



# LIVERPOOL – BARCELONA: A TACTICAL ANALYSIS OF 4-2-2 vs 3-4-3

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This article includes a tactical analysis of Champions League's most representative games.

LIVERPOOL	2007 UCL – OTTAVO DI FINALE LIVERPOOL – BARCELONA 0-1	BARCELONA
<p><b>PORTIERI</b> 25 – REINA 1 – DUDEK</p> <p><b>DIFENSORI</b> 3 – FINNAN 23 – CARRAGHER 5 – AGGER 2 – ARBELOA 4 – HYYPIA</p> <p><b>CENTROCAMPISTI</b> 8 – GERRARD 14 – XABI ALONSO 22 – SISSOKO 6 – RIISE 12 – FABIO AURELIO 16 – PENNANT 32 – ZENDEN 11 – GONZALEZ</p> <p><b>ATTACCANTI</b> 17 – BELLAMY 18 – KUYT 15 – CROUCH</p> <p><b>ALLENATORE</b> R.BENITEZ</p>		<p><b>PORTIERI</b> 1 – VALDES 25 - JORQUERA</p> <p><b>DIFENSORI</b> 23 - OLEGUER 21 - THURAM 5 – PUYOL 12 V.BRONCKHORST 11 – ZAMBROTTA</p> <p><b>CENTROCAMPISTI</b> 4 - MARQUEZ 6 – XAVI 24 – INIESTA 20 – DECO 15 – EDMILSON 7 – GIULY</p> <p><b>ATTACCANTI</b> 19 - MESSI 10 RONALDINHO 9 – ETO'O 22 – SAVIOLA 7 - GUDJOHNSEN</p> <p><b>ALLENATORE</b> F.RIJKAARD</p>
<p>LIVERPOOL 03/06/2007 – STADIO ANFIELD ROAD ARBITRO: FANDEL (GER) MARCATORI: <b>GUDJOHNSEN</b> SOSTITUZIONI: Giuly x Eto'o (61') – Pennant x Bellamy (67') – Gudjohnsen x Thuram (71') – Fabio Aurelio x Riise (77') – Crouch x Kuyt (90')</p>		



### MATCH PRESENTATION

Liverpool-Barcellona, with the access to the quarterfinals of the 2006/2007 Champions League at stake, matches up the winners of the last two editions of this prestigious Tournament. In the first leg, played in Barcelona, the Reds from Liverpool won 2-1. This forces the Barcelona to score at the least two goals in this match in order to qualify for next round. Both coaches have all their top players available. Only significant absence concerns midfielder Motta for Barcelona, which, however, recovers Eto'o, who joins Ronaldinho and Messi in the frontline.

### TACTICAL MATCH-UP

The Barcelona team does not have forwards particularly strong in the air. This forces the Spanish team to resort primarily to ground passes in their rapid exchanges between midfielders and forwards aiming at creating shooting opportunities.

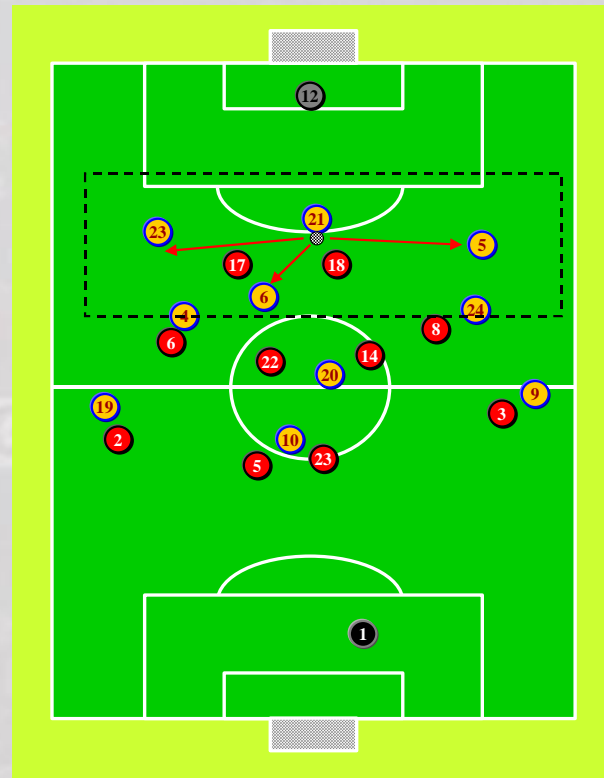
Rijkaard favors the 3-4-3 (Holland style) for this match, with the midfield in a diamond formation, expecting optimal ball control (and control of the match) with this system.

Benitez replies by organizing its Liverpool in a dynamic 4-4-2 alignment, with the objective of pressing and counterattacking, trying to take advantage of the free spaces resulting from Barcelona's 3-men defense.

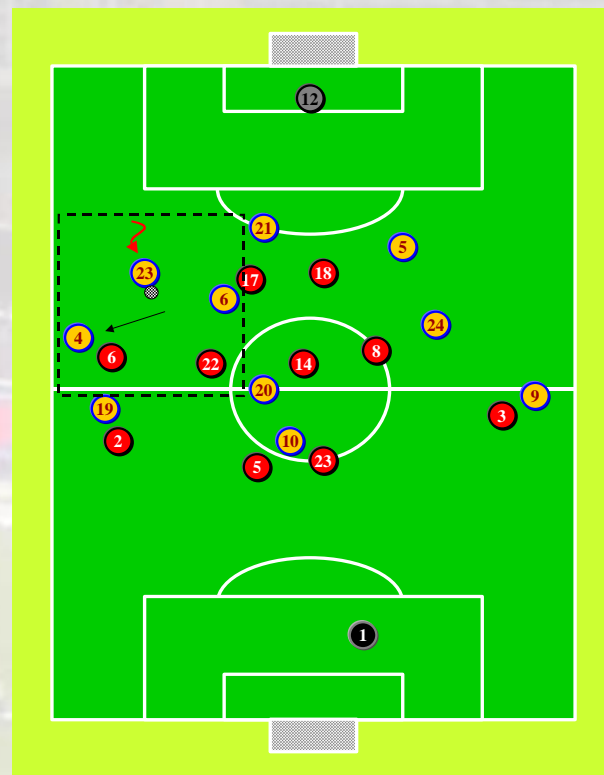
The game is very lively from the very beginning. Liverpool does not seem to suffer psychologically from the role of "favorite" for this match.

In the build-up phase Barcelona relies on prolonged possession of the ball, taking advantage of the favorable match-ups deriving from their 3-4-3 alignment. For instance, when the ball is in possession of the central defender Thuram (21), the latter, in case of pressure from one of the two opposing forwards, can pass on the outside to one of the two side defenders, or to Xavi (6) in the middle.

It's impossible for Liverpool's two forwards to close all the outlets available to Barcelona's central defender. In fact, rarely they put pressure on Thuram himself; rather they wait until the latter distributes the ball to one of the open teammates mentioned earlier and easily identifiable in the figure.



When one of the side defenders is in possession of the ball, the side midfielders (Maquez (4) on the right and Iniesta (24) on the left) move wide, forcing Riise (6) and Gerrard (8) to follow them, thus creating space for the Barcelona defender in possession of the ball.





This way, Barcelona manages the possession of the ball and the rhythms of the game, with emphasis on technique and individual ability, rather than pace. Not surprisingly, the final statistics see a ball possession greatly superior for the Spanish team (64% versus 36%).

However, Liverpool, despite the limited possession of the ball, is rarely in danger in defense, thanks to an excellent, compact team organization.

Benitez has the three lines of his 4-4-2 very close together, with the side defenders Finan (3) and Arbeloa (2) more inclined to follow the opposing wings than to support the central defenders, who suffice in marking the only central forward of the Spanish attacking trident.

Of particular help for the Reds is the extreme effectiveness of the midfield section, where Riise (6) and Gerrard (8) are able to double team frequently Barcelona's wings, whereas Sissoko (22) and Xabi Alonso (14) control the central part of the field, choking Deco's (20) effort to find space.

Liverpool is also able to create dangerous situations with its counterattacks, which highlight the fragility of the Spanish defense on the outside and the limited mobility on the part of Marquez (4) and Iniesta (24).

In the second half, with the game still scoreless, Rijkaard decides to go for broke and brings in Giuly (for Eto'o) and Gudjohnsen (for Thuram), shifting to a 3-3-4 formation. Benitez replies by strengthening even more the midfield by bringing in Pennant for Bellamy. The Reds now present a 4-1-4-1 formation, with Xabi Alonso taking on the responsibility of controlling the zone in front of the defensive unit, helping the two central

defenders in controlling Gudjohnsen and Ronaldinho.

### TECHNICAL ANALYSIS

Liverpool's qualification, even though unexpected, is well deserved. The Reds manage to register more shots on goal than Barcelona (5 versus 4) and create more danger in offense (2 posts and a couple of great saves by Valdes negate the goal to Liverpool). Barcelona is able to go to goal only toward the end of the game with a beautiful maneuver finalized by Gudjohnsen. Actually, the Spanish have evidenced deficiencies especially in offense, with the stellar trident, including Eto'o, Ronaldinho and Messi, well controlled by the English defense.

Barcelona's build-up phase was clean and effective, but the finishing touch phase (that should have led to scoring opportunities) left a lot to be desired. Liverpool's midfield has been able to close the spaces and condition the plays of the skilled opponents. The absence of wing midfielders able to get around the opposing defensive unit and to feed the attacking maneuvers, plus the absence of a forward strong in the air, have penalized Rijkaard's team, ultimately too predictable in its central attacks.

Liverpool's midfield has been excellent both in its filtering and counterattacking approaches.

Special credit goes to the outside midfielders (Riise and Gerrard) and to the forwards (Kuiy and Bellamy) for their ability in attacking the free spaces given up by Barcelona.

STATISTICS		
LIVERPOOL		BARCELONA
36%	Ball possession	64%
12/5	Shots / Shots on goal	7/4
15	Crosses	5
2	Corners	6
0	Penalty	0
3	Offsides	3
13	Fouls	12
4	Yellow cards	0
0	Red cards	0