OPPOSITION REPORT

Manchester City (3-2-4-1, 4-4-2 without the ball): build from the keeper, flood the box, open to the fast break through the middle

Match watched: Chelsea 4-4 Manchester City, Premier League, 12 November 2023. All times are the match clock (mm:ss).

This is one match, and an open one: Chelsea marked tightly in midfield, left players high and broke at every chance, so City may look more controlled, and show fewer gaps, against a side that sits off them.

The 60-second version
1 Break on them through the middle Chelsea won the ball and reached City's box in about 14 seconds twice in the first six minutes (04:22, 05:33).
2 Their high press can be played through With five City players high and the forwards standing off the keeper, Chelsea went from Sánchez to goal in 22 seconds for the 2-1 (36:02–36:24).
3 Patience and numbers round the box They keep the ball in your half and put six or seven players round the box. Rodri's 3-4 came from the D at 85:31.
4 Set pieces cut both ways They scored a penalty (24:02) and a half-cleared set piece crossed straight back in (45+0:27), but conceded from a set piece into a crowded box at 28:23.
5 Deadly in the seconds after a restart They scored 14 seconds after their own throw-in (46:14–46:28) and won the ball straight from Chelsea's kick-off to shoot inside 8 seconds (47:04).

1. Match summary

- **Result:** Chelsea 4-4 Manchester City (Premier League, 12 November 2023). City led three times and conceded the equaliser at 90+4:52. All times are the match clock.
- **System:** 3-2-4-1 with the ball: Akanji steps up beside Rodri, leaving Walker, Rúben Dias and Gvardiol as a back three, with Foden, Bernardo Silva, Álvarez and Doku behind Haaland. 4-4-2 without it, with Álvarez pressing alongside Haaland. Ederson is a spare man in build-up. After half-time Akanji stayed back more.
- **XI:** Ederson (31); Walker (2), Akanji (25), Rúben Dias (3), Gvardiol (24); Rodri (16), Bernardo Silva (20); Foden (47), Julián Álvarez (19), Doku (11); Haaland (9). Used: Grealish (10) for Doku at 58:33; Kovačić (8) was on the pitch by 81:53.
- **Opponent:** Chelsea XI: Sánchez (1), James (24), Disasi (2), Thiago Silva (6), Cucurella (3), Caicedo (25), Enzo Fernández (8), Palmer (20), Gallagher (23), Sterling (7), Jackson (15). They pressed City's build-up, went man for man in midfield, left three or four high and broke fast.

Clock	Score	Key event
00:00		Chelsea kick off backwards; four or five City forwards press together.
20:50		A City player goes down under a Chelsea defender by the six-yard box; penalty. Cucurella booked at 23:05.
24:02	0-1	Haaland, penalty.
27:49		James's central free kick beats the wall; Ederson saves at his post.
28:23	1-1	Thiago Silva. Set piece into a crowded box is not cleared; Ederson stays on his line.
36:24	2-1	Sterling. Chelsea play out from Sánchez past five high City players; low ball across the six-yard box.
45+0:27	2-2	Akanji. Set piece half-cleared and crossed straight back in.
46:28	2-3	Haaland. Throw-in deep in City's half to goal in 14 seconds.
57:50		Doku goes along the byline into the six-yard box; the goalkeeper smothers it.
58:33		Grealish on for Doku.

Clock	Score	Key event
60:12		Palmer runs into the box between several City players; kept out.
by 66:49	3-3	Jackson. Chelsea build from the back; nobody closes the shot or follows the rebound.
75:17		Sterling drives in on City's left and sets up No. 27; kept out.
by 86:04	3-4	Rodri. An unblocked strike from the D at 85:31.
90+4:52	4-4	Palmer penalty, after a ten-second Chelsea break at 90+1:35.

Second-half changes

Ahead inside 90 seconds, then an open game: City worked mostly down their left, led twice and were caught twice.

Clock	Change	What changed on the pitch
58:33	Doku (11) off, Grealish (10) on, left wing.	Same role. City kept going down the left, with longer spells round the box (61:33–62:53).

- **Fast start:** Goal 14 seconds after their own throw-in, then an effort 8 seconds after winning Chelsea's kick-off. 46:14–46:28, 47:04–47:12
- **Chelsea break on them at 2-3:** Sterling ran at Walker and Chelsea were in the box seven seconds later; Palmer later ran in between several defenders. 49:20–49:27, 60:10
- **Pegged back:** A long spell with six or seven round Chelsea's box, then Chelsea built from the back and it was 3-3. 61:33–62:53, 65:56–66:49
- **The game opens up:** City caught running back down their left; Sterling then set up No. 27 in the box. 69:33, 75:15–75:17
- **City camp in Chelsea's half:** Seven or eight in Chelsea's half, then Rodri's strike from the D for 3-4. 77:13–78:13, 85:31
- **They do not close it out:** Still four high at 3-4, then a ten-second Chelsea break and the 4-4 penalty. 87:33, 90+1:35, 90+4:52

What this means for us
Be ready from the whistle: Two of their quickest attacks came in the first two and a half minutes of the half. Our restarts after the break and after goals must be safe.
The left is their main route after the break: A man on the left touchline and the ball worked to the left corner of the box (57:55, 62:53, 77:33). Before half-time it was the right (11:20, 31:40). Cover both full-backs.
Doku runs, Grealish keeps it: Doku drives at the byline; Grealish keeps the ball and holds the width. Plan for whichever starts.
They stay open when ahead: Leading 2-3 and 3-4 they still let Chelsea into their box, and conceded both times. If we are behind late, chances will come.

2. In possession

Slow from the goalkeeper, one man holding a touchline, then five to eight round the box.

- **Build-up:** Ederson comes to the edge of his box as a spare pass, with the defenders spread wide, even with a forward close by. 19:37, 30:00, 49:53, 79:53
- **Can be pressed:** Pressed on the touchline at 19:33 they went back to Ederson, who was closed down and had to play wide. Tight marking round the centre circle bothered them. 19:33–19:41, 41:20, 75:59
- **Width:** One player always holds a touchline: the right before half-time, the left after it (Gvardiol, then Grealish). 10:40, 38:40, 57:55, 77:53, 90+9:53

- **Going forward:** Walker carries it over halfway himself. After a patient spell they suddenly go quickly through the middle with runners into the box. **20:06, 33:28–33:53, 38:06–38:15**
- **One against one out wide:** Attacks often end with a winger isolated against a full-back: Foden at 34:38, Doku to the byline at 57:48. **31:34–31:40, 34:38, 57:48–57:50**
- **Free man at the D:** Foden draws two defenders wide and slides it inside to a free man at the D. Rodri's 3-4 came from the same spot. **34:38–34:42, 85:10–85:32**
- **Numbers round the box:** Five to eight players in and around the area, often with a man wide each side. **17:20, 38:40, 61:33, 73:53, 85:13**
- **Goals and chances:** Four goals: Haaland's penalty, Akanji from a set piece kept alive, Haaland from a quick throw-in and Rodri from the D. Other chances came at 14:12, 31:41 and 33:52. **24:02, 45+0:27, 46:28, 85:31**

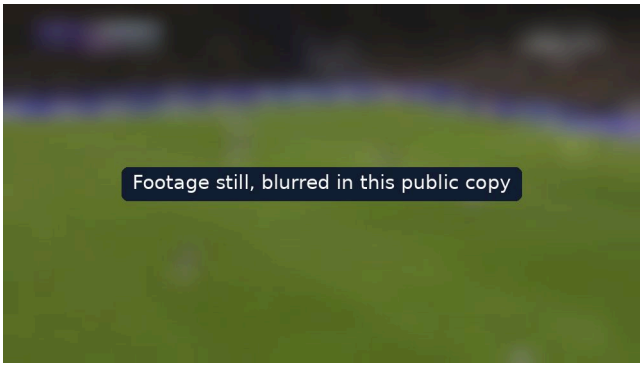
Out of possession (defending ←)



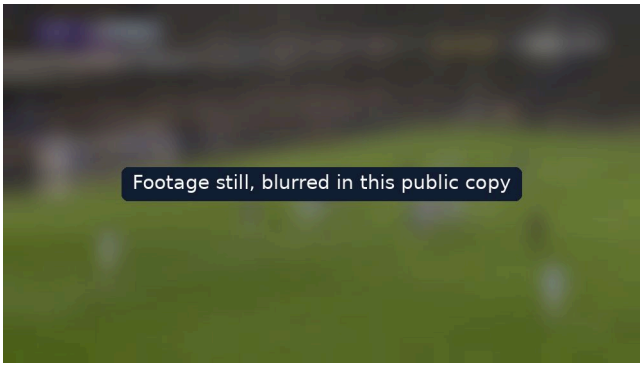
In possession (attacking →)



Shape out of and in possession, drawn from the footage. Positions are approximate.



49:53: Ederson off his line with the ball, defenders spread wide, two Chelsea forwards close.



85:32: Rodri's strike from the D: plenty of Chelsea players back, nobody blocks it.

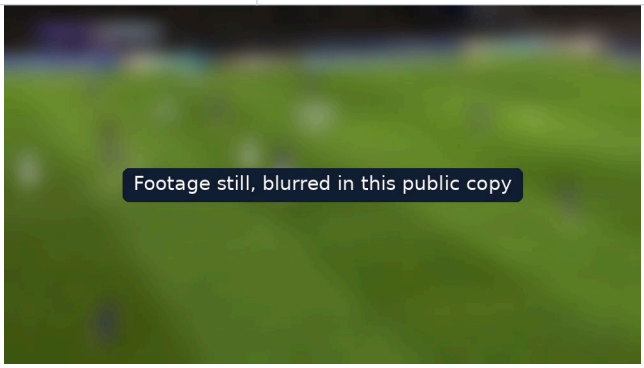
3. Out of possession

> **They press high with numbers and drop deep in numbers; the weak point is the moment in between.**

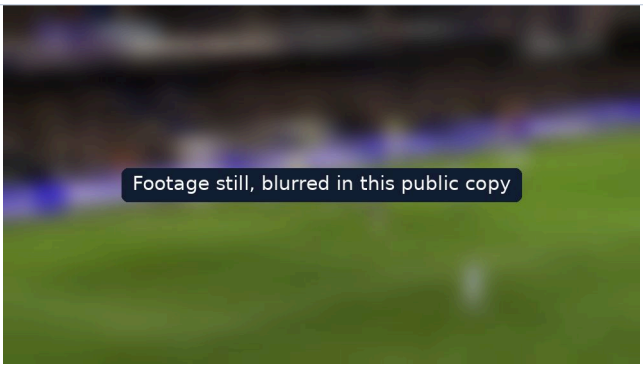
- **High press:** Four or five go together from kick-off; six or seven push into the opposition half with the back line near halfway. Still doing it at 87:33 while leading. **00:00, 01:20, 87:33**
- **When the press is beaten:** Play past their five high players and they are exposed: Chelsea scored 22 seconds after the goalkeeper had it, with City's two deepest against two forwards. **36:02–36:24**
- **Dropping in:** Once the ball reaches their final third, five to eight players get back into and around their own box. **05:00, 26:22, 53:53, 80:13**
- **Edge of their box is not closed:** Plenty of bodies, but nobody went out to the shot or followed the rebound for the 3-3. Palmer ran straight through the crowd at 60:10. **60:10, 66:21–66:23**
- **Out wide:** Three or four close the ball at the touchline and they double up on a dribbler (Rodri and Walker, 59:11). At throw-ins they mark the short options but leave the line open. **03:20, 59:09–59:14, 45+6:07–45+6:16**

Where Chelsea's chances came from. Chelsea's best route was straight through the middle after winning the ball: twice in six minutes they reached City's box in about 14 seconds. They also scored by playing out past the press, from a set piece and after building from the back.

Clock	How the chance was made
04:22–04:36	Duel won near halfway, straight through the middle to the edge of City's box. No shot.
05:33–05:47	Ball won outside their own box and carried up the middle in 14 seconds; City crowd it out.
26:28–26:40	City clearance picked up in City's half; attack kept alive down the left.
28:20–28:23	Set piece into a crowded box, not cleared. Goal, 1-1 (Thiago Silva).
36:02–36:24	Out from Sánchez past the high press, low ball across the six-yard box. Goal, 2-1 (Sterling).
39:31–39:48	Carried from midfield into the box; Ederson goes to ground.
49:14–49:27	Break down City's right: Sterling runs at Walker and Chelsea are in the box seven seconds later.
60:10–60:12	Palmer runs through several City players into the box; saved.
65:56–66:21	Built from the back; nobody closes the shot or follows the rebound. Goal, 3-3 (Jackson).



01:20: Chelsea deep in their own half; six or seven City players pushed up close to the ball.

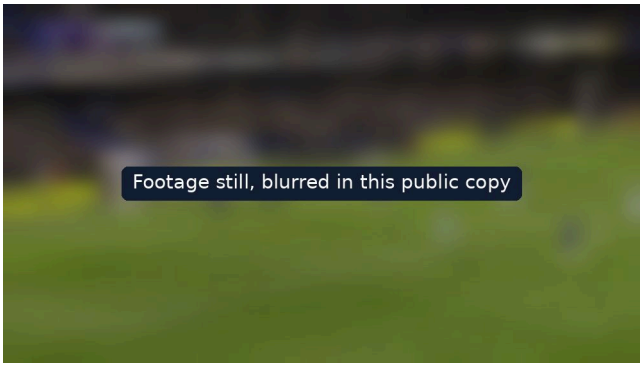


36:26: The 2-1: Chelsea in on goal 22 seconds after playing out past the press.

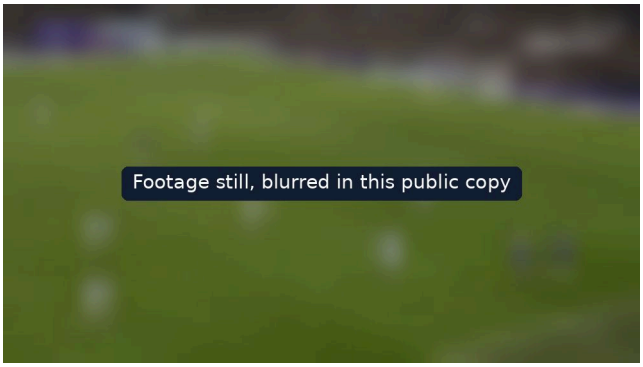
4. Transitions

Win the ball off them and their box can be reached in about 14 seconds; when they win it or restart, they go straight for goal.

- **After losing the ball:** Chelsea reached City's box in about 14 seconds twice in the first six minutes, once from halfway and once from deep. **04:22–04:36, 05:33–05:47**
- **Where they come under pressure:** In crowded duels by the touchline near halfway. Chelsea won one at 04:22 and broke. **04:22, 19:30–19:33**
- **Players behind the ball:** Short of cover on the break: two defenders against two forwards, or three or four chasing back. Once play slows they get eight or more back. **36:17, 69:33, 12:00**
- **After winning the ball:** Straight for goal: an effort 8 seconds after winning Chelsea's kick-off, and a break from the edge of their own box. **41:07–41:42, 47:04–47:12**
- **Restarts as attacks:** A throw-in deep in their half became a goal 14 seconds later. Not every restart is quick: one free kick went back to the keeper. **46:14–46:28, 60:29–60:32**



46:28: The 2-3, 14 seconds after City's throw-in deep in their own half.

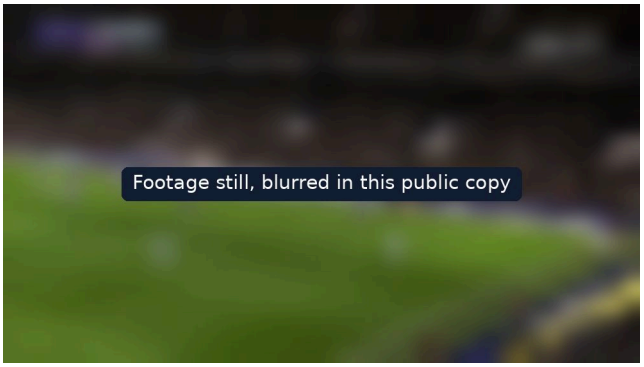


69:33: Chelsea break down City's left with three or four City players chasing back.

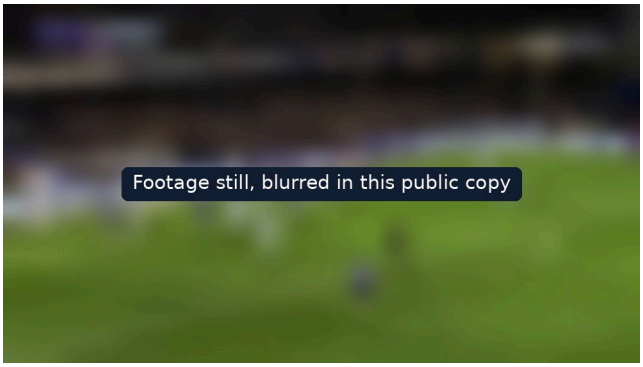
5. Set pieces

> **Their goals came when a dead ball stayed alive; they conceded from one ball into a crowded box.**

- **Attacking corners:** Álvarez (19) takes them and raises an arm before delivering. Runners bunch near goal with two outside the box. None produced a clean finish. **06:42–06:45, 16:00–16:08, 35:05–35:08**
- **Wrestling in the box:** Lots of holding round the goalkeeper (Thiago Silva on Haaland). The penalty came from a City player going down under a defender. **06:39–06:41, 07:09–07:12, 20:50–24:02**
- **Keeping the set piece alive:** The 2-2 came from a half-clearance crossed straight back in before Chelsea reset, with City still in the box and two on the edge. **45+0:21–45+0:27**
- **Central free kicks:** Slow and well signalled: three over the ball for 15 to 20 seconds, then worked to the right byline. **14:58–15:36**
- **Throw-ins:** Down the line to the byline, or Walker's low throw infield to the corner of the box. **09:23–09:27, 38:30–38:36**
- **Defending corners:** Nearly everyone drops into the box. Ederson came for one but stayed on his line for the 1-1, which was not cleared. They close short corners quickly. **05:00, 28:20–28:23, 45+6:46**
- **Defending free kicks:** A wall of four or five plus a second line. James's shot beat the wall and needed a diving save. **27:40–27:50, 45:36–45:59**



06:45: City corner: both teams packed in front of goal, two City players outside the box.



28:22: The 1-1: a crowd at the far post, not cleared, Ederson still on his line.

6. Key players

Player	Why he is dangerous	What we can target
Erling Haaland CF #9	Penalty at 24:02 and a goal-line finish for the 2-3 at 46:28.	Mark him goal-side without holding, and defend the six-yard box rather than wrestle him.
Jérémy Doku LW #11	Drives at the full-back and along the byline into the six-yard box (57:48–57:50).	Only the goalkeeper stopped him. Double up and keep a man at the near post. Off at 58:33.

Player	Why he is dangerous	What we can target
Rodri CM #16	Scored the 3-4 from the D (85:31). Doubles up wide with Walker (59:11).	One player must step out to him at the D.
Julián Álvarez Forward #19, corner taker	Takes the corners from the right and stands over central free kicks.	He raises an arm before delivering (06:42, 16:00): be set and tight by then.
Kyle Walker RB #2	Carries it over halfway (20:06) and doubles up on dribblers (59:11).	Sterling ran at him and Chelsea were in the box seven seconds later (49:20). Test him one against one.

Ederson (64:53) and Walker (65:13) both needed treatment and both finished the match. Nothing else from this match bears on availability.

7. How to beat them

#	Recommendation	Evidence from the footage
1	Win the ball and break through the middle inside 15 seconds: leave two runners high and make the first pass forward.	Twice in six minutes Chelsea reached City's box in about 14 seconds after winning it (04:22–04:36, 05:33–05:47), with three or four left high (41:00).
2	Play out from our goalkeeper when their forwards stand off, then go quickly past their high players.	36:02–36:24: past five high City players and in for the 2-1 in 22 seconds, even with four City players back. The 3-3 also came from building from the back (65:56).
3	Get our best one-against-one attacker on the ball in and around City's box and have him run at defenders.	Sterling ran at defenders in and around the box (26:19, 49:20) and won a wide free kick (45:36).
4	At our corners and free kicks, get bodies into the box and attack the delivery; shoot from free kicks near the D.	The 1-1 came from a set piece into a crowded box with Ederson on his line (28:23). James's free kick needed a diving save (27:49).
5	Defending their dead balls: no holding in the box, stay tight to the group in front of our goalkeeper, and stay set until the ball is fully cleared.	The penalty came from a City player going down under a defender (20:50). The 2-2 came from a half-clearance crossed straight back in (45+0:27).
6	Switch on at every restart, ours and theirs: be safe from our own kick-offs and get set before their throw-ins.	Goal 14 seconds after their own throw-in (46:14–46:28); effort 8 seconds after winning Chelsea's kick-off (47:04–47:12).
7	Defending in our own third: one player out to the ball at the D every time, and double up on their wide dribbler before he reaches the byline.	Rodri's 3-4 came from the D unchallenged (85:31); Foden found a free man there (34:42); Doku reached the six-yard box along the byline (57:50).

8. Training week

Sessions to prepare for this opponent. Each one links to a point in How to beat them.

Session 1: Win it and go in 15 seconds (point 1)

- **Aim:** Prepares us to win the ball and break through the middle to the edge of their box inside 15 seconds.
- **Set-up:** Box to box, the width of the penalty area plus five yards each side, marked with cones. 8v8 with a goalkeeper in each full-size goal; one team in bibs plays as them.
- **How it runs:** The coach feeds the bibs team, who build patiently into our half. Our two forwards stay high near halfway. When we win the ball, the first pass must go forward and we have 15 seconds to finish; a goal inside 15 seconds counts double.
- **Coaching points:** First pass after winning it goes forward, not sideways or back · The two high runners stay up and split so there is a pass through the middle · Midfielders run past the ball to support, not stand and watch

- **Make it harder:** Start some attacks with the coach playing a loose clearance into their half for us to collect and keep the attack alive.

Session 2: Play out past their high players (point 2)

- **Aim:** Prepares us to play out from our goalkeeper when their forwards stand off, then go quickly once past their high players.
- **Set-up:** Two-thirds of a pitch, full width, with a full-size goal and goalkeeper at each end. Our keeper plus eight build against five in bibs in our half, with four more bibs defending the far half.
- **How it runs:** Every attack starts with our keeper, with the five bibs standing off him. We play past the five. Once over halfway we have 10 seconds to get an effort on the far goal while the five chase back.
- **Coaching points:** Keeper and defenders stay calm on the ball and play past the five, not long over them · Once past their high players, go at speed, even if they have numbers back · Two forwards stay up against their two deepest defenders and run in behind
- **Make it harder:** Let the five choose whether to stand off or close the keeper down so we have to read it, and start some attacks from a throw-in near halfway down the touchline.

Session 3: Dead balls: hands off, stay set (point 5)

- **Aim:** Prepares us to defend their corners and free kicks without holding and to stay set until the ball is fully cleared.
- **Set-up:** One penalty area with a goal and goalkeeper. Eight defenders against seven attackers in bibs, who bunch in front of the keeper with two on the edge of the box. The coach stands wide with spare balls.
- **How it runs:** The taker raises an arm, then delivers from the right. As soon as we clear, the coach crosses another ball straight back in from wide, and we defend that too before anyone moves out. Any holding is a penalty to the attackers.
- **Coaching points:** Be set and tight to your man by the time the taker's arm goes up · Goal-side with your body between man and goal, arms off · Nobody switches off or walks out until the ball is fully cleared
- **Make it harder:** Add a central free kick worked to the right side of the box, and keep score: a goal or penalty to them, a full clearance to us.

Session 4: Close the D, double up wide (point 7)

- **Aim:** Prepares us to get one player out to the ball at the D every time and to double up on their wide dribbler before he reaches the byline.
- **Set-up:** Final third of the pitch, full width, with one goal and a goalkeeper. Eight attackers in bibs, with a winger on each touchline, against seven defenders. Two cone gates on the halfway side for the defenders to break through.
- **How it runs:** The attackers keep the ball patiently round the box, moving it from side to side. They score with a strike from the D or by a winger dribbling to the byline and cutting it back. When we win it, we score by passing through a cone gate.
- **Coaching points:** Nearest man calls and goes out to the ball at the D every time · A second defender gets across to the winger early, before he reaches the byline · One man holds the near post while the others stay in line
- **Make it harder:** Have the winger hold the ball wide to draw two defenders, then slide it inside to a free man at the D. We must still get one player out to him.

Match-day pocket card

Manchester City · the 6 things to remember
1 Haaland: goal-side, no holding in the box, defend the six-yard box.
2 Rodri shoots from the D: one of us out to him every time.
3 Doku or Grealish wide left: double up early, man on the near post.
4 Dead balls and restarts: stay set until cleared, safe kick-offs, ready at throw-ins.
5 Play out when their forwards stand off, then go quickly past halfway.
6 Win it, first pass forward, two runners high, through the middle in 15 seconds.

Win it and go: the chances keep coming, even late.

Win it, go forward When we win the ball, the first pass goes forward and we run through the middle with two already high.

Brave from the back If their forwards stand off our goalkeeper, we play past them and then go fast.

Hands off, stay set At their corners and free kicks we stay tight without holding, and nobody moves out until the ball is fully cleared.

Switch on at restarts They score within seconds of throw-ins and kick-offs, so we are safe from ours and set before theirs.

Someone to the D The nearest man goes out to the ball at the D every time, and we double up on their winger before the byline.