

# THE TRANSITION FROM DEFENCE TO ATTACK (POSITIVE TRANSITION)

## DEFINITION

The transition from defence to attack (positive transition) is the phase which starts as soon as possession is won by the defending team and lasts until the opposing team successfully reorganise defensively.

## DIEGO SIMEONE'S ATLÉTICO MADRID

Atlético Madrid is a club that owes much of its success in recent years on Diego Simeone's tactics during the transition from defence to attack (positive transition phase), where they have consistently been one of the best teams in Europe.

In the 2017-18 La Liga season, Diego Simeone's Atlético Madrid team had the second best record of goals scored from counter attacks (5). They were only just behind Villarreal CF (6).

## THE STAGES OF THE POSITIVE TRANSITION PHASE

1. Winning possession (where).
2. Securing the ball (moving the ball to a player with available time and space to move forward or pass forward).
3. Players in advanced positions move to receive in available space.
4. The man in possession plays a forward pass.
5. The target player receives and uses his skills to beat an opponent (1 v 1) and shoot (direct threat) or make a final pass/cross (indirect threat).

# FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE POSITIVE TRANSITION



## FACTOR 1: What area is the ball won in?

The first factor that affects the way the positive transition is carried out is the area where the ball is won, and possession is gained.

There are different ways of carrying out a positive transition if possession is won in the central area or wide areas.

## FACTOR 2: Defensive Positioning of Players

For a coach to prepare for the transition from defence to attack, he has to consider the defensive positions of his players (within the formation used) during the defensive phase.

The transition from defence to attack is strongly related to the defensive positions of the players at the moment the ball is won. This means that not only different formations provide different possibilities for carrying out this phase, but also small adjustments in the defensive positioning of the players within a formation.

In many occasions, the 2 Atlético forwards take up counter attack-minded positions within the 4-4-2 formation and this variation in positioning provides different possibilities for counter attacks.

## FACTOR 3: The Situation Around the Ball Area

Another factor that affects the transition from defence to attack is the situation which is created around the ball area at the moment the ball is won.

For example, the Atlético players (especially the forwards) react in a different way when there is an open ball situation compared to a closed ball situation.

In an **Open Ball Situation**, the ball carrier has time and space to pass forward immediately.

In a **Closed Ball Situation**, the ball carrier is pressed immediately and it is difficult to move forward or play a forward pass.

# TACTICAL SITUATION 3



## Defensive and Counter Attack-Minded Positioning of the Forwards

**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.

# COUNTER ATTACK-MINDED POSITIONING OF THE FORWARDS

## 1a. Counter Attack-minded Positioning of Forwards with Ball in Centre



Over Diego Simeone's time at Atlético Madrid, they have mainly used defensive-minded positioning of the forwards during the defensive phase. However, they have used counter attack-minded positioning of the forwards in many matches, especially when **D. Costa (19)** plays.

Atlético have 1 forward in a very advanced position and there is more space for the opposition to exploit between the forward and midfield lines.

## 1b. Counter Attack-minded Positioning of Forwards with Ball Wide



When using defensive-minded positioning of the forwards ([see last 3 pages](#)), both forwards are able to contribute in the defensive phase.

When using counter attack-minded positioning, only 1 forward contributes in the defensive phase, which is **Griezmann (7)**.

The other forward **D. Costa (19)** is in a dangerous position to exploit a potential direct counter attack if the ball is won.

## 2a. Available Spaces to Exploit After Winning Possession in a Wide Area (Counter Attack-minded Positioning of Forwards)



Despite the available space between the forward and midfield lines which can be exploited by the opposition, this positioning of the forwards provides benefits for the transition from defence to attack.

The main target player **D. Costa (19)** is close to the opponent's goal and the available space that can be exploited is in the central area. However, taking advantage of this after winning the ball in a wide area is not easy. It is far easier when the ball is won in the centre, which we show on [pages 162-164](#).

In this example, the Atlético left back **F. Luis (3)** intercepts the pass to white No.7.

When winning the ball in a wide area, it is more likely that the space out wide and behind the opposing full back No.2 can be exploited.

However, with this counter attack-minded positioning of the forwards, **Griezmann (7)** is in a relatively deep position compared to the previous situation (normal defensive positioning of forwards) and the white full back No.2 can recover in time and fill the gap.

In addition, moving the ball into the available space in the centre for **D. Costa (19)** to exploit is not easy, as a perfectly accurate pass is needed.

## 2b. Forward Receives in Available Space Between the Centre Backs and Creates a **DIRECT THREAT**



After winning the ball, the Atlético left back **F. Luis (3)** looks to play a forward pass.

The easiest forward passing option towards the forward on the strong side **Griezmann (7)** is covered by the white right back No.2.

Therefore, **F. Luis (3)** takes on the more difficult pass into the available space in the centre for the target player and other forward **D. Costa (19)**. If this pass is perfectly accurate, it can create a direct threat and shot on goal.



### ASSESSMENT

The available space for the most advanced positioned forward **D. Costa (19)** depends on the positioning of the opposing centre backs (white No.4 and No.5).

If the white centre backs' positioning doesn't enable **D. Costa (19)** to take advantage of space in between them, then he should search to find space elsewhere ([see next page](#)).

### 3a. Space on Blind Side of Centre Back After Winning Possession in a Wide Area (Counter Attack-minded Positioning of Forwards)



In this variation, the positioning of the white centre back No.5 prevents **D. Costa (19)** from exploiting the space between him and No.4.

In this situation, it was highly effective for the advanced Atlético forward to make a run into the available space on the blind side of the centre back, as he is unable to see both **D. Costa (19)** and the ball.

### 3b. Forward Receives in Available Space on Blind Side of Centre Back and Creates a **DIRECT THREAT**



However, it is difficult to achieve this kind of long aerial pass on the blind side of the white centre back No.5.

The Atlético left back **F. Luis (3)** needs quality, as well as enough time and space on the ball to play this accurate pass.

If he does it successfully and **D. Costa (19)** receives in behind, as shown in the diagram, Atlético create a direct threat to shoot on goal.

## 4. Moving the ball Inside After Winning Possession in a Wide Area to Increase the Possibility of Playing an Effective Forward Pass



When Atlético win the ball in a central area, they are able to take advantage of the counter attack-minded positioning of the forwards and become extremely effective in the transition from defence to attack ([see next page](#)).

The best option to take advantage of the counter attack-minded positioning of the forwards if the ball is won in a wide area, is to move the ball quickly to a free player positioned within the central area.

With this inside pass, the pass towards the available space between the centre backs or on the blind side one of the centre backs can be played easier.

As soon as the Atlético left back **F. Luis (3)** intercepts the ball in this tactical example, he passes inside the central midfielder **Rodri (14)** in a central area, and he opens up to receive.

A pass from **Rodri (14)** towards the available space between the opposing centre backs is now easier to achieve.

A **Direct Threat** is created, as **D. Costa (19)** receives in an extremely dangerous position to shoot at goal.

# SESSION (4 PRACTICES) FOR "DEFENSIVE AND COUNTER ATTACK- MINDED POSITIONING OF THE FORWARDS"

## PROGRESSION

### 3. Positioning of the Forwards and Counter Attack After Winning the Ball Out Wide in a Functional Game



Created using SoccerTutor.com Tactics Manager

#### Description

- The 2 teams play a 9v10 game in 2/3 of the pitch.
- The game starts with the white GK and the white team must move the ball into one of the wide areas and then try to move the ball to the forward No.9 in the yellow central area to score against the GK.
- The reds try to win the ball in a 3v3 situation within the wide area and then launch a counter attack. Please [see the analysis pages](#) in this section for the correct decision making.

As they are in a wide area, the player that wins the ball can:

1. Pass to the forward on the strong side (**7**) to create an **Indirect Threat**.
2. Pass directly to the advanced forward (**19**) to create a **Direct Threat** (difficult pass).
3. Pass inside to the central midfielder (**5**), who then passes to the advanced forward (**19**) to create a **Direct Threat**.

**Restriction:** Any pass towards white No.9 should be played from within the wide area.

# DIEGO SIMEONE DEFENDING TACTICS



Terzis Athanasios

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