



## Set Plays

For the season 2013/14 FC Barcelona, under the guidance of newly appointed head coach Tata Martino, have opted to alter their way of defending corners. They have moved from a predominantly zonal based system that was used in the previous season(s) to a system that is closer to man-marking. This move has been welcomed by some of the players, namely GK Victor Valdes who commented *"Tata prefers man-marking at set pieces and I think the same. Everyone has a clear responsibility and I have more space to come out"*.

Despite the positive outlook from Valdes, FC Barcelona have encountered problems in this area and have conceded two goals directly from corners (a third was conceded in the Sevilla FC match, however, the referee *chalked* the goal off, television replays proved to be extremely inconclusive and showed no obvious foul had taken place). These two goals account for 40% (2/5) of all goals conceded by FC Barcelona and it is clear that defending corners is a real weakness.

With an average height of 5ft 9 for the outfield players used in the opening six fixtures, it is perhaps no surprise that this is an area of weakness. However, a lack of height is not the only issue.



In the opening game of the season, against Levante UD, FC Barcelona showed their new defensive set-up for defending corners. This new set-up involves two players (Pique and Xavi) taking up set starting positions whilst the rest of the FC Barcelona players in the box mark an opposing player.

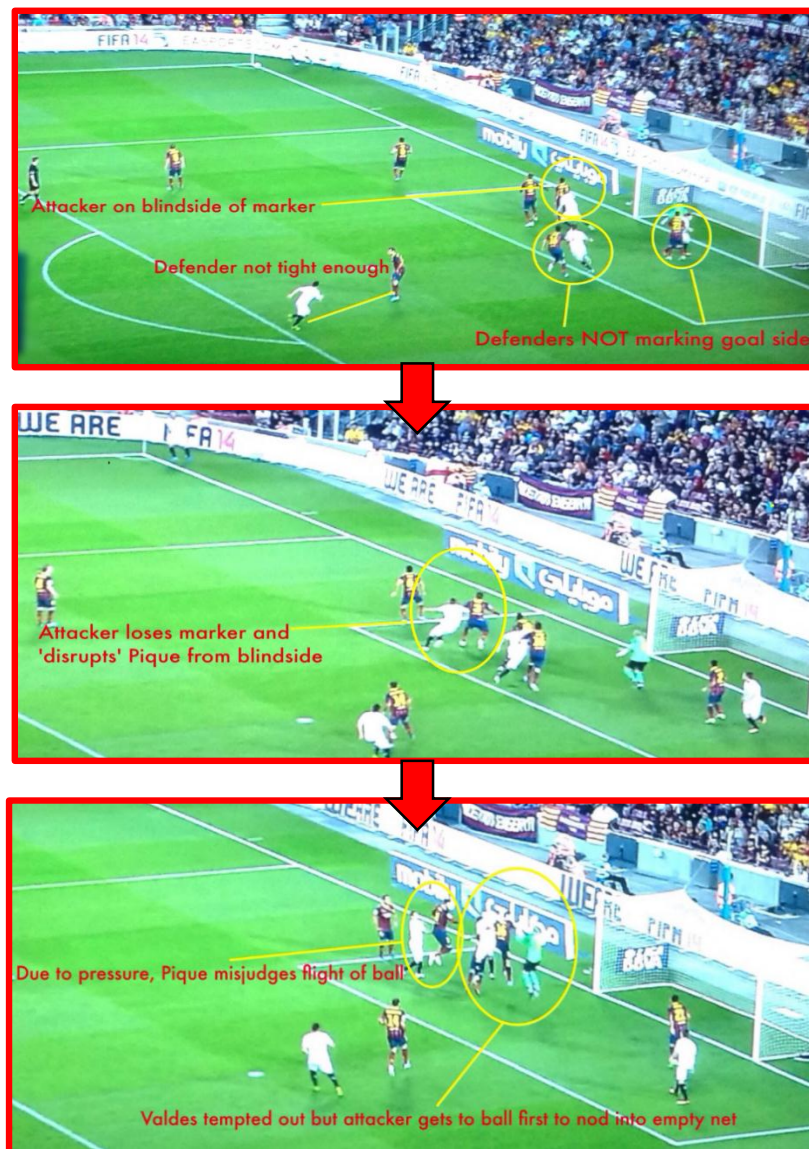


Xavi takes up the *dangerous* area in advance of the front post (to cut out any low driven corners that are played in with pace) whilst FC Barcelona's best header of the ball and tallest player Pique (6ft 4) starts in the area directly in line with the front post on the 6yard line.

In the pictured example, Levante's delivery into the box was extremely poor - the cross was over hit. However, it should be noted that all the FC Barcelona players were marking *their* men extremely tightly. Thus, limiting their movements and any potential runs.



Unlike the game against Levante UD, FC Barcelona defended corners extremely poorly against Sevilla FC.



Example 1 vs Sevilla FC

On this occasion the referee blew for a foul. However, later on in the game they were not so fortunate and conceded from a corner.



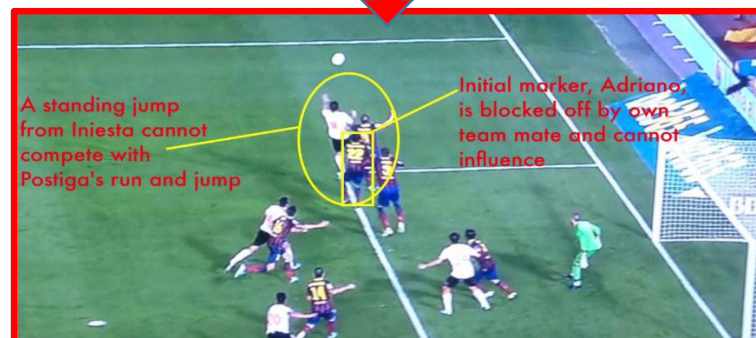
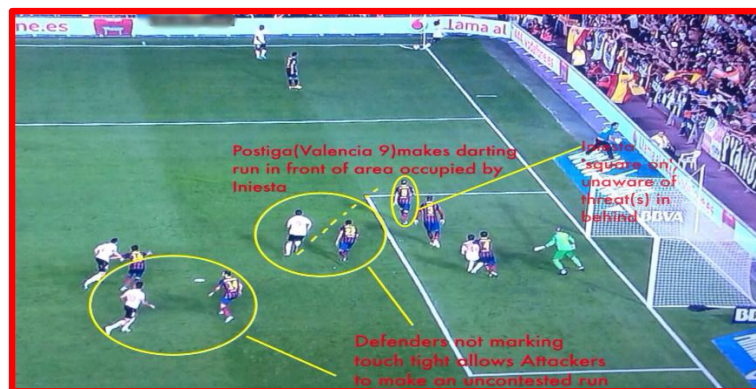


Example 2 vs Sevilla FC



Despite conceding *two* against Sevilla FC, FC Barcelona concede another goal directly from a corner in the next league fixture against Valencia CF.

In the instance below Xavi's *position* is taken up by Iniesta (5ft 7). Iniesta is facing the corner taker and never looks over his shoulder to assess the situation. Furthermore, the marking in the middle is very inconsistent. Two FC Barcelona defenders *go tight to their* man whilst the other two defenders allow *their* man space.





When awarded a corner kick themselves, FC Barcelona prefer to play it short and keep possession of the ball. Their lack of aerial threat and height means that it is not effective to play high balls into the box because the opponent will be favorite to win the *first* ball and possibly initiate a counter attack. FC Barcelona, intent on avoiding this, prefer to play safe and *restart* building their attack through short, simple passes.