

Coaching the 3-5-2 Formation



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by

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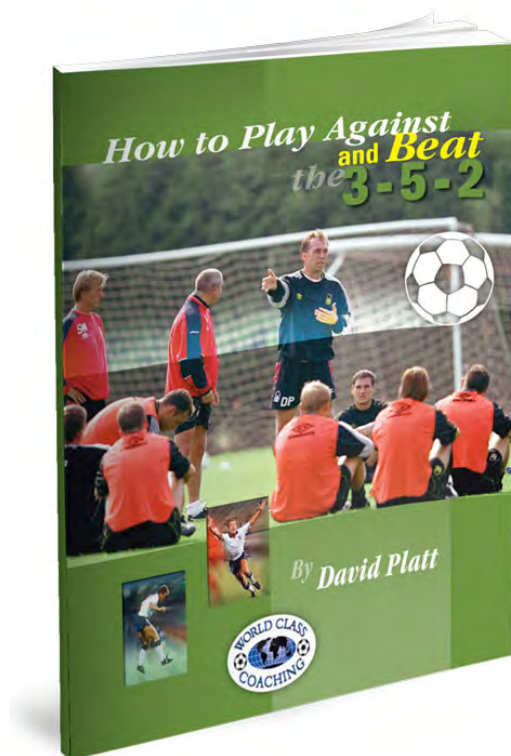
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Learn from an English Premier League championship winning coach! In this special set, Manchester City's Assistant Manager David Platt provides you with a tactical playbook for exploiting and beating your opponents formation.

This book illustrates how to effectively coach your team to beat an opposing team that is playing the 3-5-2 system. The 3-5-2 is one of the most common formations used by teams all over the world. Regardless of the formation you employ with your team, understanding how to tactically beat the 3-5-2 formation is a must for any coach.

1. Introduction

The most popular formation employing three central defenders is a 3-5-2 formation. There is also formation 5-3-2, but it is almost identical. Especially when we keep in mind the differences between the terms of 'formation' and 'system'. The only difference as for formations is the height of the starting points for wing-backs. The specifications as for their involvement in attacking and defending is a question included in the system's details.

The thing we have to remind and now is a good moment for that, is that no formation is more 'offensive' or 'defensive'. The formations pose some characteristic specifications for different moments of the game and those characteristics favor specific styles of play, none formation says us anything about the presented style of play.

For example, we may deduce that the team using 4-3-3 formation will try playing positional attacks, as they will use 3 central midfielders and both full backs and wingers on the sides, but what if those central midfielders are 2 or even 3 holding midfielders and full backs are banned from running forward?

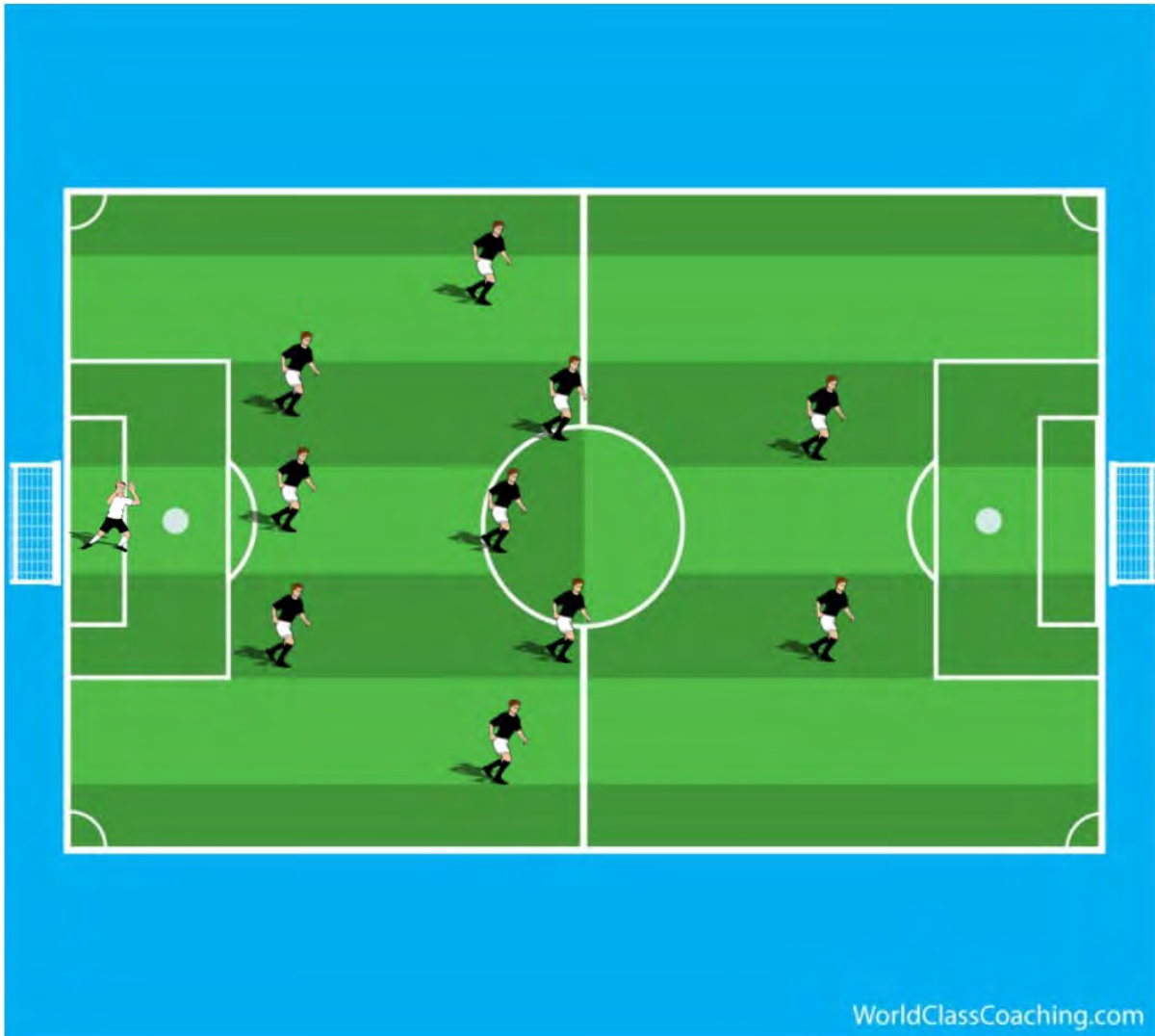
The situation that this question is repeated most often is when talking about the coach using 1 or 2 or 3 strikers. The fans usually say, the coach „decides for more offensive play” as he exchanges one midfielder for a striker, for example. But what if the midfielder coming off is a creative player and the striker coming on the pitch is a limited player, effective mainly in air challenges? In such situation we can say, that the coach forsaken the patient creation of chances and will want his team to try more direct football, what is not more attacking, but more desperate.

Also systems with front-three players is not directly meaning there will be 3 strikers playing inside the box. That can also mean there will be 2 wingers on the sides and those players may try to look for getting inside, but also getting to the end line with the ball and cross the ball. All that shows us, that the formation itself doesn't say us much about the team's system or style of play. As we have said, we may have get some info about it, but we can know for sure, only from watching the team play.

We have reminded it now, as talking about the systems with back-three we have to remember that it's not „more defensive” formation itself, as all formations are neutral. Only teams using those add them specific character. Back-three systems are often used by teams relying on counter attacking, but that is a choice made by coaches, as they believe the specific formation would suit the expected style of play and not the formation determining the play.

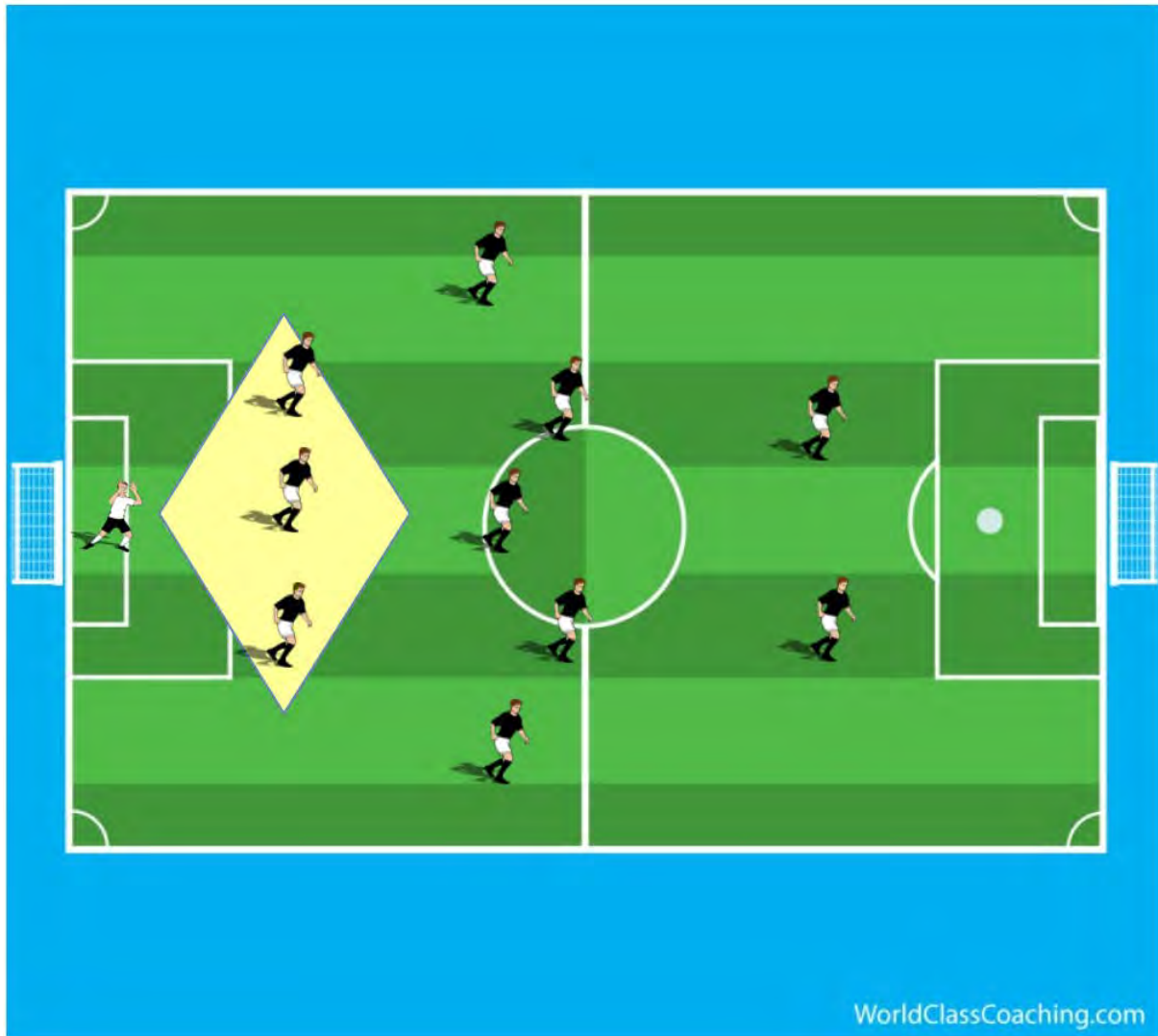
2. Theory behind 3-5-2 formation

Back three systems gives good natural cover in the center of defence. We have three players blocking the crucial zone in defence, but also three players covering the play, while in possession. That allows for assigning more specific roles for other players. Formation of 3-5-2 also allows for more natural and quicker overcrowding in the center, what also increases the covering of play, while opening up spaces on the sides for quick and high-endurance players in wing back roles. The fact that Guardiola used 3-5-2 few times, while often choosing also 3-4-3 also shows us, that calling the back-three formations „defensive” would be wrong.



Analyzing specific formations, we should start with the back three. We have said already, that those 3 players won't be involved in attacking directly. It is of course possible to allow one of them entering with the ball higher up the pitch, but that would require other player to take his post immediately and isn't seen often.

We would rather ask those players to cover the team, focusing 50% on giving an option of a safe pass and 50% on possible counter attack by the opponent.

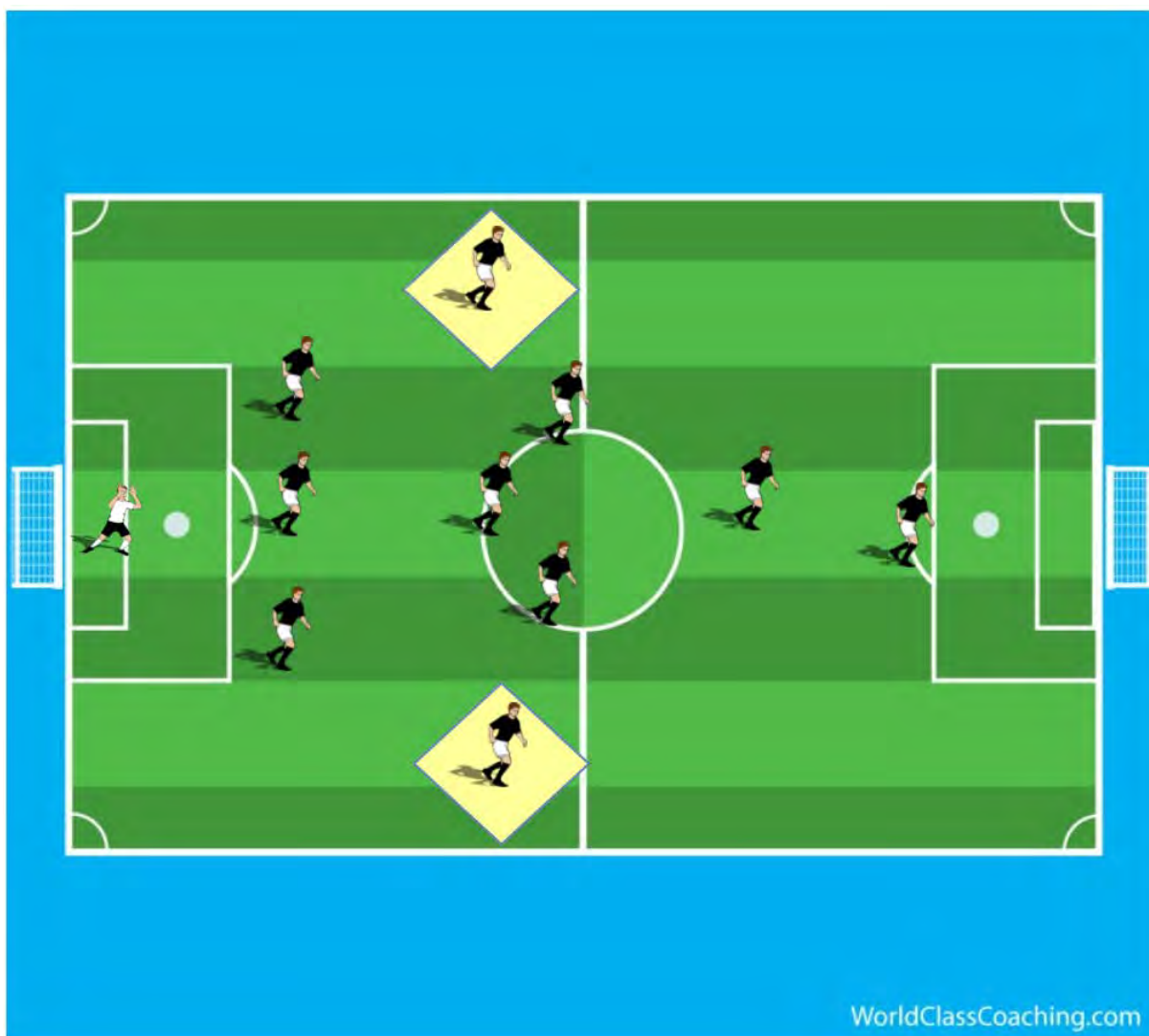


During defending those players can cover wider area than the standard central duo. They can easily cover for wing back, while still leaving 2 players in the center. That gives more options and better protection in defence. In the past, the standard pattern was that 2 of those defenders were man-marking 2 strikers of the rival, while one player was providing cover from deeper position, the so called „sweeper“. With the changes in the offside rule and increased speed of play, now those three defenders play in flat line, defending zonally.



In midfield, there are many options, resulting from the presence of 3 central midfielders. There are standard options for such scenario, so they may play in line, or with one or two staying deeper. This aspect should be decided based on the players' characteristics and the expected style of play.

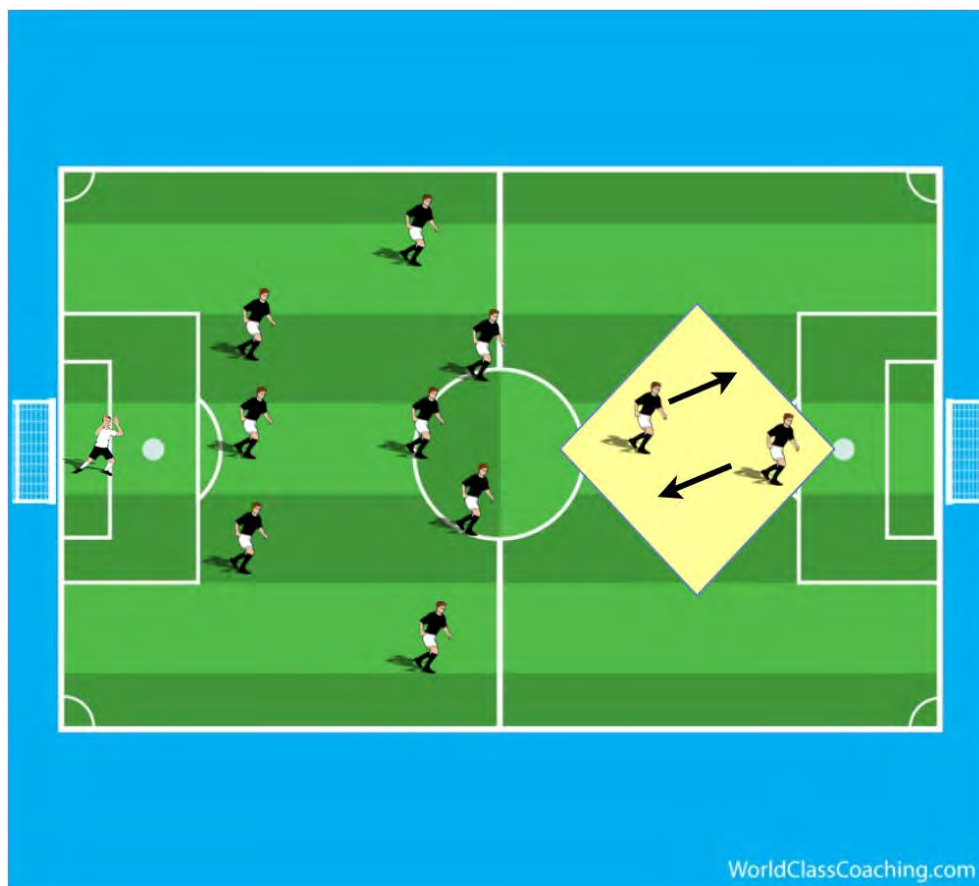




Wing backs are positions that require from players high endurance and good speed. They are usually on their own on the flanks and to cover the full length on the pitch is a really difficult task, especially if the team bases its play on transitions.

Upfront, we have 2 strikers and also their positioning offer standard choices of vertical or horizontal line or interchangeability. That should be also decided based on the players' characteristics and the expected style of play.





3. Analysis of formation during phases of the game

Analysis 1 – Reorganizing to defensive structure



We see the moment when Torino, trying to build their attack, loose the ball near the Juventus penalty box. At this moment, there are 5 Torino players above the ball line and we will check how the team reorganizes to their defensive structure.



What we haven't seen in this fragment, is how Torino defenders, while keeping compact unit moved to the side, blocking possible run by Pogba.

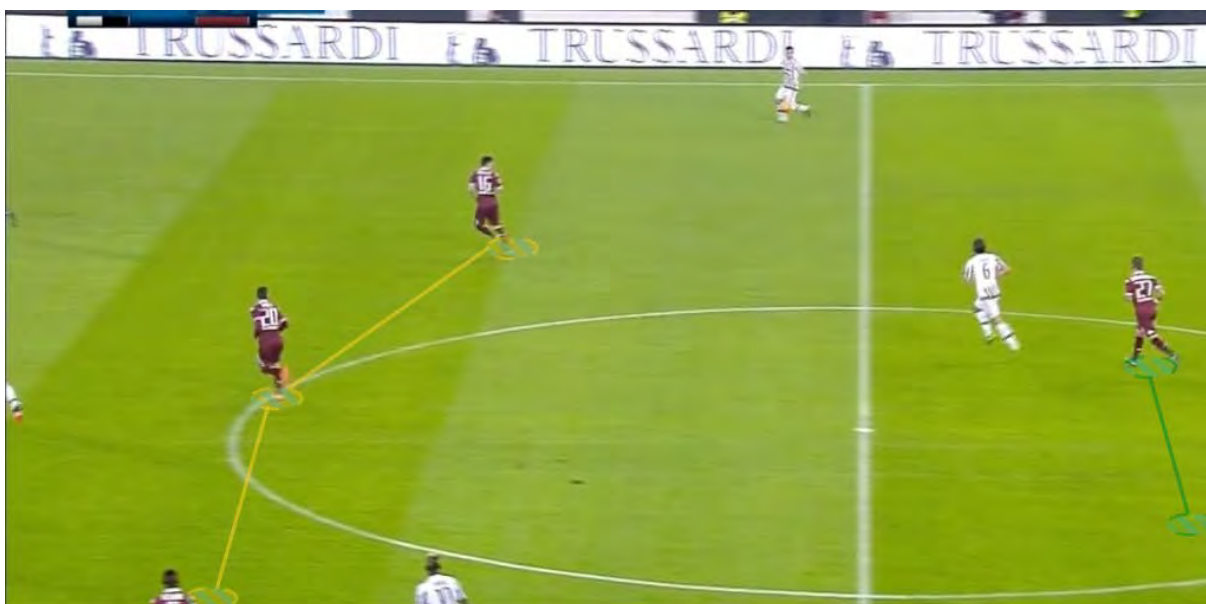
The player then passed the ball to the side, but Morata who received the ball, was quickly pressed by the opponent.

That slowed down and even stopped the action, giving time to other players to come back.



Marchisio, as he received a back pass, even though is in deeper position and although it seems that Torino have rebuilt their structure is pressed by the rival from behind.

That is because the player in question is a midfielder coming back and he knows that until he isn't in his position, the team isn't 100% ready to defend the attack.



Now we see Torino's midfielders and strikers in their standard formation. Those 5 players position in line, but with opponents circulating the ball they are cooperating moving from side to side, but focusing on blocking the center mainly.



Now, with the ball on the side, we see how wing back moves to block the rival, while one of the center back follows to cover for him. The other two defenders are staying centrally.



Good come back by one of the central midfielders allow the team to recover the ball, while the center back were staying further, defending the center of the box.

Analysis 2 – Defending in deep positions

The action starts with Torino prepared to defend in 3-5-2 against Juventus attack starting from a free kick inside their half. The players are ready and in positions.

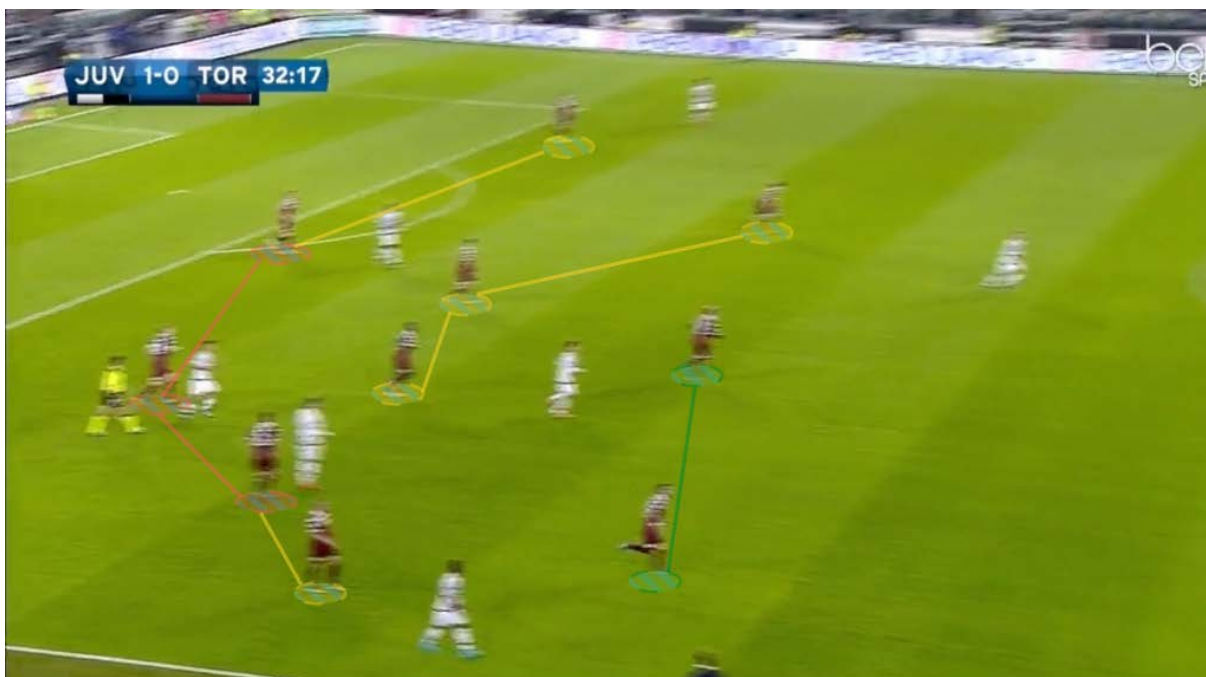
Torino are marking closely, so the opponents have to pass the ball back.



Torino players are deep, staying close to the opponents with the special mention of defenders following the strikers' movements.



Also here we see, how the central defender followed Morata's movement. He was able to do that, as there are still 2 central defenders blocking the box and midfielders are covering if needed.



Torino are organized and Juventus can't find a way towards the goal, so they pass back again.



As we have talked about the central defenders staying close to the opponents, we see Glik, next to the striker and just in a moment, he will go even further, trying to intercept Cuadrado's action.

Analysis 3 – Building actions



In this clip, we see Juventus defenders in possession as the team is building its attack. We will analyze this action, looking at the use of the 3-5-2 formation in attacking.



We see the ball is passes to the side, to Evra playing as a wing back and it its worth watching the action, looking how wing backs, are almost the only players staying in the wide zones.

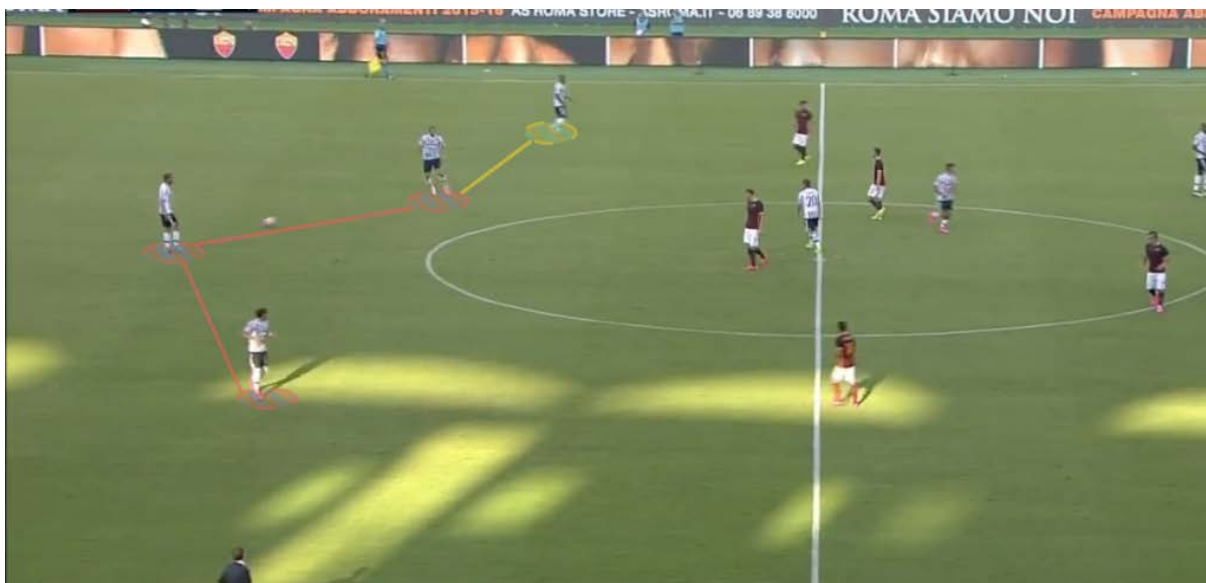


Roma players are limiting options for Juventus, and they want to take much risk in that area, so Evra passes a longer ball to the striker. Although Pogba moved to the side to give option, but the wing back would choose that option only if it was very favorable.



Following Mandzukic action, as he was stopped by the defender, the ball is quickly played to the side. Lichsteiner, who is a right wing back, again is the only player on the side and there are no movements toward him. There are many player inside the box and he is supposed to play the ball there quickly.

Analysis 4 – Creating the space in the center



After recovering the ball, it is passed to the central defenders, so they can start the attack of the team.



Again, it is worth noting how many players there are in the center, while wing backs are stretching the play on their own.

4. About the authors



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Mariusz Kondak - UEFA B license and the founder of CzytamGre Soccer Services. Football Academy Coordinator – Groups U6 - U15 (over 250 players). Has cooperated with clubs from polish 1st and 2nd Division. Took part in coaching course organized by Ajax Amsterdam.

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