

# How to utilise Inverted Full Backs

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A concept that has promoted much interest from the coaching community is the use of inverted full backs. In the professional game, this has primarily been championed by Pep Guardiola at both Bayern Munich and Manchester City.

In this analysis we will look at how inverted full backs are deployed, both in possession and out of possession, to create different challenges for opposition teams.

## Inverted Full Backs - In Possession

If we focus on Guardiola's use of inverted full backs we see that he has adopted this concept to benefit his positional play; creating superiority, both numerically and positionally, in different areas of the field with the idea of creating space and options to move forwards as often as possible.

Playing with Inverted Full Backs allows the team in possession to;

1. Overload the centre of the field as the Inverted Full Backs move inside and offer numerical advantages
2. Gives Central Midfielders the freedom to find and create space higher up the field
3. Provides space to Wingers on the outside as the opposition are drawn in to track the Inverted Full Backs

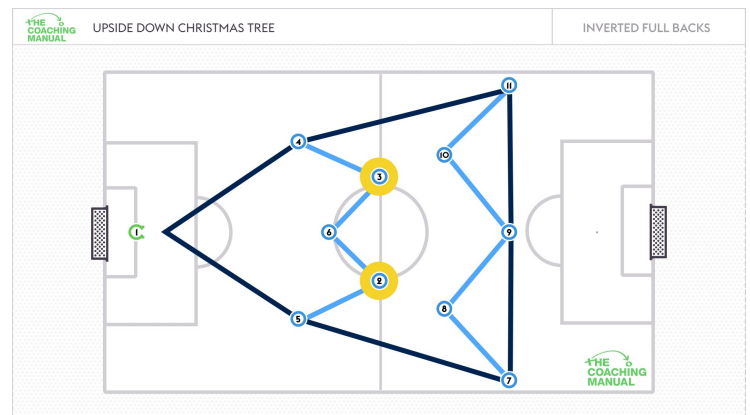
## Overloading the centre of the field

Inverted full backs are generally seen in 4-3-3 formations, and when in position they change the team shape to represent the traditional 'W-M formation', a system that was widespread in the early years of football.

If the full backs move inside to the centre of the field it creates a numerical overload in central areas, and this 2-3-5 shape provides forward passing options for the team in possession.

If the opposition maintain their adopted shape of a 4-1-4-1 formation when out of possession, it allows the inverted full backs to play forwards to the central midfielders or the strikers, as the #8 and 10 can now advance up the field.

However, if the opposition midfield become narrow to prevent vertical passes, it creates space in wide areas for the Wingers (#11 and 7) to receive and allows the team in possession to play around the opposition. This concept has been demonstrated many times with Guardiola's Manchester City.



## Central Midfielders freedom to find and create space higher up the field

Another reason that we can encourage our full backs to move inside (invert) is to push the Central Midfielders higher up the field. Traditionally, when full backs (#2 and 3) run the line it doesn't always allow the attacking midfielders (#8 and 10) to advance forwards. This responsibility falls on the wingers (#7 and 11) to come inside and offer forward passing options.

With the full backs (#2 and 3) inverting to play centrally, it allows the central midfielders (#8 and 10) freedom to advance forwards and find space to take up positions closer to the attacking line/in-between lines, in both wide and central areas of the field.

These midfield movements may also create 2v1 situations in wide areas, as the #8 or 10 can combine with the wide players (#7 and 11) and allow the striker (#9) to stay central and attack any balls delivered into the penalty area. Central midfielders may also perform runs beyond the defensive line to receive the ball in behind the opposition.

These midfield runs from deep often creates confusion for the opposition defenders, as they have to decide whether to track the runner, leaving their defensive position, or to stay in position and not track the runner.

## Provide space to Wingers on the outside

In a 4-3-3, full backs are often encouraged to provide width from deep positions, however these runs can be physically demanding on the #2 and 3 as they continually attempt to cover the length of the field. With the full backs coming on the inside, it allows them to preserve energy, force the wingers (#7 and 11) to play closer to the touchline and provide width. Encouraging wingers to take up positions on the outside may stretch and unbalance the opposition defensive line.

This is an effective tactical strategy for teams who have natural wide players, and worked well for Guardiola in his Bayern team (Robben, Ribery, and Costa) and also with his current Manchester City side (Sané and Sterling).

Wingers taking up high and wide positions allows them to create 1v1 or 2v1 situations with the attacking midfielders and encourage combination play in the final third and runs to get in behind the oppositions defence on the 'blind side' (runs which the defenders cannot see).

## Inverted Full Backs - Out of Possession

Utilising inverted full backs may seem like a risky tactic to utilise when out of possession, however the concept can be used to advantage when possession is lost.

When out of possession, Inverted Full Backs can allow the team to;

1. Press the ball quicker
2. Force counter attacks to the outside

## Quicker Pressing

Teams that execute Inverted Full Backs often like to dominate possession of the ball. Committing to this means that players need to be aware of their roles when transition takes place and the team loses the ball.

In a 4-3-3 inverted full backs can provide compactness in the centre of the field when the team is out of possession, as there may be 5 players in and around the middle third, and allow for the team to be closer together and press the ball quickly and aggressively.

When possession is lost the team can attempt to compact a small area of the field, allowing us to press and cut off passing lines around the ball. This may force the opposition to play sideways or backwards, where the ball can be recovered close to the opposition goal, or kick the ball long in panic where the centre backs and goalkeeper are positioned to regain the ball.

## Force counter attacks to the outside

If the opposition escape the press, the inverted full backs still look to protect the centre of the field by forcing play into wide areas and then recovering to defend.

When the press is adopted in wide areas, the Inverted Full Backs or nearest defending player may use the side line as an 'extra defender' whilst delaying the attacker, in order to allow team mates to recovery quickly and defend any balls that are played centrally.

When utilising the concept of inverted full backs it is important that the #2 and 3 understand their roles and responsibilities, both in and out of possession, and that the remaining players also understand how these roles relate to their movements and decisions when attacking and defending.

