

Module 2. Most common defensive structures in high-press in football

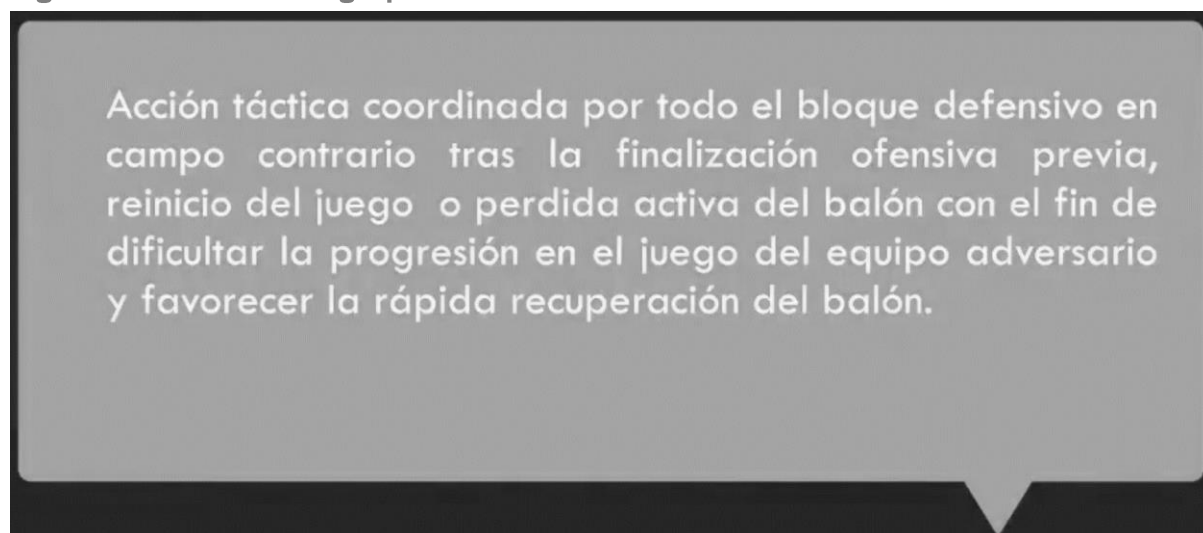
Introduction

One of the main characteristics that appear in current football is the increasing pressure in the opposing field, which is applied by most teams and in all leagues around the world.

Nowadays, most coaches perceive the moment of the start of the game as an opportunity to exert high-press in the opposing field. This is so, with the aim of trying to recover as close as possible to the opposing goal or cause the error of those teams who want to start associating in short and progress with the ball in their possession.

To define the concept of high-press, we use Javier López López's definition (2020):

Figure 1: Definition of high-press



Source: López López, J. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/entrenarfutbol.es/>

Translation

Tactical action coordinated by the whole defensive block in the opposing field, after the previous offensive finishing, game restart or active loss of ball possession, to make progression of the opponent's team game harder and favour a quick ball recovery.

As we have already discussed in table 1 of module 1, it is necessary to differentiate high-press situations with set-pieces (goal kicks, throw-ins, etc.) from situations with the ball in play (high-press in the opposing field and counterpressure or CP).

In this module we will focus on the study of the most common structures used in high-press, from goal kick situations (high-press to set pieces) and from high-press situations with the ball in play (pressure jumps from medium return to the defensive shape, and pressure jumps to the goalkeeper).

Table 1: High-press situations

Game situation	Types of high-press in the opposing field	Situations of high-press in the opposing field
HIGH-PRESS	1. High-press to set pieces.	H.P. (high-press) in the goal kick.
	2. High-press with the ball in play.	H.P. or high-press in the opponent's build-up of play zone.

Source: Authors' own work.

We won't consider counterpressure situations as they are situations where the volitional capacity of the player who loses the ball and the nearby players is more decisive than the pattern or the organisation and tactical disposition of the players when they carry it out.

To talk about high-press structures, we need to have a clear idea of what it is. To explain the concept of structure, we must limit other concepts related to the game organisation, which we often use when talking about our team's performance: the concept of game idea, game model and those of game structure and system.

According to David Movilla (2021), in his talk "Confronting structures", **the game idea** is the set **of the offensive and defensive football intentions** that our team must master.

The idea of defensive play will be evidenced by the tactical intentions that you want to carry out, either:

- a) intention to press (by using a high block in the opposing field).
- b) intention to condition the opponent's offensive game (by means of a block in midfield).
- c) intention to resist and give in the initiative to the opponent (by means of a low block in your own field).

Versatility is given by mastering all three defensive intentions and not limiting yourself to mastering just one of them. If defensively my team only manages and masters one of these three intentions, when it is not developed correctly or is outmatched by the



opponent, there will be insufficient arguments to counteract the opponent's offensive game.

Figure 2: Game idea concept and game model



Source: Movilla, 2021, retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3tQr0E3>

ESPAÑOL	INGLES
IDENTIDAD	IDENTITY
IDEA DE JUEGO	GAME IDEA
MODELO DE JUEGO	GAME MODEL
INVARIABLE	INVARIABLE
Valores colectivos en base a la idiosincrasia del Club	Collective values based on the idiosyncrasy of the Club
VERSATIL	VERSATILE
OF: Vertical/Combinativo/Directo	OF: Vertical/ combined /Direct
DF: Presiono/condiciono/resisto	DF: Press/condition/resist
ADAPTABLE	ADAPTABLE
Adaptación a las situaciones que requieran cada partido	Adaptation to situations demanded by each game

As **game model** we understand **how these intentions are carried out**: it must be flexible and adaptable to the situations of each game, to what the opponent allows to do, to what the team believes the opponent can do. Also, to the qualities and specificities of the players of the team itself and of the opponent, to the circumstances of the field of play, weather, etc.

As **game system** we understand the positioning of the players on the playing field from a static point of view:

When talking about the game systems in football, reference is made to the position that the players occupy on the field before making defensive or offensive movements. However, motivated by the evolution that football has undergone, experts define it as the set of tactical principles that organise a team.

This is because originally, the vision of a game scheme refers to the distribution of the players before a play, something is merely static, but in modern football, there is not only a rigid system but also a dynamic one, due to the variations experienced before or during the game (Misamistosos, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3ot02RR>).

Instead, the concept of **structure** encompasses the positioning of players from a dynamic point of view, which is used to identify mechanisms and patterns of play.

Before it was said that teams played with a certain game system. Now, there is believed that teams have an offensive and defensive structure, which may be the same or different. The structures change according to the height of the playing field where it takes place, for example, or based on the opposing structure to be counteracted. A team can defend with one structure and attack with a different one.

Figure 3: Structure definition

2.1.- Concepto Estructura

Conjunto de relaciones que mantienen entre si las partes (11 de inicio) de un sistema de juego de manera dinámica*

** Desde un punto de vista simétrico*

- **Analizando** una Estructura **de manera dinámica**, podremos identificar ciertos **PATRONES** que se repiten.
- **Estructuras cambiantes**
 - OF / DF
 - Alturas

Source: Movilla, 2021, retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3tQr0E3>

ESPAÑOL	INGLES
Concepto estructura	Concept of structure
Conjunto de relaciones que mantienen entre sí las partes (11 de inicio) de un sistema de juego de manera dinámica*	Set of relations that parts hold among them (starts from 11) about a game system dynamically*



*desde un punto de vista simétrico	* from a symmetrical perspective
-Analizando una estructura de manera dinámica, podremos identificar ciertos PATRONES que se repiten.	-By analysing a structure dynamically, we'll be able to identify certain repetitive PATTERNS.
-Estructuras cambiantes	-Changing structures
-OF/DF o Alturas	-OF/DF or Heights

This module seeks to examine and learn the criteria to consider creating and / or choose the high-pressure structure that best suits us based on several factors to consider, such as a chosen game system, an idea of a preconceived play and a game model adapted to the needs of our team, the opponent, and the circumstances.



Unit 2.1. Defensive structures in high-press

Before talking about the most used structures, we will talk about how defensive pressure structures are organised, regardless of the game system used.

We must distinguish when it is a set piece situation from when there is ball movement. When it's a set piece situation (on a goal kick, for example), the three lines of players that make up the high-press structure can be clearly seen:

- a) 1st pressure line made up of the line of strikers and, sometimes, a midfielder who joins this first line.
- b) 2nd pressure line made up of the midfield or midfielder line and, sometimes, a player on the defensive line who joins this 2nd pressure line.
- c) 3rd pressure line made up of the members of the defensive line.
- d) Goalkeeper is ahead, usually outside his or her area (in the penalty arc or even further ahead), with the aim of covering the defensive line in case he or she must interfere.

Figure 4: Structure of three pressure lines



Source: image adaptation taken from Mediacoach and edited with Tactic Pro from RT Software.

However, high-press is not a game situation with a fixed structure: when the ball is in play, this three-line structure (1st pressure line with strikers, 2nd pressure line with midfielders and 3rd pressure line with defenders) becomes flexible and dynamic.

When the opponent starts to play short, the pressure jump of the players of the 1st and 2nd pressure lines causes the formation of two blocks: a more advanced pressure block and another that is further behind in vigilance:

- The advanced pressure block:

This is the block of players located near the opposing area that is responsible for marking and attacking opposing players who have started to play short. Its function is to start the 1st pressure to guide the opponent to the zone of maximum pressure (on the wing, inside or causing the return to the goalkeeper), with the aim of stealing to counterattack or to prevent the opponent's progression.

This advanced block is usually made up of players from the 1st and 2nd pressure lines (strikers and midfielders). Sometimes a player from the 3rd pressure or defensive line can be added (a centre-back, full-back or winger who joins the advanced block to equalize structures and press harder near the opponent's area).

Figure 5: Structure of two pressure blocks



Source: image adaptation taken from Mediacoach and edited with Tactic Pro from RT Software.

- The vigilance block:

is the one that stays close to the midfield and in charge of marking zonally or individually, the players that the opponent leaves more advanced, watching them

closely to intervene if the opponent decides to play long. This block is usually made up of three to five players and it usually involves players from the 3rd pressure line or defensive line and, sometimes, someone from the 2nd pressure line or middle line (one of the two pivots or the defensive pivot depending on the system or tactical training used). Its function is to give support and balance to the advanced pressure block when the opponent starts playing short, watching the opposing strikers, and trying to win the challenges and 2° ball if the opponent starts playing long trying to connect with them.

These blocks are flexible and dynamic, modifying both the number of players that make it up and the line origin of the players that make it up. We can see players from the defensive line in the advanced pressure block when a full-back pressure jumps, or a pivot remains in the vigilance block, generating a numerical superiority in case the opponent plays long after starting short.

Therefore, and as a conclusion, we can affirm that **the defensive structure in high-pressure situations** is marked by the three pressure lines that the coach establishes according to the game model implemented and that, with the start of the opponent's game in short, the pressure mechanisms are triggered, producing an attraction effect towards the ball of this structure, and causing the formation of two clearly differentiated blocks.



Figure 6: Transformation of the pressure structure with the start of the opponent's game in short.

High-press structure	Opponent's goal kick in short	Change in the pressure structure	Lines that make up the defensive block	Players who make up the block	Functions	
1 ST PRESSURE LINE (striker's line) 2 ND PRESSURE LINE (midfielder's line) 3 rd PRESSURE LINE (defensive line)		VIGILANCE BLOCK (3 to 5 players)	DEFENSIVE LINE	A centre-back, full-back /winger (in a line of 5)	1. Defending near midfield. 2. Marking zonally or individually, the players that the opponent leaves more advanced. 3. Giving support and balance to the advanced pressure block when the opponent starts playing short. 4. Watching the opposing strikers, and trying to win the challenges and 2° ball if the opponent starts playing long.	
			MIDFIELDER'S LINE	Pivot		
		ADVANCED PRESSURE BLOCK (5 to 7 players)	STRIKER'S LINE	Centre forward/ strikers/half-strike		1. Defending near the opposing area. 2. Marking and attacking zonally or individually, the opponent players who are about to start playing short. 3. Starting the 1° pressure to guide the opponent to the maximum pressure area (in the wing, inside or return to the goalkeeper). 4. The aim is to steal so as to counterattack or to prevent the opponent's progression.
			MIDFIELDER'S LINE	Pivots/ insiders/ wingers		
			DEFENSIVE LINE	A centre-back, full-back /winger (in a line of 5)		

Source: Authors' own work.



Unit 2.2. High-press structures based on the number of players in the opposing field

Another factor to consider in high-press situations is the number of players that we are going to use to counteract the strategies of the start phase used by the opponents.

In high-press situations, López (2020) differentiates two structures based on the numerical difference in the opposite field as regards the opponent:

- 1) High-press structure -1: pressure in the opposing field **with one man less**, pairing the players 1v1 throughout the field (in the two advanced pressure blocks and the vigilance one) and leaving the opposing **goalkeeper as the only free man**. With this man to man marking **movements** of pressure and attack of our players are simplified, avoiding the appearance of free opponents between the lines.



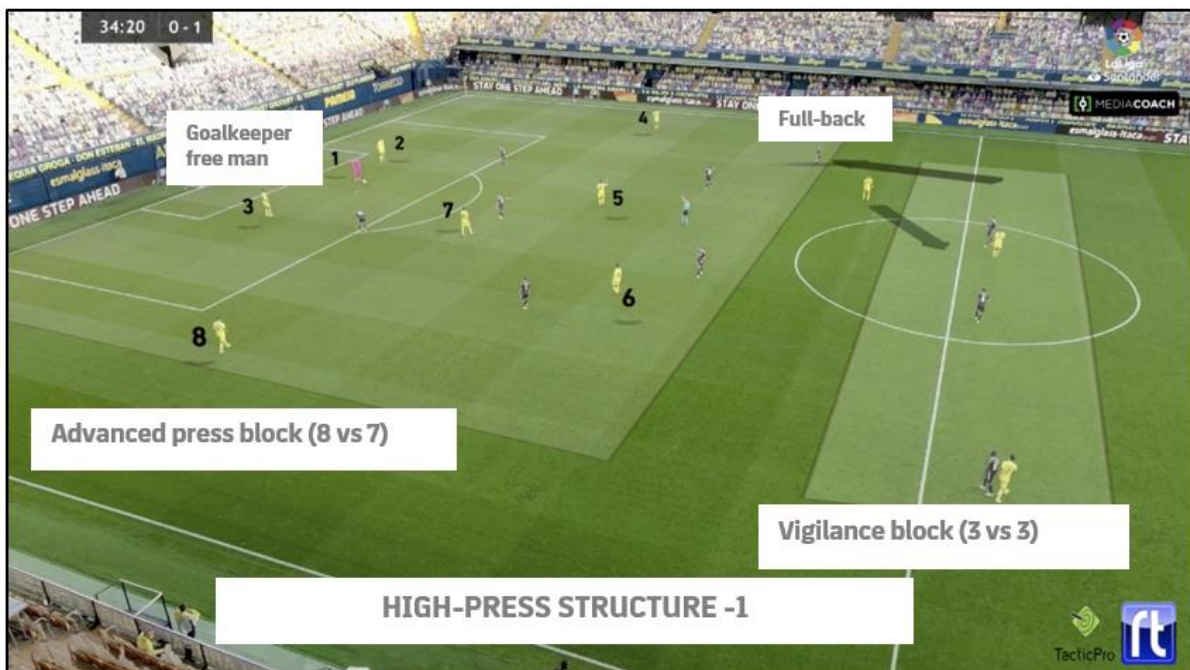
Figure 7: High-press structure -1 (one man less in the advanced pressure block)

HIGH-PRESS STRUCTURE	PRESS BLOCK STRUCTURE	TYPES OF MARKING	FREE MEN	BEHAVIOURS AND IMPLICATIONS
HIGH-PRESS STRUCTURE -1	ADVANCED PRESS BLOCK We have 1 player less than the opponent (8v7 or 7v6)	Man-to-man marking	1. No jump to the goalkeeper. The goalkeeper is free.	1. If the goalkeeper is in possession of the ball and we do not jump to pressure, we keep man-to-man marking and allow the goalkeeper to make a pass and cause a 50/50 ball situation.
			2. Jump to the goalkeeper: the player's opponent who jumps to the goalkeeper is free.	2. If we jump to the goalkeeper, the goalkeeper stops being a free man and the opponent who jumps becomes free. 3. This implies defending in an aggressive manner the 2 nd pressure line from the other opponents close to the goalkeeper, to avoid them from connecting with the free opponent through a third player.
	Combination of man-to-man marking and zone marking in intermediate position (1 player far only).	3. If the ball is at a wing, we leave the goalkeeper and 1 opposing player as free men, but with one of our players in intermediate position.	4. If the ball is at a wing, the player who is further defends 2 players in intermediate position and the others press the man in the active press zone. If there is a change of direction of these 2 free men, our player will pressure jump and try to intercept that pass or attack aggressively to steal or force an error.	
	VIGILANCE BLOCK We have equal number of players (3v3, 4v4, 5v5)	Man-to-man marking	4. We do not leave free men in the vigilance block (always equal number of players).	5. The -1 structure implies the incorporation of a player from the defensive line (centre-back, full-back and/or central) to the advanced block. 6. The accumulation of opposing players in this block indicates that they can play short to then play long, so all players at the defensive line (4v4) must be free or even reinforce this block with a midfielder (5vs5).



Source: Authors' own work.

Figures 8 and 9: Example of man to man marking in the high-press structure -1



Source: image adaptation taken from Mediacoach and edited with Tactic Pro from RT Software.

This photograph shows how the Real Madrid (which starts from a 14231 system) pressures the Villarreal (which starts from a 1433) with a high-press structure -1, incorporating the striker to the high-press block, matching 1vs1 throughout the field and leaving the goalkeeper as the only free man.

- 2) High-press structure -2: pressure in the opposing field **with two men less**, being **at a disadvantage in the advance pressure block**. The most used structures are 8v6 or 7v5, where the players use a zonal **marking**, most of them positioning themselves **in intermediate positions between 2 opponents** and being able to attack one of them, based on the first pass, which is the trigger for pressure mechanisms. In this way, there are **2 free men**, one of them being the goalkeeper, while the other is usually a full-back, a midfielder or a forward who has come down as support to the start zone, in the 2nd pressure line.

In the **vigilance block there is always a numerical superiority of 1 player**, normally a pivot who remains in vigilance next to the defensive line. The most seen structures in this vigilance block are those of 4v3 or 5v4, distributing the marks and spaces using the **zonal marking**, where the defenders mark the strikers if they invade their zone. An open player is the one who brings superiority to win the 2nd play if the opposing team plays long to the strikers.



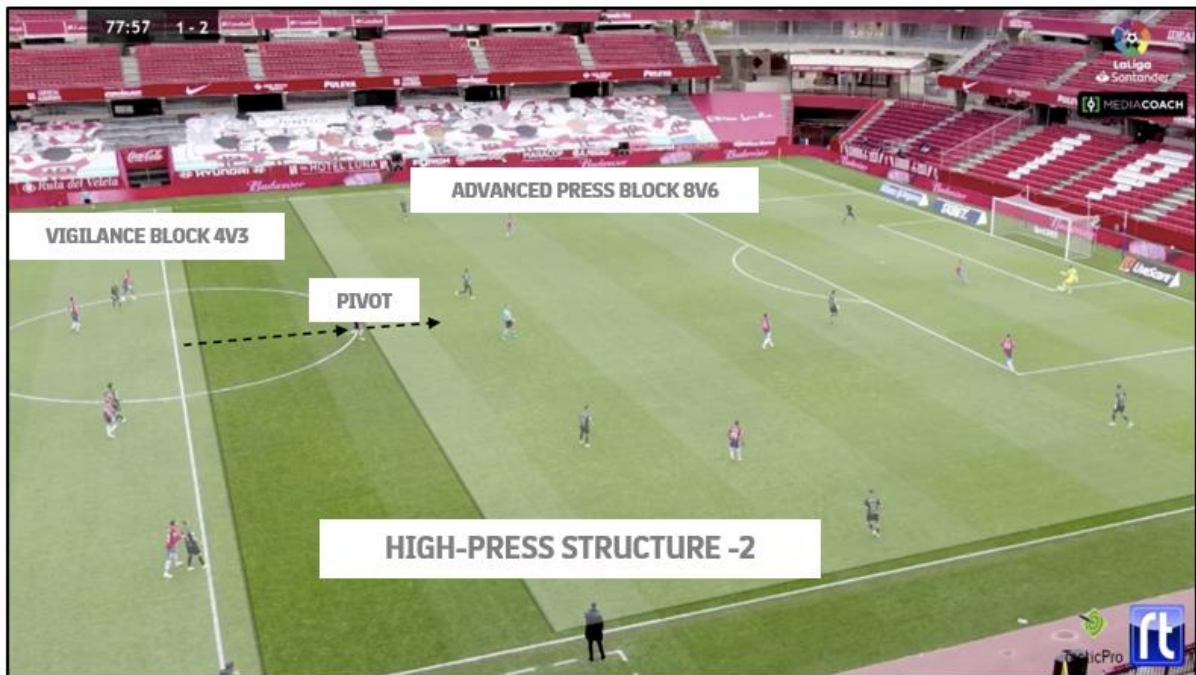
Figure 10: High-press structure -2 (two men less in the advanced pressure block)

HIGH-PRESS STRUCTURE	PRESS BLOCK STRUCTURE	TYPES OF MARKING	FREE MEN	BEHAVIOURS AND IMPLICATIONS
HIGH-PRESS STRUCTURE - 2	ADVANCED PRESS BLOCK 2 players less than the opponent (8v6 or 7v5)	Zone marking in intermediate position of most players	No jump to the goalkeeper. The goalkeeper is free + 1 player	1. If the goalkeeper is in possession of the ball and we do not jump to pressure, we keep man-to-man marking and allow the goalkeeper to make a pass and from then on, apply our pressure mechanisms.
			Jump to the goalkeeper: the player's opponent who jumps to the goalkeeper is set free+ the other free player.	2. If we jump to the goalkeeper, the goalkeeper stops being a free man and the opponent who jumps becomes free. 3. This implies defending in an aggressive manner the 2 nd pressure line from the other opponents close to the goalkeeper, to avoid them from connecting with the free opponent through a third player.
			If the ball is at a wing, we leave the goalkeeper and 1 opposing player as free men, but with 2 of our players in intermediate position.	4. If the ball is at a wing, the player who is further defends 2 players in intermediate position and the others press the man in the active press zone. If there is a change of direction of these 2 free men, our player will pressure jump and try to intercept that pass or attack aggressively to steal or force an error.
		Zonal marking	Always one more man than the opponent (always numerical superiority).	5. The -2 structure implies not incorporating to the advanced block of players of the defensive line. 6. The accumulation of opposing players in this block indicates that they can play short to then play long, so having numerical superiority at the defensive line of players plus a midfielder is a good plan to counteract that.

Source: Authors' own work.



Figure 11: High-press structure -2



Source: image adaptation taken from Mediacoach and edited with Tactic Pro from RT Software.

In figure 11 we see how Granada, which starts from a 1442 game system, adopts a high press -2 structure to counteract the Huesca, which starts from a 1433 game system.

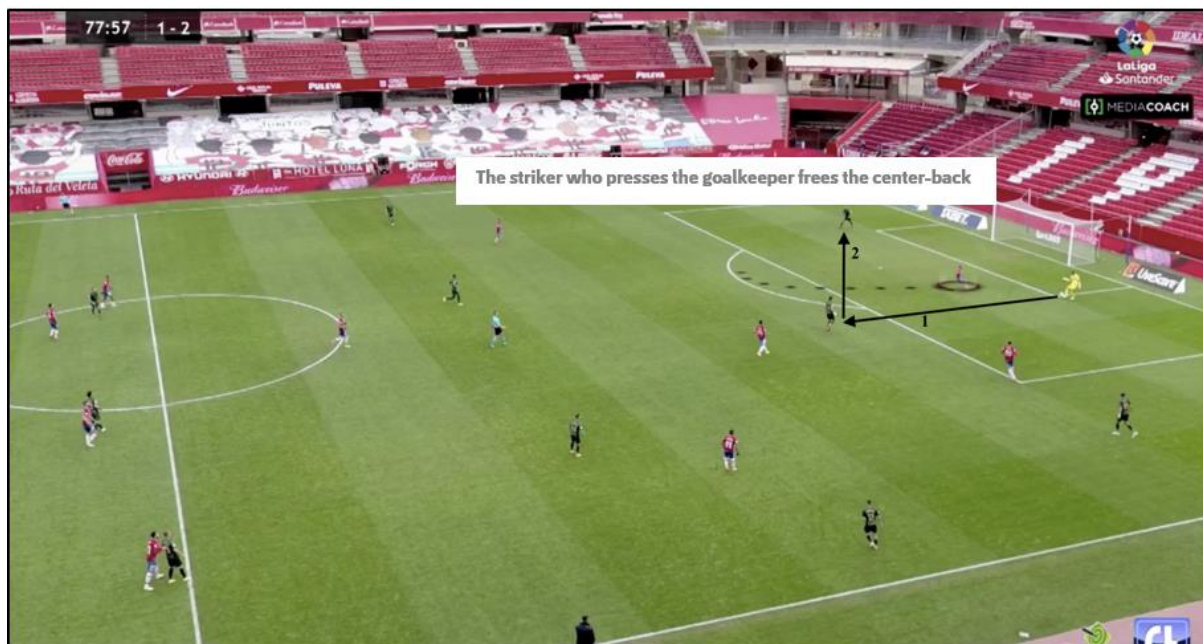
At first, the pivot remains in the vigilance block, where there is a superiority of two men, to be incorporated into the advanced press block when the ball is in play, with the aim of mitigating the clear numerical inferiority of three men and cause the opponent to do a long build-up play, with the jump to the goalkeeper by the striker.

If the opposing team does not have the ability to risk and play short to find the two free men available in the starting zone, it will throw long to the Granada's vigilance zone, where the numerical superiority of a man in the block vigilance gives them many chances to recover the ball.

As we can see in figure 12, if the opposing team can risk and take advantage of the advantage given by having two free men in the starting zone, the -2 structure and the jump to the goalkeeper can greatly facilitate the task of connecting with these free men and overcome the high-press exerted.



Figure 12: disadvantages of the jump to goalkeeper in the high-press structure -2



Source: image adaptation taken from Mediacoach and edited with Tactic Pro from RT Software.

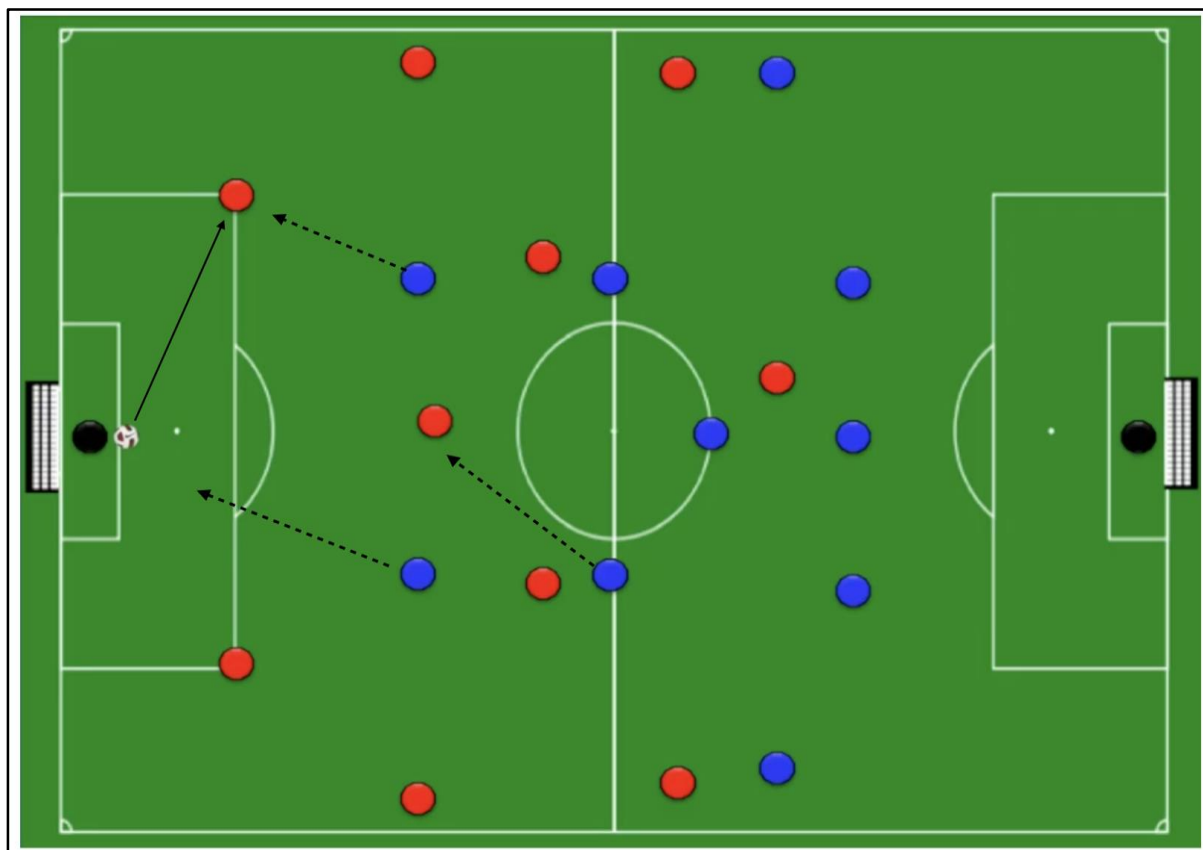
Unit 2.3 Confrontation of structures in high-press

2.3.1. Introduction

My years of experience as an analyst and assistant in highly competitive clubs have given me a point of view with a broad focus on the concept of high-press and the confrontation of structures in this phase of the game.

Due to the reasoning and knowledge resulting from these experiences, my intention in this section is not to list and classify the different systems or existing tactical formations explaining their advantages and disadvantages when pressing high on each of the structures. Much less do it from the somewhat simplistic vision of a tactical board, as if it were a chess game.

Figure 13: Tactical board confronting two structures



Source: Authors' own work.

Trying to give an explanation as a recipe on how to press the start phase of each of the structures and all its variants would be a very great daring on my part, since I would be

ignoring many important things that must be considered at the time of making decisions to find a valid solution that achieves high-press against a certain opponent. Among those important things are the constant evolution of the game, considering the situational context of the team and the opponent, as well as the knowledge and previous experience of the coach.

Considering all these factors is the way in which the different proposals that each coach gives to the game model arise, regardless of the game system used. This game model, as Movilla (2021) says, must be flexible and adaptable, considering the principles of adaptability, mutability, variability, and circumstantiality.

Figure 14: Principles to follow for the creation of the game model

1.3. MODELO DE JUEGO

MODELO: Esquema teórico que representa un proceso complicado y que sirve para facilitar su comprensión

4 PRINCIPIOS FUNDAMENTALES

- **PRINCIPIO DE ADAPTABILIDAD: Tu rival también forma parte de ti**
 - Lo que el rival haga va a venir determinado por lo que le permitas
ADAPTARTE a los PATRONES OF rival
- **PRINCIPIO DE MUTABILIDAD: Capacidad para transformar la forma**
 - Lo que hagas va a venir determinado por lo que el rival te permita
MUTAR sobre los HÁBITOS DF rival
- **PRINCIPIO DE VARIABILIDAD: La incidencia del jugador en la estructura**
 - Cada jugador tiene unas características diferentes
VARIABILIDAD respecto a la ESPECIFICIDAD INDIVIDUAL
- **PRINCIPIO DE CIRCUNSTANCIALIDAD: La influencia de las circunstancias en el desarrollo**
 - Cada escenario tiene un contexto diferente
CIRCUNSTANCIALIDAD del contexto sobre el que nos ADAPTAMOS

Source: Movilla, 2021, retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3tQrOE3>

ESPAÑOL	INGLES
1.3 MODELO DE JUEGO	1.3 GAME MODEL
MODELO: Esquema teórico que representa un proceso complicado y que sirve para facilitar su comprensión	MODEL: Theoretical scheme that represents a complex process and helps understanding it
4 PRINCIPIOS FUNDAMENTALES	4 MAIN PRINCIPLES



PRINCIPIO DE ADAPTABILIDAD: Tu rival también forma parte de ti	ADAPTABILITY PRINCIPLE: Your opponent is a part of yourself
Lo que el rival haga va a venir determinado por lo que le permitas	What opponents do will be determined by what you allow them to do
ADAPTARTE A LOS PATRONES OF RIVAL	ADAPT TO THE OF OPPONENT'S PATTERNS
PRINCIPIO DE MUTABILIDAD: Capacidad para transformar la forma	MUTABILITY PRINCIPLE: Ability to transform the form
Lo que hagas va a venir determinado por lo que el rival te permita	What you do will be determined by what the opponent allows you to do
MUTAR SOBRE LOS HABITOS DF RIVAL	MUTATE ACCORDING TO THE OPPONENT'S HABITS
PRINCIPIO DE VARIABILIDAD: La incidencia del jugador en la estructura	VARIABILITY PRINCIPLE: The incidence of the player on the structure
Cada jugador tiene características diferentes	Each player has different characteristics
VARIABILIDAD RESPECTO A LA ESPECIFICIDAD INDIVIDUAL	VARIABILITY ACCORDING TO INDIVIDUAL SPECIFICITY
PRINCIPIO DE CIRCUNSTANCIALIDAD: La influencia de las circunstancias en el desarrollo	CIRCUMSTANTIALITY PRINCIPLE: The impact of circumstances on the development
Cada escenario tiene un contexto diferente	Each scenery has a different context
CIRCUNSTANCIALIDAD DEL CONTEXTO SOBRE EL QUE NOS ADAPTAMOS	CIRCUMSTANTIALITY OF THE CONTEXT TO WHICH WE ADAPT

There are great similarities in the high-press mechanisms between coaches who start from the same game system, but also great differences. They arise from the nuances and variants that each coach gives to their team based on the needs of each game (situational context of their own team and of the opponent). Also, their knowledge and previous experience, which are often indicated by the observation and analysis of the proposals of other teams and coaches (evolution of the game).

2.3.2. Types of high-press structures depending on the starting game system: grouping into structure families

David Movilla, in his talk "Confronted Structures" (2021), talks about more common structures such as those that are more successful and set trends. We find, among them, game systems such as 14231 (1451 in defense), 1433 (14141 in defense), 1442 (14411 in



defense), 41321 (1442 in a diamond shape), 14321 and the systems that play with three centre-backs, such as 1352 (1532 in defense) and 1343 (1541 in defense), among others.

Figures 15 and 16: Types of structures according to Movilla

2.2.- Estructuras habituales

Estructuras predominantes => **ÉXITO** => Crean **tendencia**

9 estructuras habituales (6 de ellas las más utilizadas):

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 1-4-2-3-1 (1-4-5-1) · 1-4-3-3 (1-4-1-4-1) · 1-4-4-2 (1-4-4-1-1) · 1-4-1-3-2 · 1-4-3-2-1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 1-3-5-2 (1-5-3-2) · 1-3-4-3 (1-5-4-1) · 1-3-3-3-1 (1-3-4-3) · 1-3-4-1-2
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Source: Movilla, 2021, retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3tQr0E3>

ESPAÑOL	INGLES
2.2 Estructuras habituales	2.2 Usual structures
Estructuras predominantes	Dominant structures
EXITO	SUCCESS
Crean tendencia	Set trends
9 estructuras habituales (6 de ellas las más utilizadas)	9 usual structures (6 being most used)

2.3.- Estructuras especiales

2.3.1.- Estructuras poco o nada utilizadas

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 1-3-2-2-3 · 1-3-3-4 · 1-2-3-5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 1-4-2-2-2 · 1-3-2-5 · Etc...
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Source: Movilla, 2021, retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3tQr0E3>

ESPAÑOL	INGLES
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2.3. Estructuras especiales	2.3. Special structures
2.3.1. Estructuras poco o nada utilizadas	2.3.1. Little or no used structures

He also talks about special structures, less used, such as the 14222 gaming systems (that is, 1442 with two midfielders inside), and other systems with three centre-backs, such as 13223, 1334, 1235, 1325.

Based on this valuable information, I would like to inspire in the students of this course some other **ways of grouping the structures according to the starting game system**, both from an offensive perspective in the starting phase of the game (to identify opponents' offensive behaviours and structures) and from a defensive perspective in high-press (to identify different types of high-press against similar offensive structures).

1. One contribution that we could consider is grouping the different game systems in their starting phase, **according to the structure that they adopt and the intentions they have at the time of putting the ball in play from the goal kick**. Also, identifying or implementing some ways to press them at the early stage of the game.

For example, there are a few game systems which start from goal kick with the same 1424 structure: systems that use 4 men in the defensive line and start the game with a goalkeeper structure + 4 men in the 1st start line+ 2 pivots + 4 men in the last line.

Usually, these different game systems leave 4 men in the last line, either because they intend to start long directly from the goalkeeper, or they want to play short to attract opponents and then do a long kick (play short for long).

These systems of game would be part of the same 1424 structure family 1424 in the starting phase, and they would make up systems 1442, 14231, and 1433, which leaves one of its midfielders near the line of strikers, bringing the other midfielder at the pivot's height.

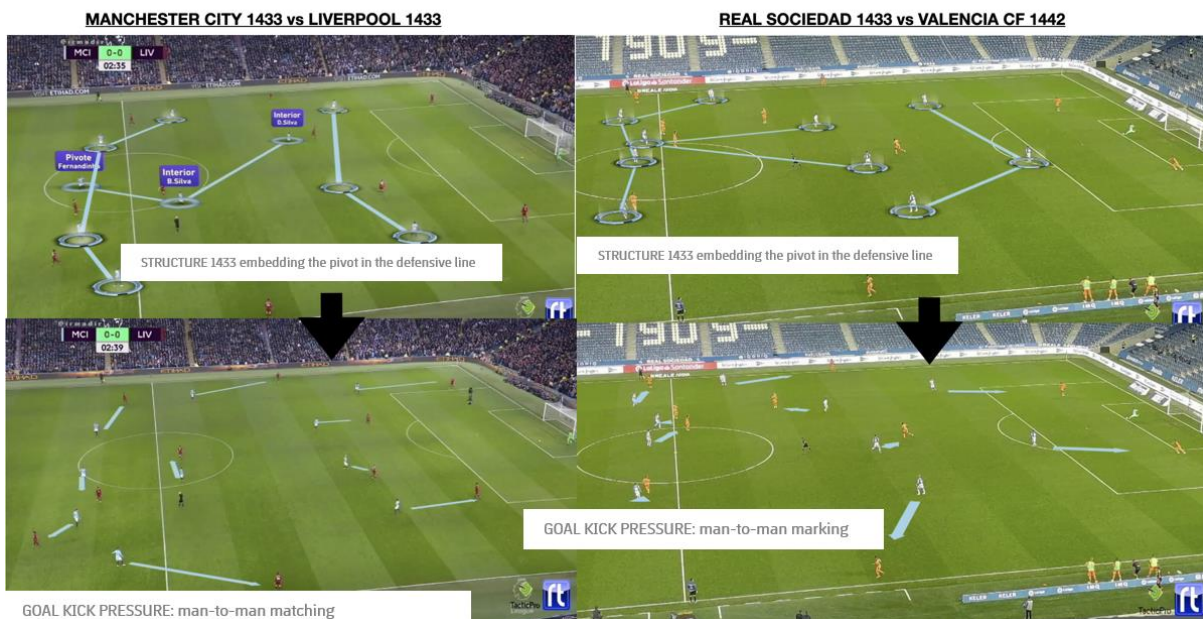
One of the ways to press this 1424 structure family - that uses 1442, 14231 and 1433 game systems - would be implementing an individual marking but embedding the defensive pivot (in system 1433) or one of the two pivots (in systems 14231 and 1442). This would allow the two full-backs to remain in an intermediate position, prepared to jump to their position in case the goalkeeper plays directly with their position, or to return to the defensive line in case the opposing goalkeeper plays long directly with the opposing strikers, thus ensuring defensive numerical superiority in the vigilance block.



Thus, two important things are achieved: marking the man ensures that there are no free opponents left (except for the goalkeeper) who can receive alone and break our pressure, as well as having numerical superiority in the vigilance block if they decide to play long.

An example of this is in the following images, where we can see how two teams that use the same game system 1433 (Manchester City and Real Sociedad), use the same high-press structure 1523, embedding the defensive pivot in the defensive line to mark the man across the field against opponents who use a different game system (the Liverpool uses system 1433 and the Valencia system 1442) but with a similar 1424 attack structure, seeking the direct long build-up play from the goalkeeper to 4v4 as a solution.

Figure 17: High-press structures in goal kick 1433 with pivot embedded in the defensive line and man-to-man marking, against a 1424 structure in the build-up play from different game systems



Source: image adaptation taken from DVMS and Mediacoach and edited with Tactic Pro from RT Software.

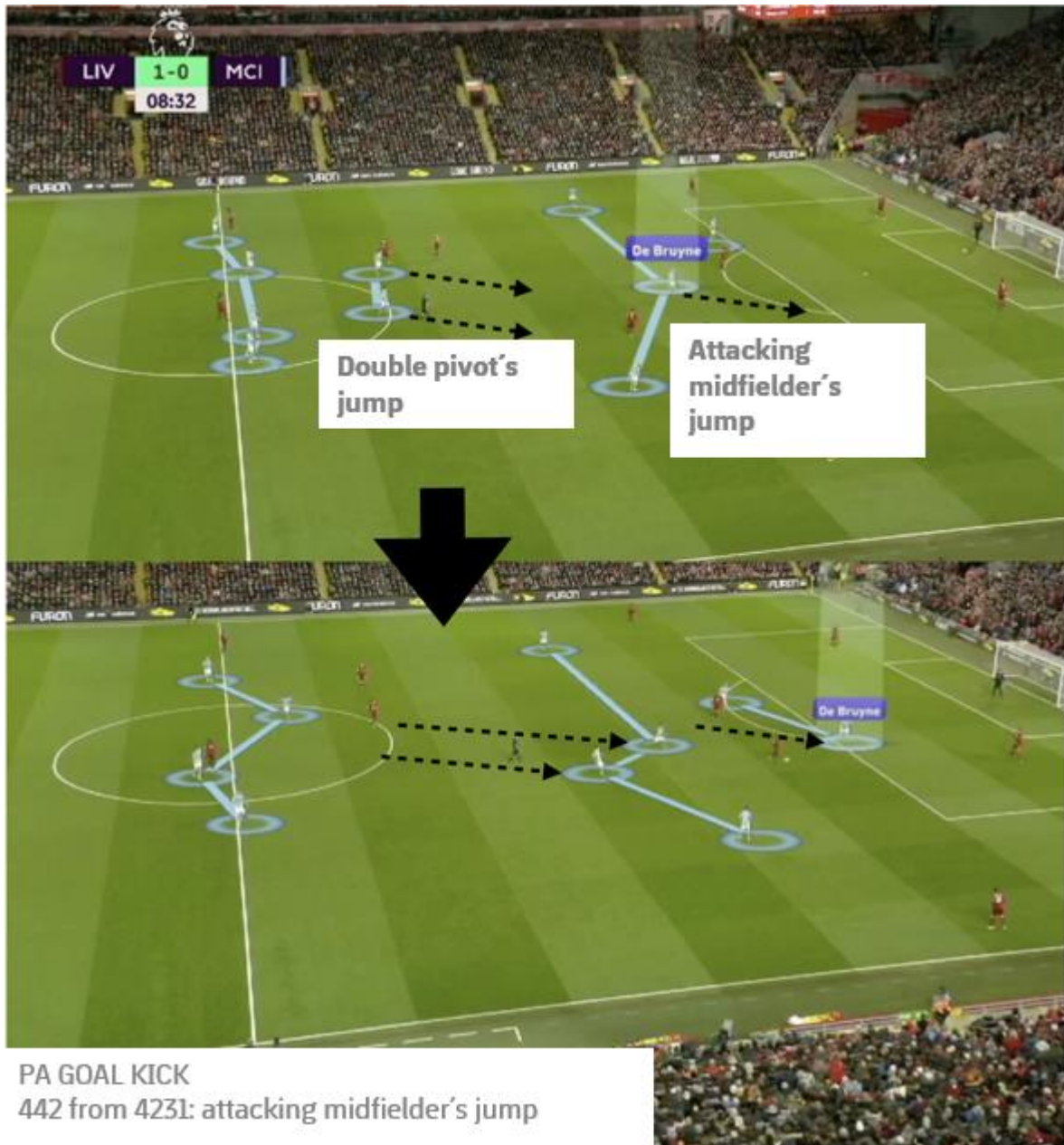
2. Another contribution that we could make would be **to create families of defensive structures that the different game systems adopt in the pressure jump.**

For example, some of these most common game systems are from the same family from the defensive perspective, at the time of the high-press jump, since they adopt

the same structure changing some nuance depending on the positioning and movements to be performed by a certain player.

In this way, we can observe that the 14231-game system turns into a 1442 when the attacking midfielder and the double pivot do the pressure jump.

Figure 18: Manchester City goes from the 14231 to the 1442 in the high-press jump.



Source: image adaptation taken from DVMS Premier League and edited with Tactic Pro from RT Software.

We also see how a game system 1433 (14141 in defense) becomes a structure in 1442 when the pressure mechanism is triggered, resulting in a striker with a centre-back, jumping

one of its midfielders to the other centre-backs, and jumping from behind the defensive pivot, joining the midfielder line and forming the 2nd line of 4.

Figure 19: Osasuna goes from the 14231 to the 1442 in the high-press jump.

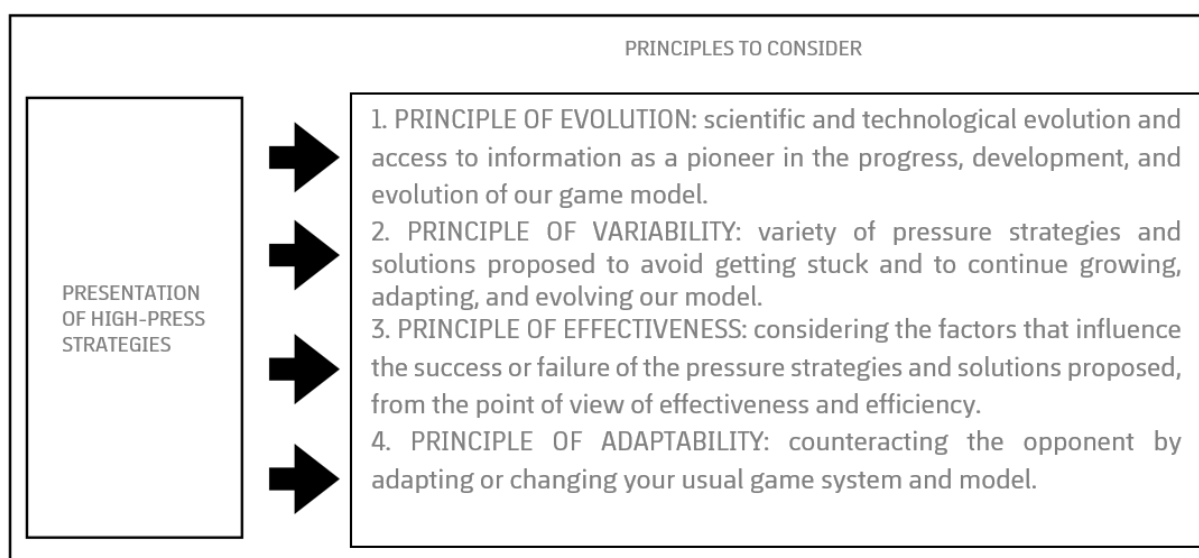


Source: image adaptation taken from Mediacoach and edited with SportsCode.

2.3.3. Principles to consider when preparing high-press strategies and approaches

Having said all this, we will comment on these principles in more detail, so that each coach and analyst has the tools and criteria needed to be the one who proposes their own pressure strategies, depending on the structure and patterns of the opponent's build-up play at the start of the game. At the same time, the conditions of their own team (structure of his defensive game model, variants, or nuances to be introduced according to the capabilities and qualities of the available players, etc.).

Figure 20: Principles to consider when presenting high-press strategies and approaches



Source: Authors' own work.

1. PRINCIPLE OF EVOLUTION: scientific and technological evolution and access to information as a pioneer in the progress, development, and evolution of our game model.

The first factor to consider is the constant evolution that football is going through. Coaches and analysts must be up-to-date on developments that may appear in their own competitive environment (the competitions in which they participate), but they must also be attentive to what happens in other leagues and competitions.

I strongly believe that science and technology applied to performance and game analysis are making football evolve. Access to information and technological analysis tools (scouting and data platforms, tactical analysis programs, etc.) are energizing the evolution process of coaches and, therefore, the evolution of their proposals when proposing strategies for each of the game phases.



What was useful a few years ago may no longer be valid today, due to this evolution of knowledge about the game, which is reflected in all performance improvement processes: from progress in all training processes to perfection of the analysis and information transmission processes.

Every day, in a game of the many leagues and competitions that exist around the world, a new variant of the start of the game may appear with a certain structure, as well as a new way of pressing it. This constant evolution has changed the game in recent years and will continue to do so.

Figure 21: Attack and high-press of the Netherlands national team in 1974



Source: Escobar, 2020, retrieved from <https://youtu.be/xoIG-L2zhCY>

2. PRINCIPLE OF VARIABILITY: variety of pressure strategies and solutions proposed to avoid getting stuck and to continue growing, adapting, and evolving our model.

The second principle to consider is that of variability. To have an open mind and not always get stuck in the same solutions, we must always consider that there is no single valid solution to counteract the opponent's approaches.

Rather the opposite: there is a great variety of solutions with different variants and nuances to pressure and counteract each system and each starting structure of the game,

so trying to establish a single valid high-press solution seems like a bit limited point of view.

For example, the same team can press high in different ways in the same game and in the same structure. Here we see how Valencia pressures at the start of the game with a man-to-man marking based on a 1442 game system, adopting a 13412 structure with the jump from the full-back to the advanced pressure block.

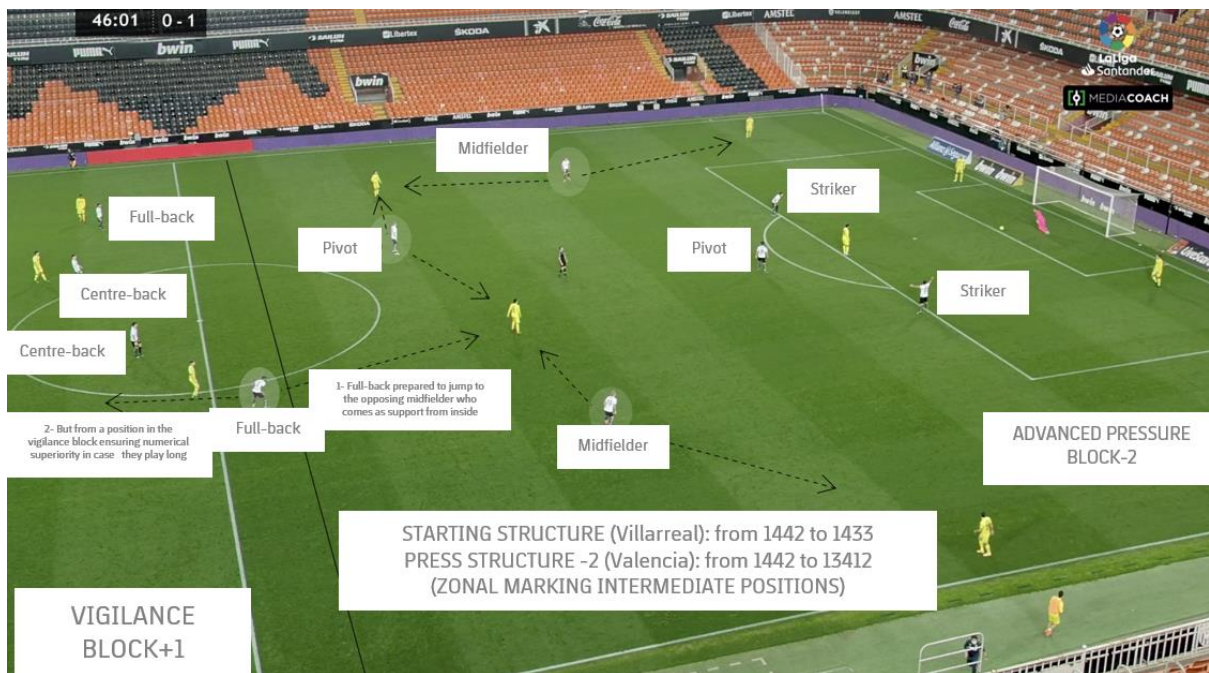
Figure 22: high-press of Valencia (1442) adopting a -1 structure (man-to-man marking) vs Villarreal (1442) adopting a starting 1433 structure



Source: image adaptation taken from Mediacoach and edited with SportsCode.

During the 2nd part, we see how Valencia adopts a -2 structure in the advanced pressure block, leaving the side in the vigilance block to avoid taking risks in the long build-up play of Villarreal. In this way, the 1st pressure line (strikers and pivot) continues with an individual marking, but the 3 midfielders on the 2nd pressure line must defend from four opponents, placing themselves in intermediate positions.

Figure 23: The high-press of Valencia (1442) adopting a -2 structure (zonal marking in intermediate positions) vs the Villarreal (1442) adopting a starting 1433 structure



Source: image adaptation taken from Mediacoach and edited with SportsCode.

In addition, when the opponent starts short, there are multiple different situations in which the defensive game model and its pressure mechanisms become more relevant since the different pressure movements are multiplied in the face of the opponent's possible offensive solutions. Here is an example, in which Valencia pressures high on a 1433 structure against Real Sociedad, which plays short on its full-back and this triggers the pressure mechanisms of each player, depending on the possible solution adopted by the opponent.

Figure 24: The high-press of Valencia (1442) adopting a -2 structure (zonal marking in intermediate positions) vs Real Sociedad (1443) adopting a starting 1433 structure



Source: image adaptation taken from Mediacoach and edited with SportsCode.

In this situation, the decision-making of the player who presses is especially important based on the different movements and solutions that opponents try.

3. PRINCIPLE OF EFFECTIVENESS: considering the factors that influence the success or failure of the pressure strategies and solutions proposed, from the point of view of effectiveness and efficiency.

The third principle to keep in mind is that of effectiveness, which refers to our ability to achieve what we propose to (effectiveness) and to achieve it in an effortless manner (efficiency).

To achieve this, we must consider all the factors that may have a direct or indirect impact on the achievement of our objective, which is stealing the ball from the opponent. Many factors come into play here.

As discussed in the Principle of Variability, I think there is no single valid way to press the start phase of a given structure. There are always several valid options and solutions, and the success or failure of these (effectiveness) depends both, on the success in imagining the game and planning them based on your knowledge, previous experience and intuition as a coach (analysis of the opponent and their behaviour in previous games, causing the opponent what they do not like or benefit, etc.), as well as the way in which the players put into practice on the match day everything that you have transmitted to them and the training.

Therefore, **the effectiveness of a certain pressure mechanism** at an opponent's game start phase **depends on many factors**:

- a) your knowledge of the game depends on their ability to propose correct pressure strategies, based on their theoretical knowledge of the game, previous experience, and intuition as a coach to plan the most accurate pressure strategy based on what the opponent proposes.
- b) your communication skills (how you convince your players): it depends on how it has been conveyed to you in your meetings or technical talks (selection of images, *feedback* used), as well as the level of assimilation of the concepts that players have, and how clear they are when carrying out the pressure strategy presented on the playing field.
- c) how you train them: depends on the tasks we present and practice this pressure strategy (training methodology used, corrections, *feedback* used, etc.).
- d) the problem-solving capacity of the players (individual quality of the player): depends on the level of success shown in the decision-making to provide solutions to the diverse and unforeseen situations that arise during the competition, both from their players when pressing, as well as the opponent when counteracting the proposed pressure strategy.
- e) how the situational context impacts the performance of the team and each player: importance of "mental strength" in the face of contextual variables such as the result, playing field, adversities, motivations, etc., so that it does not impact negatively on the individual and collective performance. The stress generated by certain competitive situations for the player can block their performance. How the player reacts to these stressful situations can determine his or her level of success when carrying out the pressure mechanisms proposed.



Figure 25: Factors that influence the effectiveness of the high-press exerted

GAME SITUATION	EFFECTIVENESS IN HIGH-PRESS	RESULT	RESULTING GAME SITUATION	FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE HIGH-PRESS EXERTED
HIGH-PRESS SITUATION	WORKS (SUCCESS)	RECOVERY	Stealing in the opponent's field (quick attack option)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coach's knowledge of the game: based on the theoretical knowledge of the game, previous experience, and intuition, to plan the most accurate pressure structure depending on what the opponent proposes. 3. Coach's communicative skills: how the coach convinces players to carry out the pressure strategy presented (technical talks, use of images, etc.).
			Recovery in own field (counteracting option)	
			Forcing the opponent's loss (a set-piece play: goal kick, free kick, offside, etc.)	
	DOES NOT WORK (failure)	OVERCOME	Timing (return to defensive shape). Tactical foul (stop the game). Fast return.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Training methodology used: the tasks we choose and feedback we use to practice the proposed pressure strategy. 4. The problem-solving capacity of the players (individual quality): to solve predicted and unforeseen situations that arise during the high-press phase. 5. Mental strength so that the situational context does not impact negatively.

Source: Authors' own work.

Whether a proposed pressure mechanism is successful or not depends on so many factors that the belief that this is the only valid solution is destroyed every time the opponent overcomes that pressure that has been proposed. We need to be prepared for that moment and be attentive to the errors that have been made to detect and correct

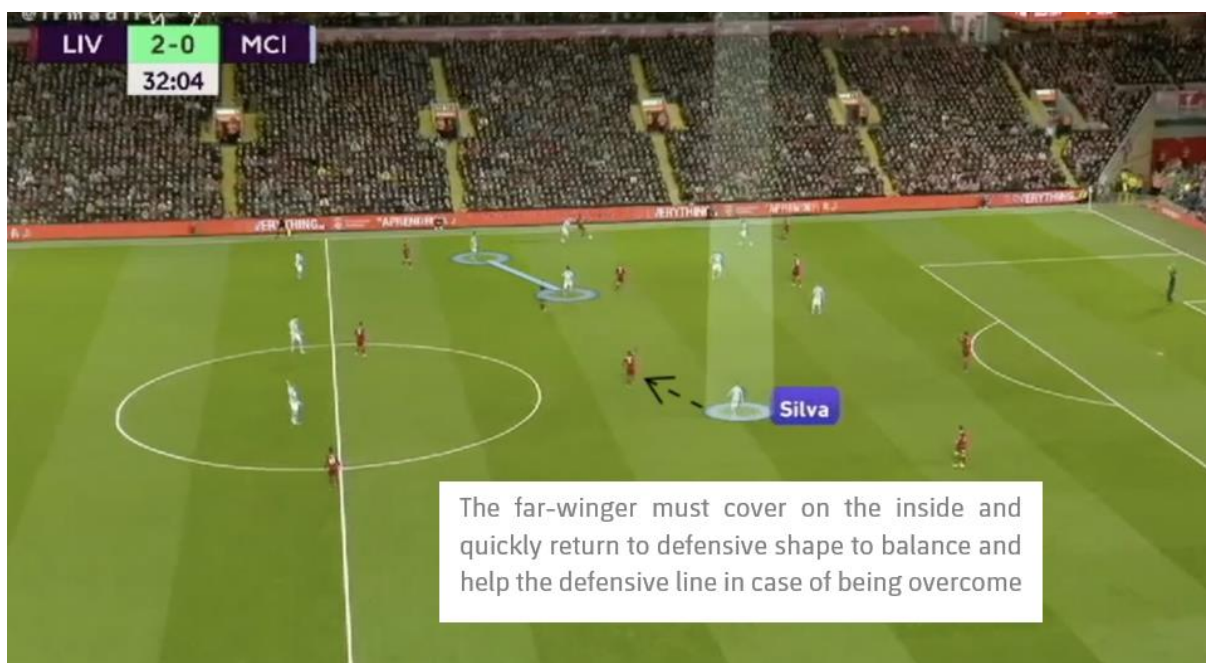


them during the competition, as well as have an alternative strategy, a plan B, that changes the dynamics.

It is important to know that the pressure solutions we propose are not infallible and that, if they are overcome, our players must know what to do when those strategies do not work (intensively drop back while others time and / or make a tactical foul).

An example of this can be seen in the following figure, in which Pep Guardiola's Manchester City is pushing Jurgen Kloop's Liverpool high and, when Liverpool overcomes the pressure, its far-winger (Bernardo Silva) must balance on the inside and come back to help the defensive line defend that disadvantage situation.

Figure 26: Fast return and intensive return to defensive shape if they exceed our pressure



Source: image adaptation taken from DVMS Premier League and edited with Tactic Pro from RT Software.

4. PRINCIPLE OF ADAPTABILITY: counteracting the opponent by adapting or changing your usual game system and model.

When planning high-press strategies, coaches must make decisions that can affect the game system and game model of their own team. There are two ways to approach pressure strategies:

- a) Adapting the game system and the usual game model: the defensive mechanisms of the game model are the usual ones, at most, some variant or nuance is

incorporated. Therefore, **what the opponent likes and benefits from is also respected**, and the idea is precisely to counteract those situations.

- b) Changing the game system and the game model: the habitual behaviours of our own team change for different ones because of the strategy of **causing what the opponents do not like or benefit from**, trying to surprise and destabilize them, avoiding to the opponents to carry out their usual mechanisms.

According to Moreno (2013), there are coaches who advocate strategies that seek to destabilize the opponent in their behaviour, provoking in the opponent what they do not like or benefit:

These types of strategic solutions have only one problem(...), and that is that many times we must ask the team to do things they are not used to. But I don't think (...) this should be the main goal of the training. But I do believe that it is important to dominate and use this factor at certain games (Moreno, 2013, p. 237).

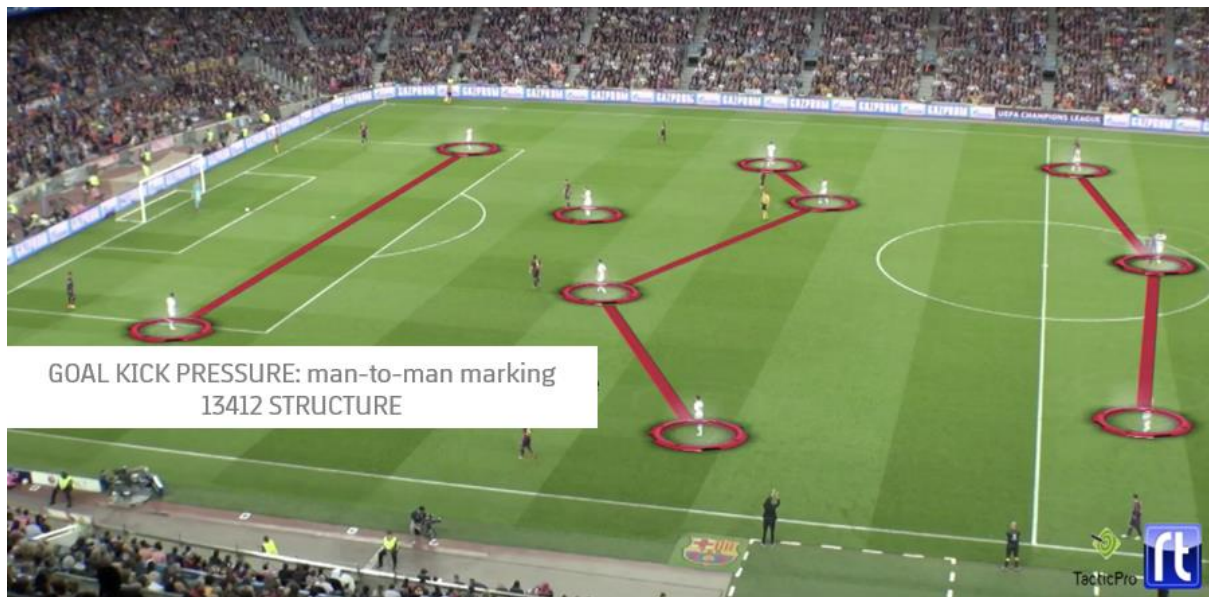
When opposing behaviours are strong and defined, it is best to make it difficult for those behaviours to occur. Teams and players find their best performance by doing what they usually do, which is what they do best. So, if we want to make things difficult for our opponents, the best thing is to make them do something they are not used to (Moreno, 2013, p. 237).

In this way, the patterns or mechanisms that best suit the opponent are broken and they are forced to do something that is easy for them, although they probably have solutions to counteract this proposal, with some movement, different positioning or simply by success and individual quality: "If I play with an opponent who likes to team up and always builds-up backwards short, then I can press them so they have to play long." (Moreno, 2013, p. 237).

This was what Pep Guardiola tried with Bayern Munich to face in the first leg of the Champions League semi-finals against Luís Enrique's FC Barcelona in May 2015. In that game, Pep changed the game system and came out with a 13412, which broke with his usual system of 14231 or 1433.



Figure 27: High-press structure in the goal kick of Bayern Munich vs FC Barcelona.



Source: Own recording, edited with RT Software's Tactic Pro.

But his bet does not go well because FC Barcelona starts long at 3v3 in the last line, creating a clear chance of goal for Luis Suarez, caused by an error of Boateng when trying to leave him offside.

This change in the game system and high-press structure was a risky bet to prevent FC Barcelona from doing what it usually does and what *a priori* was the best for it, which was to start short and progress with the controlled ball.

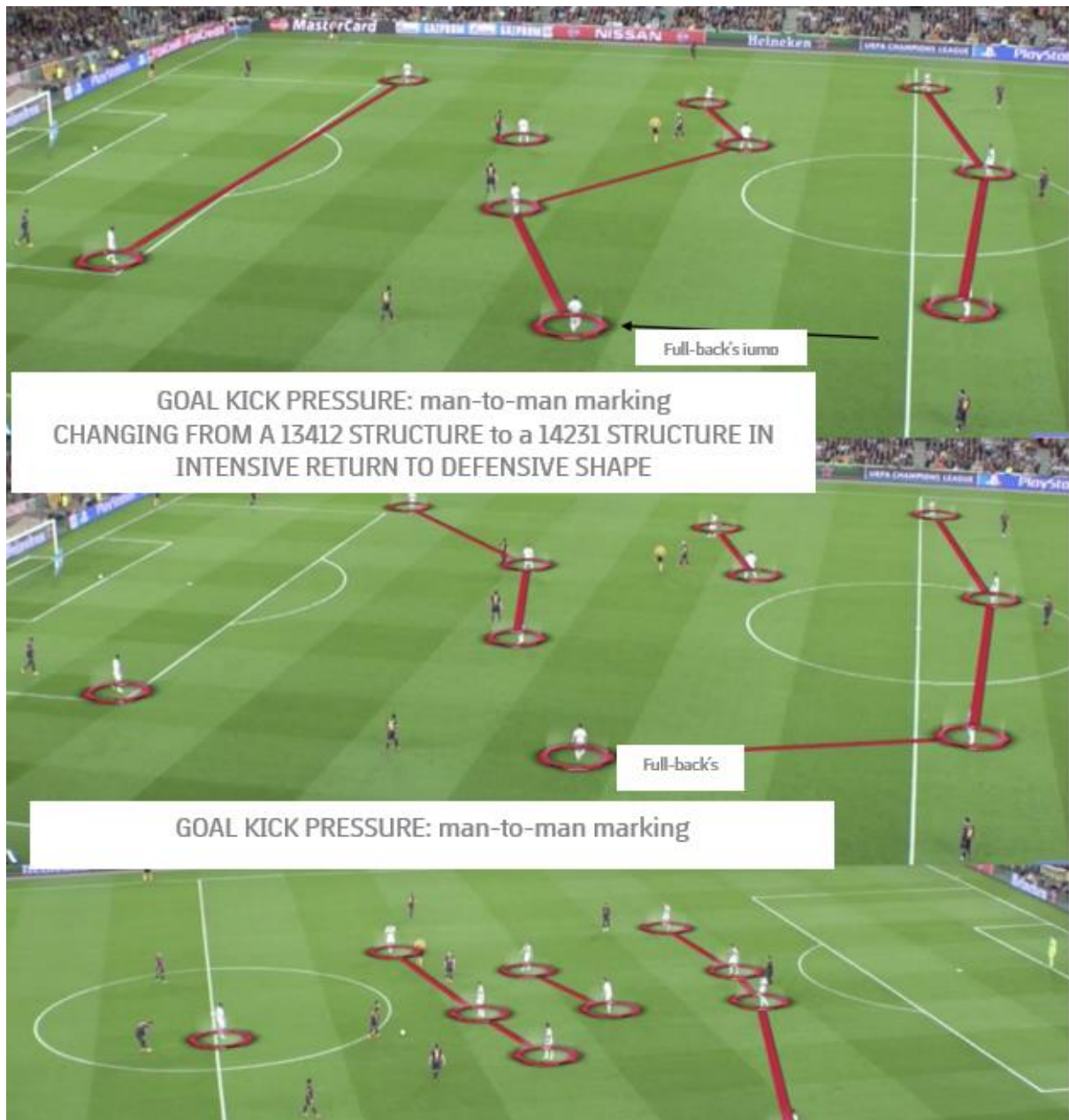
Pep succeeded with this approach, but the risk was so high that any error like the one Boateng made could have cost him a goal. In addition, in the defensive phase of the return to defensive shape in his own field, he was exposed to the constant 3v3 that this man-to-man marking entailed.

This solution has its risks. Our ability to avoid their usual game may have no effect and we may have taken risks that are then crucial. It may be that the quality of the opponent, together with our not very frequent habit of carrying out this strategy, results in its failure (Moreno, 2013, p. 237).

The latter led him to make the decision to change the game system with the same players. Thus, in minute 16, Pep Guardiola decided to change Rafinha and Thiago Alcántara from the wing to defend with a four-man zone defense when they defended, returning to defensive shape in their own field, changing the game system to a 14231, but keeping the

structure of high-press structure of man-to-man marking with the 13412. This was achieved with the jump of the full-back Juan Bernat to the 2nd pressure line.

Figure 28: Change of game system of Bayern Munich vs FC Barcelona.



Source: own recording, edited with Tactic Pro from RT Software.

As we can see, even applying a 2nd defensive strategy, the result was adverse, losing 3-0 and with the feeling that their pressure strategy was overtaken by the opposing team.

This shows that, although we think that the approach is the correct one to face and counteract the opponent's initiative; any well thought-out, trained and applied strategy

will not always be successful and this depends on many factors that we cannot control when the ball begins to roll. That does not mean that we should discard that strategy, because in other games, against another opponent, that same solution may work.



Unit 2.4 Conclusions

The conclusion I have reached is that coaches have the need to adapt the way of high-pressing the structure and the different nuances of the initial mechanisms of each opponent, which varies from game to game and to do it from multiple perspectives. That is, what the opponent, your own team and the contextual circumstances propose at a specific moment.

For example, if you have centre-backs who are particularly good at playing long ball and in challenges, and you must play against a team that dominates the short build-up play very well in the starting phase, it could be a good strategy to make the start of the opponent's game as difficult as possible. Thus, changing the way of pressing, incorporating more people, and adopting a man-to-man marking throughout the field (system change). You could also simply adapt the structure of the usual defensive game model, moving one of your full-backs or centre-backs to the advanced pressure block to make that man-to-man marking, forcing the opponent to kick long and divide the ball.

If the opponent counts with high speed and quality strikers, this approach is not such a good idea. Equal situations in the vigilance block with this type of opponents can carry an extremely high risk of suffering attempts on goal derived from any second ball that they can pick up after the long kick from the goalkeeper.

The task of proposing high-press strategies to avoid or make the start of the opponent's game difficult, requires an exhaustive study and analysis of the offensive game model of each opponent, and does not depend so much on which system or tactical training they use.

When we talk about studying the opponent's game model, we refer to analysing all the offensive structures and mechanisms (positioning of their players and movement of the ball) that the opponent adopts during the game, with emphasis on its start phase.

There is a possibility that the opponent will always adopt the same pattern for starting the game (regardless of how much the opponent presses), although at present it is very unlikely, since most teams adopt solutions to counteract the high-press exerted by the team trying to steal the ball.



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