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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Tactical baiting: A conceptual framework for opposition advancement and transition opportunities in Argentina's FIFA World Cup campaign

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ABSTRACT

Transition-based attacking is one of the prominent features of contemporary elite football, with existing tactical concepts largely emphasising actions following ball-possession recovery. Less attention has been given to how opposition positioning before recovery may shape the opportunities available during the subsequent transition. This study proposes Tactical Baiting as a conceptual analytical framework for examining this relationship. An observational analysis was conducted using three illustrative sequences from Argentina's 2022 FIFA World Cup campaign: the quarter-final against the Netherlands, the semi-final against Croatia, and the final against France. Across these sequences, a potentially recurring pattern was observed in which advanced opposition positioning, Argentina's compact defensive organisation, possession recovery, and rapid vertical progression formed a connected tactical sequence. The subsequent attacking actions were recognisable as conventional counterattacking; therefore, the proposed contribution is not a new form of counterattack but an analytical focus on how pre-recovery opposition positioning may contribute to the opportunities exploited after recovery. Tactical Baiting is presented as a complementary perspective rather than a reclassification of existing tactical concepts. Given the limited observational evidence, the framework does not establish intentionality, systematic use, prevalence, causal effectiveness, or distinctiveness from conventional counterattacking. It is therefore proposed as a promising hypothesis and potentially transferable conceptual framework for future investigation.

Keywords: performance analysis; Argentina; tactical baiting; transition play; counterattacking; FIFA World Cup.

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INTRODUCTION

Modern elite football has undergone substantial tactical evolution over the past two decades, with successful performance increasingly shaped by teams' ability to manipulate space, time, and opponents' positioning. Within this context, transition play has received considerable attention, particularly the attacking phase immediately following ball recovery (Chmura et al., 2018). Previous research has shown that offensive transitions can generate high-quality scoring opportunities because opponents may remain temporarily disorganised following possession loss (Rein & Memmert, 2016; Sarmento et al., 2018; Tenga et al., 2010). Consequently, transition-based research has focused substantially on post-recovery behaviours such as rapid ball progression, vertical advancement, and exploitation of defensive imbalance (Hughes & Lovell, 2019).

Existing tactical concepts provide established explanations of several components associated with defensive organisation and transition play. Counterattacking concerns the rapid exploitation of space and defensive disorganisation following possession regain (Prieto-González et al., 2026), while pressing traps describe the organisation of defensive pressure to constrain opponents' options and influence where possession can be recovered (Forcher et al., 2024). Low-block defending emphasises compact defensive organisation, whereas rest defence concerns the positional organisation maintained during attacking phases to manage potential counterattacks (Allen et al., 2026; Freitas et al., 2023). Positional play and broader transition frameworks similarly emphasise spatial relations, player positioning, coordinated movement, and the exploitation of available spaces. These perspectives capture important tactical components, but they do not necessarily place the same analytical emphasis on the conditions preceding possession recovery, particularly situations in which opposition advancement may contribute to the spatial configuration subsequently exploited during an attacking transition.

This pre-recovery phase therefore represents a potentially important analytical dimension of transition play. The conditions that make a subsequent transition advantageous may begin to emerge while the opposition is still in possession. An opposition team may, for example, advance into strategically consequential areas, increasing the space available behind or around its attacking structure, while the defending team maintains sufficient compactness and positional organisation to recover the ball. Following recovery, these pre-existing spatial relationships may create opportunities for immediate vertical progression. The tactical process can therefore be considered as a connected sequence in which opposition advancement and defensive organisation precede possession recovery, followed by spatial exploitation and rapid progression. This temporal relationship shifts analytical attention towards how conditions preceding recovery may relate to the opportunities available immediately afterwards.

This interpretation can be situated within ecological dynamics and affordance-based perspectives on collective behaviour. From an ecological dynamics perspective, team behaviour emerges through continuous interactions among players, opponents, space, and task constraints, with opportunities for action changing as these relationships evolve (Sheehan et al., 2022). Collective affordances may consequently emerge from changing spatial and interpersonal relations and shape the actions available to teams at particular moments (Caso et al., 2026; Petiot et al., 2024). An opponent's advancement may therefore alter the spatial and relational environment in ways that subsequently afford particular attacking actions following possession recovery. Complex systems perspectives similarly conceptualise team behaviour as an adaptive and emergent process arising from interactions among multiple players and constraints rather than from isolated tactical actions (Jones et al., 2026). These perspectives provide a theoretical basis for examining how

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transition opportunities may be shaped by preceding configurations and interactions, but they do not establish the existence or effectiveness of Tactical Baiting.

Argentina under Lionel Scaloni provides a relevant observational context in which to examine this possibility. During the 2022 FIFA World Cup, particularly in the matches against the Netherlands, Croatia, and France, Argentina was observed to alternate between structured possession, compact defensive organisation, coordinated pressing, and rapid offensive transitions according to match demands. Across three illustrative attacking sequences selected for analysis, a recurring pattern appeared to involve opposition advancement, maintenance of defensive compactness, possession recovery, and immediate vertical progression into spaces associated with the opponent's advanced positioning. The analytical significance of these sequences lies not simply in the subsequent transition, but in the possibility that favourable conditions for that transition were shaped by opposition advancement before possession was recovered. The analysis therefore focuses on the relationship between pre-recovery spatial conditions and subsequent post-recovery exploitation.

For the purposes of this study, Tactical Baiting is used as a provisional label for an observable transition sequence in which opposition advancement precedes possession recovery and rapid offensive progression, with the positional configuration at recovery potentially creating exploitable attacking opportunities. The term does not denote demonstrated baiting, inducement, deception, or intentional manipulation by the defending team. Because intentionality cannot be inferred from the footage, the framework concerns the temporal association between pre-recovery opposition positioning and post-recovery exploitation. Its usefulness must be tested against established descriptions of counterattacking and defensive-transition contexts before it can be treated as a distinct analytical construct.

This study develops the conceptual basis of Tactical Baiting and illustrates the framework through three observational sequences from Argentina's 2022 FIFA World Cup campaign. The analysis examines how opposition advancement, defensive organisation, possession recovery, and subsequent vertical progression and supporting movement may form a connected tactical sequence, while recognising its overlap with established concepts in transition and defensive organisation. The purpose is to clarify this specific temporal relationship and provide a basis for future investigation using larger samples across teams and competitions and, where appropriate, event data, player-tracking technologies, spatiotemporal analysis, and computer vision.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed an observational approach to examine a potentially recurring transition-based tactical sequence exhibited by Argentina during the 2022 FIFA World Cup (Caso et al., 2026). Publicly available full-match footage from Argentina's quarter-final against the Netherlands, semi-final against Croatia, and final against France was repeatedly reviewed. The analysis was exploratory and conceptual rather than frequency-based or hypothesis-testing. Accordingly, the selected sequences were examined to explore a recurring tactical relationship rather than to estimate its prevalence, effectiveness, or intentionality.

Analytical procedure and sequence selection

The video footage was initially reviewed to identify candidate sequences in which Argentina defended against an advancing opponent and subsequently recovered possession. The final examples were selected purposively because they displayed all four analytical features and culminated in successful attacking outcomes. This positive-case selection was appropriate for illustrating the proposed framework but cannot establish recurrence, prevalence, effectiveness, or distinctiveness because unsuccessful transitions and

sequences that did not meet the proposed criteria were not systematically sampled or compared. The analysis should therefore be interpreted as concept development from illustrative cases rather than as evidence that Tactical Baiting was a recurrent feature of Argentina's play.

Candidate sequences were compared across the three matches and selected when the complete pre-recovery and post-recovery progression could be observed with sufficient contextual clarity. Alternative sequences were considered during the review process but were not retained as primary illustrations when they did not sufficiently display the predefined tactical features or when the relevant sequence could not be followed clearly from the pre-recovery phase through the subsequent progression. The final three sequences were therefore selected for illustrative clarity and analytical relevance, rather than because they were assumed to be representative of Argentina's overall play.

Each selected sequence was analysed as a connected tactical process rather than as separate defensive and attacking events. Through repeated observation, recurring characteristics were identified and compared across the sequences, with particular attention to the temporal relationship between opposition advancement before possession recovery and the subsequent exploitation of the positional configuration present at recovery. These observations informed the conceptualisation of the Tactical Baiting framework. The emerging framework was then examined in relation to established concepts including counterattacking, pressing organisation, low-block defending, rest defence, and transition play. This comparison was intended to assess whether the proposed framework offered a distinct analytical emphasis on the pre-recovery conditions of transition play rather than simply renaming an existing tactical behaviour.

Analytical reliability and scope

The footage was reviewed by the researcher as a single analyst; no independent second analyst or formal inter-rater reliability (IRR) procedure was employed. Given that video-based match analysis may involve variation in analysts' interpretations, this represents an important methodological limitation (Furley et al., 2025). To reduce interpretive bias and improve consistency of observation, the sequences were reviewed repeatedly, candidate examples were compared with alternative sequences, and the analysis was guided by the predefined observational features rather than by the assumption that all identified transitions constituted Tactical Baiting. Established tactical concepts were also considered when interpreting the sequences to reduce the risk of attributing an existing tactical behaviour solely to the proposed framework.

No statistical analyses, event-based performance metrics, or player-tracking data were employed. The study was not designed to establish the frequency, effectiveness, intentionality, systematic use, or causal contribution of the observed behaviour. Accordingly, the three sequences constitute illustrative observational evidence informing the development of a conceptual framework rather than empirical validation of the proposed framework as an established tactical phenomenon. The findings should therefore be interpreted as exploratory and conceptual, providing a basis for subsequent empirical investigation using larger samples, independent analysts, and quantitative or spatiotemporal methods.

EVIDENCE OF RECURRING TACTICAL BEHAVIOUR

Three illustrative attacking sequences from Argentina's 2022 FIFA World Cup campaign were examined to explore whether a potentially recurring relationship could be observed between opposition advancement before possession recovery and the subsequent exploitation of the resulting spatial configuration. The sequences, presented from the final against France, the semi-final against Croatia, and the quarter-final against the Netherlands, were selected for the clarity of their pre-recovery and post-recovery phases rather

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than as representative or exhaustive examples. Across the cases, attention was given to opposition positioning before recovery, Argentina's defensive organisation, the location and manner of possession recovery, and the immediate progression that followed. Collectively, the sequences display a similar sequence of observable features in which advanced opposition positioning preceded possession recovery and was followed by rapid exploitation of spatial opportunities associated with the configuration present at recovery. These observations provide preliminary support for examining Tactical Baiting as a conceptual framework, but do not establish its prevalence, intentionality, systematic use, empirical effectiveness, or distinctiveness from existing transition-based concepts.

Argentina (4-4-2) vs France (4-2-3-1)

The sequence examined in the present study took place around the 36th minute of the 2022 FIFA World Cup Final and provides a detailed illustration of the proposed Tactical Baiting framework. Approximately 5–10 seconds before possession was recovered, France had advanced extensively into Argentina's half, with around seven to eight French players positioned beyond the halfway line and approximately five to six players operating in advanced areas near Argentina's penalty area. France attacked primarily through the left and central areas, while Argentina maintained a compact defensive structure. This pre-recovery configuration is important because substantial space was already available behind and around France's advanced structure when Argentina regained possession.

Nahuel Molina (26) recovered the ball on the right side of Argentina's defensive third and, rather than carrying it forward, played a first-time pass to Alexis Mac Allister (20). Mac Allister then played a first-time pass into Lionel Messi (10) between the lines. As Messi received the ball under pressure, French defenders adjusted towards the ball-oriented situation, while space remained available for movement into the right side of the attacking structure. Julián Álvarez (9) subsequently moved into this space and played forward to the advancing Mac Allister, who had continued his run after releasing the ball to Messi. The sequence therefore combined rapid one-touch circulation, supporting movement, and third-man progression while maintaining the temporal advantage of the transition.

Mac Allister then played a first-time diagonal pass to Ángel Di María (11), who made a late entry from the left half-space and completed the sequence with a first-time finish. From possession recovery to the ball reaching the French penalty area, the sequence developed within approximately nine seconds. The immediate attacking progression is recognisable as conventional counterattacking; however, its relevance to Tactical Baiting lies in the relationship between France's advanced pre-recovery positioning and the spatial opportunities available immediately after Argentina regained possession (Prieto-González et al., 2026).

The sequence can therefore be interpreted at two interconnected levels. First, France's advanced positioning was associated with substantial exploitable space behind and around its attacking structure. Second, following recovery, Argentina converted this available configuration through rapid one-touch circulation, vertical progression, third-man movement, supporting runs, and Di María's late entry. These post-recovery mechanisms are consistent with established principles of counterattacking and positional play and should not, by themselves, be interpreted as evidence of a distinct tactical doctrine.

The footage does not establish that Argentina deliberately induced France's advancement, that the French defenders were intentionally manipulated, or that Argentina systematically employed this pattern. The sequence is therefore treated as an illustrative example through which the proposed conceptual relationship between opposition advancement before recovery and subsequent spatial exploitation can be examined.

Tactical sequence
France advances extensively → Argentina maintains compact defensive organisation → Molina recovers possession → first-time connection to Mac Allister → Messi receives between the lines → Álvarez provides supporting movement → Mac Allister continues his run → third-man progression → Di María makes a late entry from the left half-space → first-time finish.

Argentina (4-4-2) vs Croatia (4-1-2-3)
The sequence examined in the present study occurred in the 39th minute of the semi-final against Croatia and provides a further illustration of the proposed Tactical Baiting framework. Approximately 5–10 seconds before possession was recovered, Croatia had advanced extensively into Argentina's defensive third, with approximately eight outfield players in Argentina's half and five to six players in advanced attacking positions. Both full-backs and several midfielders had moved high, while Argentina maintained a compact low defensive block. This pre-recovery configuration was associated with substantial space behind and between Croatia's advanced players, particularly through the central corridor and behind the advanced full-backs.

Croatia's attacking attempt was deflected by an Argentine defender, after which Nicolás Otamendi (19) recovered the deflected ball outside Argentina's penalty area, in the central-to-right-central zone. Otamendi immediately played forward to Rodrigo De Paul, who released the ball towards Lionel Messi. Messi then played a quick touch into Julián Álvarez's path. The initial progression from recovery to Álvarez therefore followed Otamendi → De Paul → Messi → Álvarez, helping to preserve the temporal advantage of the transition while Croatia reorganised from attack to defence.

Álvarez received centrally and immediately carried the ball forward into the available space, prioritising vertical progression rather than a lateral or backward option. As Álvarez progressed through the central corridor, the Croatian defenders adjusted their positioning and retreated, while supporting movements from Molina and De Paul provided additional forward options. These movements created additional passing possibilities and were associated with a stretching of Croatia's defensive structure as the attack progressed. Álvarez's continued forward carry, together with the supporting runs, therefore helped Argentina sustain the attacking momentum generated immediately after recovery.

The sequence also involved a combination of individual penetration and coordinated off-ball movement. The supporting movements of Molina and De Paul occupied additional areas of the attacking structure, increasing the number of potential attacking routes available to Argentina (Thönnessen et al., 2026). Although Álvarez ultimately continued the attack without using the supporting option, these movements remained part of the developing attacking configuration. The recovery-to-finish sequence lasted approximately seven seconds, illustrating the rapid temporal progression from possession recovery to final penetration.

The immediate progression can be understood as conventional counterattacking. Its relevance to the proposed framework lies primarily in the pre-recovery configuration: Croatia's advanced positioning was associated with substantial spatial opportunities that were already available when Argentina recovered possession. Argentina subsequently converted this configuration through rapid passing, one-touch combination play, vertical progression, supporting movement, and Álvarez's continued penetration. These post-recovery mechanisms are consistent with established principles of counterattacking and coordinated attacking play and should not, by themselves, be interpreted as evidence of a distinct tactical doctrine.

Importantly, the footage does not establish that Argentina deliberately induced Croatia's attacking commitment, intentionally designed the situation as tactical bait, or systematically employed such behaviour.

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Argentina's compact defensive organisation and Croatia's advanced positioning are observable, but the intentionality underlying these behaviours cannot be established from the footage alone. The sequence is therefore treated as an illustrative example of the proposed spatial-temporal relationship between opposition advancement before possession recovery and subsequent exploitation of the configuration present at recovery.

Tactical sequence
Croatia advances extensively → Argentina maintains compact defensive organisation → Otamendi recovers possession → forward connection to De Paul → Messi provides a rapid one-touch connection → Álvarez receives and progresses vertically → Croatian defenders adjust and retreat → Molina and De Paul provide supporting runs → defensive structure becomes stretched → Álvarez penetrates and finishes.

Argentina (3-5-2) vs the Netherlands (3-4-1-2)
The third sequence occurred during the attacking move that resulted in Nahuel Molina's first goal against the Netherlands in the quarter-final. Approximately 5–10 seconds before possession was recovered, the Netherlands were advancing through a structured build-up, with approximately seven to eight players in Argentina's half and four to five in more advanced positions. Denzel Dumfries and Daley Blind were positioned high and wide, while Argentina maintained a compact medium-to-low defensive block. This pre-recovery configuration was associated with space between the Dutch midfield and defensive structure and behind the advanced wide players.

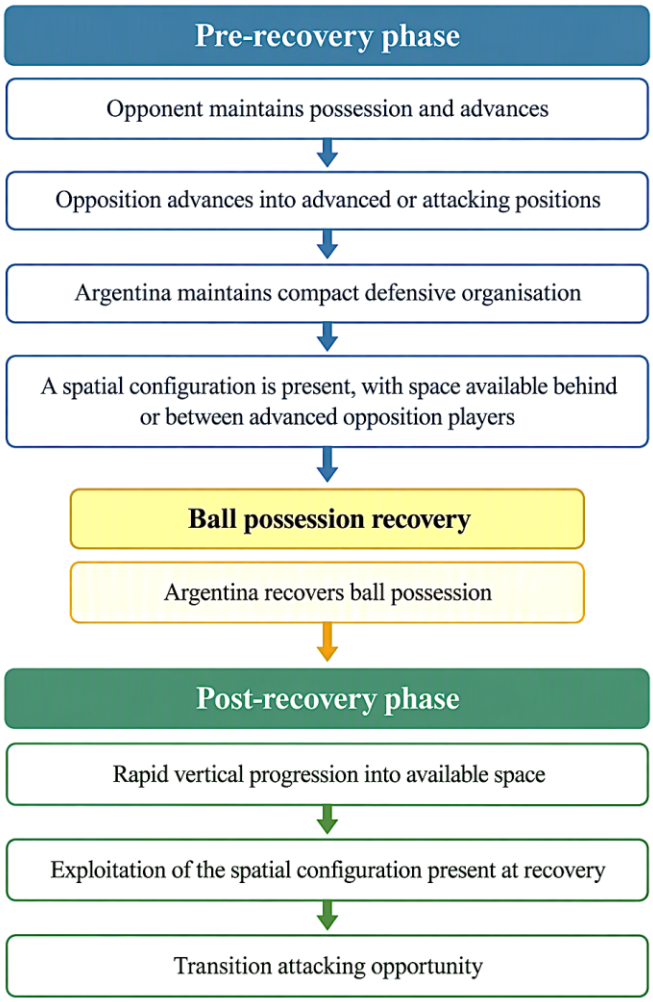
Nahuel Molina (26) intercepted a misplaced pass from Nathan Aké in Argentina's own half on the right side and immediately played forward to Rodrigo De Paul (7). De Paul progressed the ball to Lionel Messi (10), who advanced through the available central space while Molina continued his movement from the right flank towards the interior channel. The sequence from recovery to goal developed within approximately seven to eight seconds and followed Molina → De Paul → Messi → Molina → goal.

The tactical significance of the sequence lies in the interaction of four interconnected mechanisms: (i) attack initiation, as Argentina progressed possession through Molina and De Paul before Messi received; (ii) ball attraction and defensive adjustment, as Messi's involvement became the immediate focus of the Dutch defensive structure; (iii) continuous off-ball movement and delayed re-entry, as Molina continued his diagonal movement after releasing possession and entered the interior/right half-space at a later moment; and (iv) exploitation and penetration, as Messi subsequently played the decisive pass into Molina's continued movement. These mechanisms formed a connected attacking sequence in which the initial passer remained involved after releasing possession and later re-entered the attacking structure in a more advanced position.

The sequence illustrates how releasing possession does not necessarily terminate a player's involvement in an attack. Molina's continued movement maintained an alternative attacking route while the Dutch defensive structure adjusted towards the ball, and his delayed arrival was subsequently combined with Messi's passing action to create the penetrating opportunity. A related feature was observed in the France sequence, where Alexis Mac Allister continued his forward movement after an earlier involvement before contributing to the subsequent attacking progression. Continuous movement after passing can therefore be considered an important post-recovery exploitation mechanism through which an available spatial configuration may be converted into further attacking progression (Esposito et al., 2026; Thönnessen et al., 2026).

The immediate action is recognisable as conventional counterattacking. Its relevance to the proposed Tactical Baiting framework, however, lies primarily in the relationship between the pre-recovery and post-

recovery phases. The Netherlands had advanced with several players positioned high while Argentina maintained a compact defensive structure; following recovery, the spatial configuration associated with that advancement was exploited through rapid progression, ball circulation, defensive adjustment, continued movement, and delayed penetration. The sequence therefore provides an illustrative example of how opposition advancement before possession recovery may contribute to the opportunities exploited during the subsequent transition.



Note. The sequence represents the proposed analytical structure of Tactical Baiting rather than an assumption of deliberate opposition induction or systematic tactical design. The framework emphasises the temporal relationship between opposition advancement before possession recovery and subsequent exploitation of the spatial configuration present at recovery.

Figure 1. Proposed spatial–temporal sequence underlying the Tactical Baiting framework.

The footage does not establish that Argentina deliberately induced Dutch advancement, that Messi intentionally attracted defenders for Molina's benefit, or that Argentina systematically designed such situations. The observed relationship is therefore interpreted cautiously as a potential spatial-temporal mechanism of post-recovery exploitation rather than as evidence of an established tactical doctrine. Within the broader framework, the sequence is relevant because the attacking opportunity cannot be considered solely as a product of actions after recovery; rather, the pre-recovery positioning of the opposition appears to have contributed to the spatial conditions that were subsequently exploited.

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Table 1. Recurring tactical characteristics observed across the three illustrative match sequences.

Tactical characteristic	France	Croatia	Netherlands
Opposition positioning before recovery	Extensive advancement into Argentina's half and attacking third	Extensive advancement into Argentina's defensive third	Collective advancement into Argentina's half, with several players in advanced positions
Argentina's defensive organisation	Compact defensive block	Compact low defensive block	Compact medium-to-low defensive block
Possession recovery	Central-right area in Argentina's own half	Central-to-right-central area outside Argentina's penalty area	Right side of Argentina's own half
Spatial configuration at recovery	Space available centrally and to the right behind France's advanced structure	Space available in the central corridor, between advanced midfield and defensive lines, and behind advanced full-backs	Space available between the Dutch midfield and defensive structure and behind advanced wide players
Immediate progression	Rapid forward passing through Molina, Mac Allister, Messi, Álvarez, Mac Allister and Di María	Rapid progression through Otamendi, Messi, and Álvarez	Rapid progression through Otamendi, Molina, Messi, and Molina
Observed attacking outcome	Successful attacking sequence ending in a goal	Successful attacking sequence ending in a goal	Successful attacking sequence ending in a goal

Note. The table summarises observable characteristics of the three illustrative sequences and is intended to demonstrate a possible recurring pattern rather than prevalence, intentionality, causal effectiveness, or empirical validation of Tactical Baiting.

Table 2. Analytical distinction between Tactical Baiting and related tactical concepts.

Tactical concept	Primary focus	Temporal emphasis	Distinction from Tactical Baiting
Conventional counterattacking	Rapid exploitation of space and defensive disorganisation following possession recovery (Prieto-González et al., 2026; Rein & Memmert, 2016)	Primarily emphasises actions following possession recovery	Extends analysis to the opposition positioning and spatial configuration preceding recovery
Pressing traps	Organising pressure to constrain opponents' options and influence where possession can be recovered (Forcher et al., 2024)	May shape the location and circumstances of possession recovery	Examines the relationship between opposition advancement, defensive organisation, recovery, and subsequent exploitation rather than primarily the pressure mechanism
Low-block defending	Compact defensive organisation and protection of central or valuable spaces (Allen et al., 2026)	May precede and facilitate opportunities for possession recovery	Considers how spatial configuration associated with opposition advancement may relate to opportunities after recovery
Rest defence	Maintaining defensive security during attacking phases to limit counterattacking threats (Freitas et al., 2021; Schulze, 2022)	Primarily concerns defensive organisation during attacking phases and the transition risk following possession loss	Focuses on opposition advanced positioning before Argentina's recovery and attacking opportunities associated with that configuration
Tactical Baiting (proposed framework)	Connecting pre-recovery opposition advancement and defensive organisation with spatial opportunities exploited immediately after recovery	Considers recovery as the link between pre-recovery configuration and post-recovery action	Provides an analytical lens for examining whether opposition advancement preceding recovery contributes to transition opportunity, without assuming intentionality or systematic tactical design

Note. Tactical Baiting is proposed as a conceptual analytical framework rather than as a replacement for, or reclassification of, existing tactical concepts. Existing concepts may describe substantial components of the observed sequences. The proposed framework instead foregrounds the temporal relationship between pre-recovery opposition positioning and the spatial opportunities exploited immediately after possession recovery. It does not assume that opposition advancement was deliberately induced or systematically designed.

Tactical sequence
Netherlands advances through structured build-up → Argentina maintains compact defensive organisation → Molina intercepts Aké's misplaced pass → Molina connects with De Paul → De Paul progresses to Messi → Messi advances centrally → Dutch defenders adjust towards the ball → Molina continues his diagonal movement → delayed re-entry into the interior/right half-space → Messi plays the decisive pass → Molina penetrates and scores.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined whether a recurring relationship could be observed between opposition advancement before possession recovery and the subsequent exploitation of the spatial configuration available at recovery. Across the three illustrative sequences, the common feature was not simply rapid attacking after regaining possession, but the combination of advanced opposition positioning, Argentina's compact defensive organisation, possession recovery, and rapid exploitation of space associated with the pre-recovery configuration. The immediate attacking actions were recognisable as conventional counterattacking (Rein & Memmert, 2016). The proposed contribution therefore concerns the analytical relationship between the pre-recovery and post-recovery phases rather than the claim that Argentina employed a fundamentally new form of attacking play.

This distinction is important when considering existing tactical concepts. Counterattacking primarily emphasises the rapid exploitation of space and defensive disorganisation following possession recovery, while pressing traps focus on organising pressure to constrain opponents' options and influence the circumstances or location of recovery (Forcher et al., 2024; Rein & Memmert, 2016). Low-block defending and rest defence similarly describe important aspects of defensive organisation and transition risk (Allen et al., 2026; Forcher et al., 2023; Schulze, 2022). These concepts therefore capture substantial components of the observed sequences. Tactical Baiting is more narrowly concerned with the observable spatial-temporal relationship between opposition advancement before recovery and the attacking opportunities available immediately afterwards. The framework does not replace or reclassify existing concepts; rather, it extends the temporal scope of transition analysis by connecting pre-recovery positioning with post-recovery exploitation.

This interpretation can be situated within ecological dynamics and affordance-based approaches to collective behaviour. From this perspective, tactical opportunities emerge through continuous interactions among players, opponents, space, and task constraints, with available affordances changing as these relationships develop (Petiot et al., 2024; Sheehan et al., 2022). The observed sequences can therefore be understood as evolving spatial configurations in which opposition advancement was associated with opportunities that became exploitable following recovery. This interpretation does not require the assumption that Argentina deliberately induced the opponent's advancement; instead, the observed configuration may be understood as an interactional outcome that may have created affordances for subsequent attacking actions. This interpretation is also compatible with complex-systems perspectives, which view collective football behaviour as emerging from interactions among multiple players and constraints rather than from isolated tactical actions (Jones et al., 2026).

An important alternative interpretation is that the three sequences simply represent efficient transition play by an elite team and therefore do not require a new conceptual label. This possibility cannot be excluded by the present study, and all three sequences can reasonably be understood as counterattacking actions. The potential value of Tactical Baiting therefore depends on whether examining the pre-recovery spatial

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configuration provides additional analytical information beyond conventional transition terminology. Future research could test whether opposition advancement before recovery is consistently associated with subsequent transition opportunities. If such a relationship is demonstrated across larger samples, the framework may provide a useful analytical distinction; conversely, if these sequences are adequately explained by established counterattacking concepts, Tactical Baiting may be better understood as a descriptive extension of existing terminology. Its theoretical value therefore depends on whether the pre-recovery perspective provides analytically useful information that is not adequately captured by existing transition concepts.

The framework may also offer practical value for coaches, performance analysts, and other practitioners. Match analysis could examine the period preceding possession recovery rather than beginning only at the recovery event. Potential indicators include substantial opposition advancement, several opposition players positioned ahead of the ball, separation between advanced players and their defensive structure, maintenance of defensive compactness, recovery while the opponent remains advanced, and rapid progression into space already available at recovery. These indicators could help analysts identify candidate sequences systematically without assuming intentional tactical baiting. For coaches, the framework may support assessment of whether transition opportunities arise partly from opponents' pre-recovery positioning and whether players are prepared to recognise and exploit such opportunities quickly. This coaching perspective is broadly consistent with recent work emphasising the alignment between task demands and the mechanical and coordinative requirements of football performance (Islam et al., 2026; Islam & Ferdous, 2026).

From an opponent's perspective, potential countermeasures may include maintaining greater defensive balance when committing players forward, reducing excessive separation between advanced and covering players, and improving rest-defence positioning. However, these implications remain provisional because the present study did not test whether such adjustments reduce transition effectiveness.

Finally, Tactical Baiting should not be regarded as specific to Argentina or the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Its proposed definition concerns a spatial-temporal relationship that could potentially occur across different teams, tactical systems, and competitions. Nevertheless, the present evidence consists of only three illustrative sequences reviewed by a single analyst, without tracking data, statistical analysis, or formal inter-rater reliability. Accordingly, the findings cannot establish prevalence, intentionality, systematic use, causal effectiveness, or distinctiveness from conventional counterattacking. Future research using larger samples, independent analysts, event data, player tracking, spatiotemporal modelling, and computer vision should test whether the proposed pattern can be reliably identified and whether it provides measurable analytical value across elite football. Tactical Baiting is therefore best positioned as a conceptual and potentially transferable analytical framework and a promising hypothesis for future investigation, rather than an established explanatory model or tactical doctrine.

Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations. The Tactical Baiting framework was developed from three illustrative attacking sequences from Argentina's 2022 FIFA World Cup campaign; therefore, the observations cannot establish its prevalence, intentionality, systematic use, causal effectiveness, or empirical distinctiveness from conventional counterattacking. The single-analyst observational approach also involves interpretive limitations, while the absence of event data, player-tracking information, and quantitative spatiotemporal measures restricts objective assessment of the observed pattern.

Future research should examine larger samples across teams, competitions, and tactical systems, using independent analysts, systematic coding, and spatiotemporal methods to assess the framework's consistency and analytical value.

CONCLUSION

This study proposed Tactical Baiting as a conceptual analytical framework for examining how opposition advancement before possession recovery may contribute to subsequent transition opportunities. Across three illustrative sequences from Argentina's 2022 FIFA World Cup campaign, a potentially recurring pattern was observed in which advanced opposition positioning, Argentina's compact defensive organisation, possession recovery, and rapid vertical progression formed a connected tactical sequence. Although the subsequent attacking actions were recognisable as conventional counterattacking, the proposed contribution lies in examining the pre-recovery conditions that may facilitate the exploitation of space immediately after possession is regained.

Tactical Baiting is proposed as a complementary analytical framework rather than a replacement for or reclassification of established tactical concepts. Its central contribution is to foreground the temporal and spatial relationship between opposition advancement before possession recovery and the subsequent exploitation of the resulting positional configuration. Whether this perspective offers analytical value beyond existing accounts of counterattacking and transition play remains to be established through further empirical investigation.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors meet the criteria for authorship in accordance with established ethical guidelines. Contributions are specified according to the CRediT (Contributor Roles Taxonomy) as follows:

Conceptualisation: Jannatul Ferdous. Methodology: Jannatul Ferdous. Formal analysis: Jannatul Ferdous. Investigation: Muhammad Shahidul Islam. Data curation: Muhammad Shahidul Islam. Writing – original draft: Jannatul Ferdous. Writing – review & editing: Jannatul Ferdous; Muhammad Shahidul Islam. Supervision: Muhammad Shahidul Islam. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this manuscript.

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AI USE DISCLOSURE

In accordance with current publishing ethics and transparency recommendations, artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used solely to assist with translation and language editing, with the aim of improving clarity and readability. No AI tools were used in the generation of scientific content, including the study design, data collection, analysis, interpretation of results, or the formulation of conclusions. The authors retain full responsibility for the content of the manuscript and confirm its originality, integrity, and accuracy.

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