

THE ROLE OF THE
TWO
CENTER BACKS

ATTACKING



by **LUCA BERTOLINI**

The Role of the Center Backs (Attacking)

By

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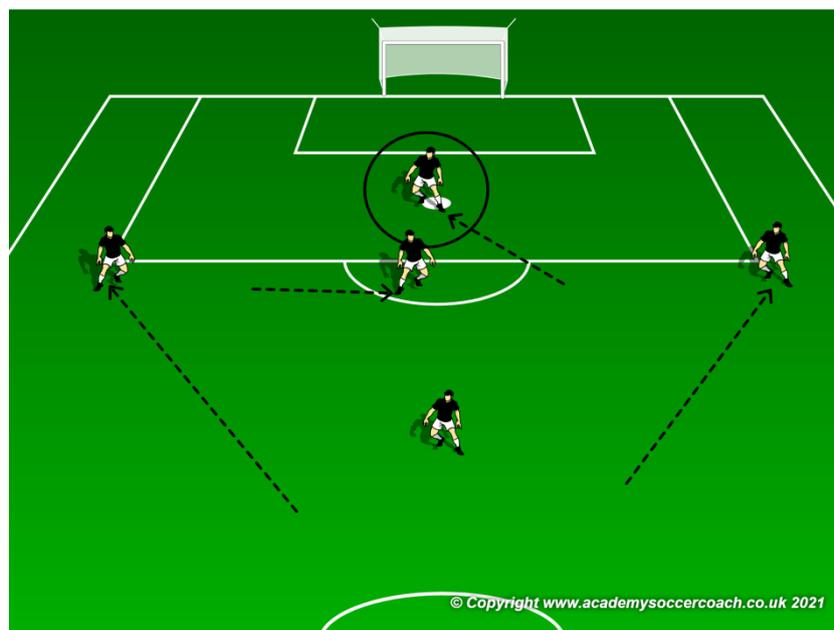
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Introduction

The modern center backs are the players who stand around the same defensive areas as those who once were called fully backs; as we have analyzed in the dedicated volumes, the fully backs are now the players out wide alongside the defensive line or the wingbacks a 3+2 defensive shape. All is true on paper and if we take into consideration the systems of play history. The term came from the 1-2-3-5 system of play when they were the lower players in front of the goalkeeper, and the three in the middle were called half-back (the outer players of the front five were called wingers, and three in the middle were the inside forwards and the center forward. So this was the Pyramid System. The creation of the Libero or center back role was the consequence of a defensive strategy that took the teams to create a back four-line at the back of a 1-3 formation:



When the wider half-back dropped back to join the fully backs, one of them dropped deeper to cover, and this player became the "Libero."

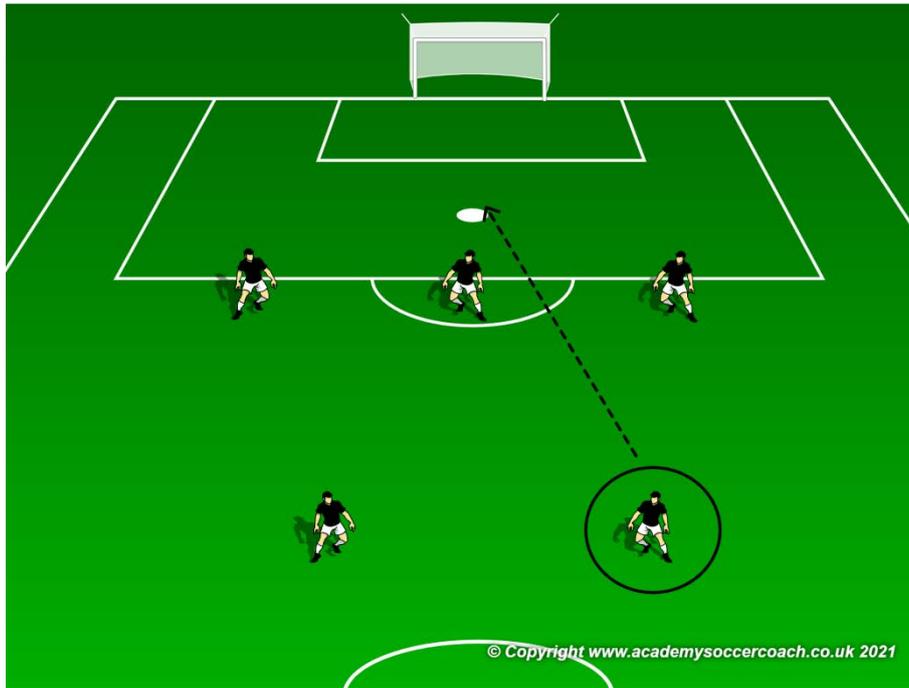


Otherwise, in other interpretations, the center half-back dropped back between and behind the fully backs, and they created a center 3 men shape.



When the teams' formations evolved in a "WM," the Sistema.





Or when the players shaped the "WW" Metodo.



Despite Ivano Blason at Ac. Milan under Nereo Rocco and Armando Picchi at Internazionale Milan under Helenio Herrera were the very first "Libero" or "Center backs" of the modern era, and the clearances were the starts of counter-attacking moves, they still weren't defensive and attacking players, as Franco Baresi or Franz Beckenbauer.

Furthermore, all these players were included in man-marking systems of play; otherwise, Franco Baresi was a libero in a zonal marking idea of defense.

When the team started to stand in the field with four players at the back, the fullbacks went out wide alongside the flanks, maintaining their names and defensive roles.



Rinus Michels at Ajax and Ernst Happel at Feyenoord, like Bayern Munich under Udo Lattek and Dettmar Cramer, used one of the back four players as a sweeper, floating between the defensive and midfield lines.

The Netherland Nation Team and the total football gave a crucial contribution to the role and position of libero and center backs thanks to the 1-1-3-3-3 system of play that developed in a 1-3-4-3 attacking shape with three at the back protect the Libero when he joined the midfield line.

From this tactical solution, the back three defenses were born, giving the freedom to one of them to become a "possession organization player." The "libero" behind the line of four defenders shaped the first type of the 1-5-3-2.



In the end, the Libero in the back four was the final evolution of the role and the beginning of the center back position as we know it nowadays. The modern Libero is simply one of the center backs, or both centers backs alternately, progressing the ball from the defense to the midfield or final third, like David Alaba. From this point of view, Gerard Piqué under Pep Guardiola was maybe the first type of defender like this, with high technical skills levels. Also, the increase of goalkeepers' abilities with the feet has made them a sweeper behind the defensive line when the team build-up from the back recovers the ball in the third.

Franco Baresi and Kaiser Franz Beckenbauer: the center defenders build-up from the back.

He played 532 times in domestic leagues (Serie B and Serie A) for Ac. Milan, providing 16 goals and 8 assists playing as a libero, the old-styled center back; he also played 187 matches in all domestic and international cups, scoring 17 goals (2 assists). Baresi also played 81 times for the Italian National Team, scoring 1 goal.



AC MILAN ALL-TIME MOST APPEARANCES

Rank	Player	Appearances
1	PAOLO MALDINI (1984-2009)	902
2	FRANCO BARESI (1977-1997)	719
3	ALESSANDRO COSTACURTA (1986, 1987-2007)	663
4	GIANNI RIVERA (1960-1979)	658
5	MAURO TASSOTTI (1980-1997)	583
6	MASSIMO AMBROSINI (1995-1997, 1998-2013)	489
7	GENNARO GATTUSO (1999-2012)	468
8	CLARENCE SEEDORF (2002-2012)	432
9	ANGELO AQUILLETTI (1966-1977)	418
10	CESARE MALDINI (1954-1966)	412

Apart from all the trophies he won with Ac Milan and with the National Team, Baresi was one of the first center backs, or Libero at that time to build up from the back. He interpreted the real role of the “Sweeper”, as the last line of the defensive shape, and a player who



The backline of Ac Milan was one of the first in soccer history to stand very high and close to the midfield one (emulating the Netherlands' one during the 70s); Baresi was often the last player just behind the other three teammates who rebounded the opposition's balls.



When the backline stood high up in the field, but Milan lost the possession, Baresi acted as old-style Libero, defending in a lower position concerning the teammates.



When Baresi could control the possession of the ball after defensive actions, he acted as a sort of lower playmaker, allowing his teammates to stand higher in the field, and he gave the midfielder the chance to support the attacking move quickly inside the opposition's half.

In this example, Baresi won the ball inside the defensive half, dribbled the ball higher up, and he allowed the center-left midfielder to receive a through pass behind the opposition's midfielders' line.



In this situation, he previously organized the attacking action from the back. He then received a through pass from a center striker, who had dropped back before, over the opposition's midfield line, after moving higher off the ball.

The following sequence is crucial to understand Baresi's style of play after the ball recovery.



1. He pushed higher to intercept a through the opposition's pass, as the center back was marking the center striker.
2. He recovered the ball, and he passed it out wide along the right flank.



3. Two teammates combined from the flank to the center, and Baresi moved higher up in the field off the ball.



Eventually, he received inside the opposition's half, and he dribbled the ball as a No.10.

He played in a very similar way to Franz Beckenbauer, who played his best seasons more than a decade before him, creating numerical advantages and passing options in the middle third for the teammates after his primary job as a defender.

On the other side, the tactical organization that Sacchi, the head coach, was able to create allowed Baresi to be more than a Libero during the phases of play with the ball.



When ground passing combinations weren't possible, AC Milan played straightforwardly, exploiting the long-range passing skills of Baresi.



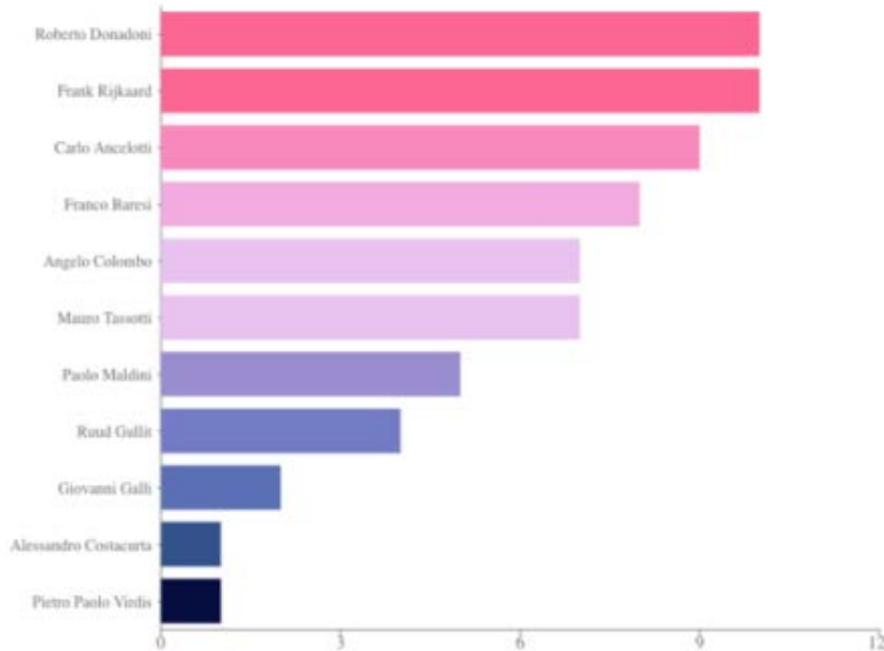
The passing network of the old European Cup (Uefa Champions League) final against Steaua Bucuresti that Milan won 4 to 0, dominating the match from the beginning to the end, explains the role of the lower pivot of Franco Baresi (the only yellow circle of the image), and all the passing lanes prove him as a point of reference for all the other teammates.

AC Milan

Champions League
1988/1989

Squad Comparison

Comparison Metric: **Deep Progressions**

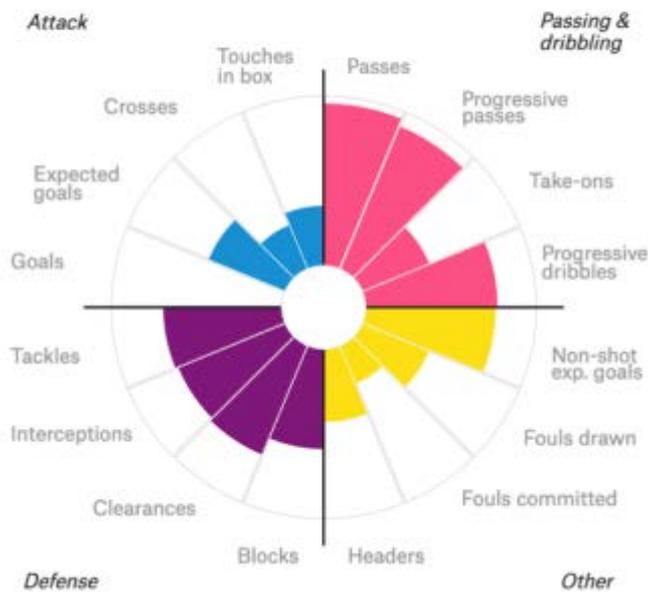


Furthermore, the deep progression metrics of that Champions League campaign (1988/1989) shows Baesi seating fourth in the unique rank, behind two attacking-minded midfielders (Donadoni and Rijkaard), and only one more conservative (Ancelotti); Baresi was crucial for the first stages of Milan attacking moves.



Franz Beckenbauer

TEAM: WEST GERMANY 1974
PLAY STYLE: UTILITY MAN

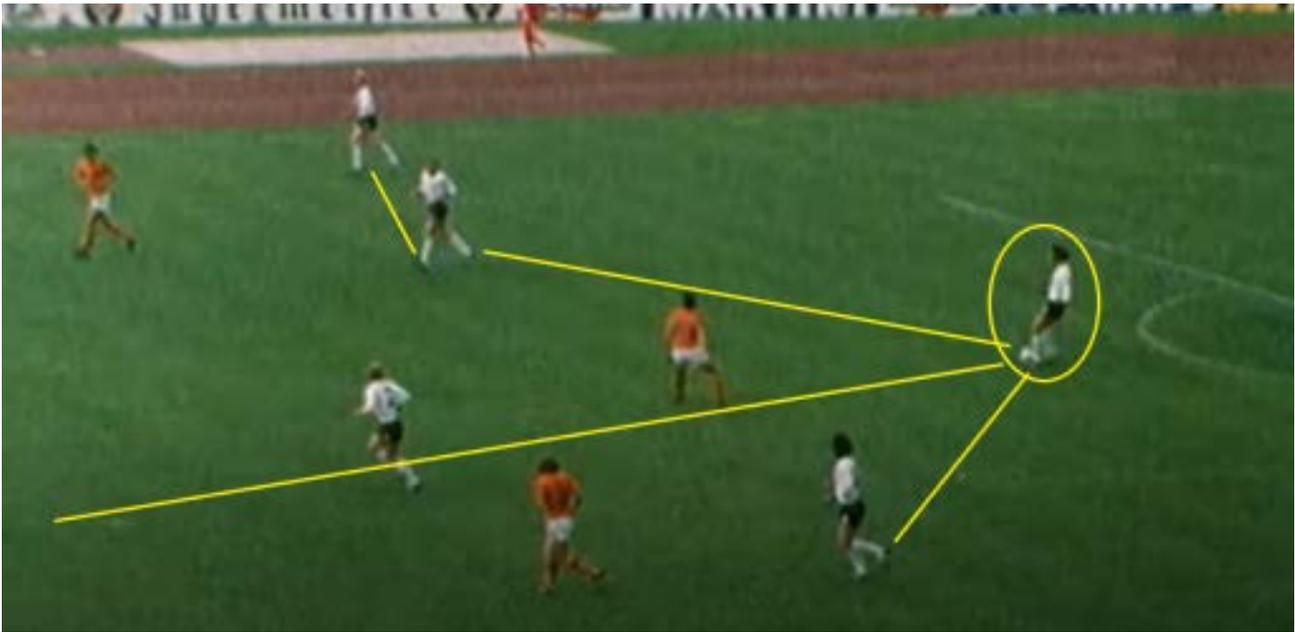


As we have already stated, Franz Beckenbauer played the same way more than a decade before Franco Baresi; we was a sweeper who usually joined the middle third sector for Bayern Munich, and West Germany National team.

The graphic beside shows some metrcis about his performances at the 1974 World Cup.

Passes, progressive passes, progressive dribbles, concerning all the other metrics confirm his centrality in the team's possession organization.

Furthermore, the high level of "possession metrics" didn't affect his defensive contribution, as the clearances, interceptions, and tackles demonstrate.



This first image showed the classic position of a sweeper when the team had the possession; Beckenbauer organized the building up phase at the back of the defensive line. In this first example, he played a long ground through pass to the middle third to cut off the opposition's pressure line.

On the other side was also a midfielder who took individual actions to drive the ball higher up in the field.



In this example, he didn't find passing options in the middle third, and he advanced with the ball between two opposition's midfielders, who were too far to be defensively effective.



As the opponents at the World Cup final pressed very high in the field, when the pressure lines were cut off, West Germany could find spaces to exploit like in this sequence where Beckenbauer could join the final third dribbling the ball past to the opponents one after the other.

Maybe more than Baresi, Franz Beckenbauer had finishing skills, and he was more "scorer" than the Italian' successor".



This is an example, as the opposition defended deep inside the first third.

Beckenbauer dribbled the ball to the center at a first stage after a corner kick, but he couldn't find any passing solutions toward the center; he maintained the possession, inviting the pressure of an opponent.

The opposition left fullback leaved his position to press but he opened a gap that Beckenbauer could exploit, as none of the opponents covered the space behind the fullback.



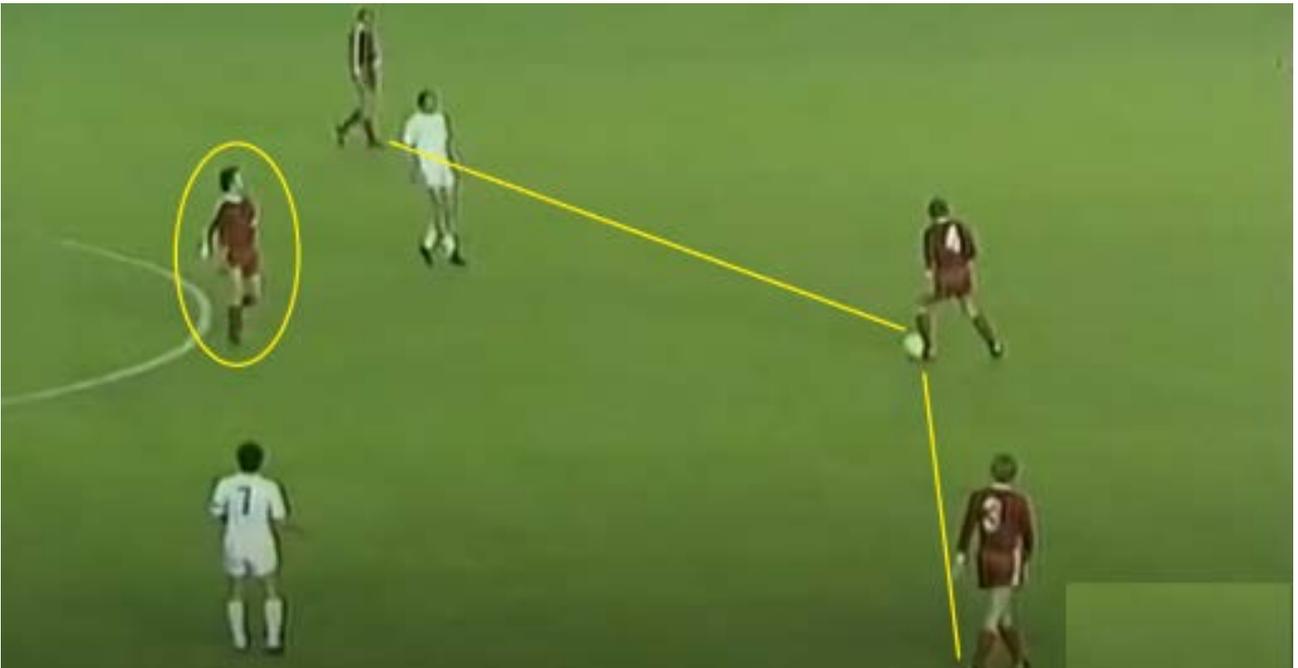
Indeed, he could dribble the ball inside the penalty area, and he scored, exploiting the space that the fullback opened, and the late defensive action of the center back.

As we have just realized, Beckenbauer could play both direct and indirect soccer.



In this example, he dribbled the ball through the middle third inviting the pressure of three opponents toward him, and opening a gap in the middle at the back of the pressing players.

Above all, Beckenbauer could join the middle third line in many ways, concerning the situation of play:



1. As a holding midfielder (he stood in front of a back three line and behind the three men midfield's sector)



2. As a box to box midfielder (he joined the midfielders' line dribbling the ball higher) of a 1-3-4-3 attacking formation.



3. Starting from a sweeper position, and exchanging the position with the teammate who would be considered as a holding midfielder nowadays (he dribbled the ball higher up, and he acted as a holding midfielder; the midfielder in front of him dropped back to cover his position, as they were outnumbered 3 v 2 in the middle, providing cover to his action.)



4. As a No.10 who scored goals cutting off the opposition's defensive lines.

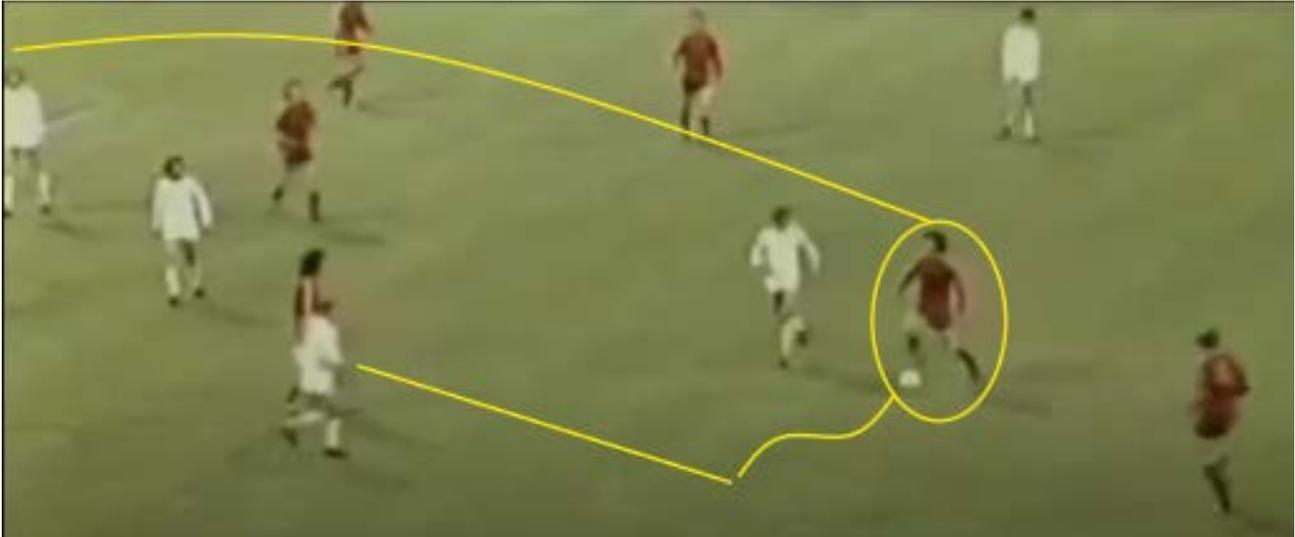
(In this sequence, Beckenbauer was able to dribble the ball until the final third through the center channel, and he dribbled past to a first opposition's defender.)



(he also dribbled past a second opponent and passes the ball inside the penalty area, providing an assist pass for a teammate to finish,



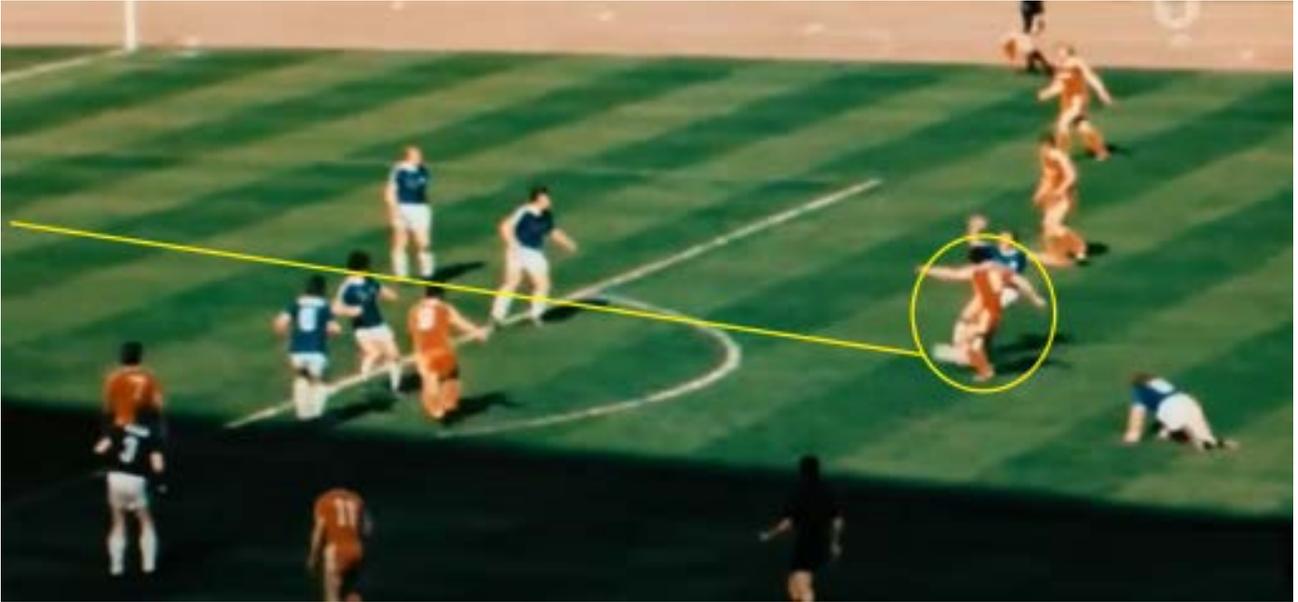
(and he also followed the final stage of the move inside the penalty area where he could win a second time of the ball after a rebound of the goalkeeper and he could score.)



5. As a second time of the ball winner (his position was effective to attack the second times of the ball, as in this situation when he recovered the ball after a goalkeeper's long kick, and passes beside to a teammate to build up a new attacking phase.)



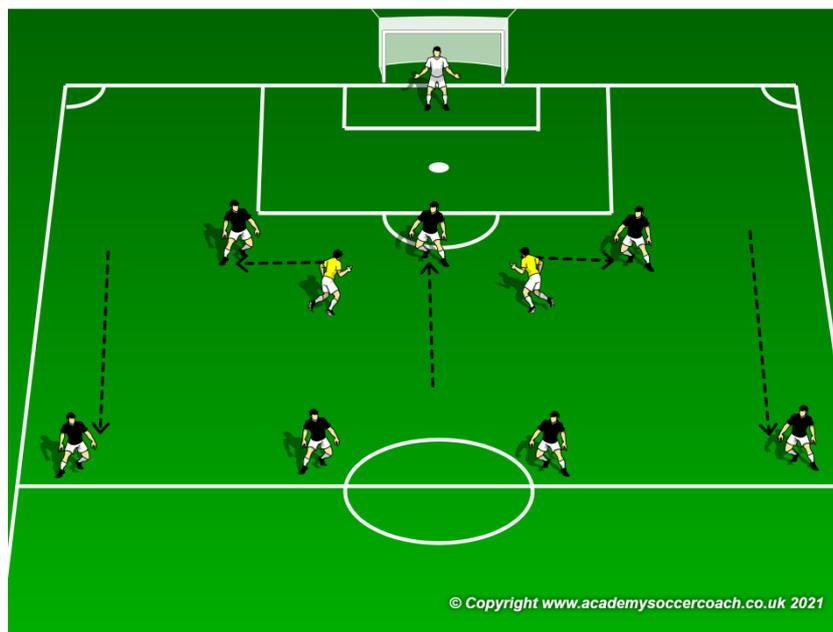
6. As an attacking midfielder, exploiting his shooting skills to score (when he found spaces through the center channel, he could finish the moves alone, and his skills allowed him to be effective in the finishing stages. Here he dribbled the ball higher up the middle third through the center, he dribbled past through two too far opponents,



and he shot on goal before the closest defender could tackle him.

The evolution of the building up from the back and the role of the center backs.

The very first recognized tactical solution to build up from the back was the "La Volpe Exit" or "La Salida Lavolpiana": the holding midfielder of a 1-4-3-3 dropped back to allow the center backs to shift wider and the fullbacks to push higher. The center backs were the link players between the holding midfielder and the fullbacks when they didn't play longer passes. The "La Volpe Exit" was the answer against the opposition's pressure line made of two strikers, providing numerical superiority at the back to play out.

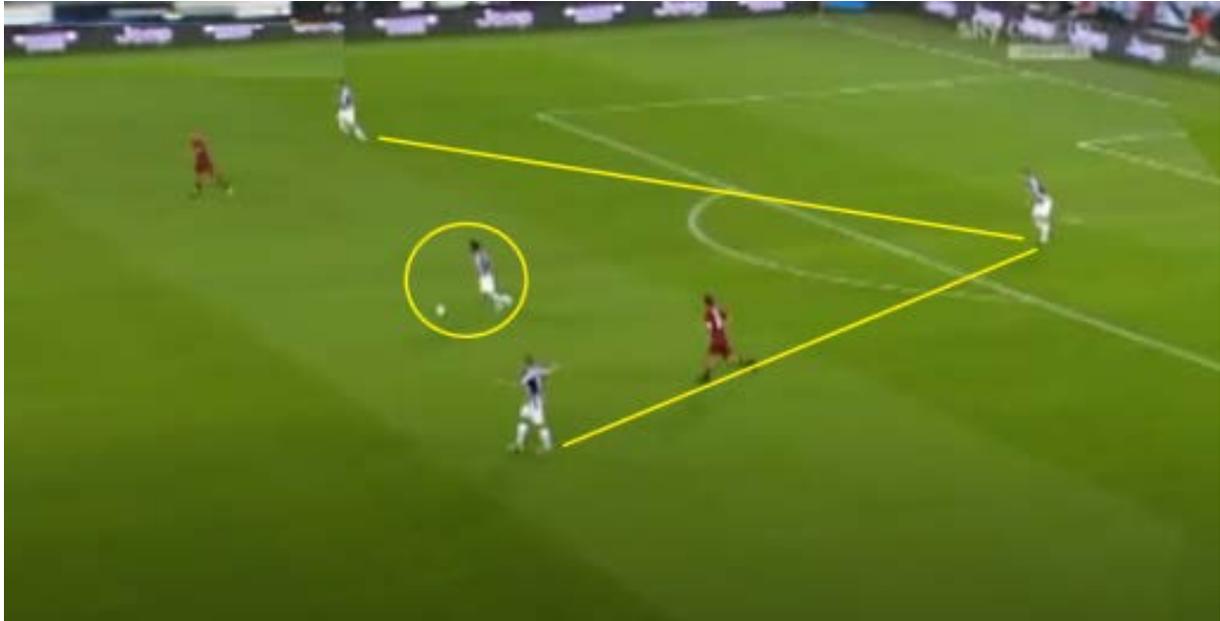


Otherwise this tactics has become useless against the mirror 1-4-3-3, as the two center backs already had the numerical superiority against the lonely opponent in the middle, and the goalkeeper provides a back passing option to move the opponents and find other passing solutions.



Furthermore, the holding midfielder was helpful if he stood being the pressure line, providing an option to play out from the first opposition's defensive line.

The back three defenses already included a builder of play without tactical changes at the very beginning of the attacking moves, like the 1-3-5-2, or the 1-3-4-3 systems of play. Antonio Conte at Juventus (2011-2014) and at Chelsea (2016-2018) gave us crucial examples thanks to Leonardo Bonucci at Juventus and David Luiz or Cahill at Chelsea.



The center backs were the focus of the building up phase, as the center defender acted as a deeper play maker, and the wide defenders were sideward support to develop the move alongside the touchlines.



The crucial difference between the systems was the role of the holding midfielder that was fixed for Juventus, exploiting the skills of Andrea Pirlo as a regista, and it was alternated at Chelsea, as both Kantè and Matic dropped back in that position.

The back three fixed both the issues we have just analyzed in the previous pages; the line between the center defender and the holding midfielder helped the playing out action against "two strikers opponents", and the wide defenders could easily receive when the lonely striker covered the passing lane to the center.

More recently the slight decrease of the pressure, and the deeper pressure lines of the defensive teams have allowed the center backs with the ball to dribble the ball higher up in the field, and contest the opposition's pressing strikers in duels.



In this example, the team with possession was building up in a 1-3-3-4 formation against a 1-4-3-3, and the three pressing opponents were far enough to allow the back three to exchange passes among the defenders.



When the left defender shifted out wide, the possession team overloaded the right side of the field. The defending team marked all them 1 v 1, and 2 players were out wide at the left side of the attacking team and the strikers pressed the center backs.

Overloading the right side and the wide player along the left flank opened a space through the left half-space.



As the center back didn't dribbled the ball through the half-space, but he dribble past the striker to the center of the field, one forward dropped back and he exploited the space in the middle, as two teammates shifted across the center to open it.

If the building up from the back phase once helped the possession team to open up spaces behind the pressure lines, the decrease of pressure phase in the final third, and the deeper defensive shapes allows the center back to dribble and stand higher inside the defensive half of the field, and the midfielders to create numerical superiorities inside more dangerous areas.



In this first example, the center back could stand wide as the opposition placed only one striker in front of them, and all the midfielder stood deeper.

The goalkeeper passed out wide to the left center back, and he invited the opposition to shift wide toward their defensive right side.

All the midfielders could stand higher up in the field, as they didn't have to help the building up phase.



The center backs exchanged the ball to invite the pressure of one more opponent and a third one behind the two who screened the center midfielder.

The possession team could place the midfield sector high up in the middle third, with one of them more advanced than the other three creating space for the center back and providing a passing option.

The wide positions of the midfielders created space to dribble the ball.



Indeed, the center back dribbled past the left opposition's striker and he joined the middle third, creating numerical superiority (4 v 3) against the opposition's three remaining players.



He played out wide to the right winger, after concentrating the pressure toward him in the center...



...and he received the ball from the winger in the center after inviting the pressure of the opponents toward their left half-space.

Thanks to the building up action of the center backs, the middle third and attacking lines could stand higher inside the opposition's half, and the pushing movement of the center back after the first combination of play provided an option to play out from the pressure area around the ball.

This move is very similar to the those by Baresi and Beckenbauer; by my side, the only real difference is the rhythm of play that the defensive teams nowadays force the opponents to use to play out from the back.



The center back passed again to the winger who tucked in from the right flank.

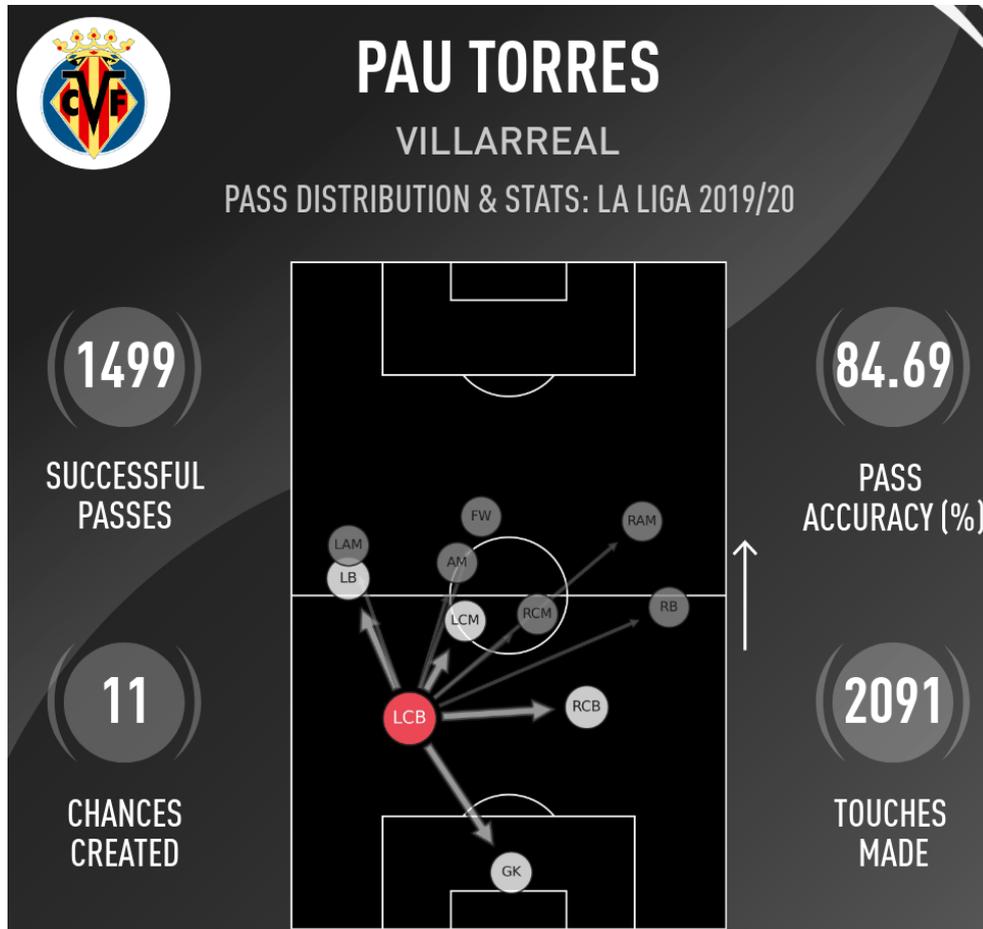
Apart from all the possible passing solutions, there are other factors that the center backs combinations and the following dribbling action of the right one have created:



1. The possession team stood inside the defensive one with few passes;
2. The possession team could exploit the overloaded area of the field at the left, after playing out from the pressure one at the right (this is the reason why the right winger tucked in;
3. The only opposition striker was already preventively marked 1 v 1;
4. The center back concentrated all the pressure on the ball, and there was space along the right flank for the fullback to run off the ball;
5. If the defensive team have recovered the ball, all the opponents were far from the goal, and scoring was difficult but in case of a quick counter-attacks;
6. On the other side, quick counter-attacks were difficult at the same time, as the potential defensive team had numerical advantage at the left side of the field, and four players were very close to the opponents at the right, despite a 4 v 5 numerical inferiority.

How do the center backs now take part to the possession phase?

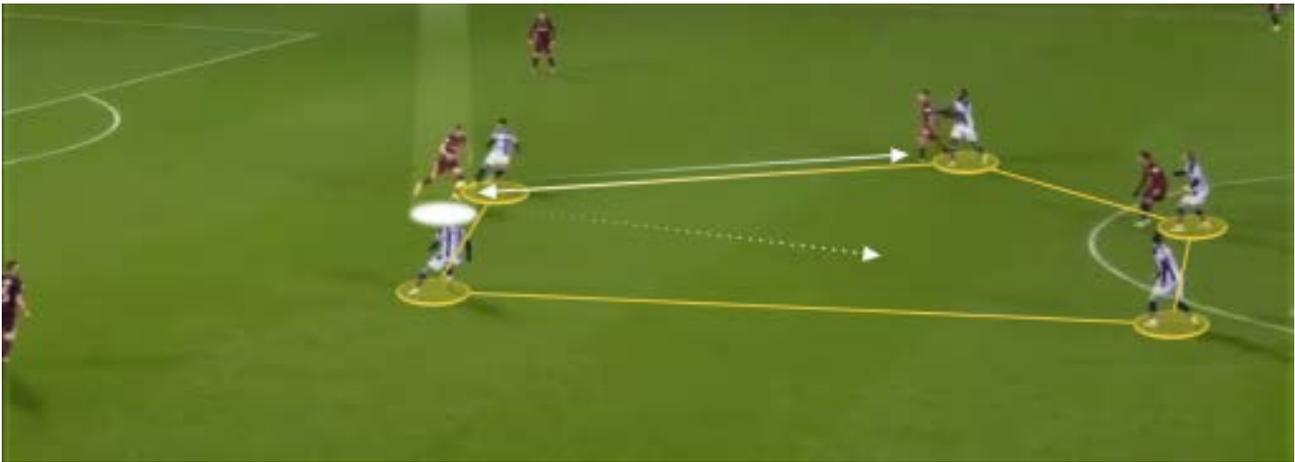
The center backs can now play progressive, smart and key passes much more than just few seasons ago; Luke Ayling, David Alaba, Dayot Upamecano and Virgil Van Dijk are three examples of these kind of center backs among many others over the past two seasons.



This above picture show the average position of Pau Torres, one of the rising center backs in Europe, and his midfielder style metrics confirm his centrality in the building up phase of Villarreal.



In this example, he had space to dribble the ball in front of him due to the lower defensive shape of the opponents



He dribbled the ball through that area, and he invited the pressure of two strikers; the opposition concentrated the pressure in the center channel, and the three forward passing options for the ball carrier were preventively under pressure.



Pau Torres exploited this pressure concentration, dribbling the ball at speed out of that zone and finding space behind the condensed area.



As all the opposition's midfielders marked the passing options 1 v 1, the center back found space to enter the final third and he could play a lifted pass behind the defensive line for the center striker to receive, after moving off the ball between the center back and the right fullback.

David Alaba often played as a left fullbacks under Hans-Dieter Flick in the building up phases, apart from the holding midfielder dropping back or not. The same did Jermoe Boateng along the right.



This example shows the typical situation of “La Salida Lavolpiana” creating a 4 v 3 duel at the back to overcome the pressure of three opposition’s strikers.

One midfielder dropped back between the center backs who shifted out wide, and the goalkeeper acted as a lower pivot of the four players; the aim was to move the opponents and find a gap to progress the ball through the thirds.

A second midfielder stood behind the pressure line, creating a passing lane to overcome the opponents up front.



The center backs shifted wider, and out of the half-spaces, and they made the pressure of the opposition's forwards ineffective, as the opponent in the center stood between the center midfielders. The center backs and the goalkeeper distributed the ball at the back, and despite the center backs were pressed 1 v 1, one of the center midfielders was ready to receive.

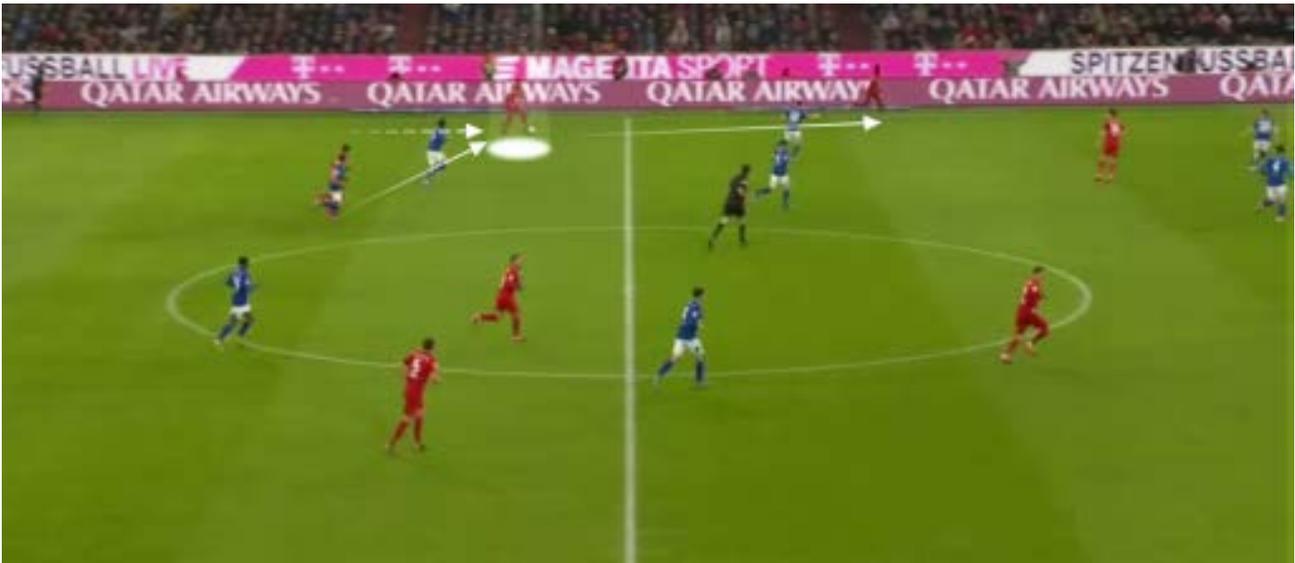
As Bayern couldn't find the way to play out, one of the midfielders dropped back again, and the third player of the midfield's trio dropped back also, to shape a lower triangle, allowing the center backs to act as fullbacks.



The new building up shape created a 5 + gk formation, and the three opposition's strikers were now properly outnumbered.

Bayern could now invite the pressure toward one side (the left half-space and flank), and despite they shifted out wide too, they were always outnumbered (4 + gk v 3), and the center midfielders behind the pressure line could receive, creating the passing lanes through the spaces among the opponents.

Wherever Bayern created the strong side, the triangular shape in the center, and the center backs wide as fullbacks would have allowed the team to play out; the left midfielder received, and Alaba was ready as wide passing option.



Alaba received and he passes forward to the winger along the left flank.

The 1-4-3-3 was just a formation on the paper for Flick's Bayern Munich. When the team attacked, the fullbacks became wingers, and the winger often tucked in to stand closer to the center backs.



In this attacking formation, the center backs had two different roles:

1. The right one, Boateng, stood behind all the lines to cover and defend the depth.
2. Alaba pushed higher to act as a second holding midfielder to concentrate the opposition's pressure in the center and free the channels along the flanks.
3. The left center back had the possession, and he played out wide to the left fullback, who could receive free from pressure.
4. The 1-2-4-3 attacking formation was all placed inside the opposition's half, and both the center backs could be considered as midfielders.
5. The tendency of the center backs to play very high in the field allows the midfielders, or a part of them to be effective support to the strikers up front.

Flick's Bayern could also build up isolating the center backs in 1 v 1 duels and placing the midfielders higher up in the field. In this example, the center backs were outnumbered in a 2 v 3 situation. The right center back passed the ball sideward before two opponents could press him, and Alaba received.



The left center back dribbled past the opponent in front of him and drove the ball higher up in the middle third.



The individual action of the center back allowed:

1. To place 7 player + 1 who could attack the opposition's defensive lines;
2. To create a strong side and free the opposite winger alongside the opposition's weak area;
3. To organize both a direct attack, if the winger could dribble the ball along the flank, and an indirect attack, as the seven players could maintain the ball inside the offensive half.

The second aim of the isolated duels of the center backs when they dribble the ball, and they face the opposition's striker through duels is to concentrate the pressure toward them, and to pass the ball to a free teammate inside the opposition half who can progress the move.

Upamecano has been a crucial example of this kind of player during the last few seasons, as RB Leipzig's center back in a 2 in the center or 3 men defense.



In this example, Upamecano dribbled the ball inside the offensive half, dribbling the ball between two opponents, and inviting their pressure and the pressure from another midfielder.



After entering the attacking half, he played out wide to the wingback, who received free from pressure, and exploited the missing dropping back run of the opposition's winger.



By moving higher up in the field the center backs also become support to the possession and attacking phases.

After passing out wide, Upamecano acted as inside option to create more space along the flank; he received, and he passed wide to the fullback who received and exploited the space that the winger created tucking in before the pass, as he made the opposition's left fullback busy.

Sometimes, the center backs becomes attackers by moving higher in the field, the center backs.



In this example, the right fullback had the possession down the flank, and he passed inside to winger, who previously tucked in. The center back moved along the opposition's defensive line, and he received in behind the back line as a center striker.

Otherwise, this second example is again about the duels of the center backs against the opposition's strikers to progress the moves.



The center back dribbled the ball past to the opposition's striker near the center cycle, and he passed to the center striker, who dropped back.



The center striker laid the ball back to the fullback along the flank.

The center back went on running off the ball, exploiting the condensed area around the ball that the center striker created. Only two opposition's center backs were saving the final third, as the majority of the players were pressing near the ball's zone.

The center back eventually received a long pass from the fullback behind the defenders.

Concentrating players around the ball, and the opposition's defensive shape close to the ball too, the attacking team created the space for the center back to move and receive free from pressure.

The center backs also become additional holding midfielders, providing support to the possession phase in the middle third.



In this situation, the right center back played out to the right flank to the fullback, and the winger attempted the creation of a 2 v 1 duel along the touchline with the right wide midfielder. The fullback didn't progress the move in that direction, but he passed to the center.



The center back provided support at the back, as the receiver was immediately pressed by three opponents.

This pressure action allowed the center back to receive, and dribble the ball higher without pressure.



He dribbled the ball high, and he passed to the center striker, who dropped back to gain a pocket of space to receive against the direct marker.

Sometimes, the center backs in the middle third become also strikers, having the chance to finish the attacking move.



The center back dribbled the ball higher up in the field, and he passed to the right winger, while the fullback pushed up along the flank to provide width.

The possession team was outnumbered near the ball, and the center back pushed higher off the ball to decrease the numerical inferiority near the ball.



He received from the fullback, and he dribbled the ball along the flank. He dribbled past two opponents, driving the ball toward the center. The right winger shifted out wide, inviting the winger to track him, and creating enough space for the ball carrier to dribble the ball toward the goal.



The center back exploited the space that the winger and the fullback created among the players of the opponent's defense, as they shifted out wide, inviting the fullback out of position.

That was the same space that the fullback could exploit by dribbling the ball.



Eventually, the center back could enter the penalty area, he shot on goal and score.

The center backs now have the freedom to play during the building up phases of play.



In this situation the left center back had the freedom to receive, as the opposite center back passed him the ball to overcome the pressure of an opponent, the holding midfielder invited the pressure of a second striker, and the third opposition's attacker was too far to press him while receiving.

As the opponents were defensively narrow in the center, the flank was empty, and there was enough space to progress the move.

A center back would be expected to pass the ball out wide to the fullback; but the tendency is now to let them advancing with the ball to allow the teammates to stand higher.



The center back dribbled the ball out wide, and the fullback pushed higher off the ball to stand along the same line of the attackers. The center striker received.



Dribbling the ball high, and distributing inside the half-space, the fullback had enough time to join the attackers line up front, and the center back became the back support for the attacking move, like an advanced play maker.

In this footage he passed to the right winger, who had the time to turn and create a 2 v 2 duel with the fullback inside the opposition's weak side at the right.

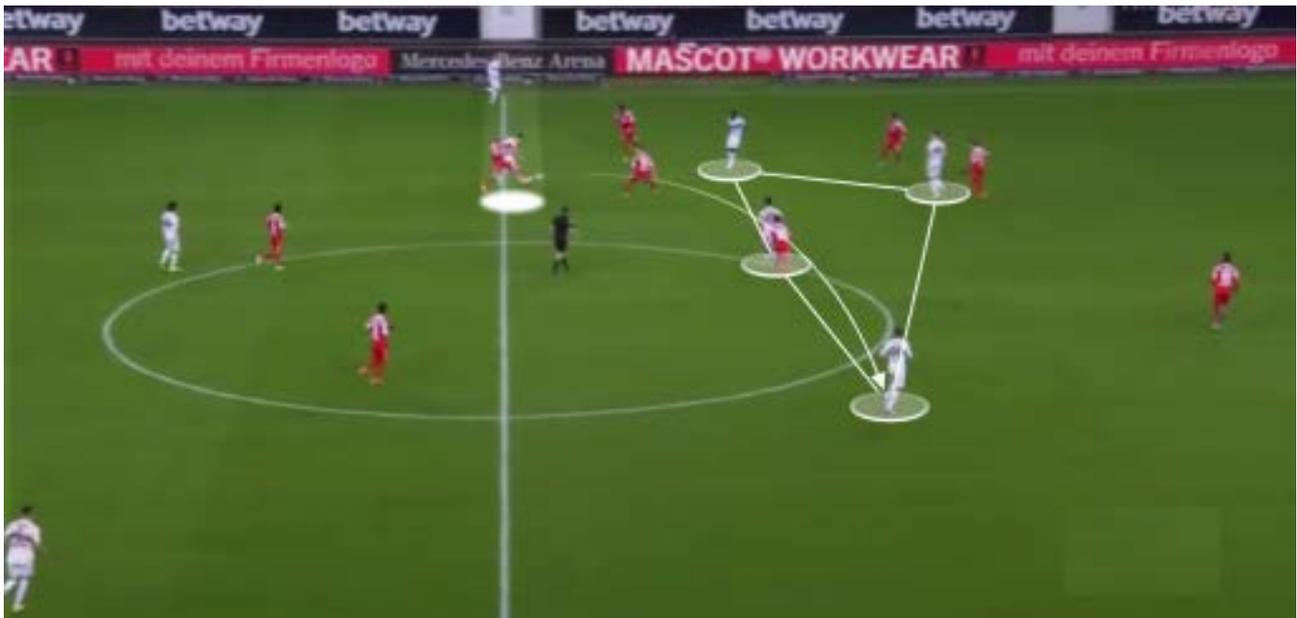
At first, the building up shape of the team could seem like many would expect, with an holding midfielders receiving behind the pressure line and the fullback providing width. Otherwise, the holding midfielder has the task to make an opponent busy, as in this example, to free one of the center back, who usually is the one on the side where the fullback is not potentially pressed by a striker.



In this example, the left winger was close to the right fullback of the defensive shape. The center striker was in front of the center back, and the left winger screened the holding midfielder. The left center back could receive.



Despite the left winger could attempt a pressure phase moving away from the holding midfielder, the center back with the ball dribble the ball higher and past the opponent; this way, the midfield's triangle didn't lose space in the field.



The left center back, the left fullback, and two strikers created a strong area near the ball, and the ball carrier could switch the side toward a free midfielder at the right.



The right midfielder could dribble the ball higher in the field toward the final third, and the ball carrier could face the opposition's goal with three teammates up front.

Another midfielder received behind the pressing opponent of the ball carrier with a cut run through the center channel, and he also could face the goal after the first touch.

To sum up the center back main tasks during the building up phases, these are:



1. To exploit the space in front of them, rather than passing the ball to a teammate inside that space.



2. To allow the midfielders to join the teammates up front and play attacking phases in a more direct way than with persistent passing combinations.

2020/2021 statistics of center back possession phase

Player	Team	Position	Passes p90	Acc.%	Av. length (m)
E. Tapsoba	Bayer Leverkusen	LCB	80,51	91,99	21,87
Sergio Ramos	Real Madrid	LCB, RCB	74,92	93,57	21,34
Rúben Dias	Manchester City	LCB, RCB	73,81	94,52	20,62
D. Upamecano	RB Leipzig	CB, LCB, RCB	73,1	90,37	22,08
C. Lenglet	Barcelona	LCB	72,74	93,45	19,69
M. Hummels	Borussia Dortmund	LCB, CB	72,01	90,65	23,07
J. Stones	Manchester City	RCB	71,22	95,35	18,95
Thiago Silva	Chelsea	LCB, CB, RCB	70,18	94,71	20,44
V. van Dijk	Liverpool	LCB	70,17	90,41	25,24
M. Halstenberg	RB Leipzig	LCB, LB	70,12	88,37	19,33
K. Zouma	Chelsea	RCB, LCB, CB	69,17	93,75	20,13
J. Boateng	Bayern München	RCB, LCB	68,94	90,22	23,44
A. Rüdiger	Chelsea	LCB	68,6	92,28	20,87
K. Koulibaly	Napoli	LCB	67,46	89,49	20,97
D. Alaba	Bayern München	LCB, LDMF, LB	66,78	87,35	19,42
M. Ginter	Borussia M'gladbach	RCB	65,12	88,63	20,41
W. Orban	RB Leipzig	CB, RCB	62,03	90,03	20,06
Marquinhos	PSG	RCB, DMF, LCB	61,73	93,06	19,4
J. Koundé	Sevilla	RCB	60,82	91,86	19,27
P. Kimpembe	PSG	LCB	60,34	95,25	18,01
Pau Torres	Villarreal	LCB	59,34	91,94	20,98
H. Maguire	Manchester United	LCB	58,61	90,39	21,35
José Fonte	Lille	RCB	57,5	92,46	20,99
L. Ayling	Leeds United	RB, RCB	56,79	80,64	21,92
M. Kempf	Stuttgart	LCB	53,01	85,89	20,8

Player	Fwd p90	Acc.%	Back p90	Acc.%
E. Tapsoba	27,64	82,75	6,09	95,65
Sergio Ramos	27,2	88,42	2,89	96,15
Rúben Dias	24,14	89,28	3,17	95,89
D. Upamecano	22,48	81,18	5,06	95,56
C. Lenglet	28,89	88,26	3,13	94,84
M. Hummels	22,29	78,99	3,04	94,9
J. Stones	22,56	90,68	3,98	96,89
Thiago Silva	24,3	89,59	2,81	95,04
V. van Dijk	23,05	78,4	3,41	97,3
M. Halstenberg	24,53	80,76	8,88	96,09
K. Zouma	22,04	86,68	3,94	98,69
J. Boateng	22,87	78,63	2,95	96,46
A. Rüdiger	24,25	81,81	4,12	98,51
K. Koulibaly	30,76	82,8	2,22	91,49
D. Alaba	23,37	78,44	6,29	92,67
M. Ginter	24,67	79,43	5,07	97,11
W. Orban	22,94	81,53	3,98	94,15
Marquinhos	21,26	86,42	3,11	94,61
J. Koundé	24,49	86,48	4,07	97,74
P. Kimpembe	21,87	91,91	3,19	96,57
Pau Torres	22,31	84,83	2,94	96,99
H. Maguire	21,55	81,77	1,99	94,66
José Fonte	19,7	84,38	2,71	96,06
L. Ayling	24,14	72,16	5,21	92,42
M. Kempf	23,01	78,04	3,25	94,74

Note: I would like the readers to look at the next tables, as some info about the best center backs from an offensive point of view, taking them as preparatory to the next chapter that defines a KPI for this role or position, providing examples of the best players for the specific metrics.

Player	Lateral p90	Acc. %	Long p.90	Acc. %	Average long length (m)
E. Tapsoba	41,48	97,82	5,76	63,98	40,69
Sergio Ramos	37,09	97,3	7,19	74,23	40,71
Rúben Dias	39,93	97,83	4,97	60,47	36,61
D. Upamecano	39,65	95,57	8,6	73,04	38,49
C. Lenglet	32,18	97,8	4,54	59,11	38,33
M. Hummels	42,21	96,65	7,99	59,32	39,57
J. Stones	36,49	98,37	3,39	64,23	32,93
Thiago Silva	37,04	98,18	5,64	68,31	39,49
V. van Dijk	39,19	97,18	9,5	54,37	49,36
M. Halstenberg	27,34	93,27	5,55	66,88	31,5
K. Zouma	37,02	97,01	5,1	65,15	39,85
J. Boateng	38,6	96,34	8,57	57,93	39,45
A. Rüdiger	32,62	98,43	6,03	56,46	41,25
K. Koulibaly	28,33	96,75	8,03	58,24	39,47
D. Alaba	28,75	93,3	6,7	55,04	37,42
M. Ginter	28,42	93,92	8,91	58,24	36,32
W. Orban	28,71	96,01	5,3	60,8	34,44
Marquinhos	29,85	97,19	4,73	63,39	37,2
J. Koundé	25,09	96,55	4,3	62,82	36,87
P. Kimpembe	26,69	98,36	1,62	55,06	30,52
Pau Torres	28	96,84	5,62	63,41	39,39
H. Maguire	29,7	96,67	5,48	63,33	41,43
José Fonte	29,57	97,4	5,11	64,85	39,94
L. Ayling	21,03	87,66	9,19	54,03	40,26
M. Kempf	21,21	92,19	7,36	57,75	41,08

Player	Smart p90	Acc. %	Progressive p90	Acc %	Key p90	To final 3rd p90	Acc %
M. Halstenberg	0,38	27,27	13,25	80,37	0,42	10,2	84,01
L. Ayling	0,49	40	13,1	74,72	0,32	9,32	65,78
K. Koulibaly	0,14	16,67	12,43	74,71	0,07	9,9	73,75
M. Ginter	0,18	36,36	11,97	77,79	0,28	8,27	71,01
D. Upamecano	0,16	28,57	11,81	75,05	0,07	9,41	80,86
E. Tapsoba	0,35	25	11,72	77,4	0,07	8,45	80,16
J. Boateng	0,24	11,11	11,5	81,36	0,18	12,2	72,81
M. Kempf	0,23	12,5	11,36	73,87	0,14	9,39	70,21
D. Alaba	0,51	45,16	11,07	79,76	0,46	10,33	75,6
C. Lenglet	0,28	57,14	10,82	81,34	0,06	10,58	84,92
V. van Dijk	0,18	0	10,7	81,03	0,09	12,63	67,88
Sergio Ramos	0,19	60	10,45	82,62	0,19	10,75	83,79
M. Hummels	0,14	42,86	10,45	74,44	0,14	9,09	71,28
W. Orban	0,11	40	10,42	76,02	0,06	8,11	81,46
Rúben Dias	0,06	50	9,57	83,38	0,04	8,43	84,56
J. Koundé	0,24	38,46	9,35	79,92	0,15	6,88	81,28
A. Rüdiger	0,25	41,67	9,01	77,22	0,08	9,07	79,41
Pau Torres	0,35	30	8,9	77,89	0,09	6,95	76,53
Thiago Silva	0,09	50	8,77	82,8	0,09	7,4	81,19
H. Maguire	0,18	75	8,77	73,96	0,11	7,64	79,08
K. Zouma	0,03	0	8,5	76,67	0	6,49	77,38
José Fonte	0,09	75	7,88	79,67	0,09	5,56	80,38
Marquinhos	0,17	33,33	7,84	79,81	0,06	7,83	81,43
J. Stones	0,2	62,5	6,68	78,52	0	6,63	87,31
P. Kimpembe	0,04	50	6,09	73,95	0,07	5,24	88,85

Player	Through p90	Acc %	Deep completed crosses p90	Passes to penalty area p90	Acc. %
M. Halstenberg	0,76	22,73	0,59	2,08	50
L. Ayling	1,11	31,11	0,86	2,72	41,82
K. Koulibaly	0,76	37,5	0,07	0,9	42,11
M. Ginter	0,93	29,82	0,44	1,79	41,82
D. Upamecano	0,61	37,04	0,09	0,7	38,71
E. Tapsoba	0,79	41,67	0,07	0,71	50
J. Boateng	1,67	32,81	0,16	1,93	37,84
M. Kempf	1,43	34	0,11	1,28	44,44
D. Alaba	1,76	41,12	0,71	3,15	50,79
C. Lenglet	0,71	31,43	0,06	0,71	57,14
V. van Dijk	1,11	33,33	0	0,83	11,11
Sergio Ramos	0,59	12,5	0,07	0,56	40
M. Hummels	1,32	32,35	0	1,1	35,09
W. Orban	0,38	33,33	0,11	0,76	50
Rúben Dias	0,38	30,77	0,06	0,4	42,86
J. Koundé	0,64	37,14	0,15	0,77	40,48
A. Rüdiger	0,76	32,43	0,04	0,76	37,84
Pau Torres	0,55	22,58	0,02	0,48	33,33
Thiago Silva	0,67	51,72	0,09	0,81	51,43
H. Maguire	0,37	37,5	0,02	0,59	48,72
K. Zouma	0,33	23,08	0	0,33	23,08
José Fonte	0,3	28,57	0,09	0,53	48
Marquinhos	0,76	34,15	0,07	0,61	63,64
J. Stones	0,17	42,86	0,02	0,2	62,5
P. Kimpembe	0,05	33,33	0,05	0,13	57,14

Player	Succ. attacks p90	Progr. runs p90	Dribbles p90	Succ %	Crosses p90	Acc %	Touches in box p90
Sergio Ramos	1,22	1,13	0,41	76,92	0,16	40	1,25
Marquinhos	0,6	0,88	0,32	58,82	0,11	66,67	0,91
W. Orban	0,72	1,59	0,44	61,9	0,4	36,84	0,91
M. Hummels	0,7	1,1	0,39	70	0,06	0	1,03
J. Stones	0,6	2,14	0,6	53,85	0,05	50	0,53
K. Zouma	0,49	1,12	0,41	47,37	0	0	0,77
V. van Dijk	0,49	0,97	0,27	40	0	0	0,7
M. Halstenberg	1,67	1,84	1,08	61,29	1,53	38,64	1,39
J. Koundé	1,4	1,54	1,55	60,22	0,68	21,95	1,17
M. Kempf	1,4	1,31	1,4	79,59	0,37	30,77	0,51
José Fonte	0,6	0,51	0,3	71,43	0,26	41,67	0,9
Thiago Silva	0,38	1,11	0,23	80	0,16	42,86	0,45
J. Boateng	0,44	0,9	0,23	44,44	0,56	36,36	0,36
M. Ginter	1,01	1,16	0,51	64,52	1,14	40	0,8
Pau Torres	0,97	2,24	0,98	72,58	0,05	66,67	0,56
Rúben Dias	0,48	1,72	0,34	64	0,08	66,67	0,67
D. Upamecano	1,33	1,4	1,49	62,12	0,27	33,33	0,77
D. Alaba	1,76	2,07	0,97	56,67	1,55	45,83	0,81
E. Tapsoba	0,91	1,08	0,86	65	0,19	33,33	0,65
H. Maguire	0,71	2,42	0,52	69,23	0,12	11,11	0,96
C. Lenglet	0,76	1,72	0,54	73,33	0,11	50	0,4
K. Koulibaly	0,75	1,52	1	59,62	0,21	27,27	0,52
A. Rüdiger	0,67	1,46	0,42	73,91	0,15	37,5	0,64
P. Kimpembe	0,58	0,77	0,73	67,5	0,07	75	0,35
L. Ayling	2,66	2,64	1,97	68,09	2,41	37,39	1,34

Player	xA	xA p90	Assists	Assists p90	Shots	Shots p90	on target, %	Conv rate %
Sergio Ramos	1,06	0,03	1	0,03	44	1,38	52,27	20,455
Marquinhos	0,4	0,01	1	0,02	28	0,52	53,57	35,714
W. Orban	0,94	0,02	1	0,02	28	0,59	42,86	25
M. Hummels	0,7	0,01	1	0,02	41	0,79	46,34	14,634
J. Stones	0,18	0	1	0,02	16	0,37	37,5	31,25
K. Zouma	0,01	0	0	0	30	0,64	43,33	16,667
V. van Dijk	0,68	0,04	0	0	11	0,59	63,64	18,182
M. Halstenberg	1,86	0,06	2	0,07	26	0,9	34,62	7,692
J. Koundé	1,81	0,03	1	0,02	35	0,58	40	11,429
M. Kempf	0,98	0,03	1	0,03	17	0,49	29,41	11,765
José Fonte	0,41	0,01	0	0	24	0,51	41,67	12,5
Thiago Silva	1,29	0,03	0	0	14	0,32	28,57	14,286
J. Boateng	0,74	0,02	1	0,03	7	0,18	57,14	28,571
M. Ginter	2,62	0,04	3	0,05	27	0,44	37,04	11,111
Pau Torres	0,6	0,01	3	0,05	19	0,3	36,84	15,789
Rúben Dias	0,82	0,01	1	0,01	22	0,3	50	18,182
D. Upamecano	0,76	0,02	0	0	18	0,41	66,67	11,111
D. Alaba	7,37	0,12	6	0,1	54	0,87	31,48	5,556
E. Tapsoba	1,13	0,02	0	0	26	0,56	30,77	7,692
H. Maguire	0,79	0,01	1	0,01	52	0,7	28,85	5,769
C. Lenglet	0,6	0,01	0	0	20	0,36	45	10
K. Koulibaly	0,48	0,01	0	0	19	0,37	15,79	5,263
A. Rüdiger	0,95	0,02	2	0,04	31	0,57	38,71	3,226
P. Kimpembe	0,98	0,02	0	0	7	0,13	14,29	0
L. Ayling	3,26	0,07	1	0,02	29	0,61	34,48	0

Player	xG	xG p90	Goals	Goals p90	Non-pen g	Non-pen g p90	Head g	Head g p90
Sergio Ramos	10,53	0,33	9	0,28	3	0,09	3	0,09
Marquinhos	6,33	0,12	10	0,19	10	0,19	6	0,11
W. Orban	5,75	0,12	7	0,15	7	0,15	5	0,11
M. Hummels	7,33	0,14	6	0,12	6	0,12	3	0,06
J. Stones	3,01	0,07	5	0,12	5	0,12	1	0,02
K. Zouma	4,12	0,09	5	0,11	5	0,11	4	0,09
V. van Dijk	1,14	0,06	2	0,11	2	0,11	2	0,11
M. Halstenberg	3,16	0,11	2	0,07	1	0,03	0	0
J. Koundé	5,67	0,09	4	0,07	4	0,07	1	0,02
M. Kempf	1,42	0,04	2	0,06	2	0,06	1	0,03
José Fonte	3,24	0,07	3	0,06	3	0,06	2	0,04
Thiago Silva	1,87	0,04	2	0,05	2	0,05	2	0,05
J. Boateng	0,76	0,02	2	0,05	2	0,05	2	0,05
M. Ginter	3,44	0,06	3	0,05	3	0,05	2	0,03
Pau Torres	3,27	0,05	3	0,05	3	0,05	1	0,02
Rúben Dias	4,13	0,06	4	0,05	4	0,05	2	0,03
D. Upamecano	2,17	0,05	2	0,05	2	0,05	1	0,02
D. Alaba	3,91	0,06	3	0,05	3	0,05	0	0
E. Tapsoba	3,26	0,07	2	0,04	2	0,04	1	0,02
H. Maguire	6,94	0,09	3	0,04	3	0,04	2	0,03
C. Lenglet	2,97	0,05	2	0,04	2	0,04	2	0,04
K. Koulibaly	2,81	0,05	1	0,02	1	0,02	0	0
A. Rüdiger	2,74	0,05	1	0,02	1	0,02	0	0
P. Kimpembe	0,52	0,01	0	0	0	0	0	0
L. Ayling	3,01	0,06	0	0	0	0	0	0

The Kpi of the a modern center back when his team attacks (transitions to attack, possession and consolidations phases, finishing stage, counter-attacks, and goal contribution (from set pieces and not)

- Passes p90 and accuracy



E. Tapsoba	Bayer Leverkusen	LCB	80,51	91,99	21,87
Sergio Ramos	Real Madrid	LCB, RCB	74,92	93,57	21,34
Rúben Dias	Manchester City	LCB, RCB	73,81	94,52 acc%	20,62

- Long passes p90 and accuracy



E. Tapsoba	41,48	97,82	5,76	63,98	40,69
Sergio Ramos	37,09	97,3	7,19	74,23 acc%	40,71
Rúben Dias	39,93	97,83	4,97	60,47	36,61



- Progressive p90 and accuracy



M. Halstenberg	0,38	27,27	13,25	80,37 acc%	0,42	10,2 to f. 3rd per game	84,01
L. Ayling	0,49	40	13,1	74,72	0,32	9,32	65,78
K. Koulibaly	0,14	16,67	12,43	74,71	0,07	9,9	73,75



- Passes to final third



J. Boateng	0,24	11,11	11,5	81,36	0,18	12,2	72,81
V. van Dijk	0,18	0	10,7	81,03	0,09	12,63 to f.3rd per game	67,88
Sergio Ramos	0,19	60	10,45	82,62	0,19	10,75	83,79



- Progressive runs p90



M. Halstenberg	1,67	1,84	1,08	61,29	1,53	38,64	1,39
D. Alaba	1,76	2,07	0,97	56,67	1,55	45,83	0,81
L. Ayling	2,66 att. per game	2,64 progr. per game	1,97	68,09	2,41	37,39	1,34

- Successful attacking actions and assists p90





Player	xA	xA p90	Assists	Assists p90	Shots	Shots p90	on target, %	Conv rate %
Sergio Ramos	1,06	0,03	1	0,03	44	1,38	52,27	20,455
M. Hummels	0,7	0,01	1	0,02	41	0,79	46,34	14,634
D. Alaba	7,37	0,12	6	0,1	54	0,87	31,48	5,556
H. Maguire	0,79	0,01	1	0,01	52	0,7	28,85	5,769



- Goals during the season





Player	xG	xG p90	Goals	Goals p90	Non-pen g	Non-pen g p90	Head g	Head g p90
Sergio Ramos	10,53	0,33	9	0,28	3	0,09	3	0,09
Marquinhos	6,33	0,12	10	0,19	10	0,19	6	0,11
W. Orban	5,75	0,12	7	0,15	7	0,15	5	0,11

Summary

The positions and the roles of the center backs have developed over the last few seasons, concerning all the phases of play when their teams have the ball. From a starting role of the moves, and support tasks during the possession phases, they are now intergal part of team in all the phases of play.

The cruciality of their techcnial skills are evident, since players like Ruben Dias or David Alaba are considered two of the best center backs all around the world; the center backs are not only markers anymore, but they are considered at the highest level when they are able to transform the action from defensive into offensive; the metrics to analyze them are the proves.

The averages of tackles, interceptions, have developed into “possession adjust” tackles and interceptions; indeed the defensive action shouldn’t be only a stop of the opposition’s attacks, but they must be tools to win the ball and attack. For this reason, the attacking skills of the center backs are now vital for the style of play like those of all the other players in the squad.

This book takes into consideration all the factors that highlight the center back as attacking players, and its aim is to be completed as much as possible. Apart from this consideration, this book contains:

- The historical approach to the attacking center backs, talking about Franco Baresi and Kaiser Franz Beckenbauer;
- The evolution of the building up from the back and the role of the center backs;
- The active role of the center backs in the possession phase nowadays;
- 2020/2021 statistics of center back possession phase;
- The Kpi of the a modern center back when his team attacks.