

## Euro 2012 – Italy v Spain – Italy’s 3-5-2 almost nullifies Spain’s midfield runners

Spain have some of the best technical footballers in the world. Italy on the other hand are not the same quality as previous Italian teams, but are still tactically very good, with some dangerous players. In this Italian team, they have a strong mentality and don’t seem to have a preferred way of playing.

Italy’s game plan was to play man-man all over the field – Italy’s 3 Central midfielders v Spain’s, Italy’s 2 wing backs v Spain’s full back’s, Italy’s 2 strikers v Spain’s 2 centre backs, with Italy’s back 3 playing deep and covering against Spain’s attacking runs by the deep lying front 3.

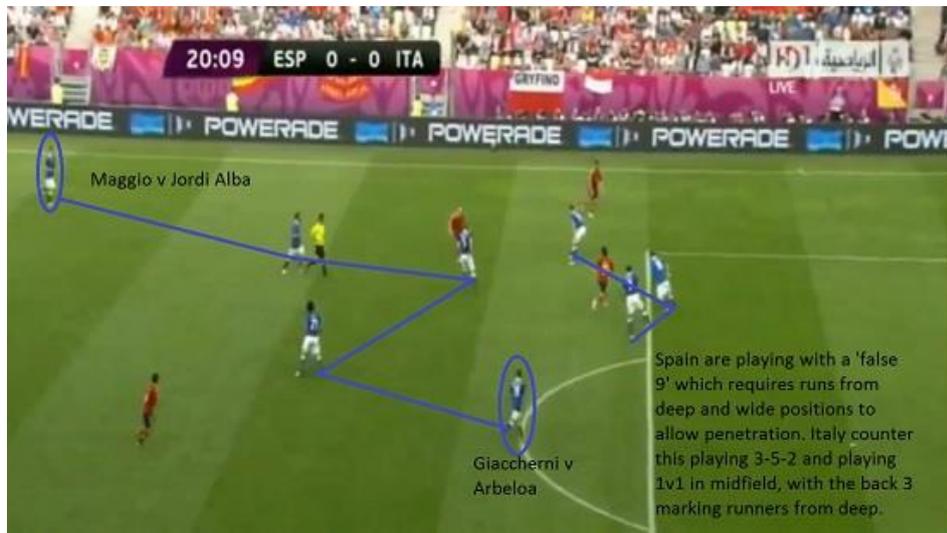
### **Italy’s pressing game – force play back when possible**



Italy’s defence have played between the width of the goal posts, ensuring that they mark runners when they appear. Both wing backs are between the lines, close to the nearest full back and stopping passes from being given directly to feet. They stay in this deep block and make sure that Spain must work hard to find combinations to find a way through the Italian midfield.

The position of Pirlo is key, as he is blocking the pass into the feet of Silva who could link with his team mate on the edge of the box and penetrate the midfield; Pirlo’s positioning on the outside of the 3 midfielders stops this pass and forces play wide and back, stopping Italy being penetrated.

## Italy in transition – recover shape quickly



Italy loses possession and Italy shift across to press Iniesta, with the body shape forcing Spain wide and away from where they like to attack. The back 3 ensure Silva is pressed and covered on both sides, but Iniesta still finds a pass into him. Silva bumps off a pass to the right but it is flagged for offside.

## Italy's high pressing game

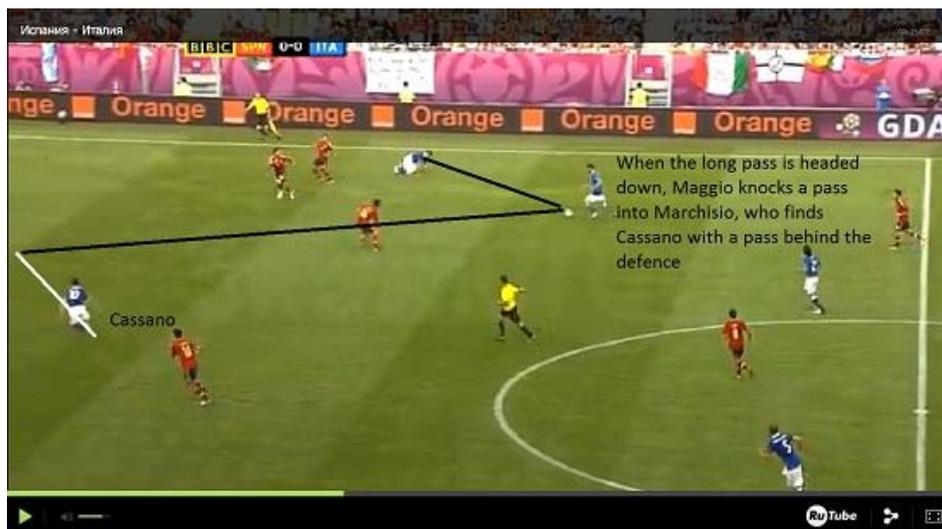


Players and coaches have now witnessed Jose Mourinho's Real Madrid beating Barcelona in the Nou Camp, and how they do it, so teams have started to copy this game plan, against Spain. Press high from goal kicks, and force them to play long. It's risky as they can still pass through opponents but effective as it slows down play in the build-up and consolidation phases, and allows an opportunity to win the ball close to the goal. Note that Balotelli and Cassano (who can also press Busquets on the other side if he needs to) are close to Ramos and Pique, Maggio is close to Alba, while Motta, Pirlo and Marchisio made a triangle to press Busquets, Xavi and Alonso. As Busquets gets caught in possession, Alonso drops back to help defend the situation. 4-3 v 5-2 works well here.

## Screening and stopping short passes



Cassano and Balotelli again press high, with Giacchini pressing on Alba who passed inside to Pique. As Cassano and Balotelli pressed high, and with Busquets and Alonso now so deep to create some space to start dictating play, Pique has limited options and plays long. Wing Backs are circled.



De Rossi wins the header from the long pass and Maggio knocks it inside to Marchisio in space. Now a large space to pass and run into is created, Cassano makes the run and has a chance to score, but can't convert.



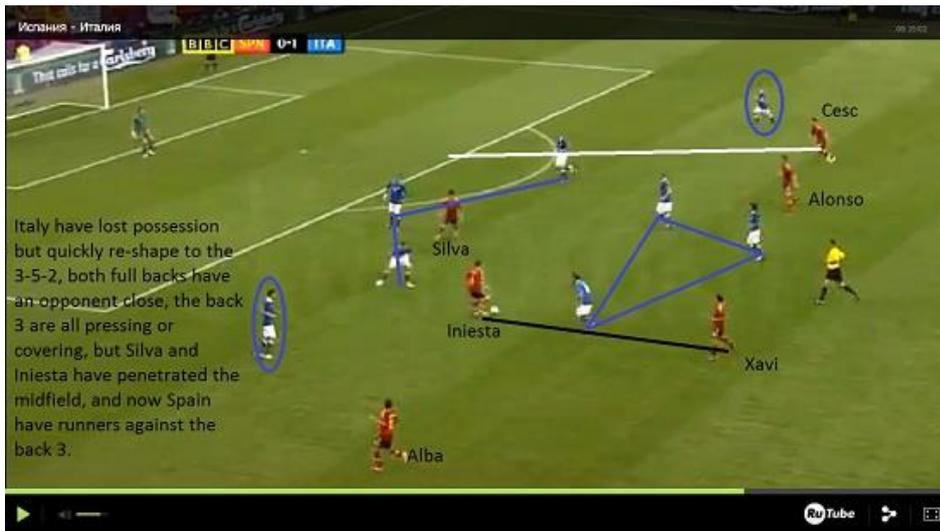
Cassano's chance to score is dragged across goal but could've been converted by Balotelli at the far post.

**Italy directly attacking space**

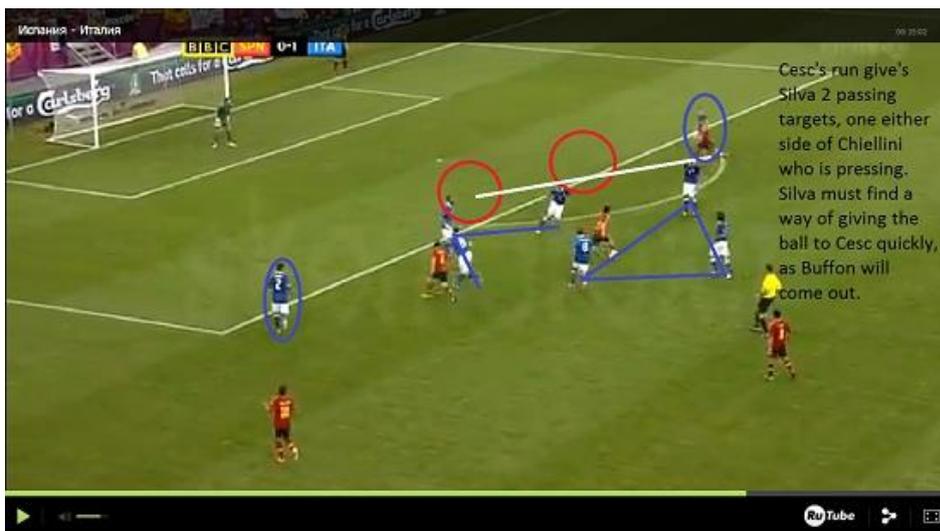


As Italy attack, they look to penetrate quickly. Pirlo has possession and as there is space behind Busquets, with 3 others ahead of the play, Pirlo goes for the dribble. Busquets is off balance and this makes it a good decision to dribble through midfield. Pirlo finds Di Natale with a through pass and Italy score, to go 1-0 up. Note Cassano's run to the right, Di Natale could've passed to Cassano to score into an empty net.

## Spain find a way through



After passing and probing for around an hour, Spain make a break through, literally minutes after Italy take the lead. Xavi finds Iniesta between the lines and Cesc on the far side can see a potential move building up, so he starts his 3<sup>rd</sup> man run early. Italy have 8 players between the width of the box but sometimes quality of play can overcome a tactical game plan.



Iniesta passes to Silva who turns outside to protect the ball, and scan the play on the far side, Cesc is now goal side of the wing back and Silva has now 2 target areas for his pass. He uses the outside of his left foot to somehow flick the ball past Chiellini's right side into the penalty spot where Cesc arrives and smashes home 1<sup>st</sup> time.

Italy's game plan was the right one for this game, and give they had a few good attacks to score from, and Spain struggled to break them down, Prandelli should be given credit for such a well organised performance.

### Training session to develop the 3-5 defensive structure

Set up a box with 2 halves – in the defensive half 3 defenders v 1 attacker, in the midfield half, 3 midfielders v 5 attackers. The 3 midfielders should prevent passes going directly into the attacker.

The midfield should try to ensure that they cannot be penetrated between 2 of the players, dropping off and shifting over as the ball is switched to the other side. To score, the attack must dribble over the end line.

### 3-5-2 Defending with wing backs



Set up 3 grids – a wide grid, midfield grid and a defensive grid. Player's play man-man inside the grid. The yellows can have any 2 of the attackers drop deep into the midfield to make a 5 v 3.

### Coaching Points: 3-5-2 defending

- Midfield must stay close to opponents
- Back 3 must take responsibility for marking and covering team mates
- Communication from defence if players drop deep
- Wing backs tuck into the defensive zone when ball is on opposite side
- Stay on feet and don't get dragged out of position
- Try to make play predictable and force mistakes where the ball can be won
- Set traps for the opponent by showing a pass/dribble then use multi-pressure on the ball
- Score quickly on the counter attack into the goals behind the midfield