpt from our new eBook by Scott Allison - [Coaching the Barcelona 4-3-3](#)*



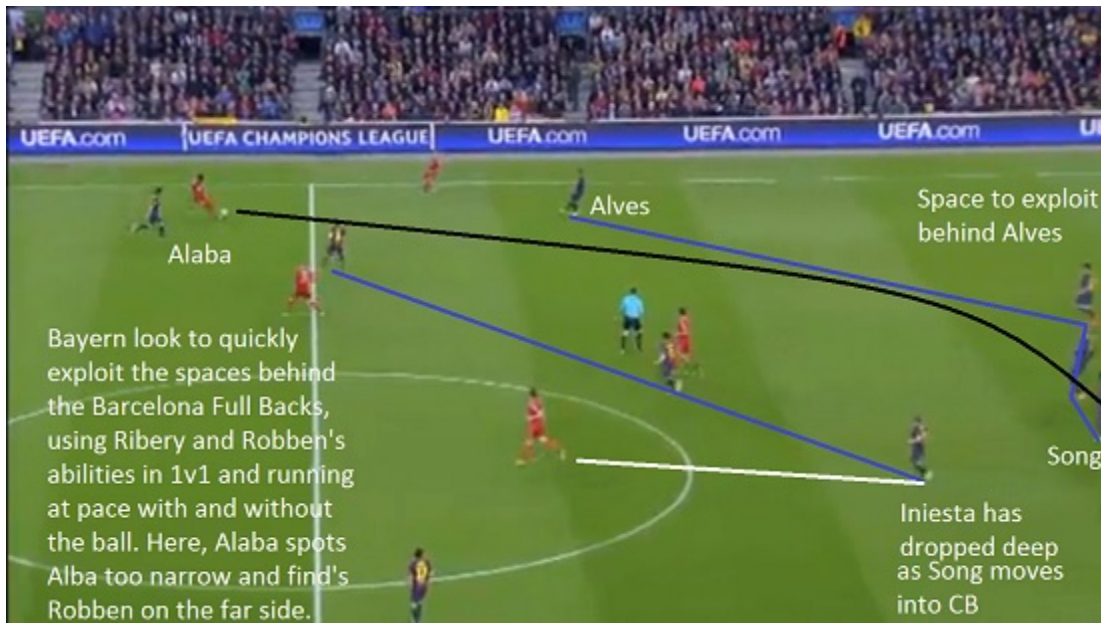
## How Bayern Exposed Barcelona's Fullbacks to Score Three Goals

By Stevie Grieve, Author of [Coaching the 4-2-3-1](#), [Modern Soccer Tactics](#) and [Winning Soccer Tactics](#). Check out his new book, [Coaching the 4-2-3-1 Advanced Tactics here](#).

### Barcelona v Bayern Munich (0-3) Champions League Semi-Final 2nd Leg, April 2013

Bayern Target Barcelona's Full Backs to Create Goal Scoring Chances

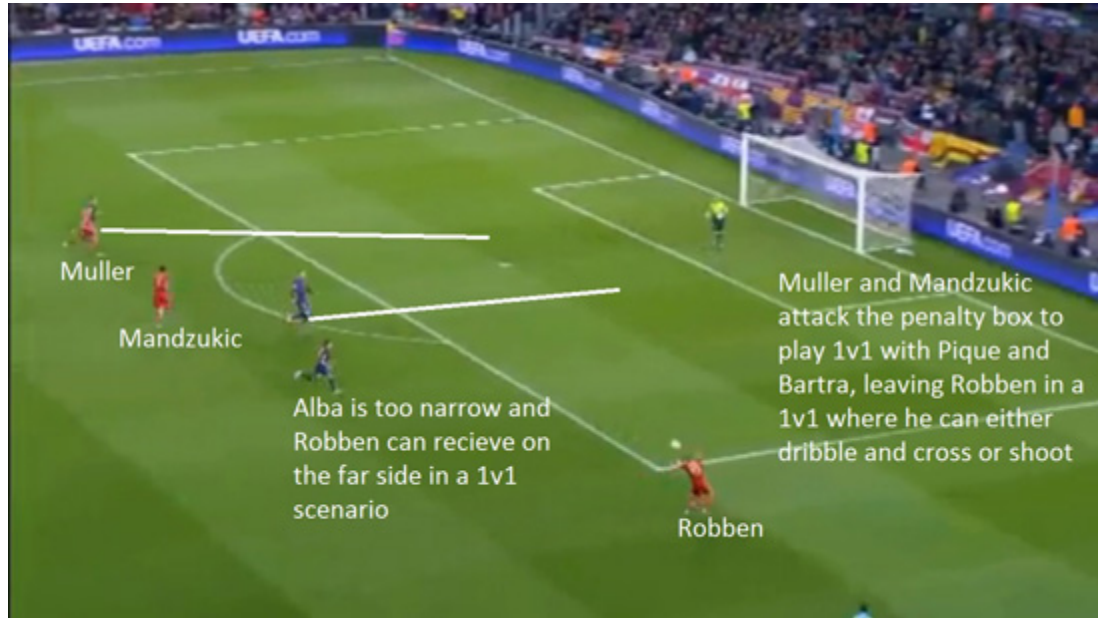
#### Robben Goal – Alaba's long pass opens up the space on the far side



Alaba has possession and can see that Alba is too narrow (out of picture) and Robben will be able to receive on the far side. He drills the long pass to ensure that Robben has time to receive and settle the ball to play 1v1 on the far side.



### Robben play 1v1 against Alba who tries to block the dribble inside



Robben has plenty of time to receive the ball and look for a way to make a final action, to cross, pass or shoot. Muller and Mandzukic attack the penalty box to play 1v1 with Pique and Bartra.

### Robben looks to create the space to find a way to shoot



Alba has a good foot position and is blocking Robben's dribbling line to cut inside and shoot, which is something he likes to do often. Muller and Mandzukic have pulled away from Pique and play 2v1 against Bartra. They're next movements will be based on the decision that Robben makes.



Pique has a difficult scenario – he needs to help Alba but can't leave Bartra 2v1.

### Robben makes Alba change his foot position and creates the space to score



Robben knows he is being forced to his right, and makes a fake to go to that side, making Alba change his foot position, opening the space Robben wants to attack to allow him to shoot.

Mandzukic and Muller have made clever movements – one player on each side to allow them to cover a rebound to either side of Bartra.

### Central to Wide Penetration behind Alves



As Robben dribbles inside, he takes Alba with him. Robben passes to Martinez who has a passing lane available between Alves and Bartra once Ribery makes the run.

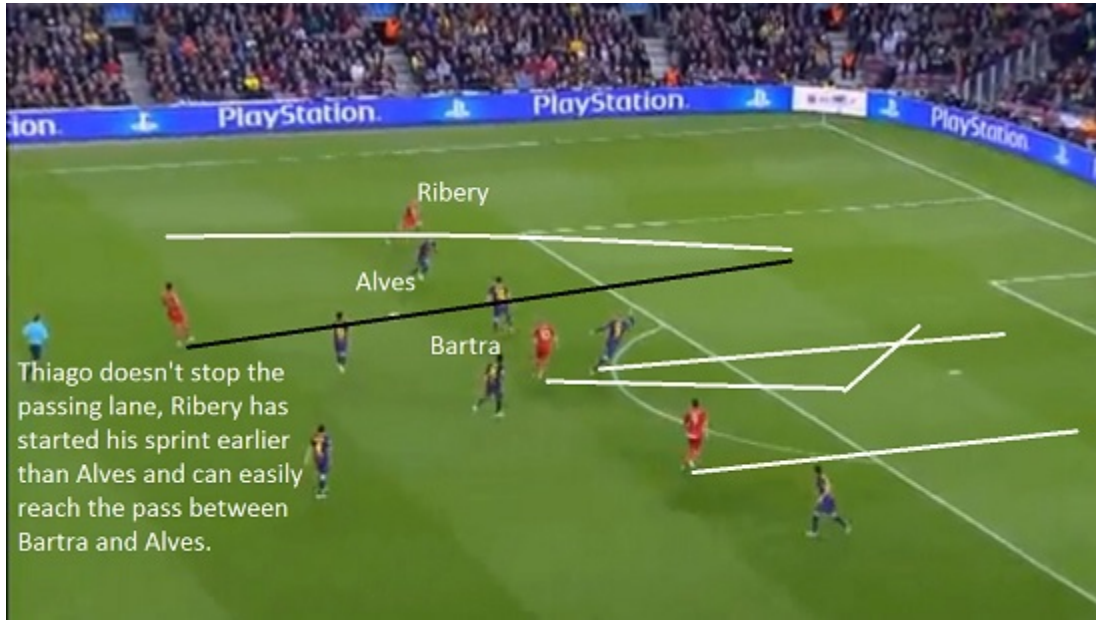
On the other side, Muller has arced wide and filled the space that both Robben and Alba have left, to offer a different option from Martinez if he wants to use it.

### **Martinez and Ribery exploit the space behind Alves**



As Martinez receives, Thiago needs to sprint to cover the passing lane and form a defensive triangle in front of Bartra and Alves. As Thiago doesn't close off that passing lane, Martinez has an easy pass into the run of Ribery.

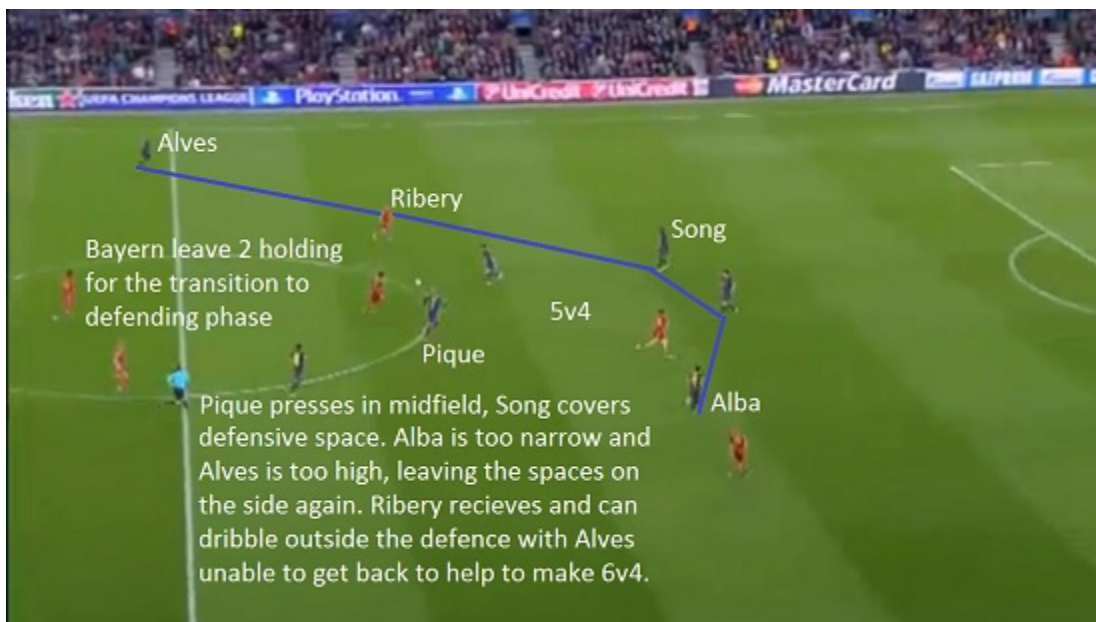
## Ribery runs earlier than Alves and reaches the pass from Martinez



As Martinez shifts the ball onto his left foot, Ribery starts his run behind Alves. Alves must turn and accelerate and as he starts too late, Ribery will always reach the ball first in the space behind the defence.

Ribery crosses but although Pique recovers into position, he volleys the ball into his own net.

## Barcelona makes a block in the centre and force Bayern wide





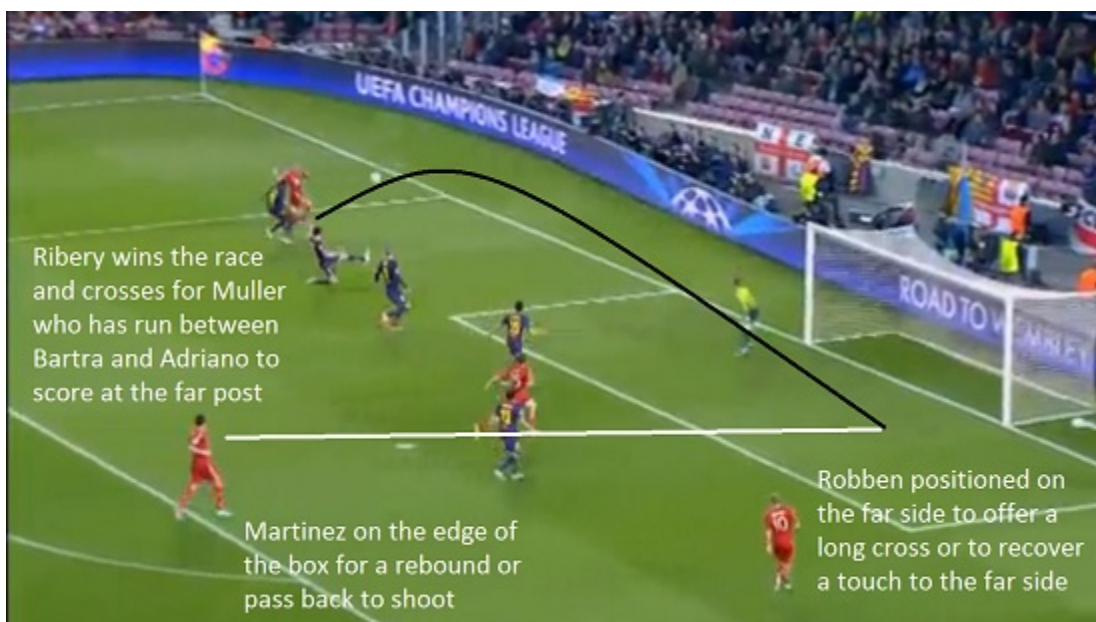
Pique comes out of defence to press Martinez, as Song covers the defensive space. Barcelona play very narrow and leave the spaces on the wide again. As Ribery receives, he is forced wide into the space on the side.

### **Ribery uses the space on the outside to get around the Barcelona defence**



When Ribery is forced outside, he uses his speed advantage over Song brilliantly, knocking the ball past Song and making it a race to the ball. He knows he has runners when he reaches the ball.

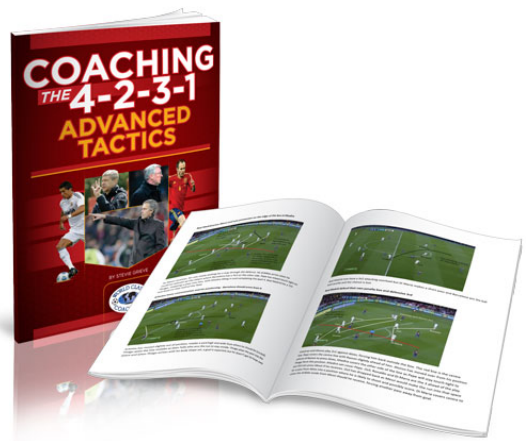
### **Ribery wins the race and delivers a perfect cross**



Barcelona have 4 players outside the front post, so Muller makes a clever run between the far side defenders and gives himself the best chance of reaching a far post cross. Robben and Martinez are cleverly positioned to keep the attack alive should the ball be touched to the far side to the edge of the box.

**Bayern's tactics over the 2 legs were to give Barcelona no space, exploit the full backs when in possession and attack directly using running with the ball and quick forward passing as often as possible, using Robben and Ribery on the outside and Muller's movement to good effect.**

*By Stevie Grieve, Author of [Coaching the 4-2-3-1](#), [Modern Soccer Tactics](#) and [Winning Soccer Tactics](#). Check out his new book, [Coaching the 4-2-3-1 Advanced Tactics](#) [here](#).*



## How to Exploit the Central Midfield of the 4-2-3-1

By Stevie Grieve, Author of [Coaching the 4-2-3-1](#), [Coaching the 4-2-3-1 Advanced Tactics here](#) AND his new book, [Beating the 4-2-3-1](#).

*This article is an excerpt from the chapter called "Exploiting the Central Midfield" from our new book, Beating the 4-2-3-1.*

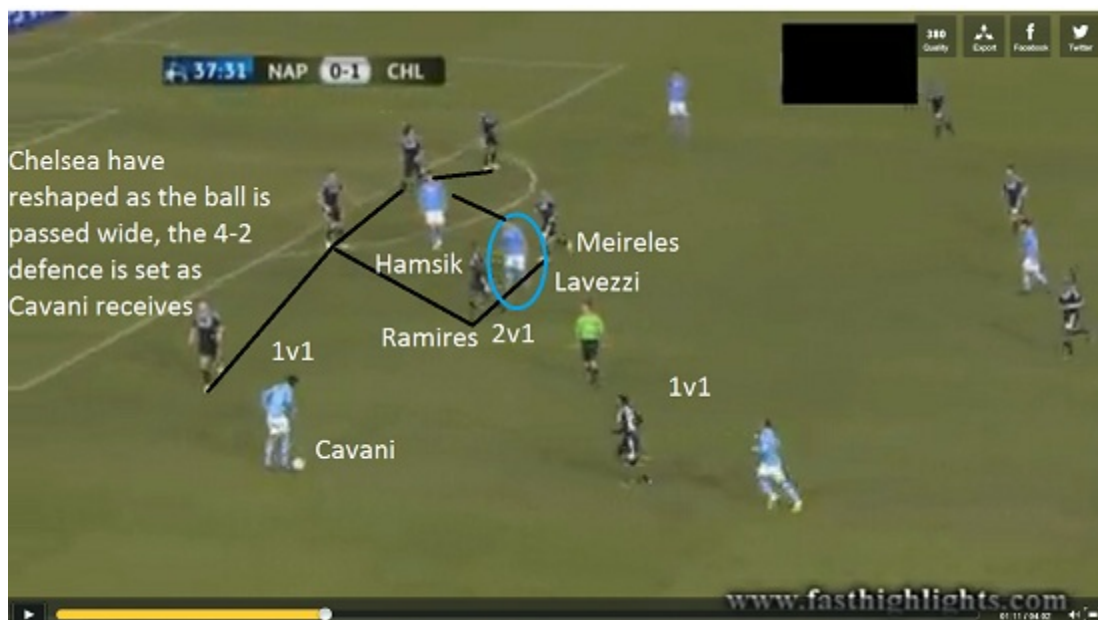
### Attacking the centre of the 4-2-3-1

When attacking the 4-2-3-1, one of the main strengths is the base of 2 players in front of the back 4, but playing in a manner which forces one of the players to come out and press, especially against a dribbler who likes to play quick passes in their stride while running, can be an easy way to penetrate the midfield line, pull a central defender out for a through ball into a run behind the defence, or even allow for long range shots if enough space is created.

Drawing out one of the defensive midfielders isn't always easy - playing with several players occupying the same space can allow for wide attacks, wide play can force one of the players over to help the full back press the ball and leave central space.

### Chelsea v Napoli – Napoli's 3-5-2 (3-4-1-2) overcomes Chelsea's 4-2-3-1 via central attacks

**Wing Backs provide support on the sides to move holding midfielder over to play 3v2 on the side**



Cavani pulls wide to leave Hamsik and Lavezzi playing 2v4 against Chelsea's centre backs and holding midfielders. Napoli's left wing back support's on the overlap bringing Sturridge back to defend 2v2 on the side. As Chelsea want to have an overload on the side and know that Cavani is

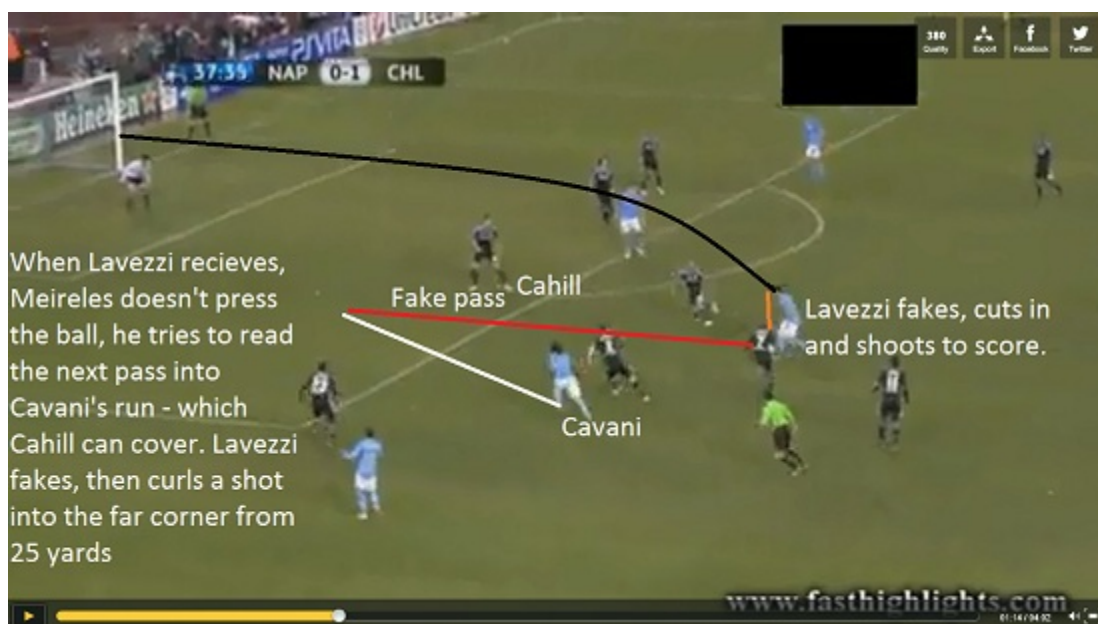


skilful and shoots from various areas, he will need to be pressed by Ramires, making a 3v2 on the side.

Lavezzi must find a way to lose Meireles and offer a pass inside and exploit the space left by Ramires moving over to press the ball and leaving a 1v1 at the edge of the box.



Cavani dribbles inside and Ramires is drawn to the ball as Meireles moves to block the pass into Hamsik – I think his priority should've been to mark Lavezzi and leave the 3 players close to Hamsik to deal with him. Note the player supporting behind Cavani – he has brought Sturridge back with him, meaning Chelsea's outball in transition will be harder to find should Ramires win possession as he presses Cavani.



Lavezzi receives, but Meireles doesn't rush to press the ball. Instead, he expects a pass into the run of Cavani which Cahill could cover as his body shape suggests he is already expecting this pass. Lavezzi fakes and then curls a shot into the far corner from 25 yards with Meireles lost.

The Napoli wing backs have helped occupy the full back as Cavani is in possession, with Hamsik, Cavani and Lavezzi showing here how to disrupt a tight zonal defence of the defensive midfielders and open up space with good movement and watching the movements of both team mates and opponents.

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### **Wing Backs drag back wingers to allow more space for Napoli to control central midfield**



As Napoli's wing backs push forward; both are circled, they bring with them Chelsea's wingers. This means that the number 10, here, Mata, should drop back to maintain 3 lines of defensive play, and gives Napoli an advantage - when they are in possession near the corner of the box, with the 3 attacking midfielders playing deeper to close the spaces between the lines, the wing back can make a deep pass back for the defensive midfielder to control the play from a deep position. From here, Gargano can control the attack.

Gargano decides to use the 3 targets inside the box and crosses to the back post with 2 runners, of which Cavani runs unmarked to score at the back post. This was an effective use of the centre as the wing backs created the space, pulling the wingers back but also the defensive midfielders deeper to help cover inside, bringing the central attacking midfielder back too, which in turn opened up the space for Gargano to receive possession with time and space to make a good decision with good execution.

As we see from Napoli's 3-1 win, two of the goals have come from exploiting central space with wide attacks made by the space created by the attacking wing backs drawing the Chelsea wingers

into defensive positions and creating 3v2's close to the ball, and exploiting the negative overload to find a player in space centrally – Lavezzi goal created by Ramires moving from central to wide (creating a defensive 3v2) and a pass being made inside to Lavezzi who wasn't pressed by Meireles.

The goal from Cavani is a result of the wing backs pushing forward to receive possession high up the field and taking the wingers with them. As Meireles has moved over to help, (making a 3v2) Mata has dropped off and allowed Gargano an easy receive to set up the far post cross to Cavani.

**By Stevie Grieve, Author of [Coaching the 4-2-3-1](#), [Coaching the 4-2-3-1 Advanced Tactics](#) [here](#) AND his new book, [Beating the 4-2-3-1](#).**

