Why Guardiola's tactics stopped working amid rise of rapid football



Another defeat, another tournament gone, and another head-in-hands moment in the bemusing collapse of this iconic Manchester City team.

An ageing and injury-hit squad are making uncharacteristic mistakes, waning confidence is leading to passive spells and the goal blitzes that follow, and key players are underperforming - in other words, all the issues on show as City froze at the Bernabeu on Wednesday.

But these are symptoms, not causes.City's malaise is a deep-rooted tactical problem that, as Pep Guardiola has acknowledged, encompasses not only the loss of historic tactical standards but the need to update and embrace the future.

Putting it bluntly, as Guardiola did after the first-lg defeat by Real Madrid: During City's ongoing crisis Guardiola has taken to musing on tactical problems during press conferences, and a few weeks ago he hit on something particularly insightful.

As the forefather of 'juego de posicion', the 'positional play' that has dominated world football since his Barcelona side won everything 15 years ago, this is a sizeable admission.It poses a question bigger than this one article: is this the beginning of the end for the 'Pepification' of modern football?

Attacking quickly after a transition - when possession changes hands - is arguably overtaking Guardiola's philosophy at elite level, with emphasis increasingly placed on direct football that runs deliberately in contrast to possession and territory.

While Liverpool have been successful this season with less chaos and more control than they had under Jurgen Klopp, and Tottenham's rapid, linear football has come unstuck with a thin squad, the data is there.