

El Pulpo - The Octopus

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“You watch the game, you don’t see Busquets. You watch Busquets, you see the whole game.”

Sergio Busquets Burgos is the most underrated player in today’s footballing world. Without a single doubt. The man pulling the strings in Barcelona’s midfield is overshadowed by the recognition that players like Xavi and Iniesta get. We all referred to Spain and Barcelona’s legendary midfield as Xavi-Iniesta’s midfield without ever realizing it was Sergio Busquets that enabled them to be that good and have that freedom to create. The two had a silent guardian behind them, always watching their back and a silent assassin, breaking up every play before it could be made.

We often talk about what Barcelona will do once Messi retires or what they’ll do when Iniesta retires. The real question lies in what are we going to do when there’s no Busquets?

The man entrusted with the number 5 by legendary captain Carles Puyol as he left the club, the man who has ice flowing in his veins instead of blood, the man who you can always depend on, no matter who you are. That is Sergio Busquets Burgos. Rewind 10 years back to 2007 and he was that kid who came out of La Masia and into Pep Guardiola’s Barcelona B team. A year later, Guardiola gets the big job at FC Barcelona and it seems that young Busi has gotten the promotion as well. Sergio is now a first-team player, ready to make his mark. He was nothing more than a promising talent back then.

Fast-forward a few months into the season and he had taken then defensive midfielder, Yaya Toure’s position as his own and forced the Ivorian to be used as a centre-back in Pep’s plans. Busi is the same boy who cost Xabi Alonso from Liverpool, a move to the Nou Camp. Pep was interested in signing him that summer but when the defensive midfield spot had a taste of Sergio, Pep knew exactly who he had to play and as Alonso says:

“Guardiola chose him, and he wasn’t proved wrong.”

The next year, upon signing for Barcelona, defensive midfielder Javier Mascherano was also forced to be played as a centre-back because Busi had cemented his place in defensive midfield and was going nowhere.

Leaving out statistic, graphs, and images from this article is intentional. One cannot associate the beauty of Busquets with something as crude as statistics. Art should not be reduced to mere numbers. It should be visualized, imagined and respected. Art is something you feel and Sergio Busquets will never be done justice by any statistic or award.

As you know, it is in the centre of the game where Sergio really comes alive. With the ball going *pim-pam, pim-pam, pim-pam* in Barcelona’s midfield (as Eric Abidal likes to call it), Sergio Busquets showed his true genius. Throw him a bad ball and with an elegant first-touch, he’ll control it, he’ll bring it down and find space for another teammate. This cycle repeats. Read the game, take *la pausa*, find a teammate. The calm, the cool and the poise of Busquets is what will always be used to define him. His intelligence is unlike anything I’ve ever seen before and that too in a position that demands a lot of running and hard work. Add to that unparalleled tactical and space time awareness. Only a handful of players in today’s world can read the game the way Busi does. But there’s nothing fancy – just quick passing, impeccable positioning and an everlasting positional awareness. No tricks, no skills, no showboating. Just pure football. That’s how taking a midfielder like Kante out of the game with a simple roulette and setting up a goal in the process is the essence of football as displayed by *El Pulpo* week in, week out.

“Look at [Sergio] Busquets, Xavi [Hernández], Silva, [Santi] Cazorla, Mata – in small spaces they read the game, knowing when to dribble, when to go short, when to switch or open out the play. That intelligence is vital to give a collective sense to the game.”

His anticipation of play is something else as well. Where players like Kante run and make 3 tackles, anticipation and awareness enables Sergio to do the same job in a

single tackle while having to run less as well. This lies in clever positioning – being on top of an opposition player before he even realizes and subsequently smothering any buildup. That's what makes our #5 so effective at his job. He is everywhere on the pitch, whether that's to collect from the keeper, be in a position to provide the centrebacks numerical superiority or be ready to pivot defence to attack. Everything is done at the most perfect timing. The quote below aptly sums up this concept of anticipation and timing.

“It's much better to avoid the tackle. Try to anticipate. How many times does Sergio Busquets tackle in his position? He's so ahead of the game, he doesn't need to.”

They say you never truly value someone until they're not there anymore and I genuinely fear the day when Busquets will no longer be a part of our midfield.

“If I was reincarnated as a player, I'd like to be like him.”

When a revolutionary like Josep Guardiola says that about you, you know you're something special.

The video below (credits to @LaCroqueta6) summarizes the intelligence, anticipation, positioning and above all, the calm of Sergio Busquets Burgos, the greatest defensive midfielder that the game has ever seen.

Image source: https://twitter.com/BCN_Raphi/status/886601249709330432