

## Real Madrid Analysis

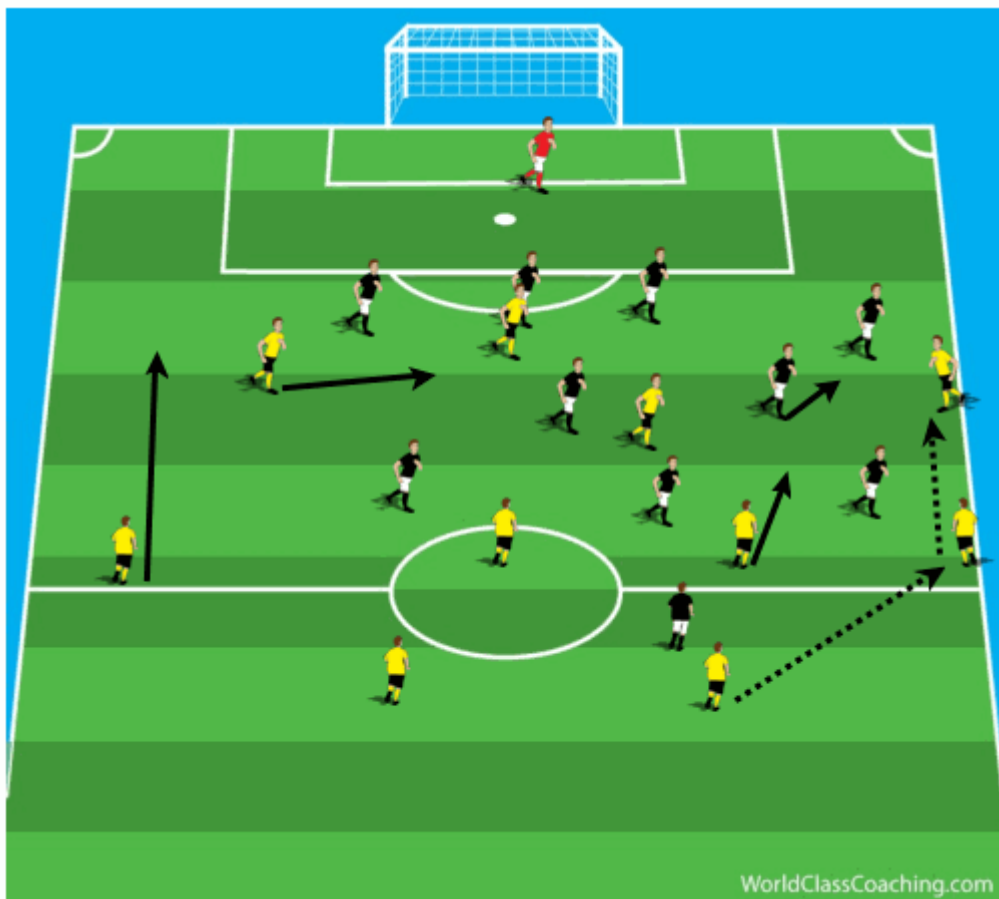
### Patterns of Play and tactical options within the 4-2-3-1 – Real Madrid (Di Maria)

Real Madrid have become one of the most effective teams in Europe under Jose Mourinho, aided by utilising the specific abilities of certain players, and we often see patterns of play emerging that have been worked on in training enough times that every player knows their role and positions when the ball is in certain areas and with certain players. Jose Mourinho's teams generally are attack minded, but with a strong emphasis on defensive solidity within either a 4-2-3-1 or 4-3-3 formation. This Real Madrid team have added an extra dimension since Mourinho joined and now they are very quick on the counter attack and use the speed of the front 4 very well, generally Ronaldo, Ozil, Di Maria and Benzema.

Angel Di Maria is a very fast and skilful left winger, capable of cutting inside and playing reverse passes or long diagonal passes accurately, or going outside and then cutting back inside to cross with the left foot, generally on the right side of the 4-2-3-1. Real Madrid will use these abilities to bring a crossing option into the attack and use Ronaldo's exceptional heading ability as he starts moving central early to reduce the distance of the cross and the time it takes Ronaldo to get into the box, with Benzema also inside the box with Ozil supporting from deeper in the number 10 position.

Players numbers (in general starting line up positions, 2 Arbeloa, 3 Marcelo, 4 Pepe, 5 Ramos, 6, Alonso, 7 Ronaldo, 8 Khedira, 9 Benzema, 10 Ozil, 22 Di Maria)

**Di Maria receives on the side and uses dribbling ability to cut inside to find the next pass**

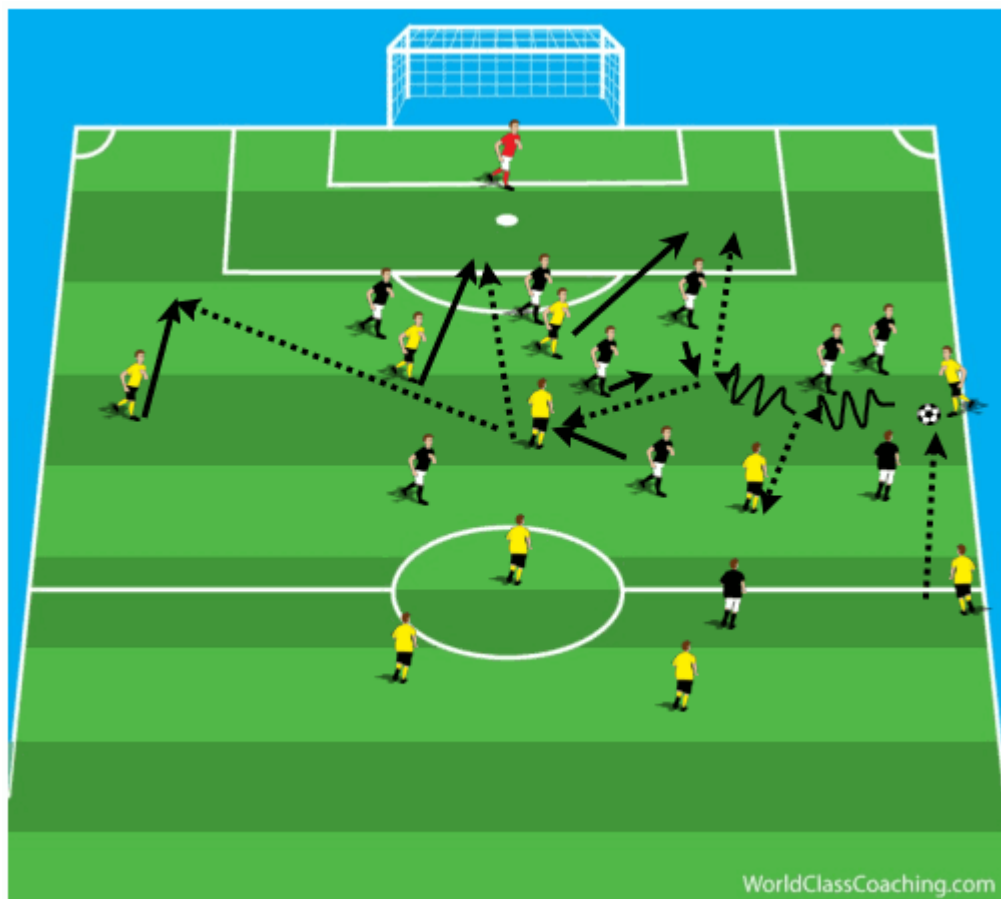


Ramos passes wide again to Arbeloa, who passes forward to Di Maria who is instantly pressed by the full back and doubled up with the near side central midfielder. This allows Alonso some space to move forward and offer a pass back and open up an opportunity for Alonso to attack the space the central midfielder has left. In this instance, the other central midfielder would likely cover over a little more. Ronaldo again, has moved inside as Arbeloa has received and allowed Marcelo to move forward and re-create the left side width. This is almost identical movements as the 1<sup>st</sup> pattern of play except the ball is passed wide and allows Alonso to move forward.

Di Maria is a skilful dribbler and his 1<sup>st</sup> option is to cut inside and look for a diagonal run behind the defence for Benzema or Ronaldo.

If he can't cut inside, he has been known to fake the long diagonal pass then quickly accelerate down the line to make a cross from between the goal line and edge of the box with Ronaldo, Benzema and Ozil in support inside the box.

#### **Di Maria cuts inside and assess' his options for the penetrating pass**

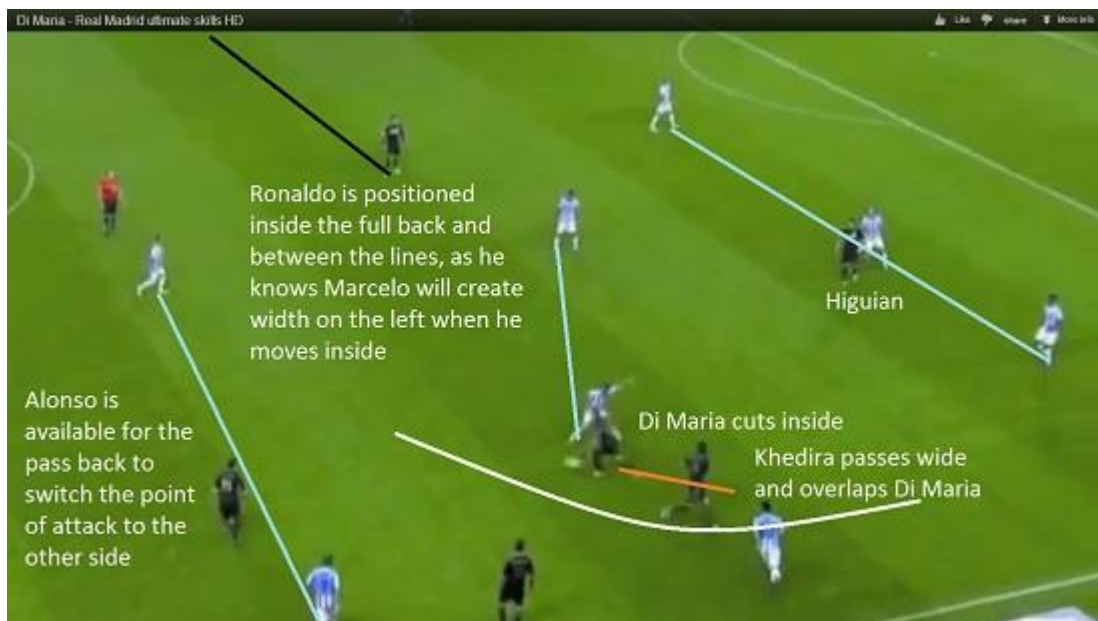


As Di Maria cuts inside, he protects the ball with his right side and keeps the ball on the outside of his left foot. As he does this, his options are (with quick penetration in mind):

- Reverse pass into the run of Benzema behind the defence
- Diagonal through pass into the run of Ronaldo behind the defence, or into feet to shoot 1<sup>st</sup> time, depending on the line depth and speed of the attack
- Pass into Ozil who can find Ronaldo with the pass behind the defence
- As Ronaldo makes a diagonal run, the defence will be narrower, Ozil can find Marcelo.

If the short penetrating passes are not available, Di Maria can pass back to Alonso who is positioned where he can play a long pass over to Marcelo, moving the defence across and opening up new spaces, knowing Marcelo is a competent attacker who can dribble 1v1 and make accurate crosses into the box for Ronaldo, Ozil, Benzema and Di Maria who will support the attack at the back post as Alonso switches the point of attack to the far side, with Khedira and Alonso covering the space around 30 yards from goal to recycle a cleared cross.

#### Examples of Di Maria cutting inside from the Right Attacking Midfield position



As Khedira passes wide to Di Maria, he overlaps and continues to support the attack. Di Maria cuts inside as he knows that both Alonso is available for a pass back to switch to the far side, or Ronaldo is available for the pass centrally between the lines, inside the full back in a position to dribble and pass or dribble and shoot. As Ronaldo has moved inside, Marcelo will now re-create the width on the left. Note Higuain playing on the far side centre back as Di Maria passes to Ronaldo – this is so he is on the central defenders blind side as the ball reaches Ronaldo and gives him more opportunities for movements to receive the next pass.

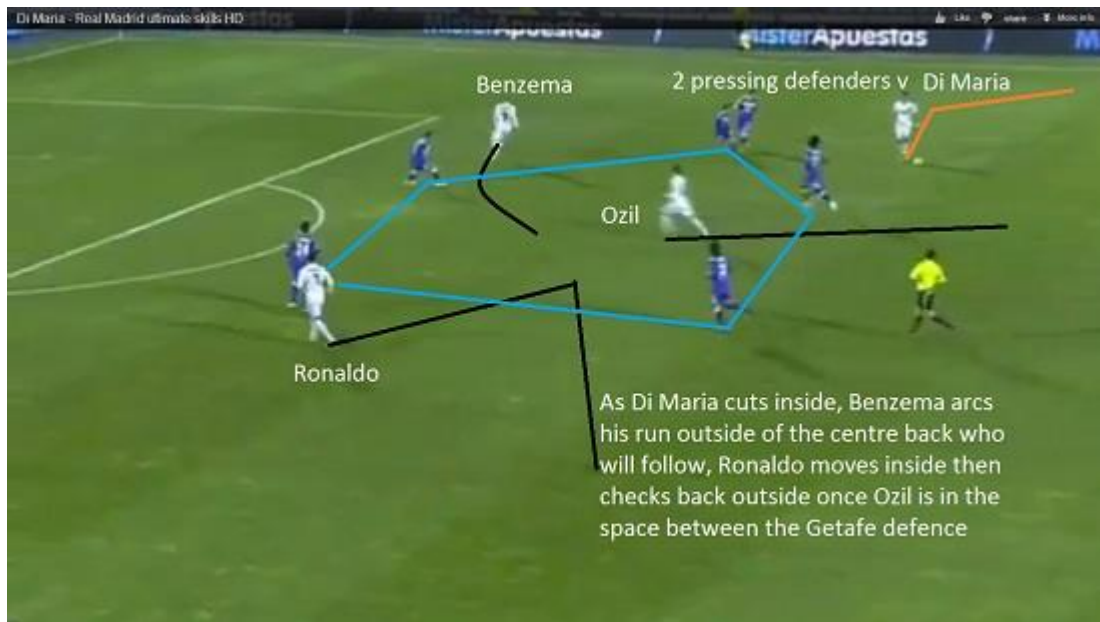


As Di Maria cuts inside to pass to Ronaldo, the closest defensive midfielder will press the ball and force Ronaldo to turn back. Di Maria needs to pass to Ronaldo's safe side to allow Ronaldo to protect the ball as passing to the other side may result in an interception or an easier opportunity to win the ball for the defensive player. Marcelo has now moved up so it is likely Ronaldo has made his decision early to turn away and pass out to Marcelo to retain possession.

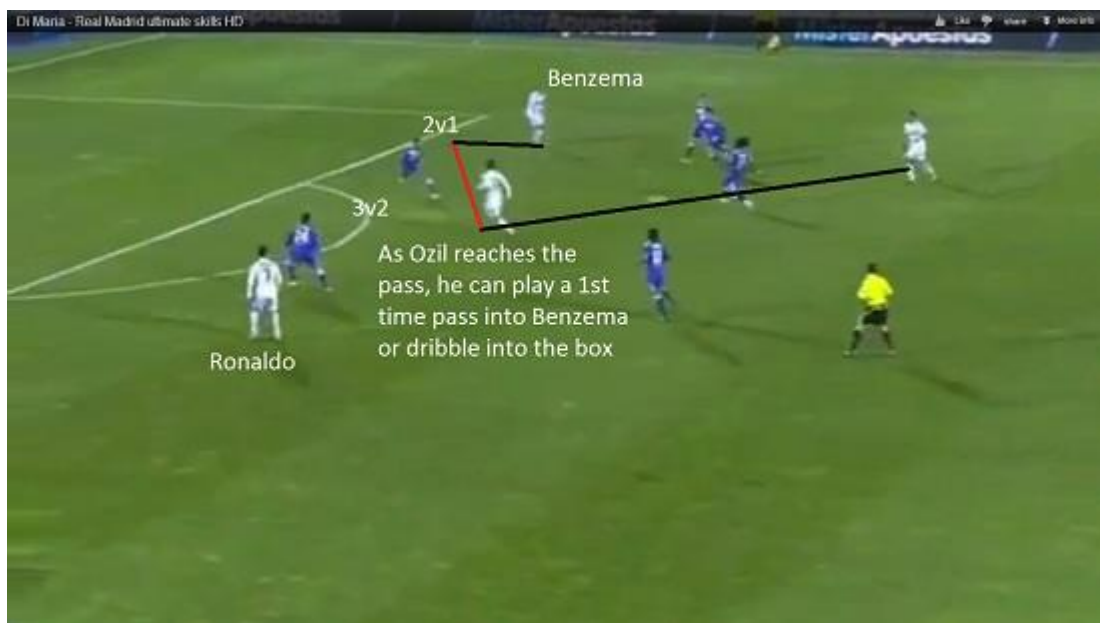


As the ball is passed over to Marcelo, Higuain starts to move away from his opponent and try to find space as the ball enters the penalty area, or find space to link play around the box.

**Di Maria cuts inside to make an assist from the pattern of play**



Di Maria has 2 pressing defenders who continue to back off and not tackle, so he has time to assess his options. Benzema pulls wide to offer a pass down the side but more likely this is because he knows that either Ronaldo or Ozil will receive the next pass and he should move on the outside of the defender to offer a quick penetration from either Ozil or Ronaldo. As Ozil is breaking through the centre, Ronaldo moves outside making the space for Ozil larger as the defender has a problem – Press Ozil and risk the pass to Ronaldo, or stay with Ronaldo and risk Ozil running and shooting – it's a 3v2 so both decisions have a consequence.



The defender stays with Ronaldo, but has poor body shape and is too far away from him team mate. As Ozil receives the pass on the run, and is left footed, he can play the next pass 1<sup>st</sup> time into Benzema or take his 1<sup>st</sup> touch towards goal and try to score himself. He takes his 1<sup>st</sup> touch between the defenders then dribbles around the goalkeeper before scoring a well-rehearsed move.

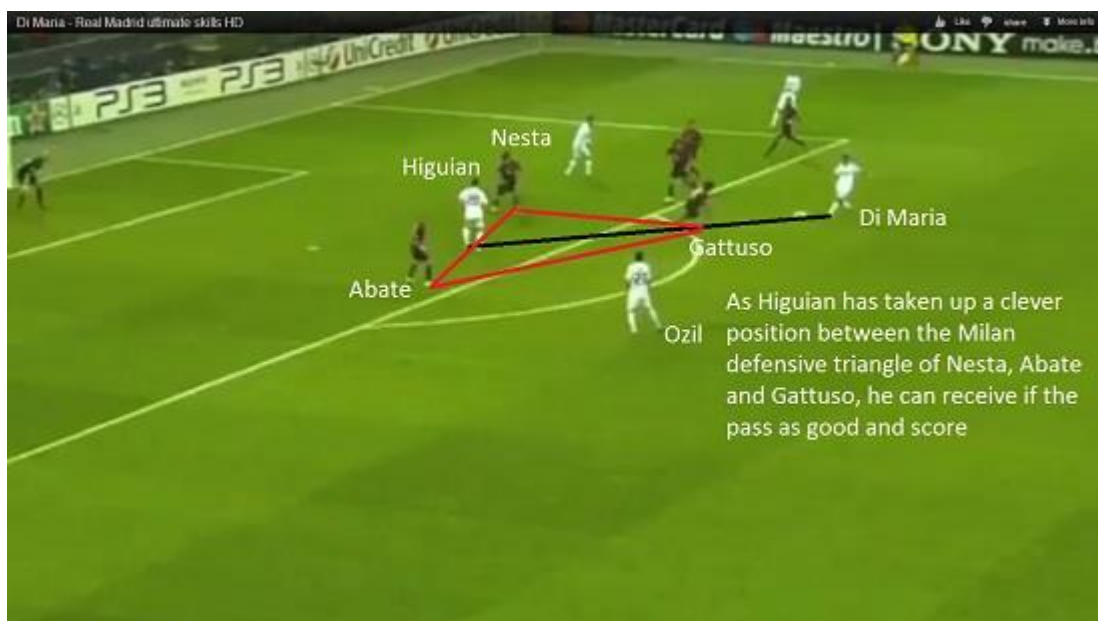


Note the body shape of the pressing defender – he is trying to force Ozil left to play 2v2, instead, Ozil passes ‘against the grain’ to the right and opens up the space for Benzema to attack.

### Di Maria makes an almost identical assist from the right side v AC Milan



Again, Di Maria has a defender backing off and giving him time to choose his pass, but this time he has Ramos overlapping on the right. As Silva moves out to press the ball, Ronaldo (who had moved central already) makes a 2<sup>nd</sup> run into the space behind Silva to offer a pass from Di Maria. This run also moves Nesta slightly further over to try to cover the possible pass to Ronaldo, but Abate doesn't react to get himself closer to Nesta. Higuian has cleverly positioned himself between the defensive triangle of Nesta, Abate and Gattuso, offering a 2<sup>nd</sup> passing option from Di Maria.



Di Maria cuts inside and chooses the pass into Higuian, who has a great chance to score. Gattuso makes the right decision to try and stop the pass but Di Maria knows how much time he has and the

passing angle is available. Alternatively, had Gattuso blocked the pass, Ozil was in a good position to receive and may have been able to find Higuain himself given that it may have been a 2v1 against Abate with Ozil and Higuain.

**Stevie Grieve**

[Steviegrieve@hotmail.com](mailto:Steviegrieve@hotmail.com)

**@StevieGrieve - Twitter**