

## Playing Football, Above Almost Anything Else

Playing football is first and foremost.

This is one of the strongest statements I can make.

It is what comes first and what I have always preferred to do, more than any other commercial version of football created for consumerism.

I am not referring to the choice of football as the only sports option. Nor do I mean that football comes foremost when compared to the fundamental things in life. There is no doubt there are many things more significant than football.

Yet when I say that playing is first and foremost, I am thinking of the intrinsic value involved in actively practicing this sport, nothing more and nothing less than that, and in the supreme significance I attribute to that scene made up solely of those who actually play this sport. Nor is it relevant whether they are even good at it. Simply being there, being actively involved in it is what I will always consider paramount.

To illustrate this, I would like to draw a very simple comparison between those who play the game and those watching it as mere spectators. In this example, for a start, there are some people actively taking part in the game and others simply willing to stand there watching them.

For one involved in the game, playing football means being part of a scene that actually belongs to him, where he is actively included.

And this does not mean belonging just anyhow. Each player belongs in a highly particular manner: as the central actor of the scene he is taking part in.

As the central actor he is himself creating this scene, while being a part of it and at the same time playing in this scene.

The player himself is building the scene as he plays, and presents it to himself for his own satisfaction.

Taking part in this scene or in this world the player has created for his own pleasure also means forging his own story - forging his own story, however he can, whether wearing the trendiest trainers or just barefoot, whether playing to compete, or just for the fun of it. It makes no difference.

Ultimately, those who have been actors in this scene, the scene of the game, will also be able to tell their story.

Not only will they be able to tell of what they have experienced as central actors, but they will also be able to tell of what they have done as central actors.

The story, however, of one who simply watches, to continue with this example of the spectator, can only concern what others have experienced and done - precisely because he has been unable to become himself a part of this scene.

I believe the true actors in this game, whether it is football or any other kind of game, are the ones who create it.

And to be able to create it, they have to practice it. What else could football be other than the very action of playing the game?

This happens with many things in this life. There are those who produce and those who consume. I will resist as often as necessary those who indifferently, even complacently, squander their time and efforts compulsively on mere consumerism.

How many precious hours are frittered away before the persistent supply and voracity of a market relentlessly telling us how and on what to spend our lives? Well, I believe the marvellous thing about this sport lies elsewhere: in actually playing it.

When I say playing football comes foremost, I refer also to the intrinsic significance of football as a game, the fun and recreation it provides, creating so much enjoyment in those playing it; and to the value and weight of its rules in the way they contribute, from a very early age, to modelling and creating a person's behaviour and social bonds.

When I say playing is foremost, I am also referring - and very specially so - to the immense value of football in that it provides us with the option of putting into practice one of the attributes I consider most marvellous in each human being: the entirety of a person's creative capacity expressed to the utmost extent and purity through the virtues and singular features of this individual's personality.

And all this is what actually happens when a person plays.

Those who play football, or any other sport, for that matter, have the privilege of being the true central actors in a world they themselves have made, a unique world they belong to and where an onlooker can live and breathe all they are capable of putting into playing, all they are capable of putting into the game, all they are capable of enjoying.

In that world, one feels protected against everything - or against almost everything.

Playing football brings the outside world to a standstill and gives birth to a new time: gone are the devastating effects of the unfairness and injustices of everyday life, of lack of understanding, hunger and social differences of any kind.

In this artificial, albeit consistent, world that comes into creation when playing the game, players display a profound immunity as regards the imperfections of a society not created, though inherited, by us. The game removes the sting of any lack of love or affection from parents who have been unable to devote themselves to their children as might have been expected. Or as any child would expect, even though he might never say so.

There, in that world of their own, each of them is relieved of any duties and responsibilities imposed by their mere existence.

Playing the game is, simply, encountering the sheer pleasure of playing.

Adversity has always managed to permeate the world I have known, yet it has never had a place in this scene packed with such pleasure.

What joy and significance achieved in a manner of our own have imbued each of all those moments I have shared playing football with friends.

What joy and significance were sparked when I had the ball lying at my feet!

There is nothing that can ever make up for those moments.

It is obvious that playing football does not resolve any of these issues. Of course not.

Philosopher Jean Paul Sartre said a human being is what he does, with what has been done to him.

This definition is accurate to the extent that life is always providing us with the option of something to do. And in this sense I believe football can really contribute to this. Inside the game, and in the intimacy of this time created by the game itself, lies the possibility of glimpsing a new kind of life. No doubt better, for sure.

When I was a child I used to play football, and today I am still playing.

Among the most wonderful things I experienced in my childhood was the immense joy I remember feeling when I discovered someone played well. It was as if my world had shrunk to the size of a small football field and had lit up because someone, some other boy, was making it more beautiful and worthwhile, and giving the best he had to offer.

It was the more refined forms of aesthetics that even at that early age already moved me.

When something is well done, life, at least to my mind, takes on a sense of abundance comparable to nothing else.

It is an obsession that even today stirs in me, whatever is being talked about. The quality of the work done will affect the quality of the product.

Those childhood football days sparked my sensitivity for aesthetics, and for issues related to the worth of an individual's own personal toil, the idea of group work, something I have always found majestic, and the responsible, respectful feeling of caring about the wellbeing of another, that other who during my childhood was whoever was my rival of the day.

In the world we live in today, saturated with proposals often neither healthy nor recommendable, I believe people will welcome any actions aimed at encouraging this sport and building up concepts for a better life, concepts that will help to clearly distinguish good from evil.

Personally, I have been able to find the beauty of this sport, rather than in other things, in the mere act of playing it.

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