

Tactical Analysis

AC Milan 2018-2019

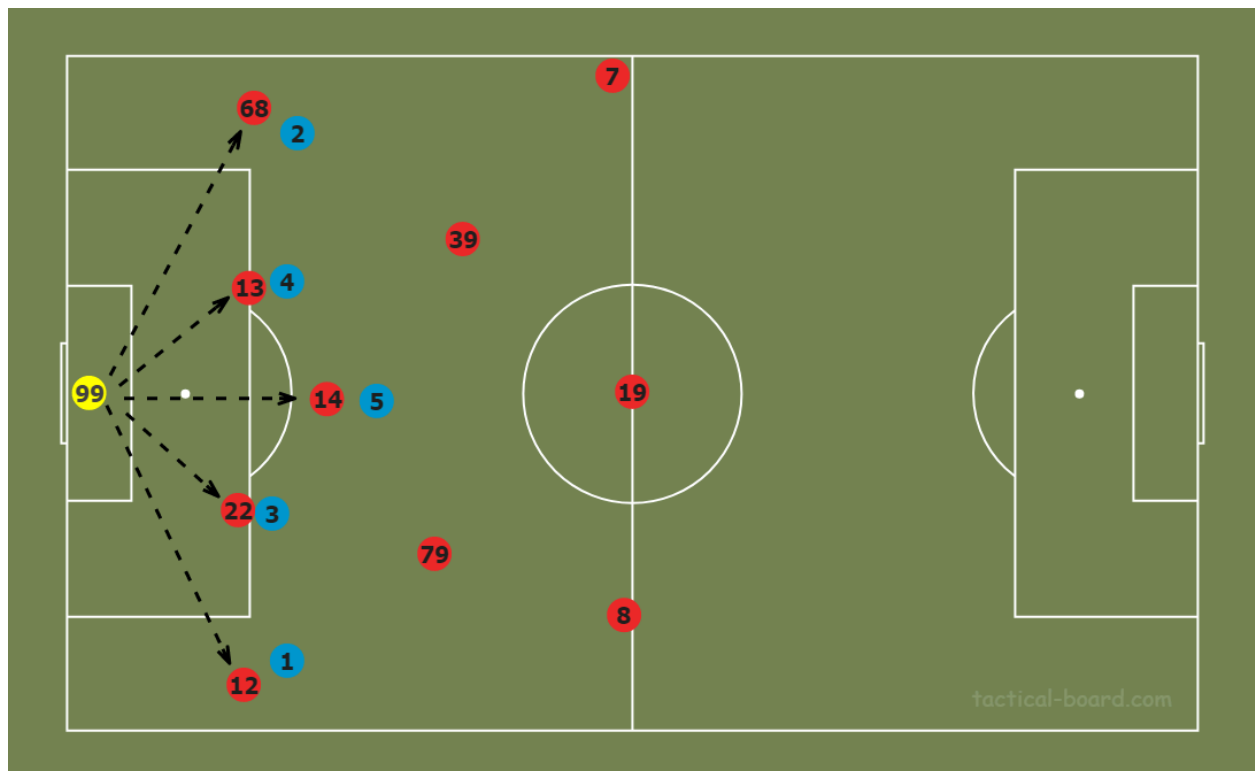
This writing is created simply because of AC Milan, one of the greatest club in the whole world, is getting demolished, even by clubs of mediocre stature. In this writing, the writer expects, this whole-heartedly letter can be used for reaching one goal only. And that is AC Milan's resurgence, a club whom I supported from years ago.

Greetings, i'm a xx years old who supported Milan right from the start, when I know what's football about. You see great players like Maldini, Costacurta, Nesta, Kaka, Pirlo, Gattuso, Inzaghi, of course you'd love it right away. AC Milan, the most succesful club in the world. But nowadays, that big name isn't there anymore. Any younger generations would only say, "AC Milan? Oh the mediocre club that can only bragging the past?", and that really hurts a lot. Now, with Elliot at the helm, and I can see that Elliot is serious about bringing back Milan to the top, i'm starting to have hope again.

Unfortunately, with great ambitions and goals, Gattuso or coaching staffs seem very stubborn to use their own tactics (which I can see in more than 40 matches this season, it's not working AT ALL). What are the gameplans? I can only see the only gameplan is to give the ball tu Suso and just hope he lands any cross and someone trying to strike the ball. Does it work? If it works, we won't be fighting for the 4-8 places. Now, up until this analysis is being created, we lost to Torino 2-0, and as usual, no gameplan whatsoever. Only Paqueta and Romagnoli deserve to be in Milan shirt today. And I seriously feel bad for Piatek. He was on the top scorer board, and now he's just become practically useless. How did that happen? How many times we ended on a cul de-sac this season? I watched most of them, and that's a lot for a big club standard. WE HAVE NO GAMEPLAN.

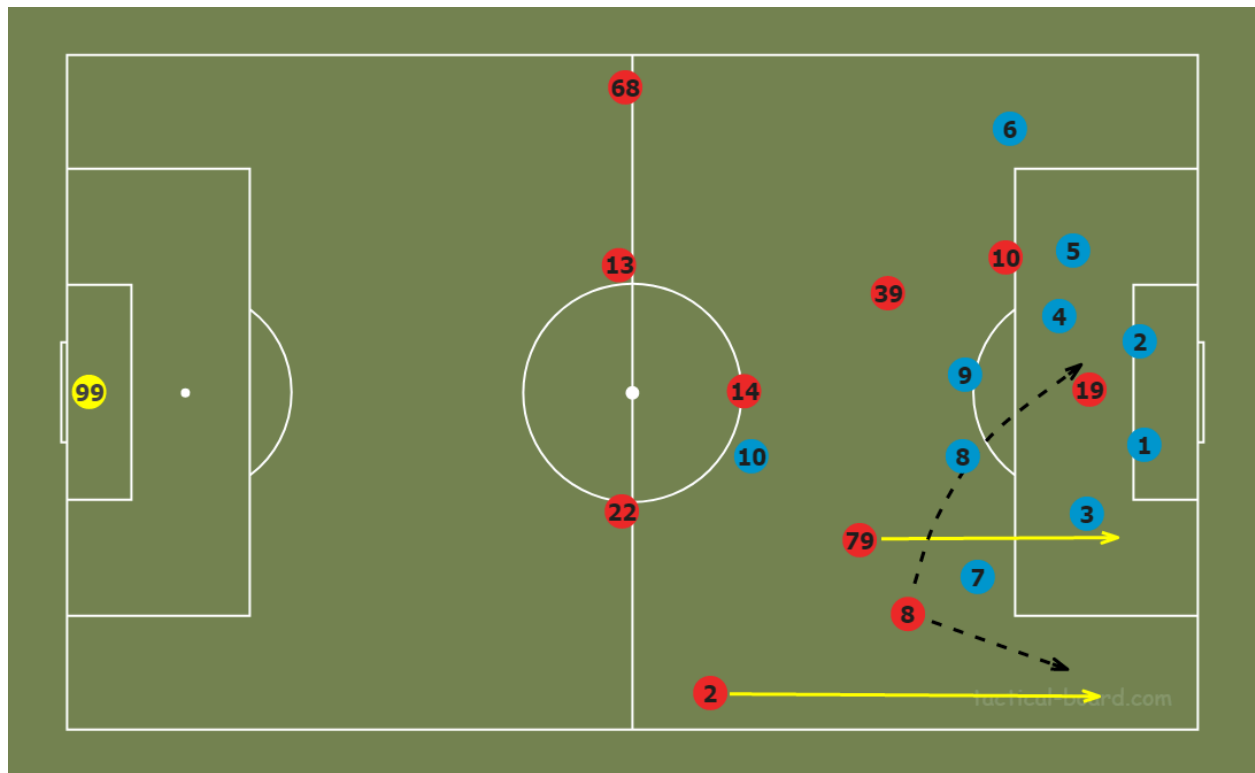
Now, I love Gattuso. I really do. He played with heart (and quoting Gattuso's interview when he worked in Greece, play with balls). As Italian said, Grinta. But, when Gattuso played, was Grinta alone can lift the trophy like UCL? No. We had smart creative players like Kaka and Pirlo. Plus the best poacher in history, Inzaghi. Of course we could easily unlock any defense. Back to present era, I still support Gattuso, no matter how many people screaming Gattuso out. But we can't play the game like this everytime. Here are some example of why Milan tactical team made a grave mistake almost every match.

STARTING ATTACK FROM THE BACK



It's never a good thing, to only have 1 way to start the attack. Donnarumma only pass to back 5, most of the time, he passed it to Rodriguez. Sure, you can do that first 2-3 matches. But if everytime we build attack that way, our opponents can easily adapt and high press our defensive line. And as expected, that leads to A LOT of blunders, missplaced pass, intercepted pass, or even stolen possession that leads to goals.

ONLY ONE PATTERN OF ATTACK



I watched a lot of Milan games this season, and believe me. As a person who lives in Asia, Serie A schedule isn't that nice to us. But that didn't slow me down to watch Milan games most of the time. But, everytime I watched Milan, I can only watch 1 (ONE/SINGLE) pattern of attack. And that is "Give the ball to Suso, and hopes for the best". Sure it worked couple of early matches / seasons. But now (not really now, it's happened for a long time, and still happening now), our opponents know how the only way we play. How they counter us? It's simple.

Enemy Fullback will tight-mark Suso, who doesn't have the physical attribute to beat his marker (He can't even outpace a 33 years old Kolarov). They already know how to beat slow player, by tight marking him before Suso even face towards the opponent's goal. The result, Suso can't even hold the ball, he's getting bullied almost all the time recently, and Gattuso still play him this way, hoping to Suso somehow become 1/3 of Ronaldinho.

If somehow Suso can escape from the situation above, he will do one of the followings. Suso cut inside then shoot/ make in-swinging crosses, make some through ball to Kessie with his underlap run, or opening space then make through ball to overlapping Right back. Now that every clubs we faced this season know how to counter these pattern, AC Milan become the only "big club" that doing a lot more cul de-sac than attacking properly.

Now let's see what happens when Suso can achieve one of the 4 options he has:

- **Cut inside then shoot.** How many times, when opponents play against Milan, they park the bus? A LOT of times. Everytime Suso shoots, let's admit it. He's no Messi/ Robben. But he's quite good to be honest, it's just that his shooting is always predictable and lack velocity. Opposition defense can stack some bodies to block the shots, leaving Suso only able to shoot to far post, and that's already anticipated.
- **Cut inside then make in-swinging crosses.** Again, with bodies stacking in penalty area, how can you expect our poachers to get to the end of the ball? Most of the time, it's 1v3 even 5. At best, Calhanoglu getting inside and trying to get the ball. But one thing for sure, HE'S NOT A STRIKER. He just doesn't have what it takes to be at the end of the cross. So what that makes us? 2v3 or 2v5? What about Kessie? He's also frequently making deep run to opposition's penalty area. Yes, but he always stand on the Near post area, not the place where you want a great physical player, and not where Suso choose to cross (which is far post most of the time).
- **Through ball to Kessie.** Kessie is a player with great physical abilities. But technically, he's just lacking. What will Kessie do next? He doesn't have the intelligence nor technique to produce the end what we expect.
- **Opening some space for right back to overlap.** Again, good alternatives for attack. But as always, the cross, no matter how good crosser you are, even Cafu

backs do. Why tactical instruction force him to play defensively? To maintain the back 3 just in case counter opportunity occurred?

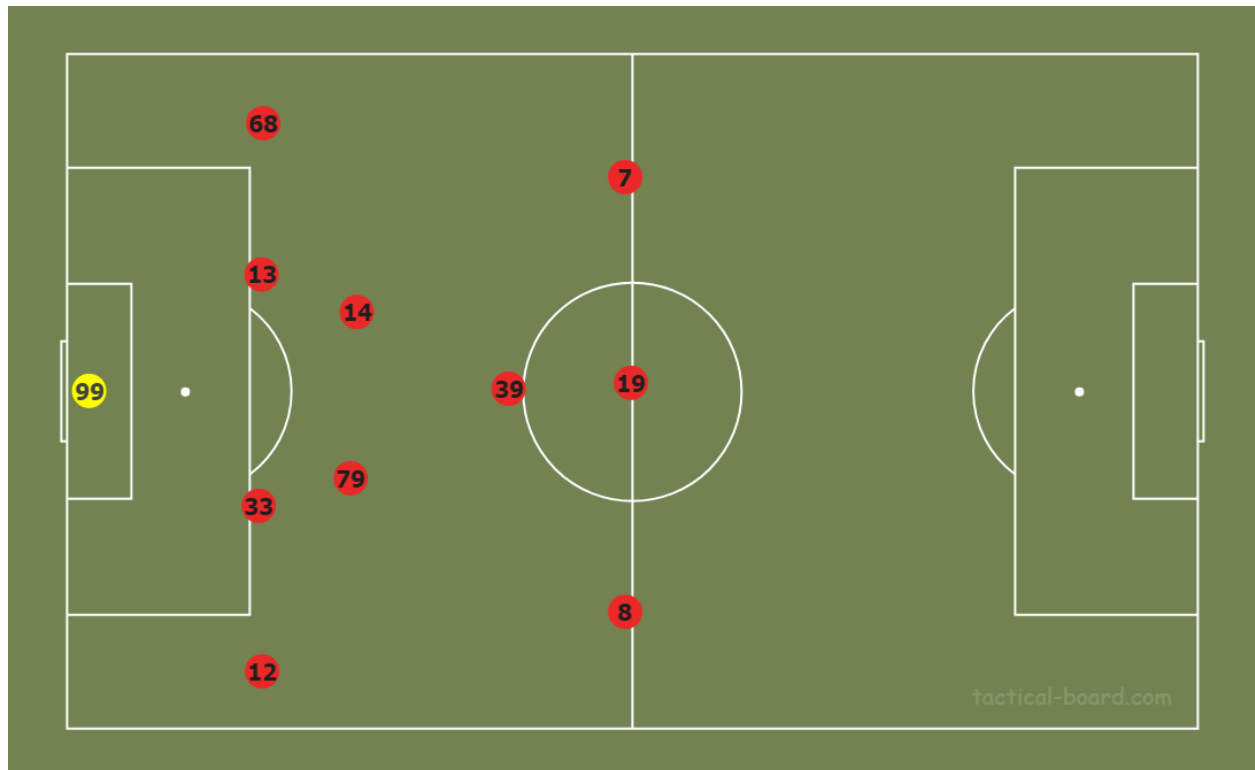
- Kessie most of the time is nowhere to be found. If Calhanoglu plays like Suso, he can just make more in-swinging crosses with Kessie who can outmuscle defenders and have better chance than right side in-swinging crosses pattern.

Based on these alone, even I, a non-holding any coaching license can see the problem from Gattuso's system. I personally don't know, maybe it's internal issue with the team. But everytime I saw Milan this season, we either played without Grinta (I expected a lot from a team that's handled by one of the most passionate player i've ever seen in my life. I hoped almost every post-match press converence, Gattuso would explode and showing his determination like when he exploded in OFI Crete press conference around 2014. But now, i'm not even sure he's the same man who I really looked up to), or we're just running around, full of Grinta, but again, has no gameplan to produce the end-goal.

What is the solution? First of all, **CHANGE THE WAY MILAN PLAYS**. A great team shouldn't just have 1 pattern of attack. I know that MOST of our players are not champions material. To be honest, I only feel that Romagnoli, Paqueta, and Piatek are worthy to be in a great club like AC Milan. But do the rest of the squad have worse abilities than the likes of Parma, Sampdoria, Olympiakos players? Most of the time we played badly and getting destroyed by midtables club, are we seriously this bad?

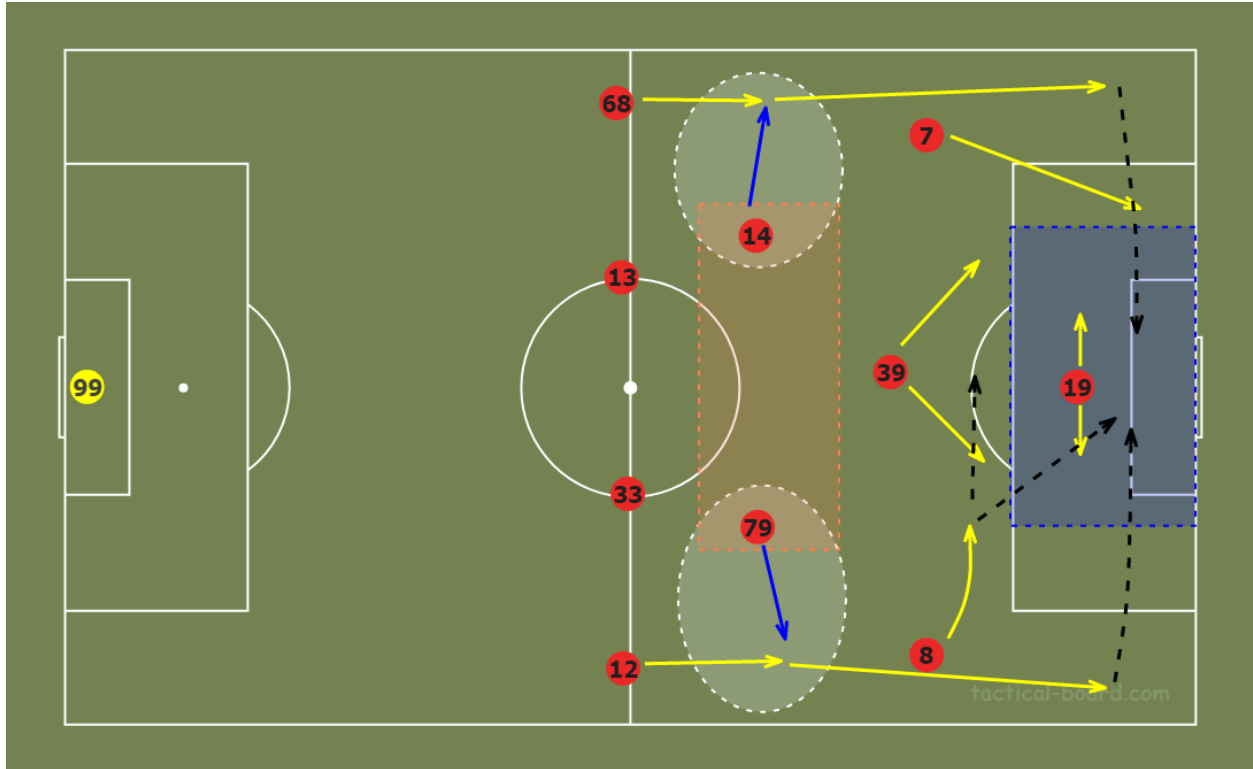
I know, we only have 4 games left. What's worse that could happen right? At worst, Milan can drop to 8-9th, what's the harm, we already become midtable clubs for years now. Who cares about Europa Competitions, no matter what happened, "we still get paid a lot. It's like a free vacations". That probably what's in players and maybe staffs mind. But just in case, if the one who receive this letter still have a bit shred of dignity, please, give this recommendation to those in charge of tactical works.

4-2-3-1 WITH PAQUETA AS MAIN ATTACK FOCUS

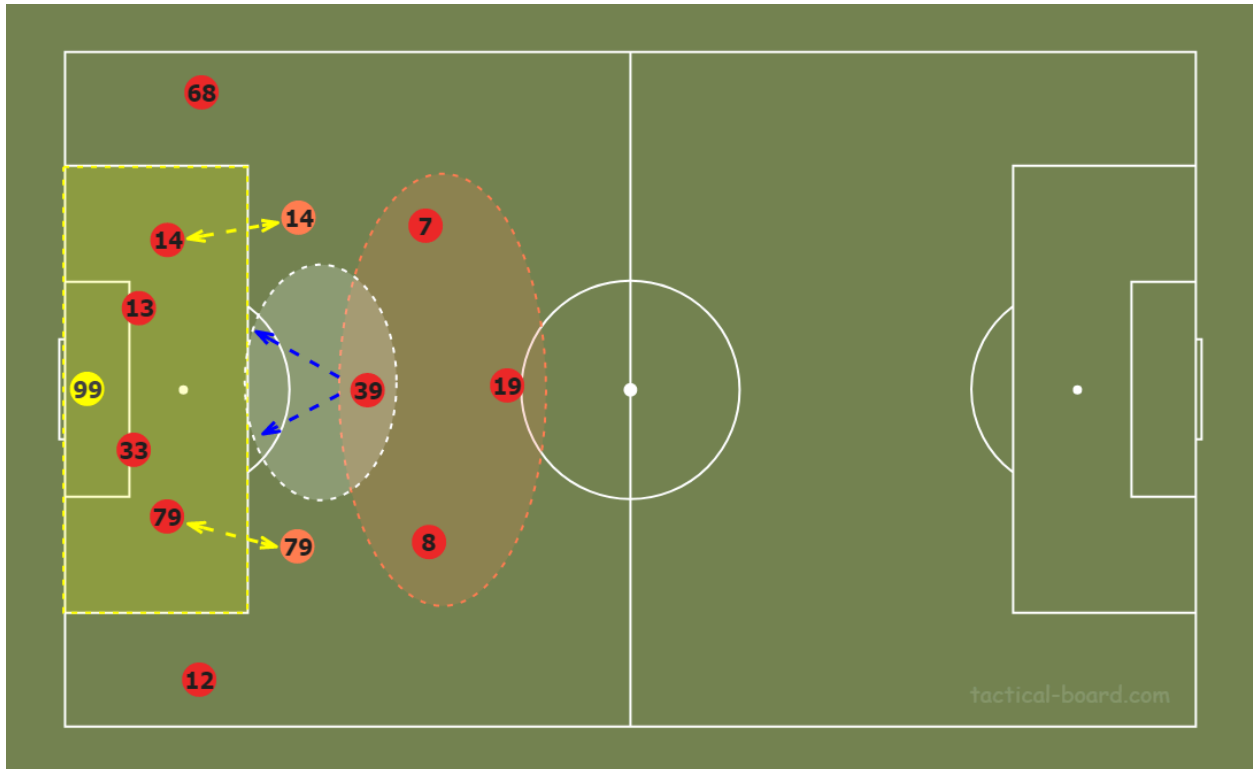


Why Paqueta? Because he's the best player we have right now. And have you seen how easily he holds the ball even against 3 players? Play him a lot more up the field behind Piatek who's one of the best striker in Serie A right now, can't even score because he's isolated. Kessie and Bakayoko can be the holding midfielder, with sometimes pushing forward a little bit, or just cover overlapping fullback easily, since their positions naturally close to the opened spaces. Paqueta works up front as attacking midfielder that has free role running around and supporting area where the plays are made.

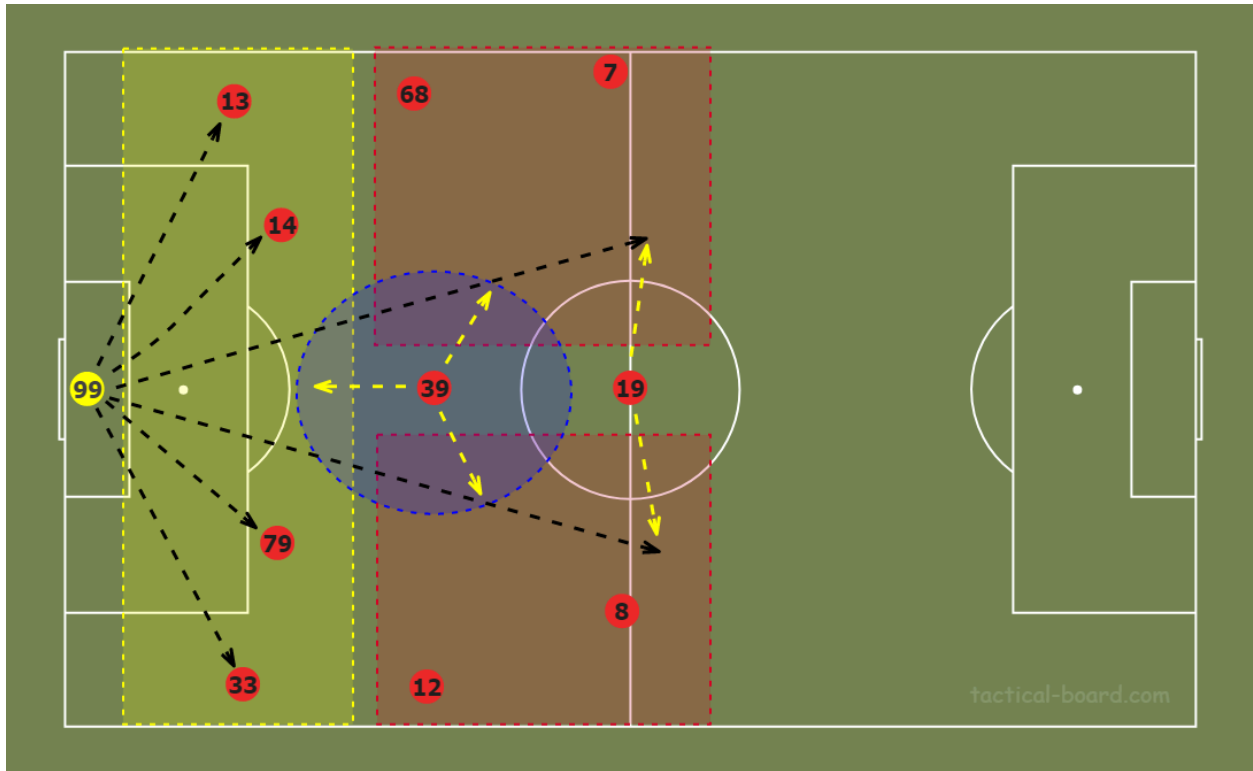
The goal of this formation is to get inside opposition penalty area A LOT MORE than current formation. Find those penalties, more bodies mean more hands/ foul potential. The last 4 matches are not against juventus, referee won't be as bad as those on juventus' payroll. Plus, this one of the few ways for now, to beat park the bus system deployed by small teams.



- **Paqueta, as the main attacking threats** will hover around supporting Castillejo/ Suso, play A LOT of one-twos, and again, exploit their bodies stacking, find a penalty.
- **Castillejo plays more as aggressive traditional wingers**, dribble more, beat opposition defender and make quick low crosses for Piatek/ Paqueta who arrives easily to penalty area since his position are AMF.
- With Fullback pushing and overlapping, 2 Holding Midfielders can protect and cover the hole. Making a risk-free Overlap, since there're still 4-5 players on the back. **(PLAY KESSIE AS HOLDING MIDFIELDER, NOT BOX TO BOX. HE'S NOT PRIME GERRARD/ PRIME SEEDORF)**
- Suso, he really is a one dimensional player. Play him like before. But **place Paqueta near him to allow some one-twos** creating some disruption on opposition's defense. Fullback overlaps more freely and force the oppositions to make mistakes.

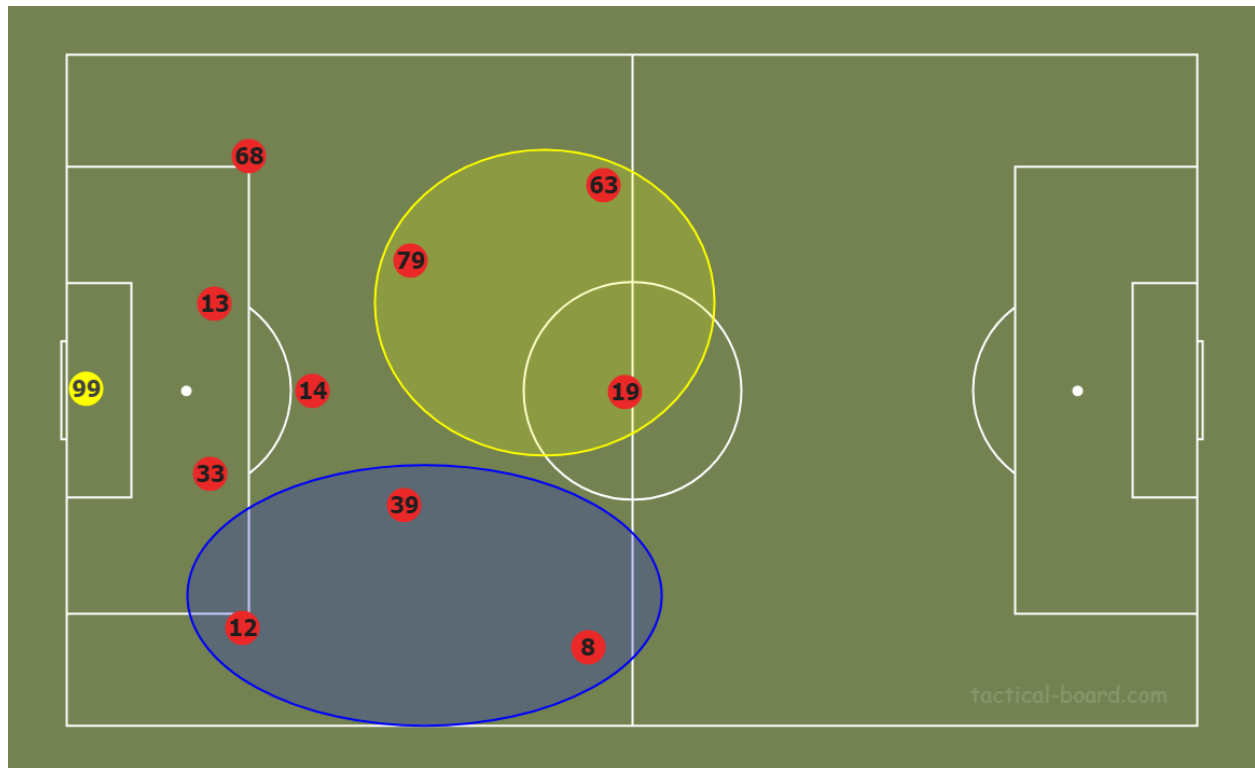


- **DEFEND WIDE AREAS.** How many crosses, wingers cutting inside destroyed this team now. Solution, defend WIDER. Don't let them getting inside penalty area. Our Fullbacks often late in covering those areas because Gattuso system try to defend narrow.
- **2 Holding midfielder can easily be the 3rd-4th centerbacks.** Near holding midfielder can cover the penalty area if needed, and the far holding midfielder can help covering any long shots with Paqueta.
- If it's not that dangerous, 2 Holding midfielder can form a 3-man lines soaking some penetration from center.
- Suso/Castillejo/Piatek FALL BACK. Help defending the situation. 3 of them can mark opposition's defensive mid/ overextending center back.
- **This team CAN NOT COUNTER ATTACK.** So don't bother, how many counters we squandered. Better hold the ball, and play it slow. Play Total football style. Defend together, Attack together.



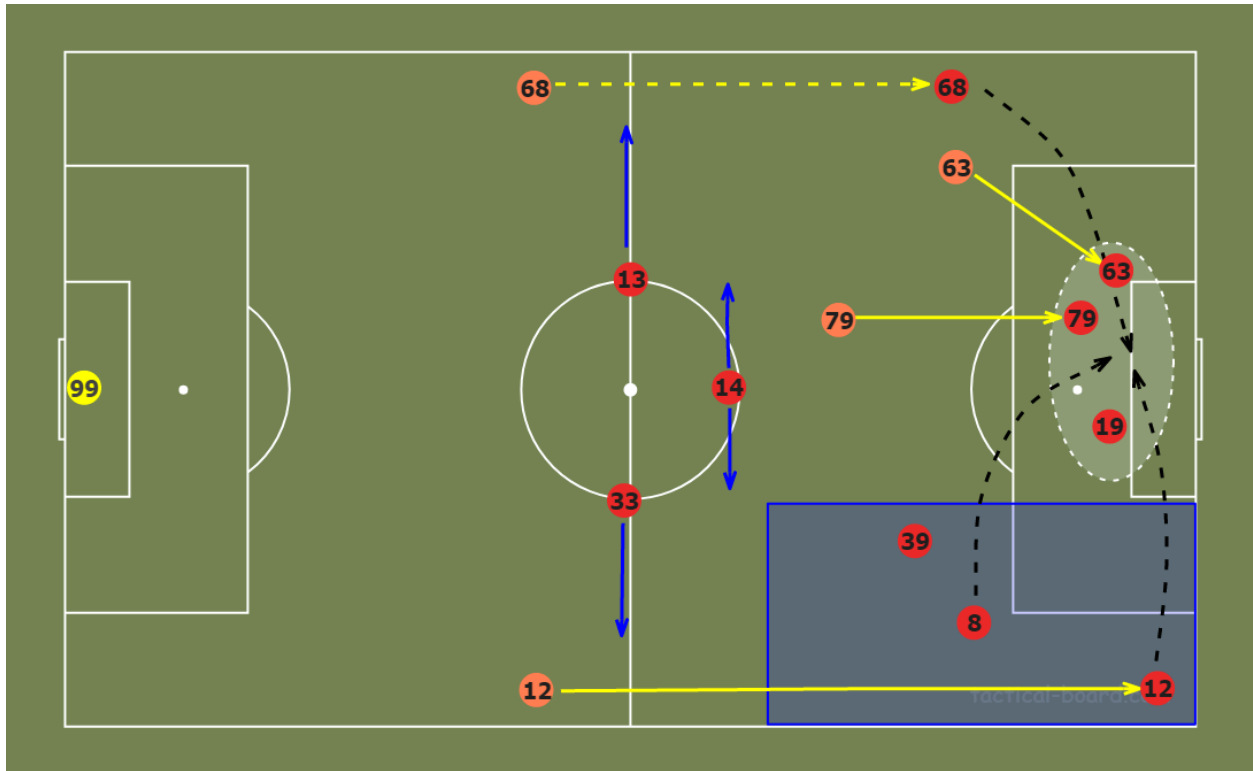
- In Goal kick situation, now we have 3 patterns of ball distribution. The usual short pass, and 2 additional long balls. Paqueta in flexible position can fill any options taken easily.
- Short pass – the same 5 options, with Paqueta closing in to offer some flexibility. The difference is that Fullback will push forward instead of holding the ball until some players find space/ backpass to GK.
- Side long balls – with fullbacks pushing early, and sometimes Kessie/Bakayoko also help the area in contest, it makes us mostly 4-5 of our players against 3 of them, since most of their fullback are usually behind/ quite bad at heading, and forcing their centerback to either chasing the ball and creating hole for other sides player make some inside penetrating run.
- **WE CAN NOT SEND THE LONG BALL TO THE CENTER AREA.** Unless our strikers are strong players like Giroud or Lukaku to duel opposition's central defender who usually have big physique.

OR IF GATTUSO AND STAFF STILL STUBBORN AND PLAY 4-3-3

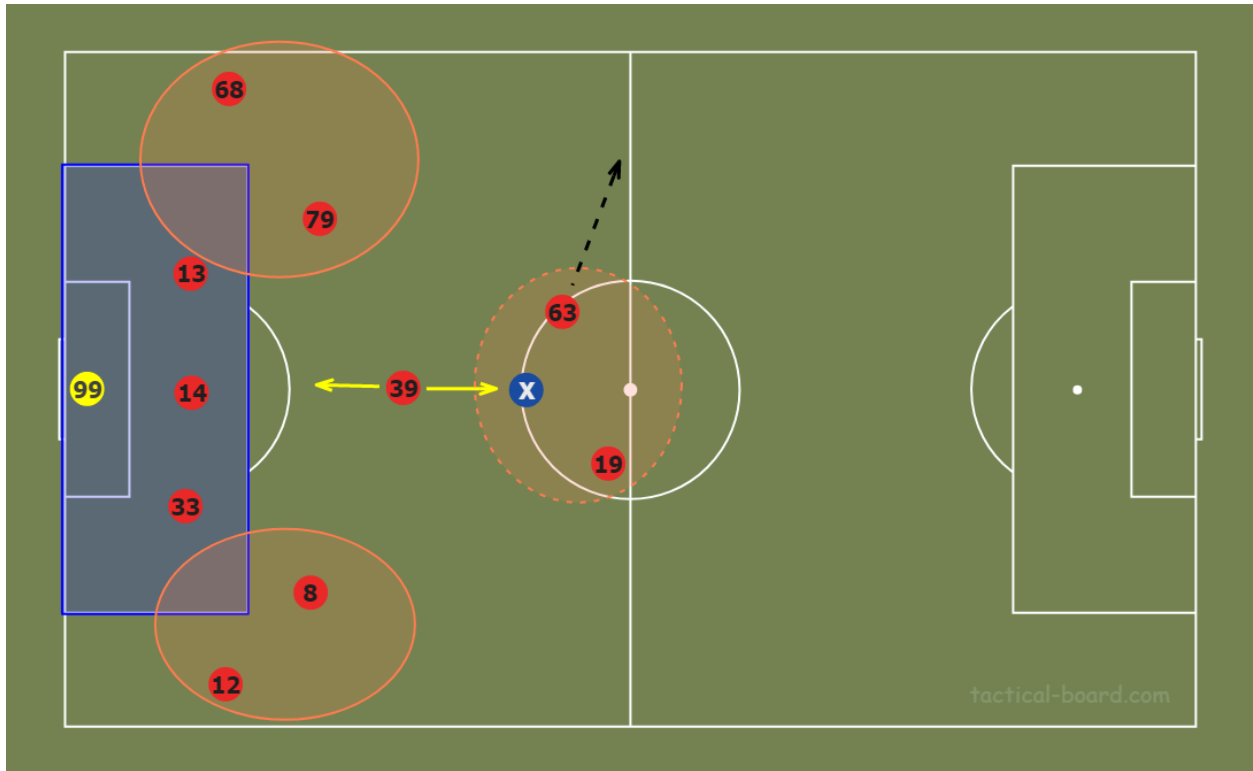


I realize, most likely Gattuso and staff'd still play this, no matter what. I really hope that Maldini/Leonardo slaps some sense to them. This is the only way to fix this tactics.

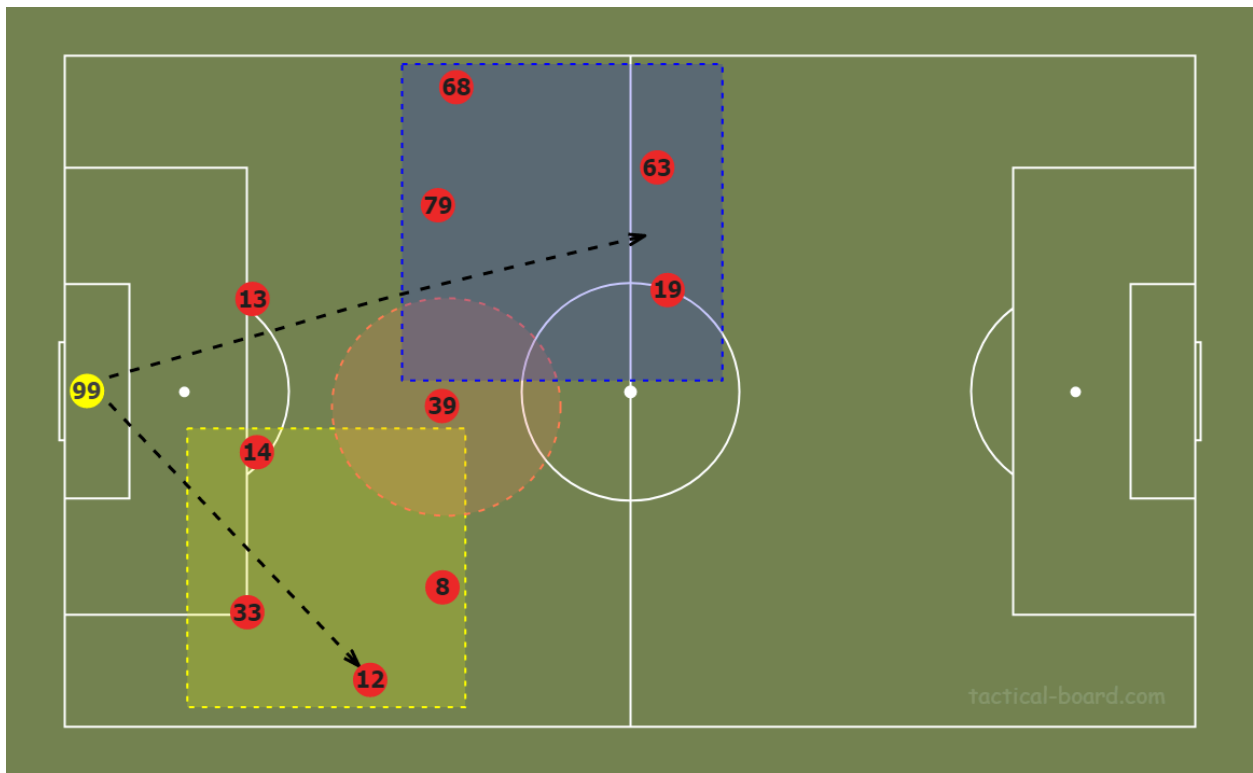
- **PLAY 1 STRIKER AS WIDE TARGET MAN.** If Gattuso really loves how this team works, at least create a system that can thrive on it. We all know that Suso loves to cut inside and do the rest. Why not just create a system around it?
- Cutrone played in Left wing, but in reality, he will be the wide poacher. And Kessie swap position with Paqueta in this system.
- **Right wing still be the focus of attack.** But now with addition of Paqueta that has far better technical abilities than Kessie, and can offer better creativity in final third.
- Left side players will be the 3 players that trying to get to the end of the in-swinging crosses from Suso or others supply from right side.



- With this system, **in-swinging crosses would have better chances than before**, since now we have 2 strikers and 1 strong midfielder that can contest the ball. Now it's 3v5 or 3v3 against park the bus system.
- Paqueta added more creative options so that Suso won't be the only marked player on opposition's left defense, which in turn giving Suso/ Paqueta more space.
- Rodriguez can push a little bit forward to cover any scrambled balls, with Paqueta and Bakayoko also covering, which make 3 players to recover the ball.
- With Rodriguez pushed a little bit forward, Cutrone, Piatek, Kessie can enter to position ready to attack deep floating cross from Rodriguez (he also has a good swerve too, utilize this kind of dangerous cross).
- Technically we have 3 players at the back, and 4 since Rodriguez doesn't need to overlap too far, and the crosses most likely difficult to counter.



- **Again, DEFEND WIDE AREAS.** Pull Bakayoko deeper to be the third center back. Gives Paqueta the role of long-shot blocker alongside Kessie/ even Suso if needed.
- **Suso must contribute in defensive phase**, at least do what Pirlo could do. Covering and blocking pass trajectory. It's such a waste that Suso stay in front, since he can't really start a counter because he's a slow player.
- Paqueta can mark opposition's holding midfielder if area behind him are risk-free/ wide area are safe, so that Kessie/ Suso can cover more central area.
- Either Piatek/ Cutrone mark overextending Center back, or defensive midfielder/ regista.
- Again, **THIS TEAM CAN NOT COUNTER ATTACK.** We just don't have the ability nor the speed to break opposition's defense. Let's just say we get to the counter opportunity, what's next? Our forwards are all poacher style, all of them don't have great vision/ passing ability to help smoothen the counter attack. Play it from the back, hold the ball, take it slow.



- **NEVER PLAY SHORT PASS IN THIS SYSTEM.** Unless the players are products of La Masia or something. But definitely this kind of short pass Gattuso use NEVER worked.
- Paqueta is the dynamic player, he can join each three options of ball distribution easily in this system.
- “Short” pass to right side like usual, but **pass it further to increase the safety of ball-carrier.** I can't stress this enough, but if your play is build from very deep area, our fullback would only have 2-3 options to pass at best. But if it's played further, our fullback will have better diamond passing options, even the 4th man can arrive easily to give more options.
- Long ball to area where our strongest headers are (naturally, our wide poacher). Again, fullback usually don't have a good header, exploit that weakness.
- If all lanes are blocked, Romagnoli and Paqueta can easily offer the third options (which I highly doubt).

CLOSING STATEMENT

I don't care about what people said, this Milan team are overpaid, overrated bunch that got SAME POINTS with the likes of Torino and Atalanta, with Atalanta still has 1 match to be played. Of course i'm angry, of course Gattuso should be angry. But nowadays, as I said earlier. I feel that Gattuso has given up already.

Milan Staff, and most of all, Gattuso should understand the limitation of his players. You can't really expect prime Gattuso to playmaking like Pirlo can you, same applied to players like Borini, Calhanoglu, Suso, and many more. My point is, create a system that utilize their strength to cover their weakness. Just like Ancelotti's diamond. Gattuso of all people should understand. He couldn't dribble, he couldn't shoot, he couldn't make plays. So what Ancelotti did? Made a system that can cover Gattuso's limitation. And now, he should do the same with this Milan.

I know it's just a rant, and probably thousands of similar emails getting send to Milan's channels. But just in case this letter got into the hands of some coaching staff in Milan. I really hope you can change the way Milan plays. I know, some of you are in it for the money. Well, i'm not. And I can assure you, my motive is pure. And that is the resurgence of the club I love most.

Thank you for reading this letter, I hope this analysis can reach some of you who's responsible for Milan's bad run this season, and still want to turn it around instead of running the same cul de-sac for the last 4 games.