

# TACTICAL SITUATION 8



## Positioning and Defensive Movements of the Front Block

**The content in this section is from analysis of Diego Simeone's Atlético Madrid teams during the 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 seasons.**

The analysis is based on recurring patterns of play observed within the Atlético Madrid team. Once the same phase of play occurred several times (at least 10), the tactics would be seen as a pattern. The analysis on the following pages are examples of the team's tactics being used effectively.

Each action, pass, individual movement with or without the ball, and the positioning of each player on the pitch including their body shape, are presented.

The analysis is then used to create a session to coach this specific tactical situation.

# HOW THE OPPOSITION CAN EXPLOIT THE "CRUCIAL CENTRAL AREA"



The forwards and the midfielders make the front block of a team.

For Diego Simeone's Atlético Madrid, the players in the front block work in perfect harmony. They shift according to the position of the ball with the aim of defending the crucial central area.

The **Crucial Central Area** is the central area between the midfield and defensive lines of the team (rear block). This area is very important and if the opposing team manages to find space and time on the ball within it, there is a great opportunity for them to then play a final pass or shoot at goal (if in final third).

In the diagram above, Atlético are defending within the middle third. The white opposing team manages to find a way to move the ball to a player within the crucial central area and that player (No.8) has space and time on the ball.

In this situation, it is easy for the white central midfielder No.8 to pass in behind the defensive line (final pass) for one of his team-mates (forward No.9 in diagram), who makes a diagonal run.

If this situation takes place closer to Atlético's goal, No.8 can also shoot instead of passing.

## MAIN AIM OF THE FRONT BLOCK

The main aim of Atlético Madrid's front block is to protect the **"Crucial Central Area."**

To succeed in this main aim, the Atlético players have to succeed in other smaller aims, which are fully analysed on the following pages...

### 1ST AIM: NARROWING THE PASSING LANES TO PREVENT THROUGH PASSES

There are many small aims which all add up to being successful in main aims as a team. For the 1st aim of "Narrowing the Passing Lanes to Prevent Through Passes," the following smaller aims are very important:

- As the players in the front block (forwards and midfielders) shift according to the position of the ball, they have to make sure that the through passing lanes are kept narrow.
- Narrowing the passing lanes can be achieved by retaining a safety distance from the player in possession.
- The horizontal cohesion (compactness) of the midfielders enables them to react, shift and block any possible through passes attempted.
- The further away the player in possession is from the midfielders, the larger the distances can be between each midfielder.
- A very important element in succeeding with this aim is controlling both centre backs, which limits their available space when they receive the ball. This means that they will have to pass the ball forward from a relatively long distance, which gives the Atlético Madrid midfielders more time to react to potential through passes.
- If the forwards allow the opposing centre backs more space than they should, they can move forward with the ball, reduce their distance from the Atlético midfielders and make a pass from a shorter distance which increases their chances of success.

## 1. Positioning of the Front Block to Prevent Through Passes with the Ball in the Centre



The white centre back No.4 is pressed by **Griezmann (7)**, while the other forward **Torres (9)** is in a balanced position to control both the potential through pass and the other centre back No.5.

The Atlético midfielders retain the appropriate compactness according to the distance they are from the player in possession.

This enables them to keep the passing lanes narrow and make a successful through pass almost impossible.

## 2. Positioning of the Front Block to Prevent Through Passes with the Ball Near the Side-line



When the pass is played towards the full back No.2 near the side-line, the players shift towards the ball. The through passing lane is narrowed by the central midfielder **Gabi (14)**, so the ball cannot be passed to an opponent within the **Crucial Central Area**.

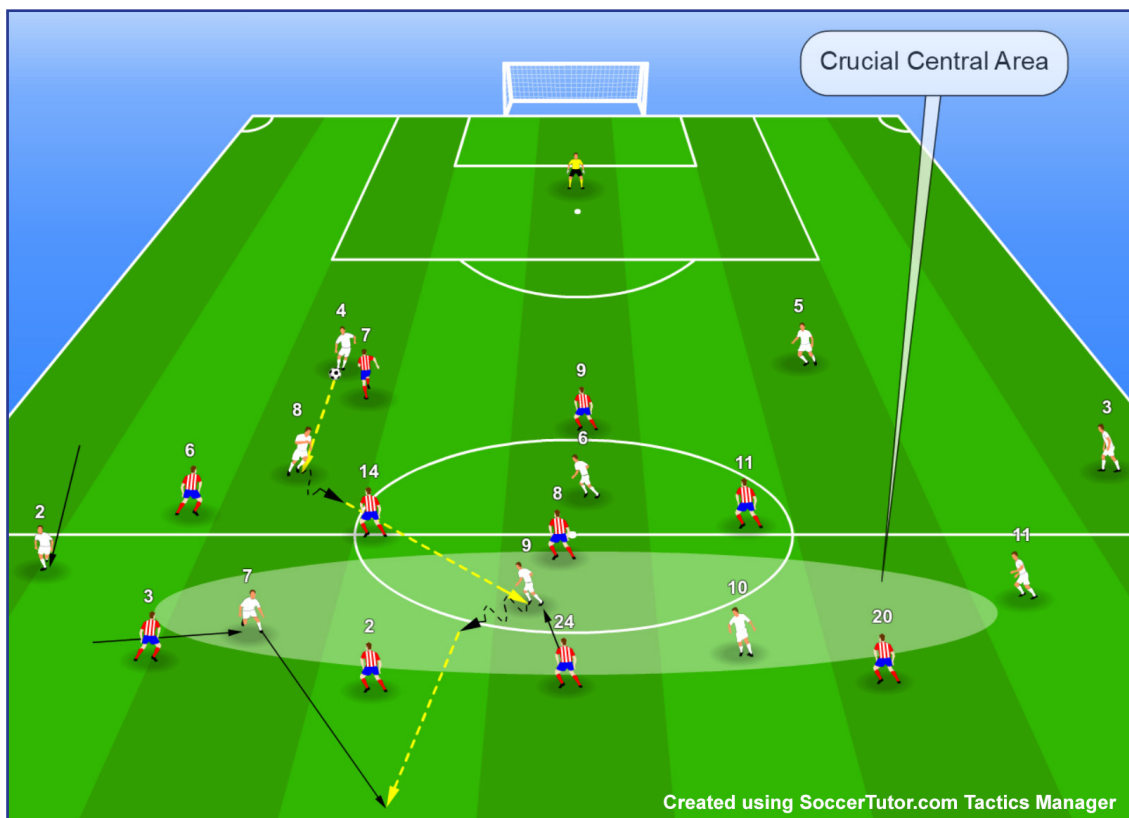
However, the forward pass to a player down the line is left open. This option is neutralised by mechanisms activated by Atlético's rear block, which will be analysed fully later in the book.

## 2ND AIM: LIMITING THE AVAILABLE SPACE BETWEEN THE FORWARD AND MIDFIELD LINES

The second aim of Atlético's front block is to keep the space between the forward and midfield lines limited, so the opponents positioned within the **Crucial Central Area** can be immediately put under pressure and prevented from turning if they receive.

If an opposing midfielder receives within the **Crucial Central Area** and manages to turn without pressure, he is highly likely to play a through pass, as the Atlético midfield line will no longer be at a good safety distance.

### 1. How the Opposition Can Receive, Turn Between the Lines and Play a Final Pass in Behind



In the diagram above, the opposing central midfielder (white No.8) receives, turns, and passes forward to a team-mate (No.9) positioned inside the **Crucial Central Area**.

It is easy for the white forward No.9 to play a final pass for one of his team-mates (winger No.7 in diagram), who makes a diagonal run.

## 2. Adjusting the Positioning of the Front Block to Limit the Available Space Between the Lines



In the section "Tactical Situation 4 - Positioning and Defensive Movements of the Midfielders," we showed the shape of the Atlético midfielders during the defensive phase. However, this shape is sometimes affected.

For example, when the distance between the Atlético forwards and midfielders is too large to prevent an opposing midfielder from receiving and turning in between the 2 lines, the Atlético midfielders have to move forward a few yards to control the opposing central midfielders within the space in front of them.

In this example, the white central midfielder No.8 is in position to receive from centre back No.4.

The distance between white No.8 and the Atlético central midfielder **Gabi (14)** is large enough for No.8 to receive from his team-mate and turn.

Therefore, **Gabi (14)** has to adjust his positioning. He steps a few yards forward to make sure he is able to prevent white No.8 from receiving and turning if a pass is directed to him.

## 6. Adjusting the Positioning of the Front Block to Limit Space Between the Lines with the Ball Near the Side-line



If the ball is directed to the full back (white No.2 in diagram example) near the side-line, the Atlético players readjust their positions with the aim of keeping the space between the forward and midfield lines limited. At the same time, the wide midfielder **Koke (6)** presses the ball and tries to block the path to the space inside the **Crucial Central Area**.

The most important element in this situation is the positioning of the forward **Griezmann (7)** on the strong side, who drops back and across to control a potential inside pass towards the white central midfielder No.8.

Without **Griezmann's (7)** defensive movement, white No.8 would be able to receive in between the lines and then play a forward through pass towards the **Crucial Central Area**.

If the ball is passed back to the centre back No.4, there is no possibility of playing a forward through pass towards the crucial central area.

Therefore, between white No.4 and No.8, the white central midfielder is the most dangerous receiver for Atlético, which is why he is controlled.

This tactical situation continues on the next page...



# DEFENSIVE REACTIONS OF THE FRONT BLOCK WHEN THE OPPOSITION BREAK THROUGH PRESSURE

If the opposing centre back breaks through the pressure of the forwards and moves forward with the ball, the front block should work in collaboration to deal with the situation.

## 1a. Drop Back to Retain a Safety Distance, Converge to Be Compact and Create a Strong Side (**Opposing Centre Back Dribbling Forward**)



In this tactical example, the opposing white centre back No.4 breaks through the pressure of **Griezmann (7)** and moves forward with the ball.

The reaction of the Atlético midfielders is to drop back collectively and reduce the distance between one another, retain a safety distance

from the ball carrier and become more compact.

The second forward **Torres (9)** drops back and across towards the ball area. This action creates a strong side for Atlético Madrid and makes the opposition's attacking play predictable.



## 1b. The Compact Atlético Midfield with a Good Safety Distance is Able to Intercept Attempted Through Passes



This tactical example follows on from the previous page, with the Atlético front block having dropped back (safety distance), converged to be compact and having created a strong side.

If a through pass is attempted, the Atlético midfielders have a very good chance of intercepting the ball, as they have more time to react.

In the diagram example, the right midfielder **Koke (6)** and the central midfielder **Gabi (14)** both have time to converge and close the gap between them and block the pass towards white No.8.

**Gabi (14)** easily intercepts white No.4's pass.

# **SESSION (3 PRACTICES) FOR "POSITIONING AND DEFENSIVE MOVEMENTS OF THE FRONT BLOCK"**

## PROGRESSION

### 2. Block Through Passes with the Front Block in a Functional Practice (6 v 8 + GK)

#### Scenario A: Narrow Passing Lanes and Limit Space Between Lines



#### Description (Scenario A)

- This is a progression of the previous practice with 2 white central midfielders (6 and 8) added, who can be used as link players to move the ball to the 2 forwards inside the yellow area.
- The red forwards and midfielders (front block) shift collectively according to the position of the ball and retain narrow passing lanes to block any potential through passes.
- They must also keep the space between the lines limited and prevent the white midfielders from turning if they receive.
- Please **see analysis pages 100-109** for the correct defensive reactions in the different tactical situations.
- As soon as the reds win the ball, they launch a quick direct counter attack, trying to score past the GK within 8-10 seconds.

## Scenario B: Centre Back Dribbling Forward (Breaks Through Pressure)



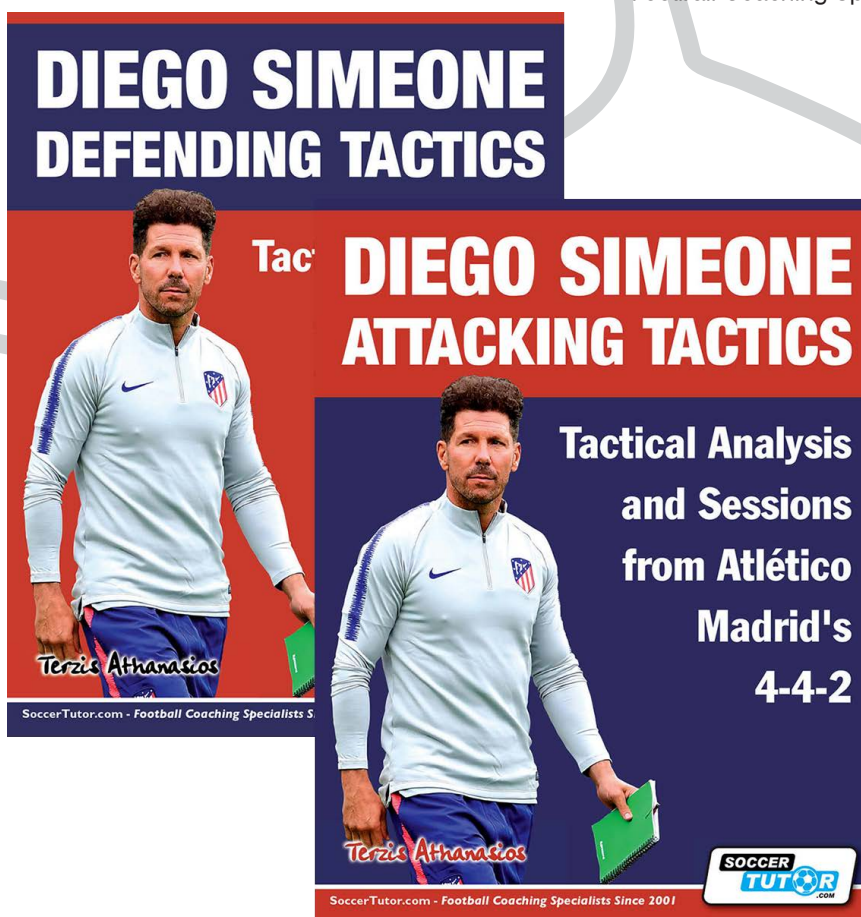
### Description (Scenario B)

- In this second scenario, we practice what happens when the opposing centre back breaks through the forward's pressure and moves forward with the ball.
- For this practice, the Coach tells the forwards to let the white centre back (No.5 in diagram) dribble forward without pressure so this situation can be replicated.
- The red forwards and midfielders (front block) have to adapt to the situation.
- As shown in this example, the red midfielders drop back to retain a good safety distance from the ball carrier, so they will still have time to react and block any attempted through passes.

- Please **see the analysis on pages 110-112** for the correct defensive reactions in this tactical situation.

### Coaching Points

1. Shift according to the position of the ball.
2. Read the tactical situation.
3. Retain the correct horizontal distances (between the players in the midfield line).
4. Retain the correct vertical distances (between the forward and midfield lines).



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