
PRINCIPLES APPLIED WHEN DEFENDING NEAR THE BALL AREA



TACTICAL SITUATION 5



Principles Applied when Defending Near the Ball Area

Content from Analysis of Manchester City during the 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 Premier League winning seasons.

The analysis is based on recurring patterns of play observed within Pep Guardiola's Manchester City team. Once the same phase of play is observed multiple times across many matches, the tactics are seen as a pattern. The analysis included is built from examples of the team's tactics being used effectively, taken from specific matches.

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 full progressive session to coach this specific tactical situation.

The 3 Principles Applied for Pep Guardiola's High Pressing Philosophy

When defending, the Manchester City players near the ball area apply 3 specific principles (and sub-principles) which facilitate Pep Guardiola's high pressing philosophy.

First Principle

Limiting the time and space for the player in possession

When an **opponent receives facing the goal**, it is key for Pep's players to close them down to a short distance. The **player closest to the ball carrier (first defender) runs quickly to press** and stops his run when he is very close to the player. This action **restricts the available time and space for the opponent to think and act**. It also **creates a wide shadow behind the first defender** which drastically limits the opponent's range and options for a forward pass.

When the **opponent receives with his back to goal**, limiting his available time and space quickly means **putting immediate pressure on him and preventing him from turning** with the ball and passing forward. If he receives on the half-turn, then he should be prevented from fully turning. Therefore, the only option left would be passing horizontally or backwards. If the first defender is able to apply this first principle, a pressing situation is created.

Second Principle

Narrowing through passing lanes while marking direct opponents

This second principle is applied by the players who are positioned diagonally

behind the first defender on his right and left and we will call them **second defenders**. The positioning of these players keeps the **through passing lanes narrow**, keeps the **space behind the first defender limited**, and **facilitates double marking**. Even if preventing the through pass is not possible, it may still lead to restricting space for the potential receiver. This can only be carried out in conjunction with the appropriate positioning and reaction of the third defender (explained in the third principle).

Sub-principle: Focusing on blocking the pass rather than getting close to direct opponent

Sometimes the second defenders have to make the passing lanes very narrow to block the potential through passes at any cost. This sub-principle is applied when a specific situation is created behind the second defender.

Specifically, if there is a free opponent behind the second defender who is a potential receiver of a through pass, the second defender has to make sure that the pass towards him is definitely prevented. If the opponent behind the second defender is marked by a teammate, the second defender should keep the passing lane narrow enough to be able to intercept it if the pass is not very accurate. At the same time, he should stay as close as possible to his direct opponent, to be able to apply the first principle if he receives. This will enable him to create a new pressing situation.

To be able to apply the second principle and sub-principle, the second defenders have to be aware of the positioning of their

Second Principle: Narrowing Through Passing Lanes while Marking Direct Opponents

As soon as the first defender moves to put pressure on the player with the ball, the player/s who are positioned diagonally behind him (second defenders) should apply the second principle.

According to this, the second defender/s have to move into a position which keeps the through passing lane narrow enough, while making the distance from their direct opponent as short as possible.

Narrowing the passing lane does not mean that a potential through pass will definitely be blocked but that a potential through pass becomes a risky choice because there is a high chance it can be blocked. The passing lane cannot be completely blocked because the second defender also has to get as close as possible to his direct opponent (second aim).

The decreased distance from the direct opponent enables the defender to secure a short closing down distance if the ball is directed to him and helps create a new pressing situation.

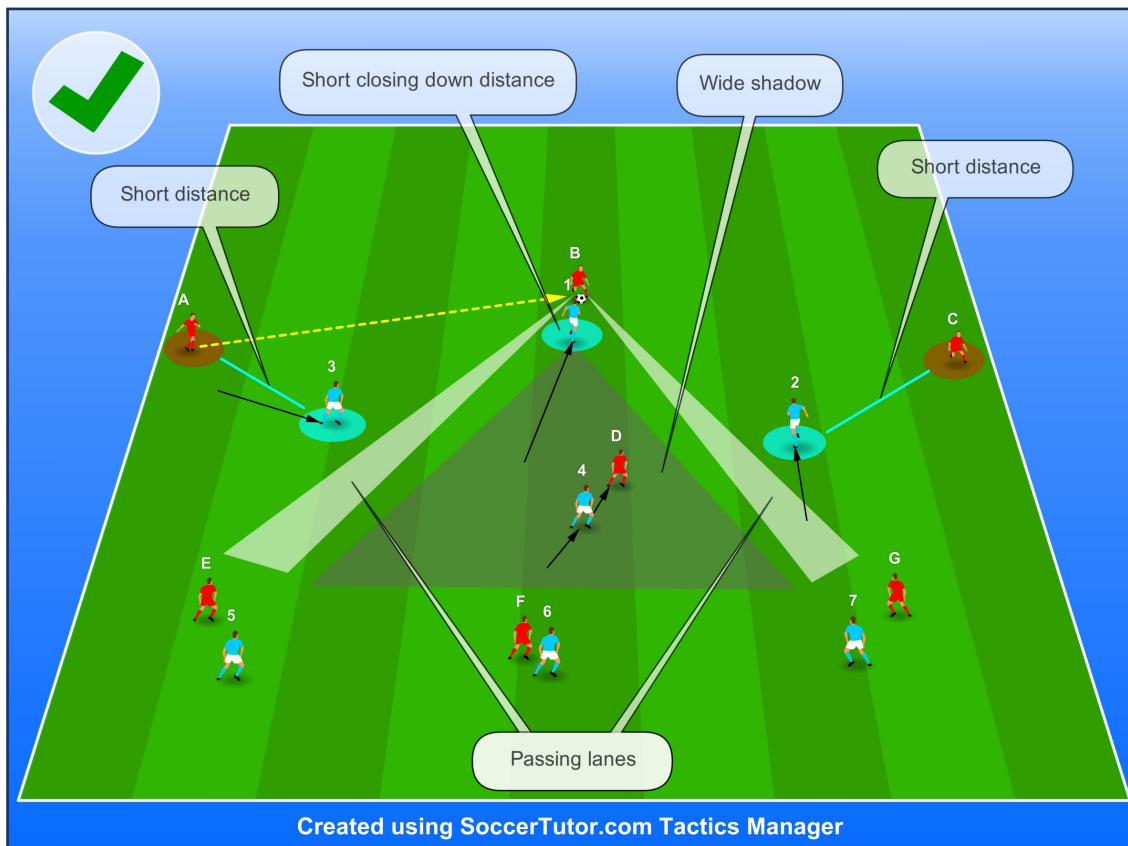
The attempt of the second defender/s to keep the passing lanes narrow also helps the team to keep the space behind the first defender limited and enable them to provide help to teammates positioned behind the first defender by applying double marking.

The positioning of the second defenders is strongly related to the closing down distance of the first defender.

If the closing down distance is short, a wide shadow is created. The second defenders can then take up wider positions and get closer to their opponents.

If the closing down distance of the first defender is longer, then the shadow created is narrower and the second defenders, to narrow the through passing lane, have to take up narrower positions. This means that they will be further away from their direct opponents and unable to create a new pressing situation.

1. Short Closing Down Distance Enables the Second Defenders to Take Up Advanced and Wide Positions



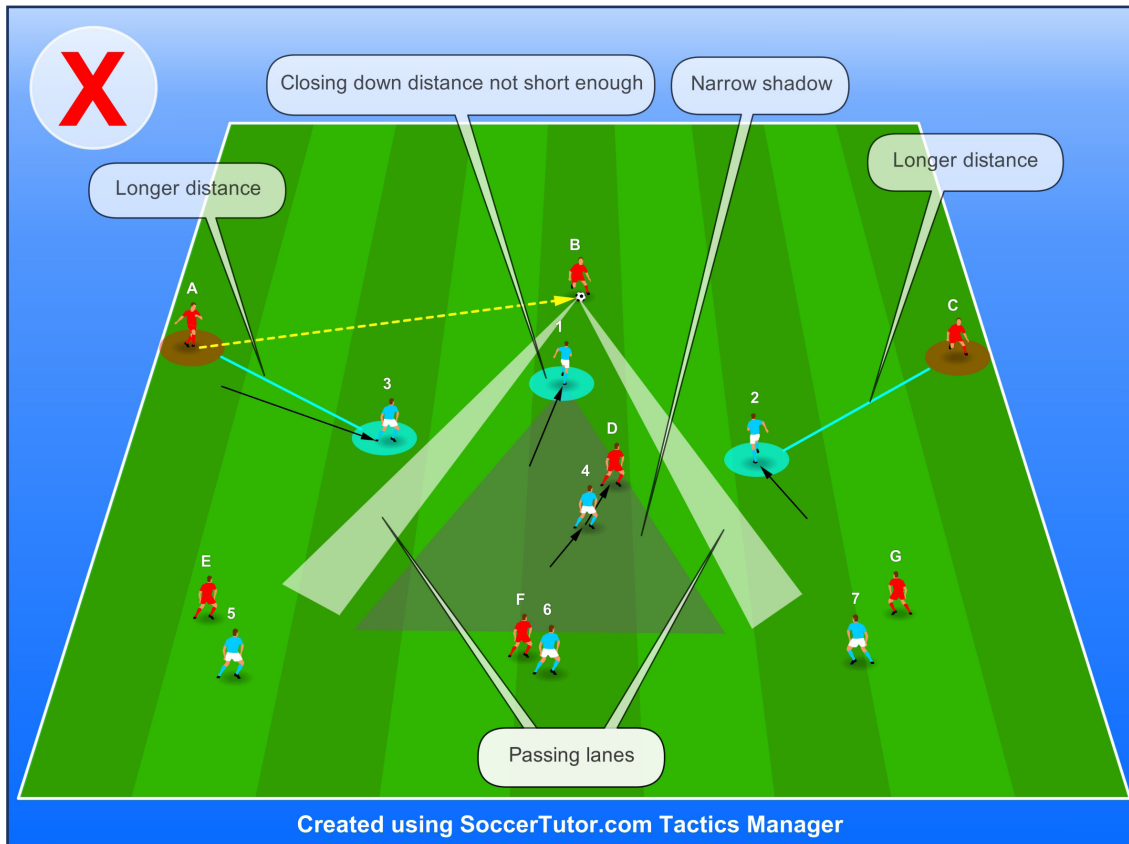
We use a 7v7 situation to analyse the principles applied by Pep Guardiola's Manchester City players. As soon as the pass is played to Red B, Blue No1 moves to secure a short closing down distance. This creates a wide shadow behind him which limits the possibility for a forward pass. This is achieved because of Blue No1's good starting position and taking advantage of the transmission phase properly.

Blue No2 and No3 (second defenders) move simultaneously with No1. They notice the short closing down distance and the wide shadow created behind No1. This

enables them to take up positions close to their direct opponents (Red A & C), while keeping the through passing lanes narrow enough at the same time.

The potential passes towards the central areas have a high chance of being blocked. If the ball is directed to the wide players A or C, the second defenders (No2 & No3) will be able to secure a short closing down distance to them, limiting their time and space on the ball drastically, and consequently creating a new pressing situation.

2. How a Longer Closing Down Distance Affects the Second Defenders' Positioning



If the closing down distance of the first defender is not as short as the example on the previous page, then the shadow created behind him is narrower.

This forces the second defenders No2 and No3 to take up narrower positions to make sure the potential passing lanes are not too wide. By taking up these positions which are more central, they will still have the potential to block attempted through passes.

There is now a longer distance between the second defenders (No2 and No3) and their direct opponents (Red A & C). This means that it is not possible to create a new pressing situation if either of these wide red players receives a pass.

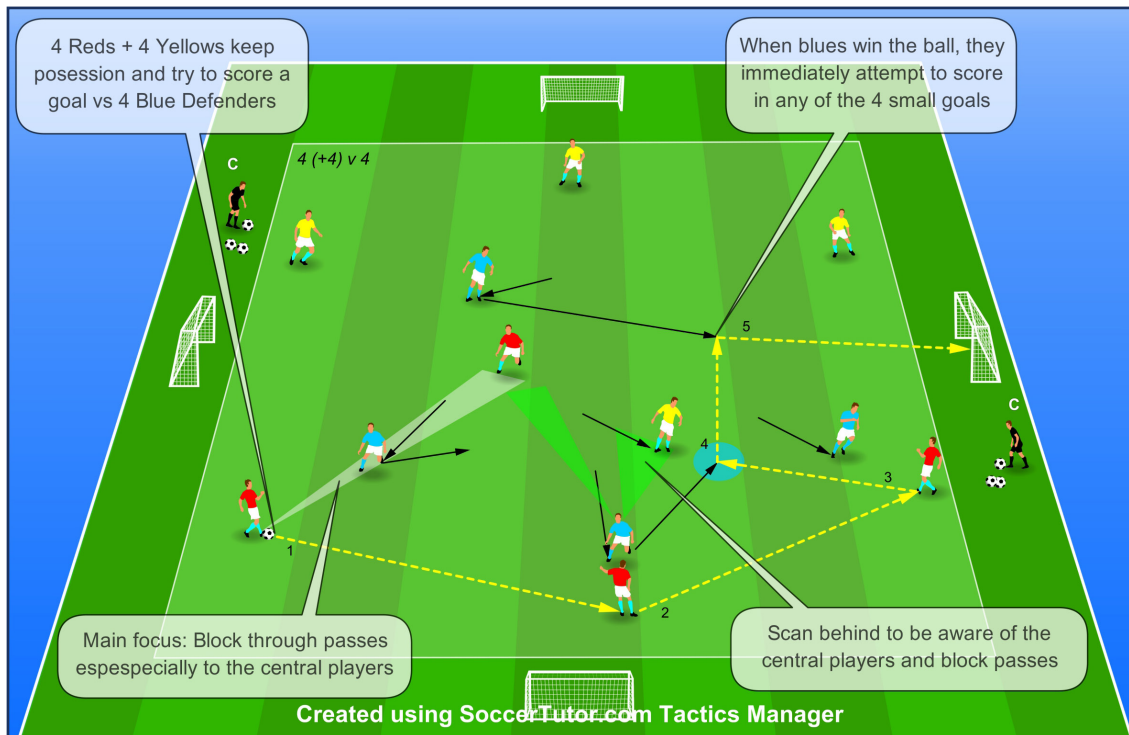
SESSION 5 BASED ON THE TACTICS OF PEP GUARDIOLA

Principles Applied when Defending Near the Ball Area



SESSION FOR THIS TACTICAL SITUATION (7 PRACTICES)

1. Defending and Pressing Near the Ball Area in a Conditioned 3 Team Possession Game



Objective: Applying first and second principles when defending near the ball area (see analysis pages 80-88).

Description

- In a 20 x 20m area (adjust according to player level), there are 3 teams of 4 players. Two teams (8 players) start by keeping possession together using a maximum of 2 touches. Their aim is to move the ball to a central player (1 Point).
- The 4 defending players (blues) try to win the ball and then score in any of the 4 small goals. **They defend with the focus on applying the first and second principles correctly, which are fully outlined on analysis pages 80-88.**

- After a set amount of time, change the team roles with 4 new defending players.

Coaching Points

- The main focus is on blocking through passes, especially to the central players
- Take advantage of the transmission phase to secure a short closing down distance and create a wide shadow.
- The correct positioning of the second defender is determined by the first defender's closing down distance.
- You need to scan to be aware of the positioning of the central players to prevent passes being played to them.
- Play at match speed (high tempo).

To Learn and Coach all of Pep Guardiola's High Pressing Tactics, purchase the full book from SoccerTutor.com



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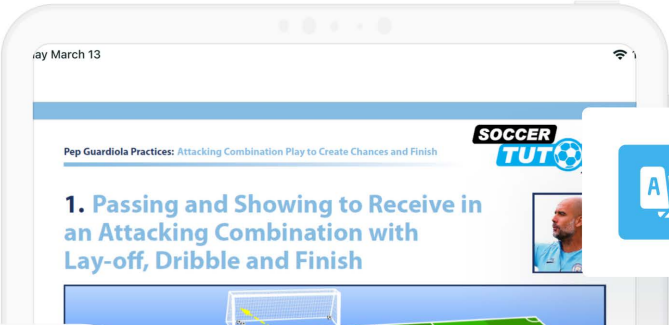
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Base Español

Description

1. Player A passes to B, who drops back behind the pole.
2. Player B passes back for A to move forward onto, completing the 1-2 combination.
3. Player B passes to C.
4. Player C passes across to B, who has moved forward past the pole.
5. Player B passes forward to D, who drops back.
6. Player D plays a lay-off pass for E to move forward onto.
7. Player E receives and dribbles past the mannequin.
8. Player E shoots at goal.
9. The players rotate positions: (A -> B -> C -> D -> E -> A).

Source: Pep Guardiola's Manchester City training session at Etihad Campus Training Ground, Manchester - 12th July 2017

113

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Base Español

B, who drops back behind

ask for A to move forward the 1-2 combination.

es to C.

ses across to B, who has moved the pole.

ses forward to D, who drops back.

Guardiola's Manchester City training session at Etihad Campus Training Ground, Manchester - 12th July 2017

113

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