

TACTICAL SITUATION 4



Positioning and Defensive Movements of the Midfielders

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 practice to coach this specific tactical situation.

SHAPE, DISTANCE AND DEFENSIVE COHESION OF THE MIDFIELD LINE (BALL IN CENTRE)

1a. Shape and Cohesion of the Midfield Line to Make Sure Passing Lanes are Kept Narrow



The midfielders shift collectively, according to the position of the ball.

When shifting, their aim is to defend the space and prevent any through passes towards players positioned within the space between the midfield and defensive line.

By blocking through passes, the midfielders are able to protect the **Crucial Central Area**, which is one of the basic aims of Atlético's defensive phase. They retain a compact formation with short distances between each other.

Normally, when the opposing defender is 15 yards away, the distance between each midfielder is approximately 10 yards.

The distance can vary because it is strongly related to the distance from the player in possession.

1b. Retain a Safety Distance from the Ball Carrier, React, Shift and Block Attempted Through Passes



Keeping a safety distance from the player in possession means retaining a distance which enables the midfielders to react, shift and block any potential pass played in between them. Specific attention must be given to the position of the deepest central midfielder on the weak side **Saúl (8)**, who can control the space between the lines and be closer to the defensive line in case he needs to support them.

2. Reducing the Distance Between Players in the Midfield Line when the Ball Carrier is Closer (Compactness)



If the distance between the midfielders and the player in possession is shorter than in the previous example, the midfielders keep a shorter distance between each other.

They must still be able to block through passes, otherwise they will no longer be at a safety distance.

DEFENSIVE REACTIONS OF THE MIDFIELD LINE WHEN THE CENTRE BACK DRIBBLES FORWARD

a. Midfield Line Drop Back to Retain a Safety Distance and Become More Compact to Prevent Through Passes



When a centre back moves forward with the ball, the distance between him and the midfielders get shorter. This means that the possibility of playing a successful through pass is increased.

To deal with this situation, the Atlético midfielders drop back to retain a safety distance and converge to become more compact and counter the reduced distance.

b. Midfielders Create an Effective Defensive Triangle



As soon as they get compact enough horizontally, the closest midfielder to the ball carrier, which is central midfielder **Gabi (14)** in this example, moves to press him, while an effective defensive triangle is created.

This defensive reaction narrows the through passing lanes and the ball is forced towards the side-line.

PRACTICE FOR "POSITIONING AND DEFENSIVE MOVEMENTS OF THE MIDFIELDERS"

PRACTICE FOR THIS TACTICAL SITUATION

Compact Midfield Line Blocking Through Passes in a Functional Game

Scenario A: Shift to Ball Position, Retain Safety Distance & Block Passes



Description (Scenario A)

- We have a 4v4 situation inside the main area, with 4 red midfielders against 2 white centre backs and 2 white full backs.
- The white defenders pass the ball to each other in set positions and try to play a through pass to a white forward inside the yellow area.
- The red midfielders shift according to the position of the ball, try to retain a safety distance at all times and block any potential through passes.
- Please **see pages 46 and 47** for the correct defensive reactions.
- As soon as the reds win the ball, they launch a very quick direct counter attack, trying to score in either mini goal within a set amount of time.

Scenario B: Retain Safety Distance as the Centre Back Dribbles Forward



Description (Scenario B)

- In this second scenario, the white defenders can now move forward or backwards with the ball and their distance from the red midfielders can vary.
- The aim for the white team stays the same: Play a through pass to a forward inside the yellow area.
- The red midfielders adapt to the new situation by moving backwards or forward, making sure a safety distance is always retained and through passes are blocked.
- Please [see pages 48 and 49](#) for the correct defensive reactions, including creating a defensive triangle and what to do when the ball is played out wide to a full back.

Coaching Points

1. Retain a safety distance at all times.
2. Use the correct angles and body shape to block through passes.
3. Launch a quick counter attack as soon as the ball is won.

DIEGO SIMEONE DEFENDING TACTICS



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