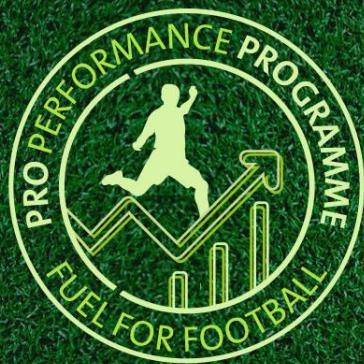




# KYLE DEGELMAN





## FUEL FOR FOOTBALL

*Change The Game*

Scanning, Positioning & Movement

Kyle Degelman



## OVERVIEW

To build on ideas discussed previously, this analysis will go into greater detail about the intangibles of body shape and position with the thought processes across common scenarios. To start, we will consider when to invert versus stay wide with reference to the position of teammates. Thereafter, we will break down where to face based on the positions that you are receiving from. While a head check over your shoulder reveals some information, processing live footage directly through your eyes will give up much more. Therefore, the way you face can massively affect how well you find options. As well as this, we will key in on other scanning-related ideas, such as how changing angles and staying on the ball for longer creates more opportunities to remain progressive. Although there is a clear pathway for decision-making, it is only possible to consistently find the higher options from this if you are smart on and off the ball. Evading pressure and opening space where you can find these is crucial. The difference between being in space and under pressure changes decision-making greatly. Therefore, differentiating between which scenarios allow for which thought processes more often can allow you to see the game much faster in real-time. The decision-making pathways will not change, but the speed at which you skip through them to find the best option available may become more apparent. For this, we will look at top full-backs for how their shape and position creates success.

## STRENGTHS & AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- *Tracking runners*
- *Pushing forward into gaps*
- *Opening new angles on the ball*
- *Recognising first-time options*
- *Body shape*
- *Scanning while on the move*
- *Using teammates to protect 1v1's*
- *Knowing when to invert*

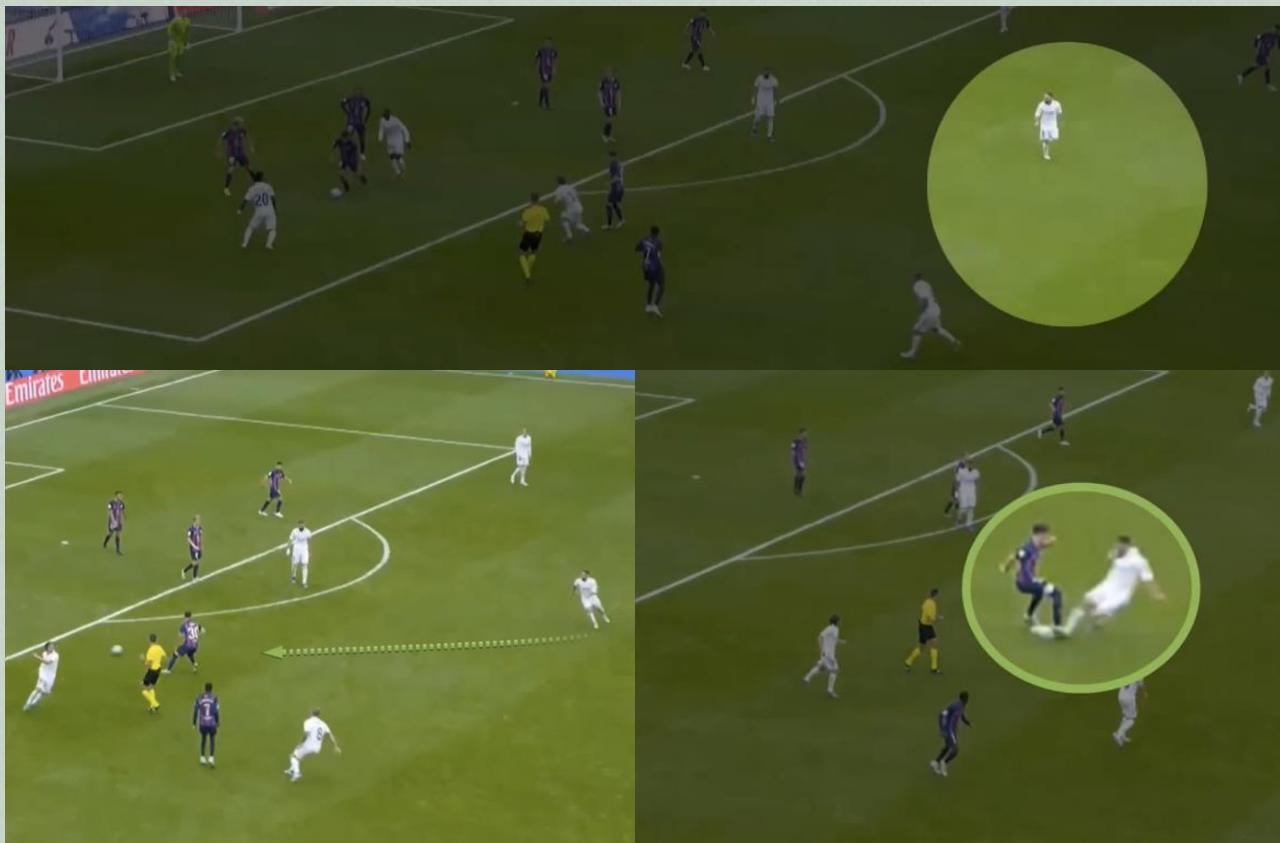




## ► GAME ANALYSIS

### ***DEFENDING IN FRONT***

When scanning defensively, the major decision is on when to press versus when to drop off or hold into your defensive line. For higher rates of success with this, you should also read ahead of play while assessing the scenario in front of you to make it easier to apply the more effective decision. Consider the risk and reward of pressing versus dropping on the fly and more consistently read this correctly.



As we can see here, Carvajal initially began to drop after the turnover. A major reason why is that the opponent on the ball had space to open up and play forwards. That said, he was quickly put under pressure, which is a trigger to expect poorer decision-making or technique. As this happens, it is vital to assess the options available to the player on the ball and what responsibilities you have. As there was only one free player in front, who was also within a reachable distance, it made sense to press forward the moment the ball left the Barcelona player's foot. Furthermore, on this occasion the pass was played too far inside due to the pressure, making the gamble to step in worthwhile and leading into the successful tackle. In conclusion, assess the risk and reward of pressing or dropping with your initial scanning and subsequently watch for triggers which call for you to step in or drop off.



## ► GAME ANALYSIS

### ***DEFENDING IN BEHIND***

Speaking more on the latter option, whenever an opponent has space in front of them to drive into or play progressive options, your primary focus should be on protecting space in behind you. With this in mind, you would typically drop off or hold your defensive line. Smaller details also matter in this moment too, for example, keeping your weight onto your back foot whenever there is a potential threat offering into space behind you. That said, as we are focusing on the scanning, what is important to speak about here is where you look, when, and what for.



We can pick up from this example, a few smart ideas for dealing with dangerous passes in beyond you. First and most important is to see the ball as it is played. The initial information you take from this is very useful for getting to the correct position. In particular, if you see the flight of the ball and your matchup does not, it is often then possible to beat them to it. That said, to be looking at the right moment and still know where your opponent is can be difficult. If close enough to them, you should grab a hold or link arms so that you know where they are even if not looking. Otherwise, keep glancing across to this player before returning your attention to the ball itself. Once you have read the flight of the ball, you can turn your attention to where you expect it to arrive or to your matchup with the aim of reaching it first. All of this is what we see applied perfectly by the full-back in the above example.



## ► GAME ANALYSIS

### ***COVER FROM DEFENSIVE MID***

Speaking specifically to the 4-3-3 scheme, one way you can protect yourself from dealing with 1v1 defensive situations is having the defensive midfielder cut his distance from the defensive line earlier. This can be done with him filling in behind you as cover, or by sitting behind the left-central-defender who can then get tighter to you. In the back three variation (3-4-3) of this scheme, this is done naturally as the defensive midfielder is already the extra defender allowing this cover to be created more easily.



It is vital that you command your midfielder to drop in this manner as without him you can often be caught out or will need to deal with 1v1's far more frequently. One extra point to note is that it is ideal when the defensive midfielder has already shifted to face forwards after dropping towards the defensive line. This allows him to press out quickly should you be beaten to your inside and therefore you can also be more aggressive covering the line as a result.



## ► GAME ANALYSIS

### ***CONTRASTING MOVEMENTS***

Fundamental to any scheme is that players occupy different vertical lines. Although it can often be useful to play the same passing line as a teammate, this is diagonally rather than vertically. The issue with occupying the same vertical line is that it becomes easy for a defence to simply shift across in unison to take away passing options. When players are staggered, it is not possible to protect each option simultaneously. At best, players will look to split distances between opponents and use feints or jab steps to cause indecision in who to play to for the ball carrier. In the 4-3-3, the most common movement to create staggered vertical lines is for the winger to pull into the half-space, while the full-back then pushes forwards into the space down the line.



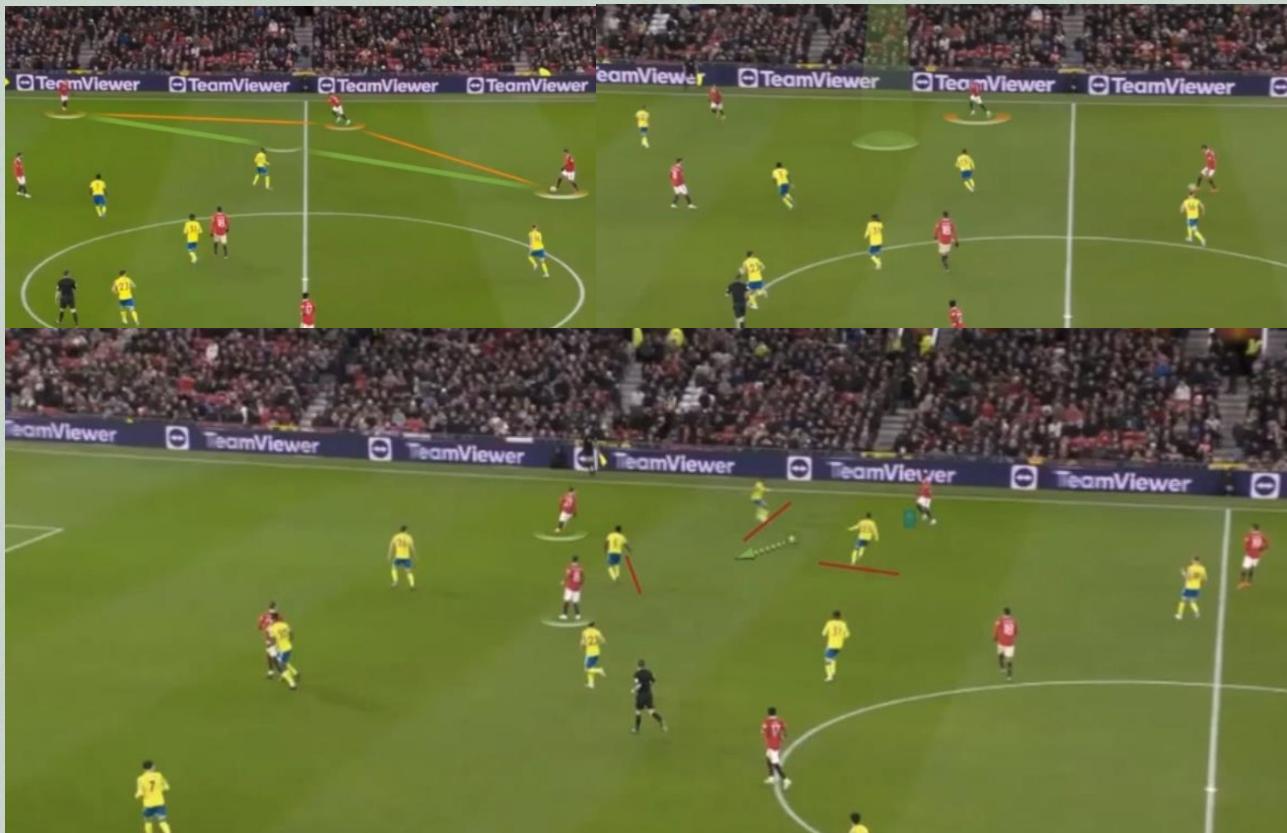
The third component to this is the movement of the left-central midfielder to pull into the half-space from a deeper position. A simple contrasting movement between the full-back and winger can often suffice, but this third movement is what creates the most disruption to the defensive shape of the opponent as it means that both the full-back and winger are pinned with multiple opponents to be concerned by. Note the same passing line occupied by the wing-back and winger in the bottom of these snapshots as an illustration of how the same diagonal lines pin opponents.



## ► GAME ANALYSIS

### ***ADVANCED POSITIONING***

Against a low and sometimes mid-block, it can be wise to drop deeper into the defensive line to draw opponents out to press. This expands the field and makes it more difficult for an opponent to keep their lines compact. For the defensive line of the opposition to stay spread, wingers should then stay wider in their base positions as this happens. When the distances are too great, it matters less that you occupy the same vertical line as this player, because the distances are too great between the opposition full-back and winger anyway. That said, an issue can arise after receiving which forces play to be recycled, hence, it is still ideal to invert in these moments to retain the staggering of lines for later in the play. Furthermore, it is in these moments that it can be most optimal to invert into the passing line of the winger.



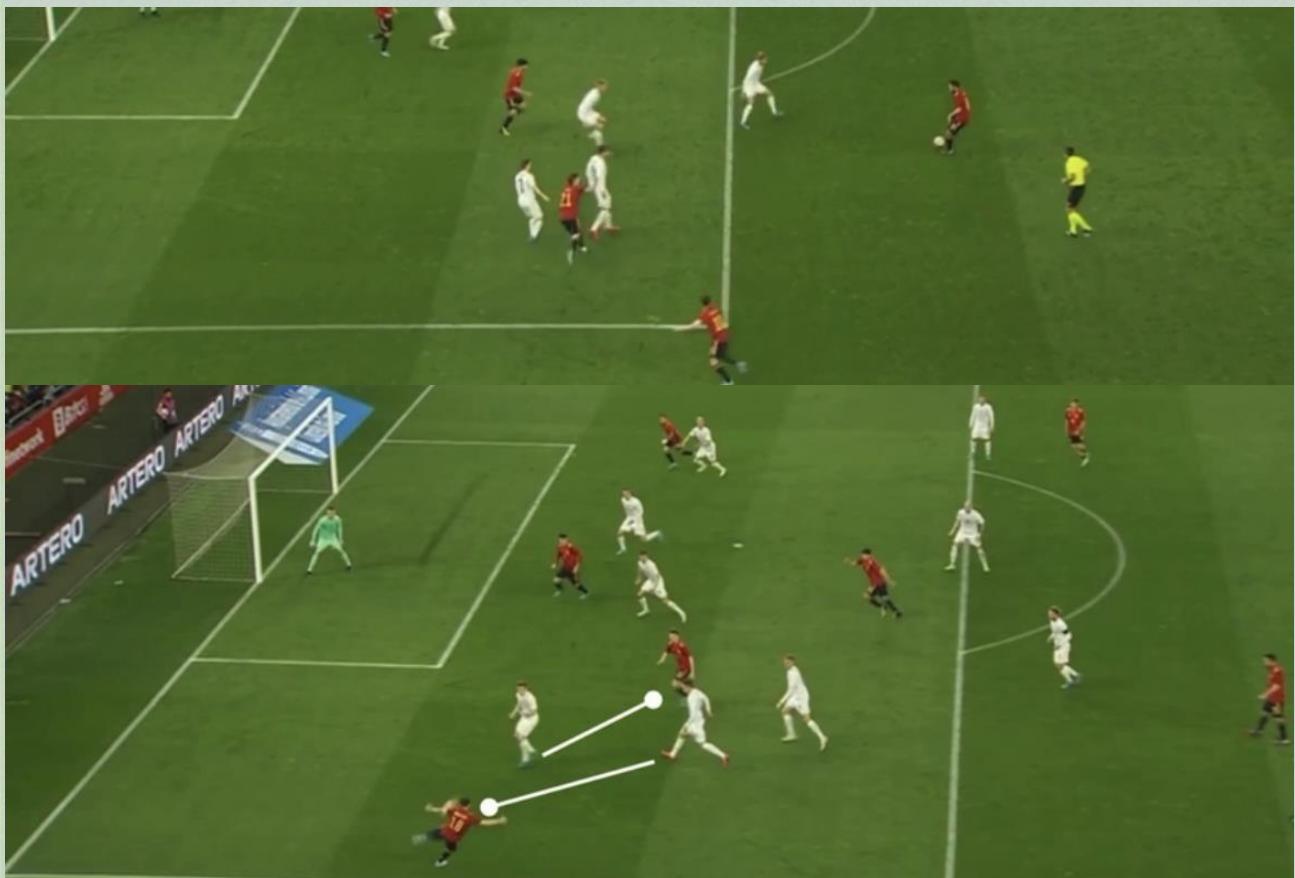
Consider how options can be closed down after receiving when starting wider with the winger on the same line. This would have mattered less if the right-back were to receive shallower, as the opposition winger in pressing would give up more space down the line for the winger to 1v1 in. In advancing, the correct decision was to invert onto the passing line. This would still have drawn a pressing pack, but in a position where a short touch would have opened up a forward passing option outside of the pack.



## ► GAME ANALYSIS

### PINNING THE FULL-BACK

Speaking a little more about pins, we can point out that one of the main principles of play is to cause dilemmas for opponents. That is to say – give a player two problems to contend with at the same time where there is no perfect answer. Pinning an opponent means positioning in such a manner that an opponent feels responsible for two players at the same time. A key role of the full-back in most schemes, but none more so than the 4-3-3, is getting high enough to pose a threat to the opposition full-back. This in combination with the contrasting movement of the winger creates a difficult to win situation for the opposition full-back.



With the same movements, note how it was not possible to follow the run inside and protect the ball out wide simultaneously. At best, the defender could communicate to pass the winger on while shifting his body shape to deal with the wide option, but outside of the very best players, this is an inconsistent decision and furthermore, remains difficult to deal with. As a result of following the run, the wing-back was then able to receive with space from his marker, while the winger also broke free to the blindside when the opposition full-back had to shift responsibilities.



## ► GAME ANALYSIS

### ***OPTIONS RECEIVING IN THE PIN***

Whoever receives in pinning situations, it is important to keep the game forwards after whenever possible. If the winger receives in the half-space, they should look for opportunities to turn and drive, either sliding their full-back in down the line or cutting inside for more lethal opportunities. That said, even if they go back, the pin remains a problem and often a central midfielder can find the wider option afterwards. When the ball goes directly into the full-back, this is typically where space opens down the line to quickly slide the winger in. Knowing this, open your body language early to find the option and then generally look to underlap towards the box afterwards – thus staggering the lines again. This body language might draw a marker to overly aggressively cut the passing line to the outside. Therefore, this is then where the sharp cut inside to drive into the half-space comes into play.



For the first example, we can see how the full-back pushed into space early to receive off the switch. Remember that forward ground covered whenever a defence is in transition leads to more efficient chance creation. Upon receiving, he could immediately find the ball into space down the line. This works so well in this scheme because the earlier movements of the winger open up the space for either a second movement back into the space, or for a #8 or centre-forward to offer into as well. With the latter example, note how the full-back tried to cheat in closing the distance from the full-back, which opened the direct ball down the line from deeper instead.



## ► GAME ANALYSIS

### *ANGLING TOWARDS OPTIONS*

Offensively speaking, one advantage of playing as a full-back is that you have more of the pitch in your vision without the need for constant head checks. In particular, if you have no options directly ahead of yourself, which is more likely as you reach the final third, all attention can go towards the box while adopting a smart body shape to see what is going on in there. Aim to see both the ball and the most dangerous options with your body shape whenever it is possible so that you scan more easily.



Here, for example, it was easy to recognise Haaland's positioning for Walker because he had a constant eye on the box even before the situation had developed for him. The whole time, he could assess the ball and respond correctly, such as with his forward run into the space, while simultaneously knowing ahead of time where his teammates would be. That is also what allowed him to play first-time with accuracy.



## ► GAME ANALYSIS

### HEAD CHECKS

Further back, the ideal body shape is generally that which allows you to face down the line. Seeing each of the striker, winger and any nearby central midfielders will allow you to pick up on their movements more easily. This does not necessarily mean you will face up the pitch as you receive, but certainly beforehand, this body shape is preferable whenever possible for knowing where your options are and for understanding how much pressure you will be put under.



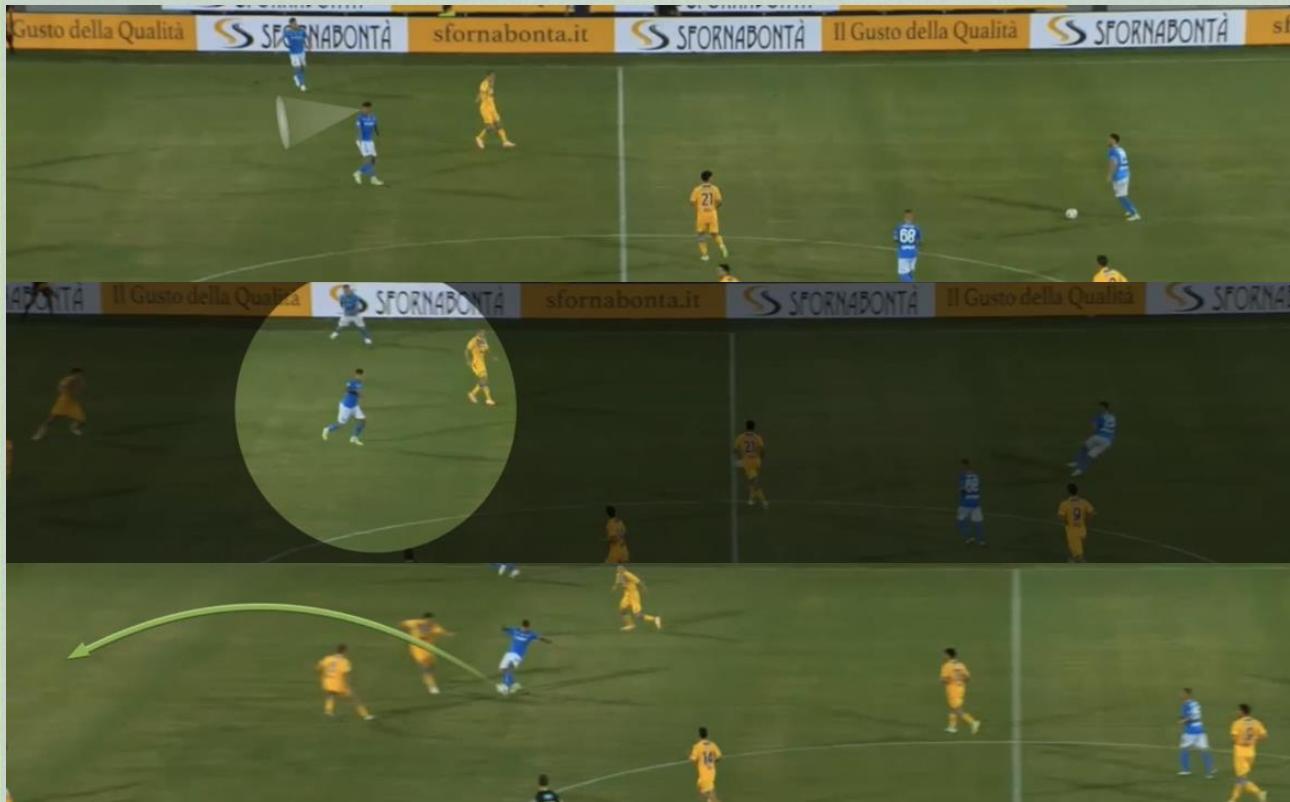
As we can then see here, the constant head checks are made towards the ball if it is not already in your field of vision. This is to read if you need to change position based on the pressure teammates are put under or to offer for them along a greater passing line. It is true you might shift completely if the pressure is significant, prioritising body shape and positioning that allows for maintenance of possession or protects against a loss of it. Otherwise, upon receiving it will be easier to play having adopted this body language.



## ► GAME ANALYSIS

### WHAT TO SCAN FOR

When receiving with your back to goal, it becomes more difficult to scan because much of the pitch that you want to be aware of is on your blindside. With that in mind, the scanning process should be broken down into smaller parts. First, you should continually scan for the positions of the opposition and of your own teammates, with a keen focus on what gaps are likely to open up if you receive the ball. This can continue right up until you are about to receive a pass. The final scan should then prioritise understanding nearby defenders for the speed and direction at which they will press you. This is the same final idea to keep in mind from any position, as it is this which decides what first touch and subsequent decisions you can then make.



In this case, the first scan revealed the position of Osimhen making his run in behind. The second then displayed two overly aggressive defenders pressing in at speed. When this is the case, they can be taken out either by a first-time pass or a heavier touch into the space just beyond them. That said, a player can only know where the space will be if the initial scans are made properly. For instance, it is too late to use the final scan to watch for the run of Osimhen for Di Lorenzo here. He had to make the earlier head checks to take note of this, then use the final scan to know he could play the ball through to him first-time.



## ► GAME ANALYSIS

### BODY SHAPE

When the ball goes into a player ahead of you and no over or underlapping run is possible, such as when the distances are too great, you can often receive a safe pass from behind. For these, it is generally smarter to face your teammate and offer an easy passing line for them. This signals that you want the ball, and because it is being played backwards, you will still have significant vision of the pitch. This is a much better situation to do it than the prior ones further back with lateral passes while playing out.



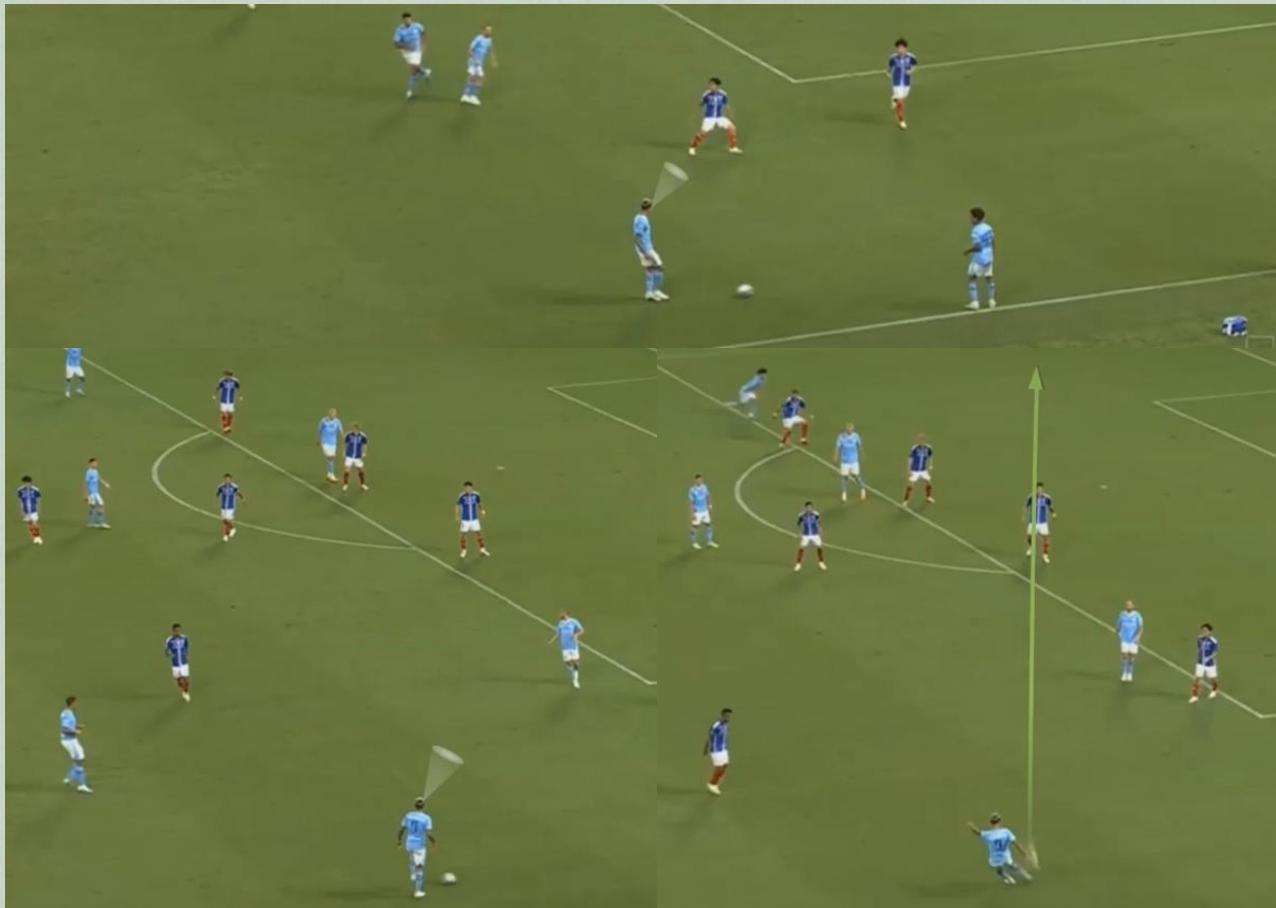
Watch here how Di Lorenzo offers directly for his teammate from behind while opened towards them. At the same time, he scanned regularly up the pitch to create a picture. In this case, as he could see everything of importance within these head checks, he knew that he would have the space to take a 1-yard touch and was already picking out his man as the ball travelled in. Note how his pass was then all one motion off of the first touch and so fluid that it caught the defenders sleeping.



## ► GAME ANALYSIS

### FIRST TOUCH

The moment that you release the ball, it is vital to immediately start your next movement if there is one to be made. For example, you might play into your winger then sprint forward to over or underlap him. Similarly, you might stay in your spot or even drop off when that is the best decision for the situation. Regardless of this, as soon as the ball leaves your foot, you should then scan once again.



Note here how Cancelo checked the box immediately after his pass. This came in combination with dropping a couple of yards as he offered again for the backward option. Interestingly, we can see how quickly he scans through multiple options including Haaland, the short pass to feet and the deepest option at the back post. Equally quick was how he opened up and took the extra touch to the side to enable an easier strike to power the ball towards that far side option. The combination of multiple scans over the best options with short and fast touches in any direction lead us to believe Cancelo would be able to play any of these three options rapidly after creating the space to pick them out.



## ► GAME ANALYSIS

### FIRST TOUCH

Taking a look at another Cancelo situation where he passed short and then received back again, we can also appreciate the timing of scans and the types of touch he takes to enable more freedom in finding options. Remember that you will often find a lack of progressive ideas in your scans before receiving as teammates make their runs too late. To enable yourself to find more of these, you can take up some smart intangibles that we will look into now.



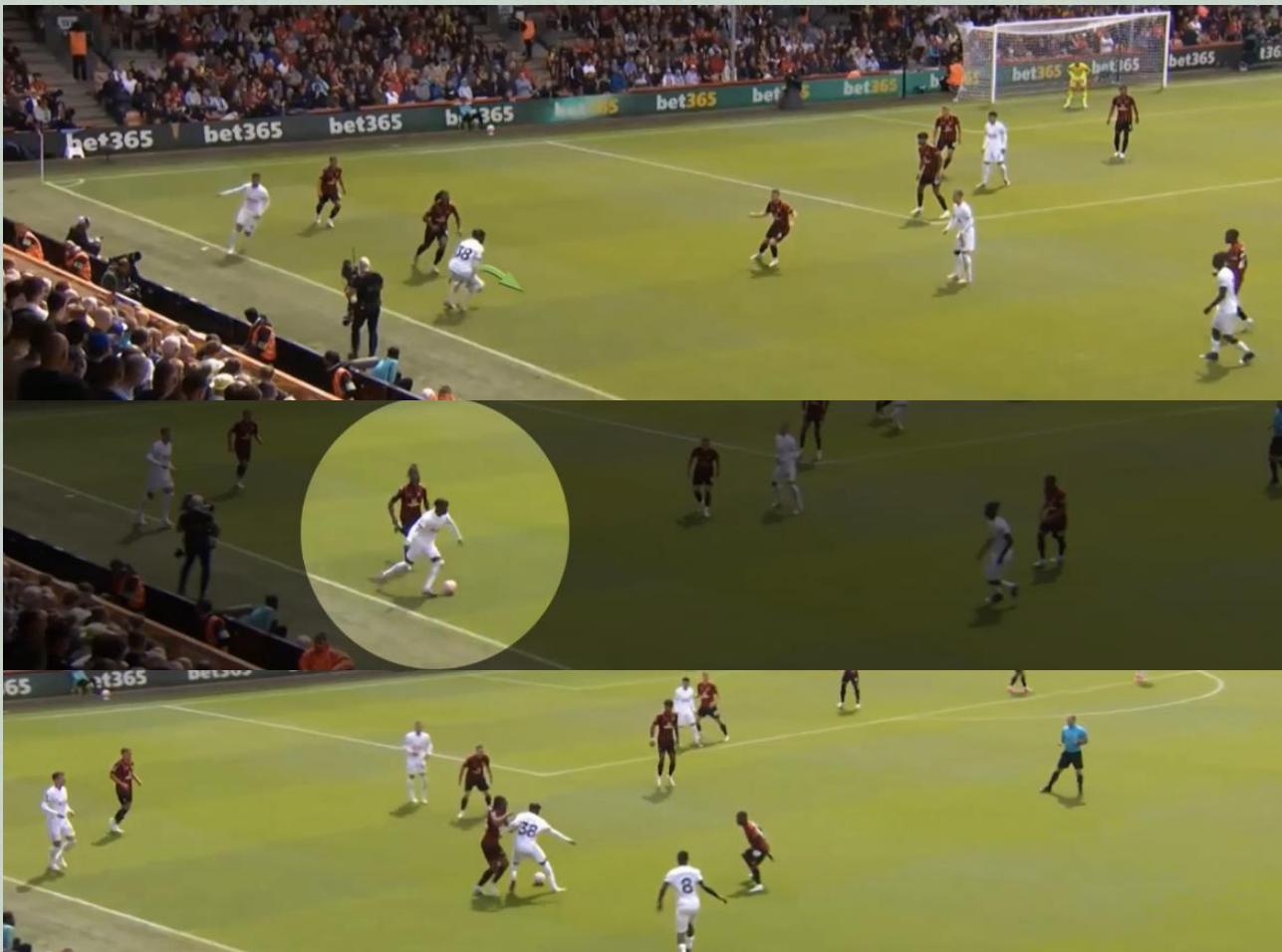
Notice the foot on top of the ball while simultaneously scanning the runs of teammates. With the best option of a movement in behind being made, this was a particularly easy position to simply roll the ball out and then directly move into the pass. Consider how this type of touch gives the freedom to find passing options at speed.



## ► GAME ANALYSIS

### ***PLAYING WITHOUT OPTIONS***

Another way to buy time for teammates to make greater runs in support of you is to open into space with your first touch. You might also do this while employing a feint or fake to roll into it.



Taking this example, consider that there were no passing options available to Udogie. While we always want to recognise what is available ahead of time, knowing what to do when you fail to spot any is important. Simply driving into space after buys time for teammates to move, but it can also attract additional pressure which opens the pockets of space to play into. What is important however, is to not force the ball out of this pressure until an option actually becomes available. One caveat to that is clearing the ball down the line or away from your own box, but those we will speak to in a moment. In general, stay on the ball and continue to dribble into space or change direction while using your body intelligently as the worst-case scenario then if technically adept, is that you will be fouled and win a free-kick to evade the pressure.



## ► GAME ANALYSIS

### ***CREATING NEW OPTIONS***

Sometimes passing angles are not available at first, but a quick shift of direction will open them up. Fairly common among league football is the idea of opening to one side before sending the ball. A differentiator for top players is utilising time and space to move in the opposite direction to the way they want to play. If followed, this then creates the opportunity to turn back in the direction they actually desired having created the passing angle and given another trigger for their teammate to offer.



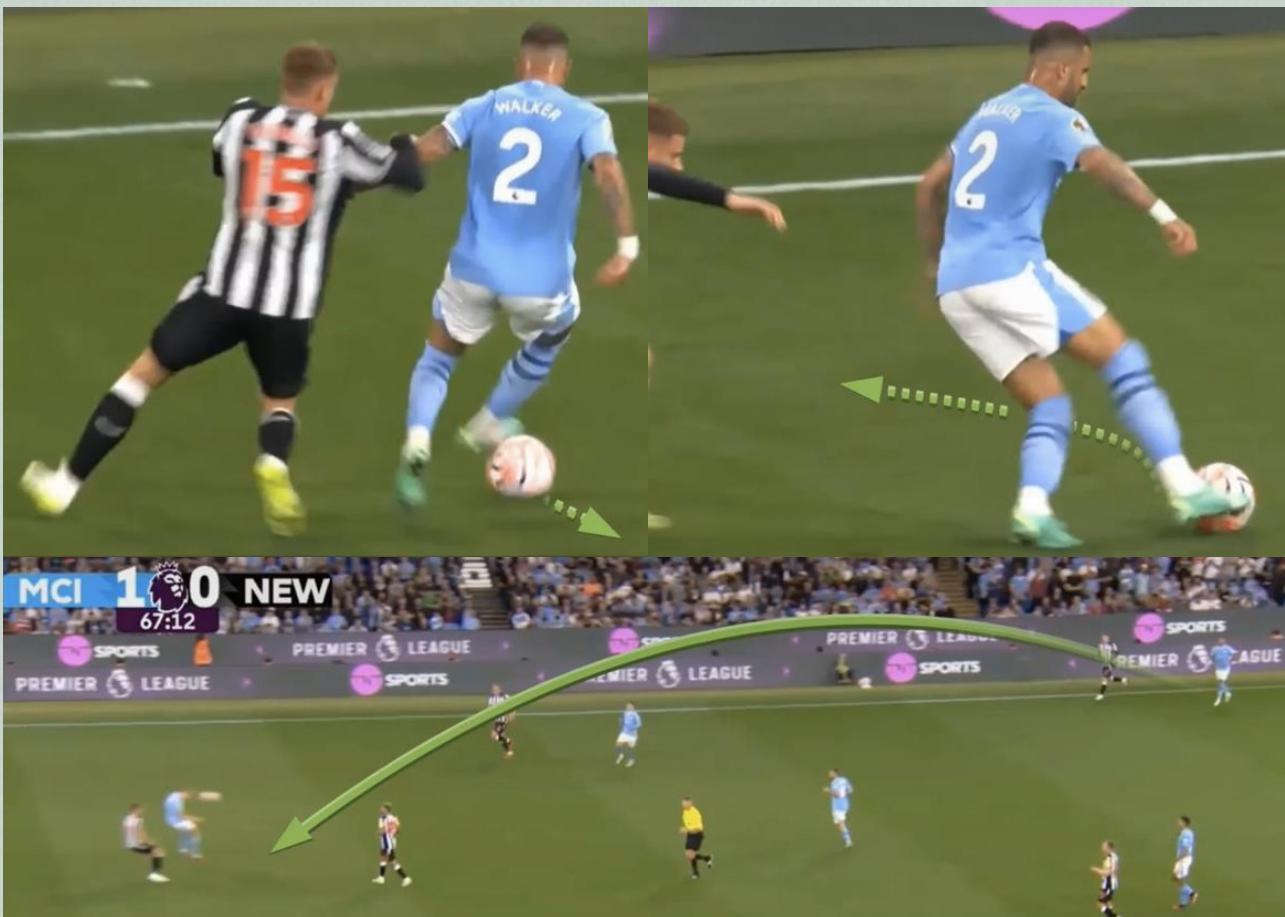
Notice here that Haaland was not making the run initially and would be difficult to find. Furthermore, a smart defender would simply step across to close the passing angle on this. In taking a short touch backwards, Walker invited his matchup to step across to the inside. As a result, there was more space to play after opening forwards again. We can see then that Haaland read the trigger on this occasion and made the movement to offer. Assuming the initial touch is not followed or pressed from inside, Walker would then have space to drive inside himself and open new angles that way. Furthermore, if this goes wrong, it is no loss as a safe backward pass was the only option available in the first place. Taking advantage of space upon receiving to search for or create greater options is therefore smart to do.



## ► GAME ANALYSIS

### ***PLAYING OUT OF PRESSURE***

When you are under tight pressure, it is vital to use your body effectively and to change direction often in order to buy yourself time to play. Remaining calm and composed is important, but you should consider that every change of direction is also a change of angle. Therefore, in scanning, you should be seeking ways to evade this pressure.



Note how Walker remained calm on the ball and simply moved to evade the pressure on his back. After cutting inside, he took a quick glance to know if there was a safe pass out. When this was not available, he simply cut again back to the outside. As mentioned earlier, in these types of situation, it does make sense to fall back onto a longer clearance when no greater option is available. That said, avoid trying to play this if no space has been created to send the ball long. It is wiser to continue protecting and moving until this is the case rather than forcing the ball through a player. One point about spending longer on the ball and shifting in this manner is that you also signal for teammates to move in support, so Haaland's arrival off the long ball is no coincidence either.



## ► GAME ANALYSIS

### CONTROLLING SITUATIONS

One of the most important ideas in any situation is to simply retain control over the situation. Do not allow opponents to dictate what you can do. This is why we have options in mind ahead of time, including how we might create those which do not yet exist. As long as you keep a defender on the back foot trying to react to what you are doing on the ball, you will increase the time you can stay on it and therefore the overall number of options you will see. Of course, it is still smarter to play quickly out of pressure more often than not as it is in space that you will find it easiest to pick out progressive options. Nevertheless, your dribbling both under pressure and in space can create more time.



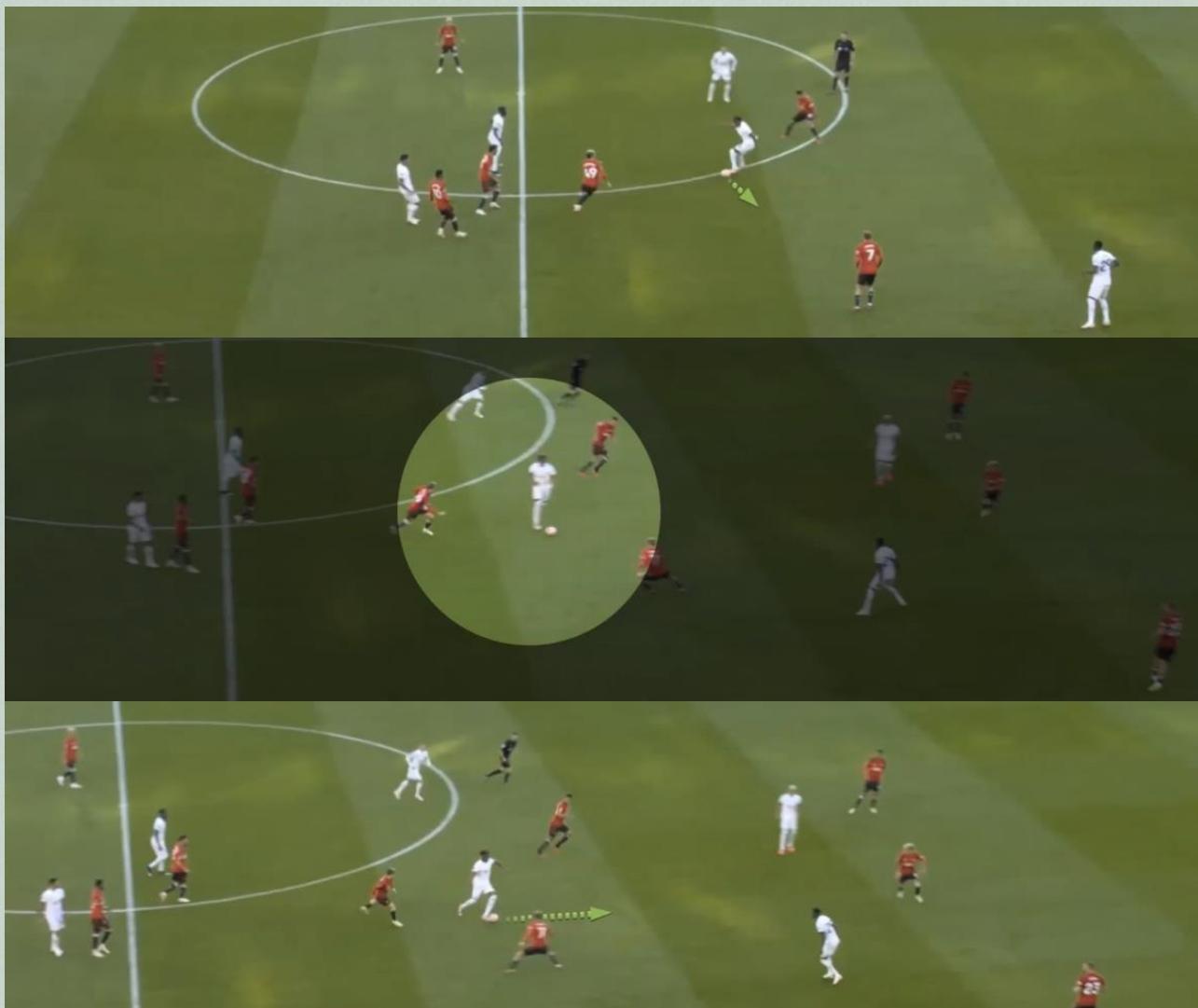
Notice how the defender was trailing here and therefore overcommitted to protecting against the initial cross threat. For Hakimi, if unhappy with the options available to him, it is as simple as cutting against the motion of the defender that gives an extra second for play to develop while maintaining his space advantage.



## ► GAME ANALYSIS

### DRIBBLING

In cases where you have a clear target in mind, you can open into space one way to find them, or into another with the aim of opening the space to then move into and find them. Besides these moments, you should be more direct with your dribbles to open towards opponents and face them up 1v1. The reason for this is that it keeps your options open to cut in multiple directions.



You do not have to get close to an opponent before cutting, but in simply facing towards them, it becomes more difficult for an opponent to close your options and force you in a specific direction. This is also what allows you to lead situations in a different way. We can appreciate Udogie's dribble here to face up opponents directly and then cut past them early.



## ► GAME ANALYSIS

### ***ADVANCED DECISION-MAKING***

What will make a big difference to offensive decision-making is having the ability to swiftly roll through potential decisions on the ball quickly, not only in scanning, but also while moving the ball in the aforementioned manner. To open one way and have the freedom to quickly cut out another instantly if the options do not manifest in the way desired, will lead to the ability to remain progressive far more often.



Take this example from Carvajal. Initially, he opened towards his option down the line. Although this was blocked off, in simply opening that way, the defender had to shift across. This gave more space to drive into with the ball after and therefore to get the cross away into the box. What is more, this gave time for his teammates to read a new trigger and offer for him from even greater positions. To do this takes awareness of all the options before receiving, but more importantly, quick thinking on the ball with zero hesitation.



## ► GAME ANALYSIS

### ***OPENING INTO SPACE***

It is important to open into space whenever you have the opportunity. As mentioned, if you already have an idea in mind which is available, simply open into space before releasing the ball. Otherwise, drive towards a specific defender, even if they are far away. This is all about maximising the time and options you will have.



Consider how much easier it was to slide this ball in behind having opened up and began to drive forwards. Of course, the distance to cover was lessened. More important was that the body shape and angle were already perfect for leading into the next action.



## ► GAME ANALYSIS

### TAKING UP SPACE

When you open up on the ball and find few options, it is often just the case that you need to take an extra touch towards an opponent or while cutting to change the picture enough. In deeper areas of the pitch this is typically not necessary as we can simply recycle the ball and move again while waiting for a better opportunity. That said, around the final third, being more courageous on the ball in this manner is ideal provided no hesitation to decisions being made after.



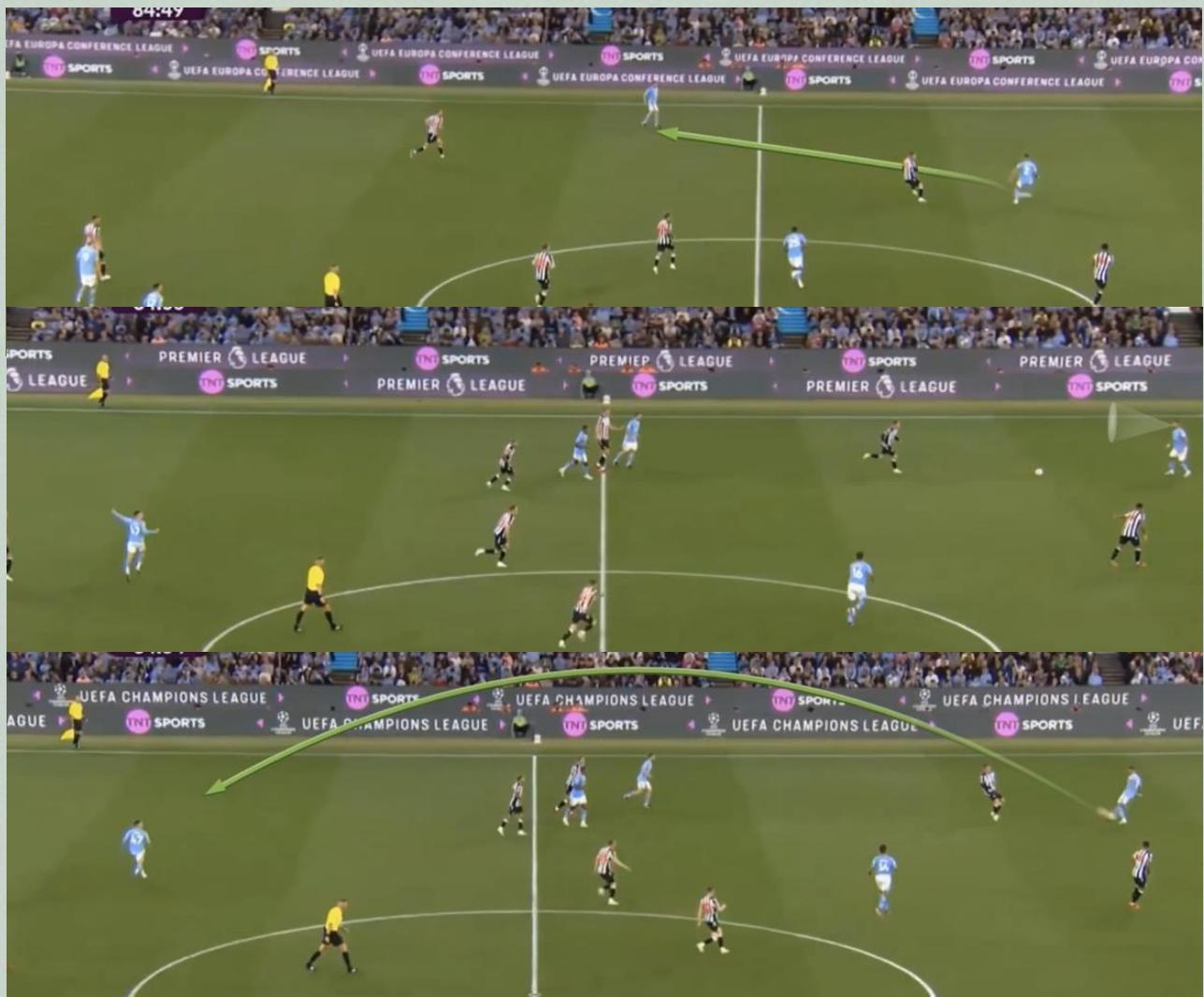
For this scenario, notice how the extra touch shifted the position of the nearest defender further across. This created a greater path to finding teammates inside the box. It also changed the cross from an out-swinger further from the box to an in-swinger closer in - making a big improvement in efficiency to the overall chance.



## ► GAME ANALYSIS

### *SPEED OF PLAY*

The final theoretical point to consider is that you should not panic on the ball. If you protect it with your body and cut away from pressure, you will often be able to find a safe passing option. Even if not, a deeper clearance down the line is usually available. What is important however, is to continue linking play and offering again from greater positions.



For example, after opening outside and playing a safe pass to feet, Walker dropping off and opening to face up the pitch was perfect. This completely changed the scenario as he could then survey the pitch more easily without straining, having opened up space to play more progressive options. This is how he spotted and played the deep ball forwards which he did not have the space for on the first time of asking.