

How to Beat a Four-Man Midfield

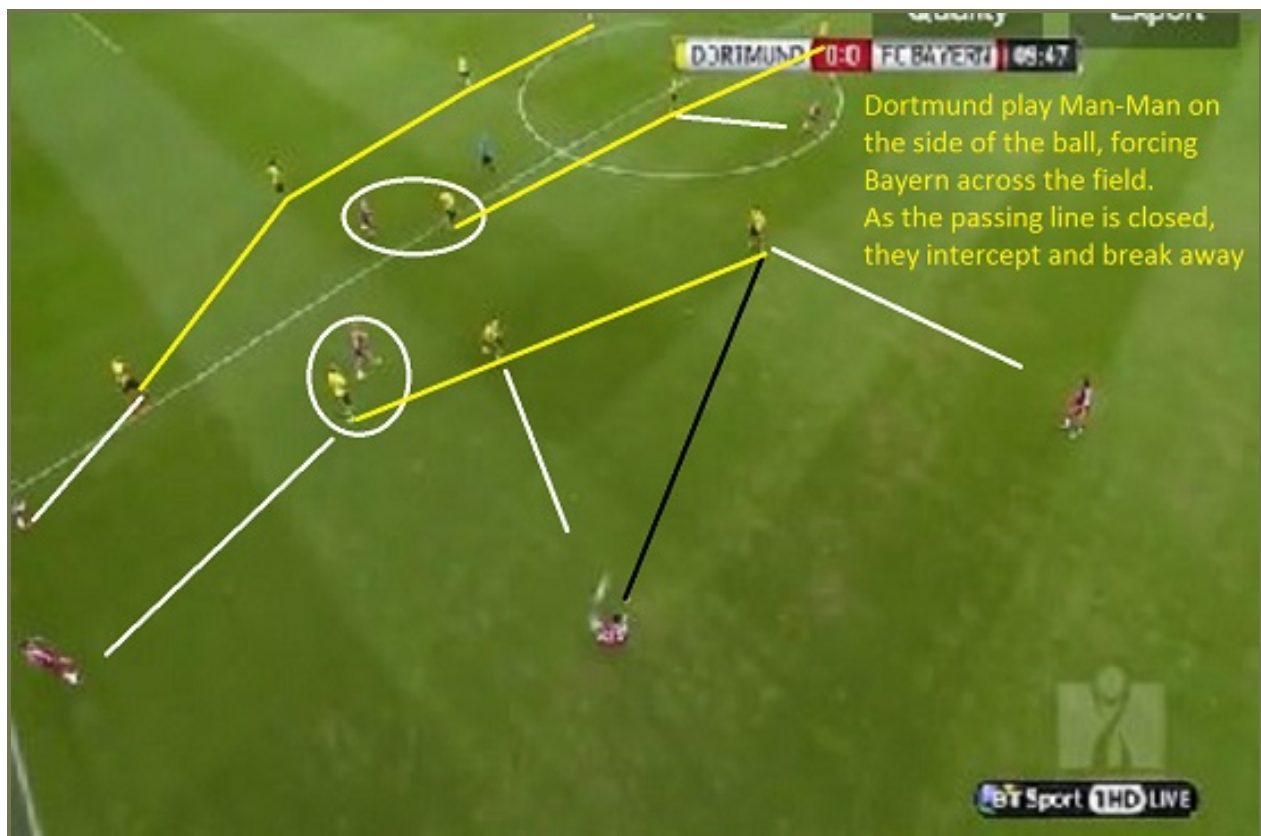
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By Stevie Grieve

Borussia Dortmund lost to Bayern Munich in the 2013 Champions League Final, the 2014 German Cup Final, and lost Robert Lewandowski to their domestic rivals on a free transfer. They have however, now won the last 2 German Super Cups.

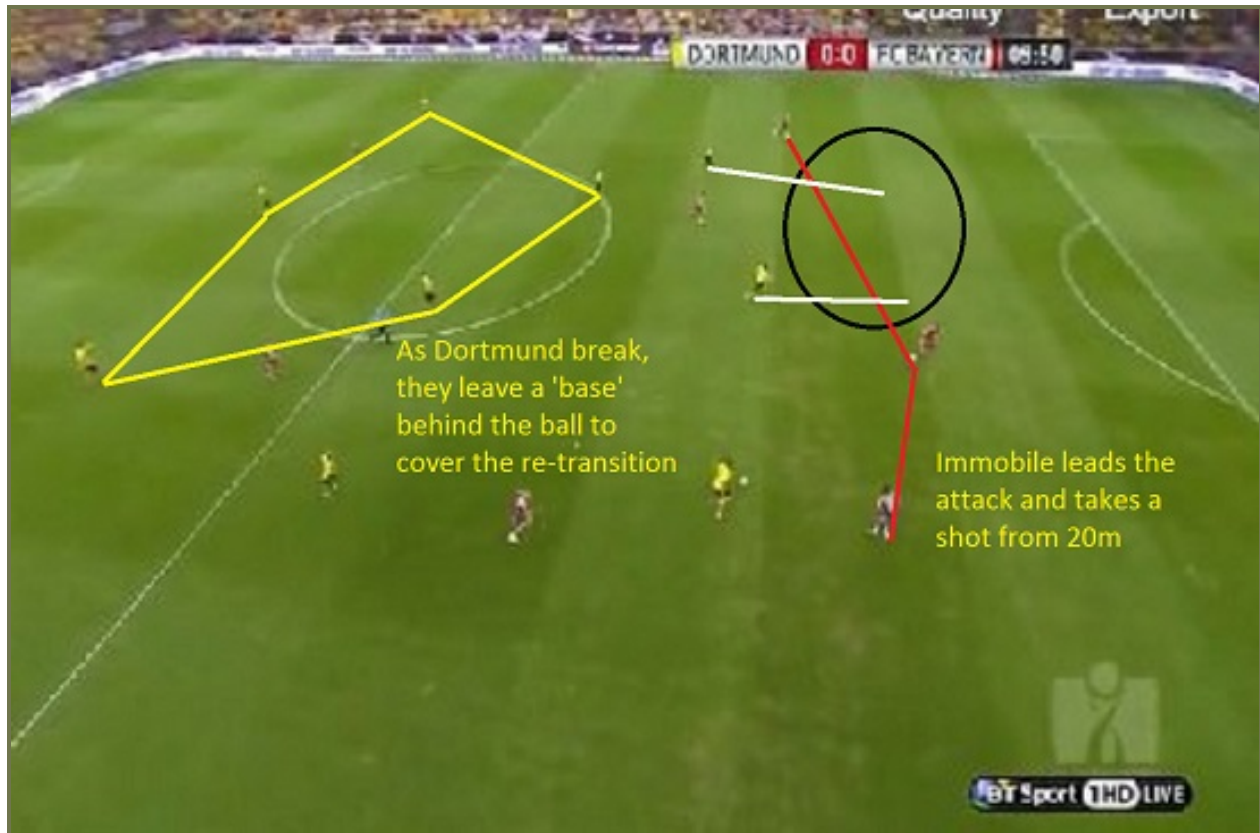
Jurgen Klopp has made some slight changes to his team and the structure and these slight changes worked perfectly against the 3-4-3 of Bayern Munich.

Positioning against the Bayern build-up phase



With Bayern playing a 3-4-3 formation, they have great width to circulate horizontally, so to counter this, Dortmund squeeze the space between the front line and back line to stop them from being opened up as the ball is passes horizontally across the field.

As they squeeze the lines and compact the field, they play almost man-man on the side of the ball, while they block the diagonal passing lane into the CM, who could be pressed from behind if the ball is to get there. Alaba tries to drill a pass into him which Dortmund intercept and break.



Dortmund always make quick transitions in attack or defence (you could argue that there is no 'transition' due to the pace of the mental transition before the ball is regained! Here, Immobile drives at the back 3 while he has 2 passing options into the gap between RCB and CB.

Importantly, they do not lose shape when they win the ball, they leave a structured shape behind the attack to be in position to 'gegenpress' (counter-press) if the ball is lost, while staying in shape to be able to stay in shape if the press is unsuccessful.

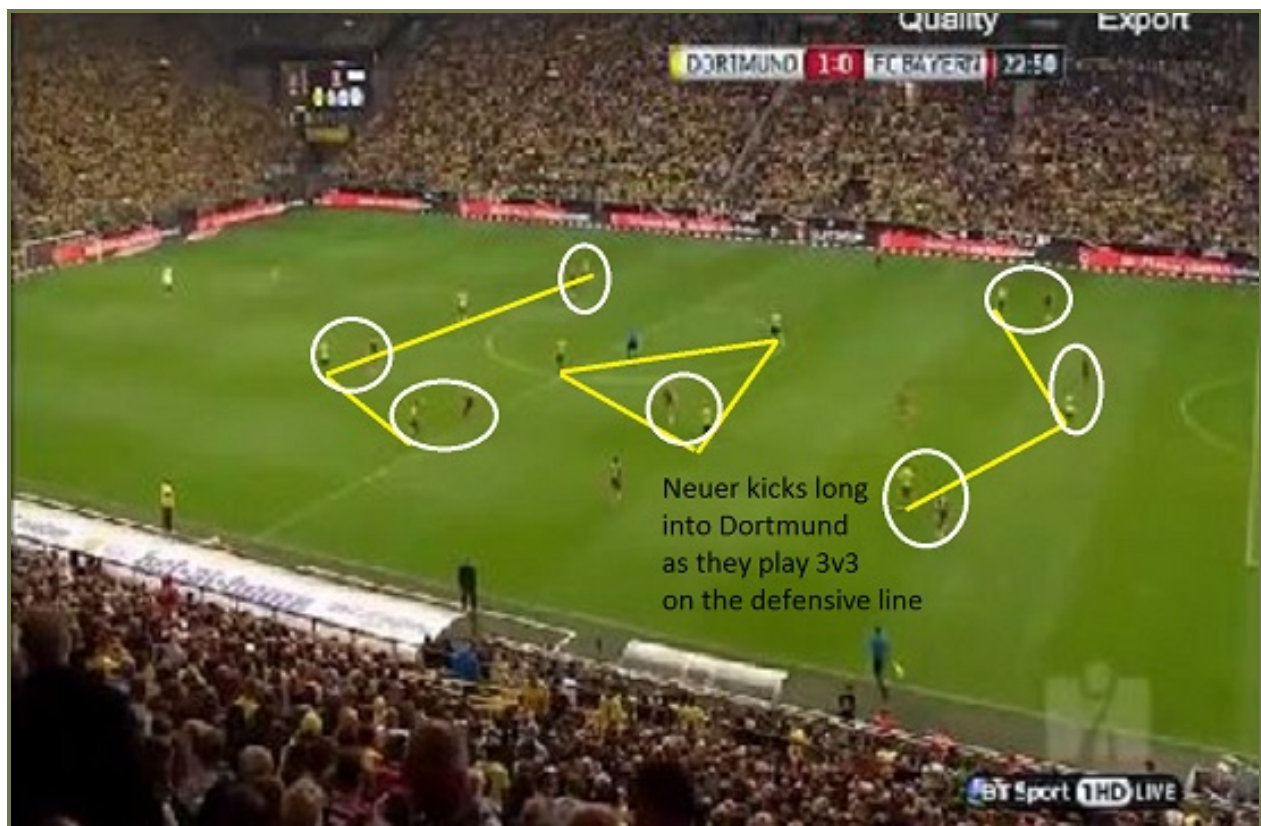
Dortmund Compaction on the side



Here, Dortmund have defended a throw in and forced the play back. As that happens, all players play 1v1 and man-mark across the field on the near side, with Aubameyang able to block the pass from Martinez to Alaba.

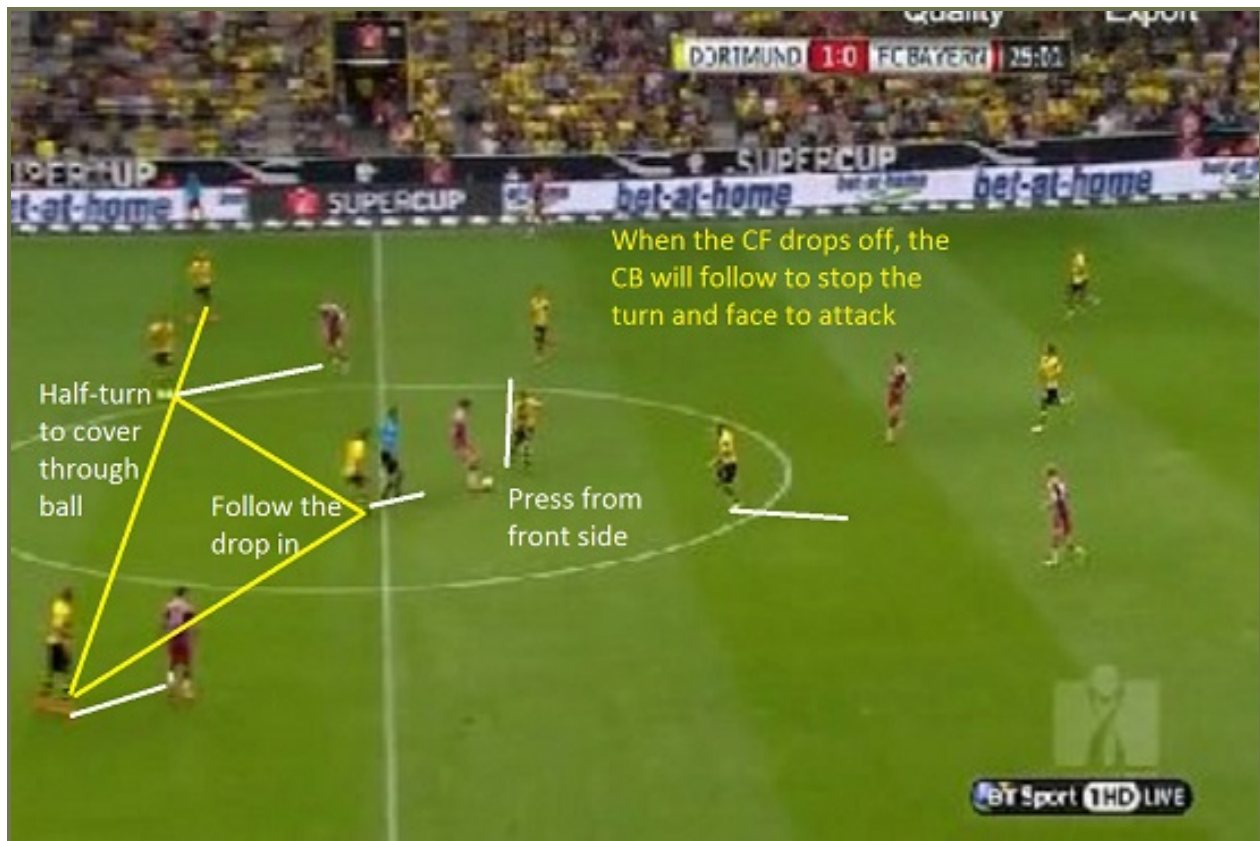
Martinez is forced to play a backpass to Neuer who clears it straight into the Dortmund midfield.

Dortmund GK defence



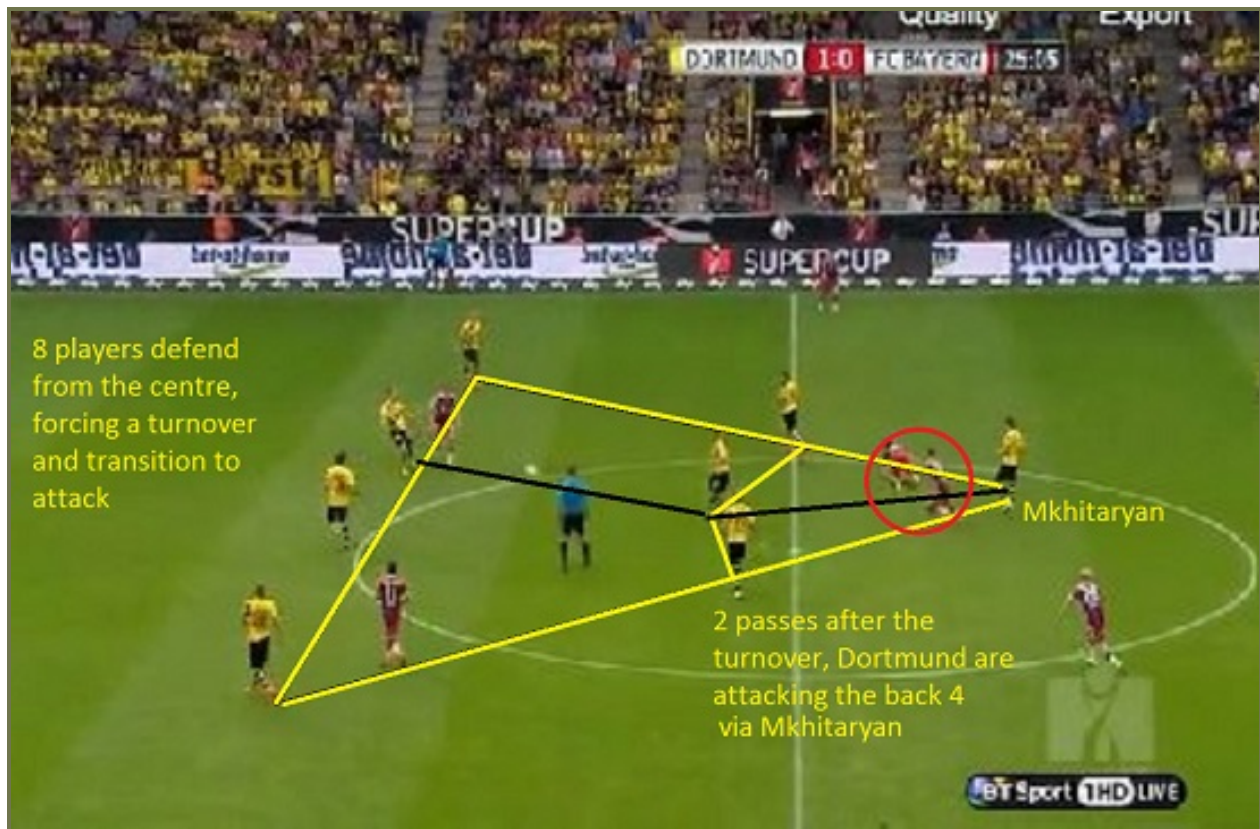
Instead of allowing Bayern to control possession, Dortmund play 3v3 on the back line, forcing the play long. Dortmund have set up a pressing trap as they can allow the spare CM to receive; into a pressing trap where they press high in midfield, press inside from the wide area and block off all exits. Instead of falling into the trap, Neuer kicks long which Dortmund recover easily.

Defensive pressure and the defensive line

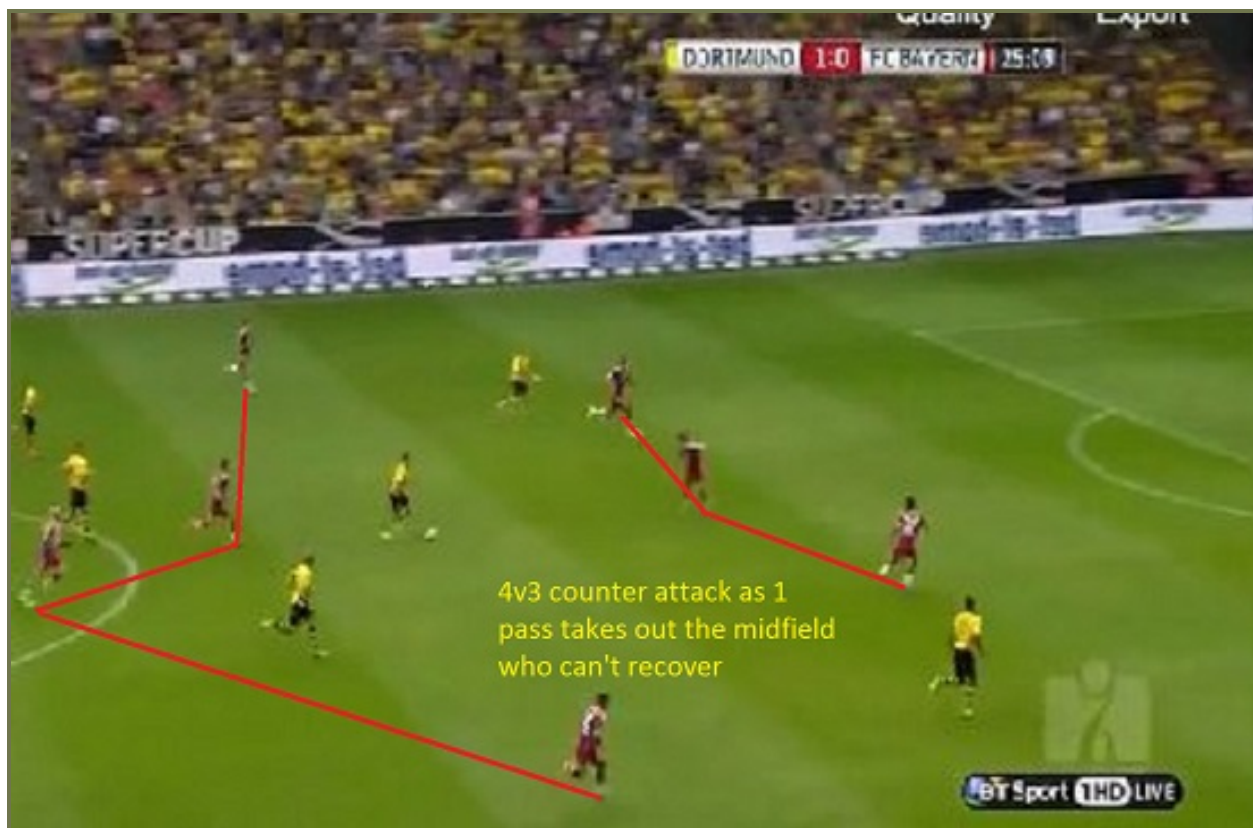


As Dortmund press high and don't want to be stretched horizontally, the marking CB follows Lewandowski as he drops deep. Note the body position of the left side CB – he is turning to face his own goal to drop off and cover the pass behind the defence by turning his body, instead of doing so when the ball is passed, giving an advantage to Mueller who will run beyond.

Central compaction – making a narrow block to make play predictable



As Dortmund recover into position, they form a 4-3-1 triangular block with Mkhitarian as the outlet in transition with protection behind the attack.



Now that Mkhitarjan initiates the attack, Dortmund have a 4v3 on the counter attack as Bayern's flat 4 in midfield can't recover with no protection between the lines.

I feel that the change to 4-3-3/4-3-1-2 helped them win this game against a weakened Bayern side, especially with the 5v4 advantage across the midfield, giving them protection to screen passing lanes and give an outball between the lines in transition. With Bayern's winger tucking inside, the fullbacks marking the wingers as they moved inside helped solidify the back 4 in their narrow positions. Overall, Dortmund deserved to win the game 2-0 and could have won by more.