

The diagram shows a soccer pitch with a 4-4-2 formation. The defensive half is divided into a back four (two defenders and two fullbacks) and a mid four (two central midfielders and two wide midfielders). The attacking half has a front two (two strikers). A dashed line represents the defensive half, and a solid line represents the attacking half. A curved line is drawn across the pitch, indicating a pressing line. The text 'Mid / High Block Pressing' is written in yellow on the board.

Mid / High Block Pressing

Tactical Presentation
by Gavin MacLeod

Defensive Formation to Press



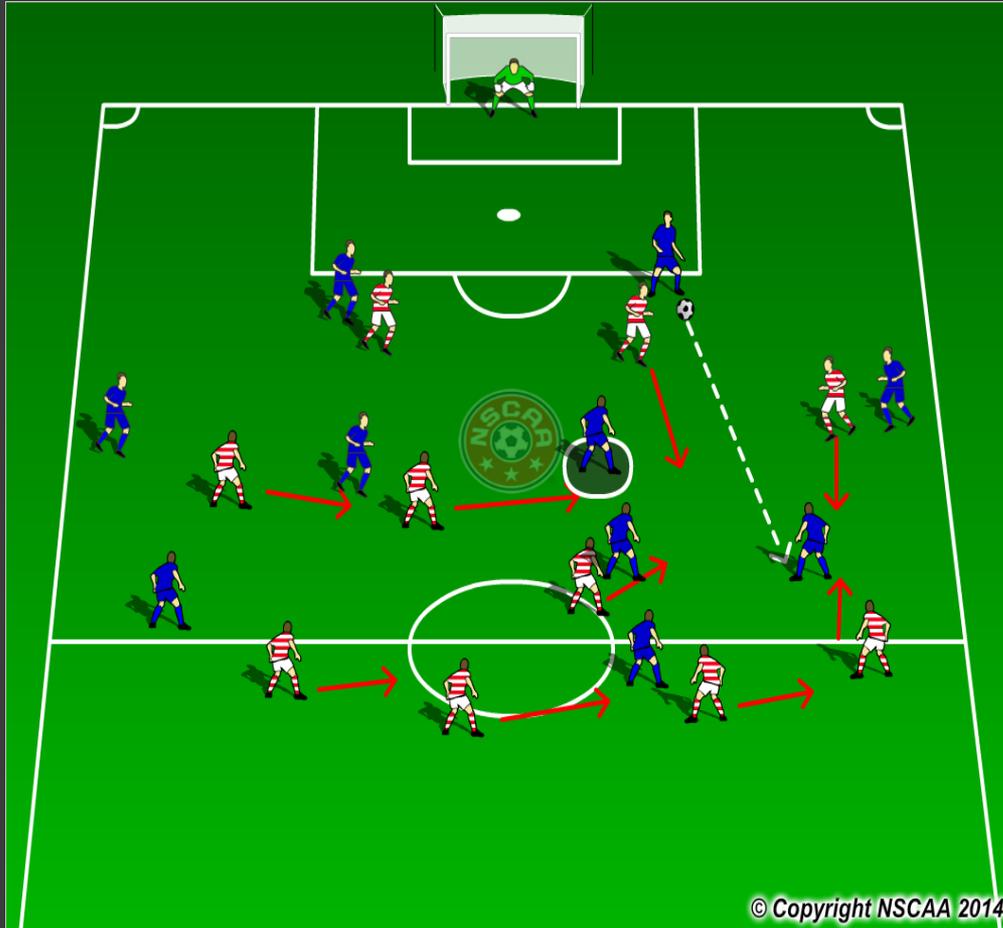
- Recently we have seen Bayern Munich (4-1-4-1) and Chelsea (4-2-3-1) press in the mid/high block with great success.
- The strength in this setup is the DM who covers space between the line of defenders and midfielders (4-1-4-1 shown)
- Initial setup can see the defending team staying compact through four (shown) or five (slide 6) lines depending on the line held by the FBs
- This can be employed from free-kicks, goal-kicks, GK distribution or when opponents are playing back

Initial Pressure From CM #1



- Instead of splitting the 2 CBs, have your forward mark one CB
- The team will setup based on which CB is open and look to make play predictable
- When the open CB collects the ball, the closest CM applies instant pressure on the ball
- This pressure must also close the passing channel to the opposition DM that the CM has just left (highlighted player in next slide)

Initial Pressure From CM #1



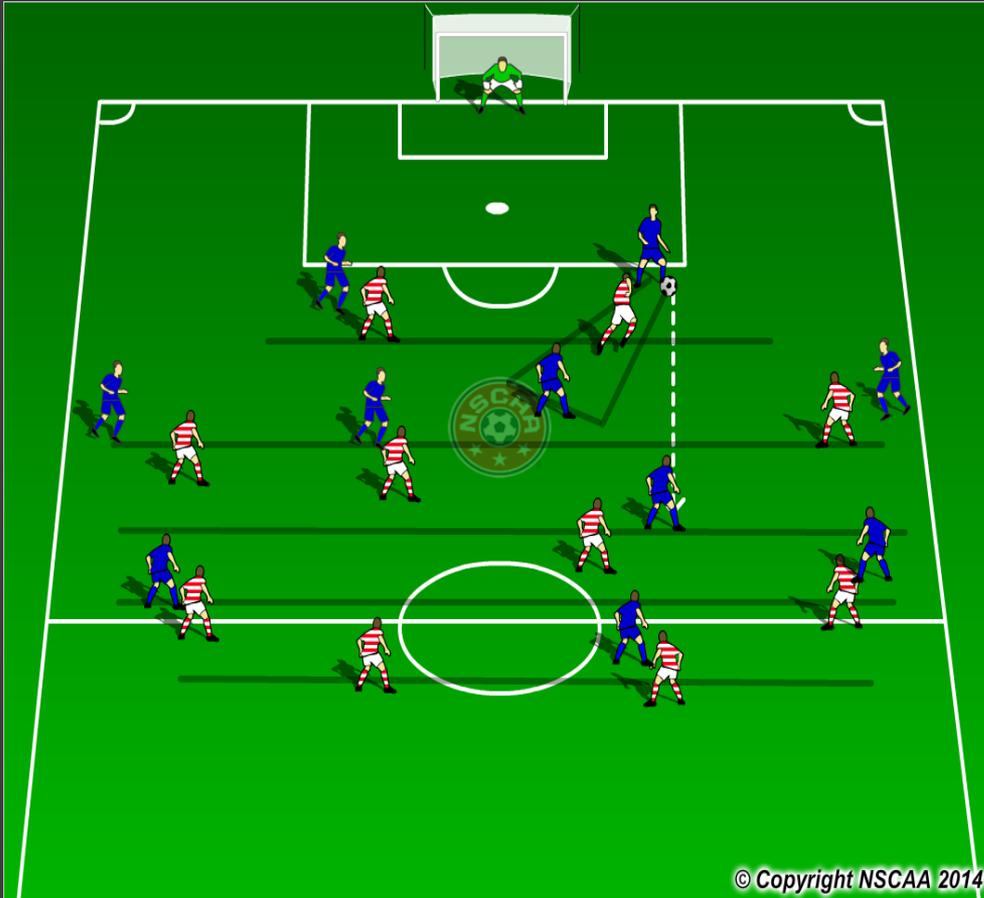
- With the opposition LB, DM, CM and FW covered we can show the CB in to their LM
- The RB must pressure this player as they receive the ball
- The initial pressuring CM comes to close down space and the passing channel back to the opposition CB
- Remaining defenders slide to cover and balance when RB pressures
- DM and CMs also close down the player in possession and shutdown passing channels
- Our LM must tuck in to balance the team shape

Initial Pressure From CM #1



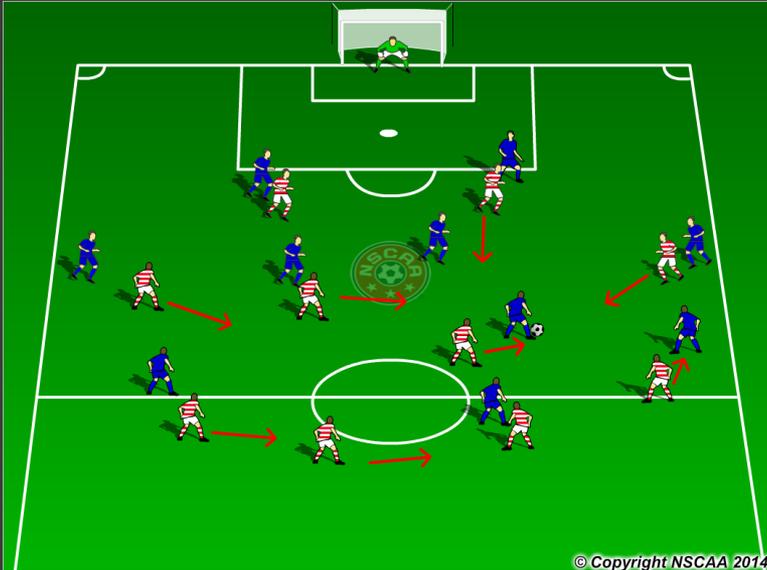
- Effective team pressure can funnel a team into certain areas of the field
- With concentration and understanding of positioning the pressuring team can set traps to win the ball back higher up the field
- Once the opposition have been funnelled the team must shrink this zone and commit to causing a transitional turnover

Initial Pressure From CM #2



- A second option is to funnel the opposition into the middle of the field
- Again, the CM pressures the opposition CB and does so at an angle closing the channel to the player they have left (illustrated)
- With the LM now marked you need to leave an option/trap
- Your DM can stand-off the opposition CM to invite the CB to play into this zone

Initial Pressure From CM #2



- As soon as the ball is played the DM closes down the opposition CM
- Similar to example #1, all other players must move to either shrink the zone, directly pressure the player in possession, slide to provide cover and balance to the team shape.
- It is important that pressing players closedown the ball carrier but also remain conscious of the passing lane to the opposition players they are leaving behind.



A good example of this was Dortmund 2-1 Real Madrid from last season's Champions League. Pepe picked the ball up and Reus initiated the press (1). With Alonso screened, Pepe was shown inside to Ozil who was being closed down by Kehl and Gotze (2). Reus turned to shrink the zone and screen Pepe while Kehl picked up Ozil and Gotze & Bender closed-in (3). Pepe's bad pass went to Kehl, who played in Lewandowski for the games opening goal.

Initial Pressure From Outside Mid

- Another option is to have an outside midfield player initiate the press
- The setup for this is the same as before but we keep our CMs matched up with the opposition
- This time, the presser must also be responsible to approach at an angle that denies an easy outlet to the opposition RB
- If done correctly, a press initiated by the outside mid can lead to a turnover in a wide area and quicker transition to goal



Initial Pressure From Outside Mid

- The play is funnelled into the opposition RM this time

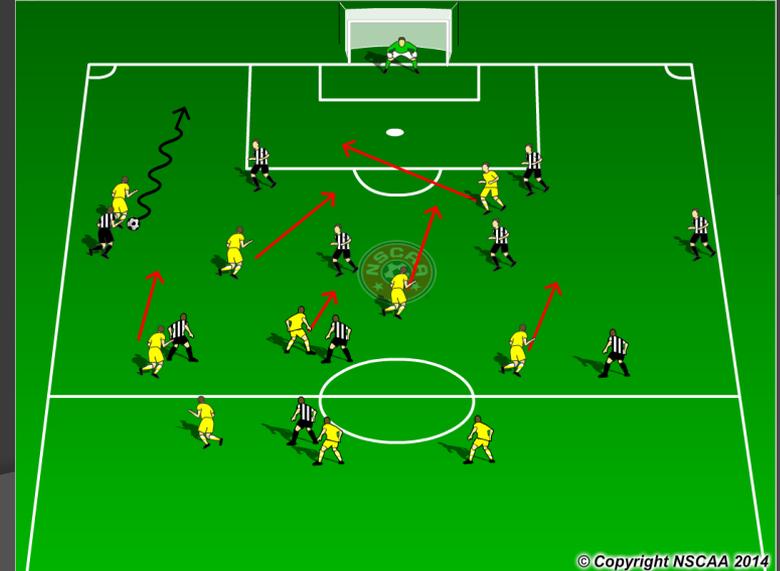
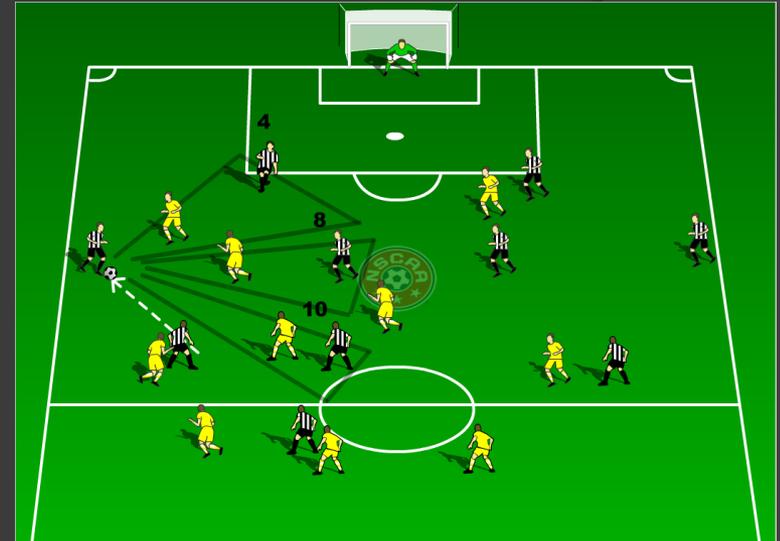


- As all players react to the movement of the ball, the opposition RB is left open as this is the zone we are looking to trap.



Initial Pressure From Outside Mid

- By pressing the RB against the sideline and closing the passing channels to their preferred options we can look to win the ball back in this wide area of the high block.
- If the ball is won in this area then the LM can exploit the space behind the opposition RB
- Attacking players must be alert to this transition and the speed of play must be high to capitalise before the opposition can recover



Initial Pressure From Outside Mid



As the ball is played back to the Hamburg CB, pressure comes from Bayern's LM and additionally from the FW (1). The ball is funnelled into a CM, who has pressure behind from 2 players, as everyone else closes the zone and the trap is set for the RB (2). Hamburg's CM takes a bad touch and ultimately the ball is taken from him and played to Mandzukic (3). From this Bayern break 4v2 and score through Ribery on the right-side.

Discussion Scenario #1



- In order to commit to the mid/high block press, maintain a compact shape and minimise the gap between our defensive lines (slide 2) our back four must play with a higher line
- As such they must always be alert to the danger of a ball in behind them
- In this situation, the body shape and awareness of our CBs becomes crucial, as they need to be side-on, switched-on and prepared to recover

Discussion Scenario #1



A recent example of the problem this can cause was Phil Jagielka getting caught flat against Liverpool. Toure's body shape signals his intentions. Alcaraz is side-on, Jagielka is flat, and both are ball watching. Sturridge capitalised, scoring from a ball played in behind the Everton defenders.

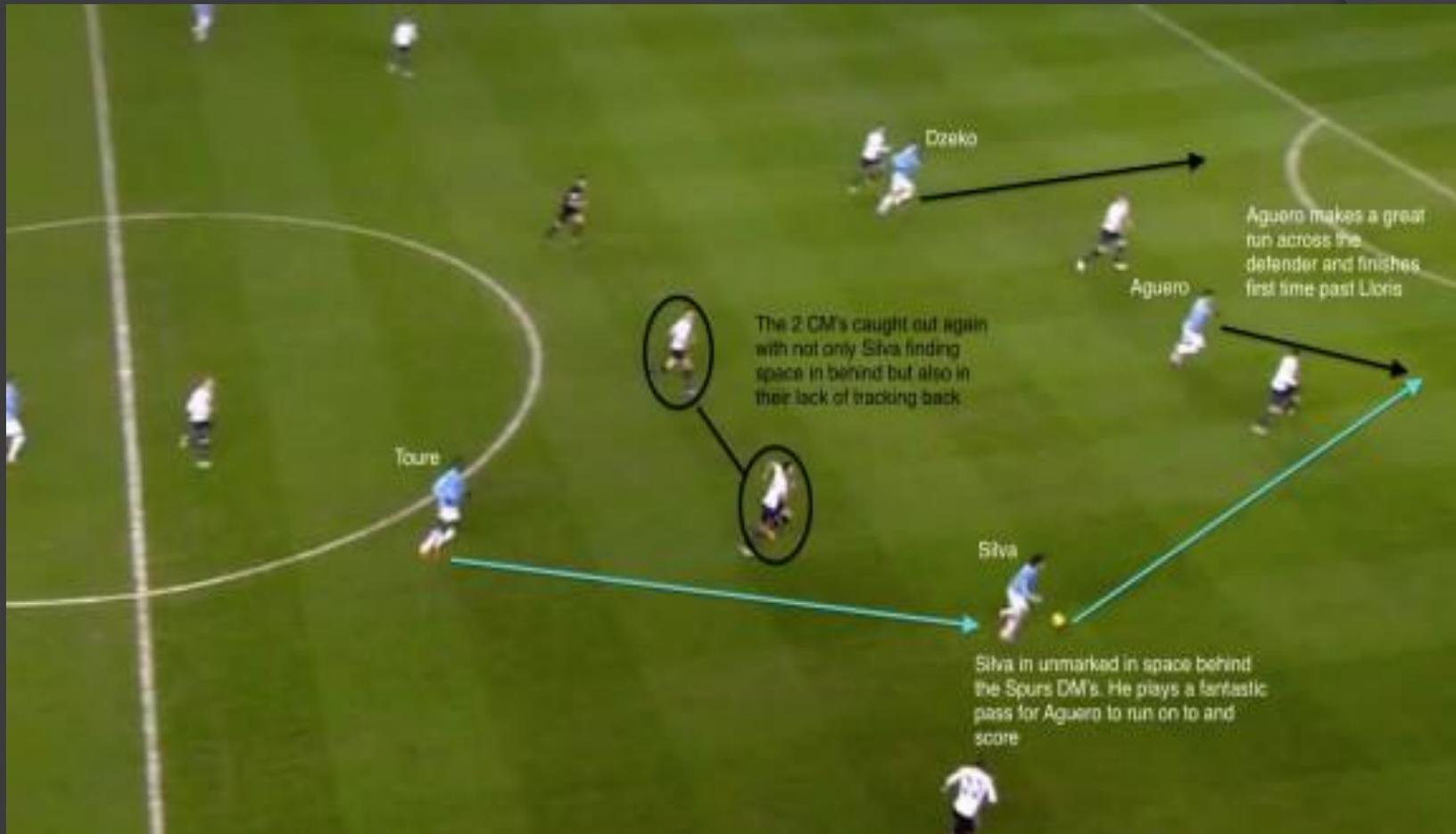
Discussion Scenario #2



- We can adopt this 4-1-4-1 defensive shape to press from a 4-3-3, 4-2-3-1 or a 4-5-1
- As with all phases of the game, player concentration is critical in order to press.
- If players are not aware of their positional responsibility then they can leave themselves exposed against a more organised opponent
- Here, the CM pressed and the DM left his mark to cover the CM's old position
- In this situation 10 has found space between the lines and can create an overload on the left wing against 2 & 4. 10 can also carry the ball and play through the gaps in defence if forward movement (9 & 11) is intelligent



Discussion Scenario #2



David Silva makes his living by exploiting space between the lines and he did so again in the recent Spurs 1-5 Man City game. Both Spurs CMs are drawn towards Toure, leaving Silva in a pocket between the midfield and defence. Aguero makes a quick run in behind and Silva plays him in for the opening goal of the game.

Picture from www.eplindex.com

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Discussion Scenario #3

- There is always the possibility that the opposition player can relieve the pressure by playing a long switch to a teammate in space
- However, if executed properly, the press should restrict the players space making this pass more of a lofted ball than a driven one
- If this is the case, the flight of the ball should allow the defending team enough time to slide across the field, maintain defensive shape and closedown the receiver without getting punished.
- Any under hit cross-field passes are at risk of being intercepted by the defending LB and LM



Thank you for taking the time to read through this presentation. Hopefully it has provided some food for thought.

As with everything, please feel free to adapt, share and utilise this with your teams.

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