

The Modern Centre Back

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Roles of the Centre Back

As the game constantly evolves, the roles and demands placed upon players has also developed.

Centre Backs have always needed the ability to defend 1 vs. 1, be dominant in the air to win headers and be able to organise and communicate with the back line and other team mates.

However, dependent on a club's or coaches preferred playing style, centre backs may also be required to launch the attack, be an option to receive to switch play or break opposition lines through accurate passing or driving out of defence with the ball.

Barcelona v Atlético de Madrid - Gerard Piqué

With players like Messi, Suárez and Neymar Jr in the FC Barcelona line up it is sometimes easy to forget or miss the contributions made by the defensive unit, offering security to allow the Catalan side to commit players to attack. One player who often goes under the radar is Gerard Piqué.

Quite possibly one of the best defenders in the game, Piqué's performance vs. Atlético De Madrid demonstrated his contributions to his side, with Piqué controlling the defensive zone (first third) with great confidence whilst also making vital tackles and interceptions. Here are Piqué's stats for the game;

Ability on the ball

Piqué made very few errors and won most of his individual battles across the field. One which was particularly impressive was his passing statistics for the game.

Amazingly Piqué completed 87 out of 89 passes. What is more impressive is that his 2 missed passes were in the last few minutes of the game, giving him a 100% pass completion for almost 90 minutes. This complete dominance was, in fact due to Atlético going down to 10 then 9 men respectively. However, that doesn't shine away from the fact that Piqué had the confidence and ability to continue to pass and circulate the ball.

Defensive duties

Though Piqué's passing was impressive, his ability to not switch off under pressure and never forget his duties as a defender was excellent.

Here we can see, early in the second half how an excellent piece of defending stops Atlético's momentum.

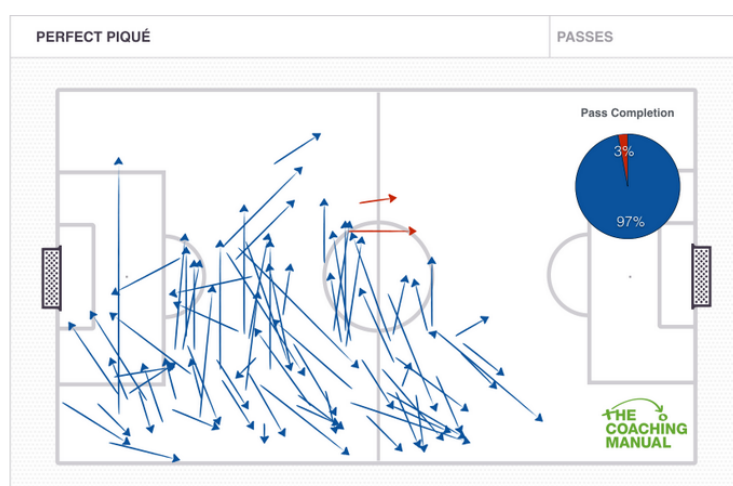
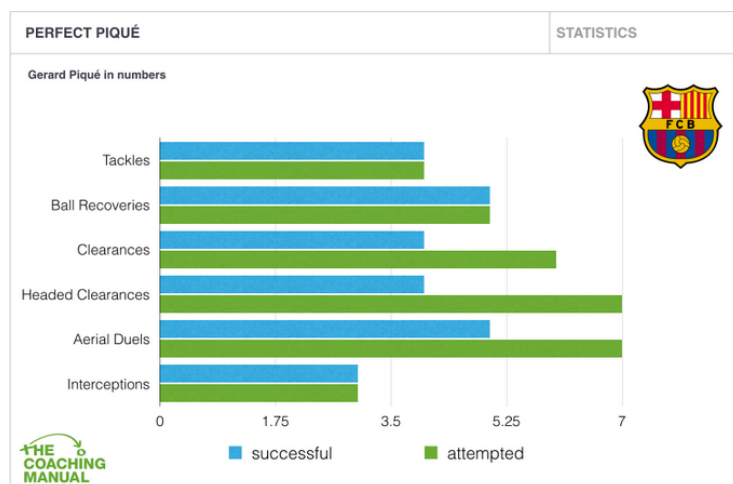
Piqué finds himself in a difficult situation with Carrasco running directly at him from great distance, which enables him to get up to greater speeds than Piqué. Piqué directs himself in between man, ball and goal.

Piqué's intelligent movement begins to take him away from the goal (Deflect) to try and give himself a competitive advantage, using the touchline as a fake defender, against the quick Carrasco.

As Carrasco penetrates the box, Piqué makes his move to tackle Carrasco, using his pace and then strength to muscle him off the ball and tackle him, resulting in a corner and allowing Barca to reshape and organise to defend the set piece.

Support & security to attack

Piqué's performance just goes to show that Barca is not just about Messi, Suárez and Neymar Jr, but a collective team with talented players throughout.



Gerard Piqué is a great example of the modern centre back because not only does he have the physical stature and presence to dominate opposition attackers, he also possesses great game intelligence and technical ability that allows him to read the game and regain possession for his team in defence and contribute to the attack through clever, penetrative passes.

This defensive profile breeds confidence in the rest of the team to go and attack, knowing that if play breaks down and FC Barcelona are countered, Piqué will offer opportunities to delay the attack allowing his team mates to recover.

Ultimately, centre backs still need to be able to defend and this is something that Piqué also has the skills set to do at the highest level.

