

Football Clubs and Coaching Players

When a club or financial group decide to purchase a player for millions of euros, dollars or whatever currency is agreed on, they do so based on a large amount of information they have managed to gather about the player - information not always available to the general public. These are the facts the purchasing parties should be aware of since this information provides the support and guarantees that will enable them to finalise the transaction.

In the event the buyer is a club, the club management not only hope their investment will mean personal success for the player they are buying, in other words, the player's own individual achievement, but that this personal success will translate into the largest possible amount of titles and cups while the player is wearing that particular club's shirt. If this is accomplished, then the sports attainment envisaged and expected from the start of the transaction comes true, and the player's personal resale value exceeds what was originally paid.

There are clubs that, urged on by the need to pull off immediate sports achievements, at times decide to purchase players in all the splendour of their maturity and performance.

Those same clubs might at other times decide to purchase a player even though he may not be at the peak of his performance at the time the transaction is finalised. Most likely because they have seen in him conditions that could be developed in the relatively near future and could provide them with very profitable benefits.

There are other clubs, in a very different financial situation, which purchase players with a lower, or even very low, performance level, often even opting for the purchase of young players with a view to developing the inborn conditions they have already seen in them.

Obviously, the differences in the sums of money paid in each of the above cases are colossal.

Clubs that can buy players whose career is already at its summit are clubs with the most powerful economies on the planet. This is clearly the case with Real Madrid and Barcelona in Spain, Manchester United, Chelsea or Arsenal in England and Milan and Inter in Italy, to mention only a few.

It is, therefore, reasonable that, having the financial resources to do so, the purchase should seek to derive immediate benefits from the investment. There is no time to lose. Which is why so many millions have been paid, and the more millions paid, the faster success should follow in their wake. This is what is expected - indeed demanded - of them.

Clubs unable to compete in this market where great stars are bought and sold due, so to speak, to the restrictions of their budget, must make do with however much or however little their own struggling players can achieve match after match. Needless to say, what they are relinquishing is the hope of immediate success in this sport.

There is little or no chance of these clubs winning any significant recognition in tournaments lasting a certain amount of time, while trying to compete with teams that can as much as triple their own worth.

Year after year, then, the cycle is inevitably repeated, and dreams of being champions are again kindled, only to evaporate a few matches into the season.

One might ask, then, what the odds are for a club with scant financial resources to break out of this vicious circle where it has always been bogged down, and stand firmly in another place, a place where anything might be possible?

Here I would like to outline an idea that I find interesting.

This has happened and continues to happen in Argentina as well as many other places in the world where football holds a privileged position among the sports regularly practiced: I am referring to the development of policies seeking to create and leverage the potential in the clubs' own raw material, the players themselves.

What purposes and realistic timescales does this undertaking involve? During the first stage, basically devoted to searching for and accumulating information, the task aims to identify and choose children and youngsters specially skilled in the sport, while the second stage seeks mainly to complete the full training and instruction of the youngsters selected, the final product of which are custom-built players.

The clubs that have managed to profit most from this type of policies are those that have been able to implement this system and keep it going over time. And it was not precisely the financially powerful clubs that brought this into being.

When I mention them having profited the most from this, I refer to the fact that the total cost of the investment made, in other words, everything spent on identifying and preparing large quantities of future football players, was absolutely insignificant compared to the proceeds of the sale of just one of them.

However, the figures currently paid for a player differ significantly from those paid in the times of Maradona and so many others in his generation, and for instance, the money Argentinos Juniors netted for their coffers when Diego was eventually sold was far more than what the club had invested in training and coaching him. Despite the absurdity of that figure, if we consider what would be paid for him today, the money meant extremely high revenue for the club that spawned him, which had the same financial difficulties as any other small club anywhere in the world.

Valuable, not only because of the sum of money involved but because it also helped to reinforce the original idea and confirm that all the efforts made under that entire working structure were, in fact, worthwhile. There are scores of examples like this one.

Necessity and creative imagination are a combination that has led clubs and educators alike to use their initiative to build veritable player-creating factories. The initial work structure had them scouring every square centimetre of our country to find and coach the most talented children who would eventually finish their training at the club.

These pioneers in the task of selecting and coaching football players certainly identified an alternative path for searching for players in an environment where resources are scarce.

All this experience has led to the creation of genuine football schools able to mould several generations of players in Argentina, even to the extent of preserving and stimulating characteristic features of our own kind of football.

These schools have coached and made players out of a large number of boys and youngsters, firstly in their own local clubs, later in the different categories of the national team, and eventually in many teams in Europe where they were sold for many thousands of dollars.

What merit can I attach to this undertaking?

I believe there are two distinct aspects: on the one hand, making these youngsters formally part of a club means they will be receiving systematic coaching, which will leverage their innate virtues and skills. On the other hand, there is the enormous amount of experience to be had by competing. Both these considerations in themselves involve added value, and represent enormous advantages compared to a child playing simply for the fun of it.

The skills our players have deployed the world over cannot be attributed solely to their coaching and instruction, but I am sure these virtues were optimised by the work done on a day-to-day basis until they achieved their maximum capacity for expression.

In Argentina there are scores of anonymous players who will never know they are excellent footballers, who will never know they could be professional players earning a fortune. They will never know it because they have never had the chance of being seen, or because the market in Argentina is saturated with good players.

It is thus so many of them are ultimately prevented from grasping the chance of being included in a club, where they could complete their development and see their dream of becoming professional players come true.

Argentina has spilled out her wealth since time immemorial - and not only in connection with football.

I have thought time and again of all this wealth that is lost. Of the virtues burgeoning in a player, on the one hand, and the investment capital so distant from these virtues, on the other... and between them no point of contact, no meeting place. All wasted, all in vain, in silence, with nobody aware of it.

If we agree that the task of coaching players is a task that takes time - though who knows exactly how long, for each player is a world with a clock of his own - I feel tolerance is the basic virtue required in this type of projects, and a virtue that should be displayed with even greater wisdom among both managers and coaches.

Tolerance involves some sort of support, and is the foundation of this edifice known as coaching for children and youngsters.

In clubs in some countries where these experiments have not yet been tried out, or perhaps have been tried out with little success, it is the haste and anxiety to achieve results, the pressures in this particular environment, and sometimes the lack of experience that tend to systematically do their job, dashing the hopes and well-intentioned efforts of so many people involved in the project, let alone the valuable time of the player, captive to all these errors, his efforts entirely wasted. And what is even worse, appropriate paths and procedures are discarded and abandoned simply because nobody realises they were wrongly tackled or approached in the first place.

Therefore, there is no other alternative but the implacable option of depending on results as the outcome of the job performed.

This option is implacable because it always reflects, in their entirety, the successes and mistakes of the previous move. It is like the footprints behind us as we walk. Thus it is that there are countries or regions that progress while others seem unable to do so, with the cause attributed solely to the combined endeavours and total quality of their administration.

Whatever the situation and the economy of each club, I believe it is always healthy to implement programmes aimed specifically at developing one's own players - even more so if the club's finances restrict their purchasing power. It is not the only way, but it is clearly possible for clubs of this nature.

How can someone feel 'great', and actually take ownership for it, given that sentiment alone is not enough to make one great. To my mind, carrying out a job can reinforce and support that feeling. A job thought out and planned with intelligence: what am I seeking to achieve and how? If this feeling is lacking, for instance, this undertaking aimed at coaching and instructing players, this search for a feeling of greatness, is no more than mere wishful thinking.

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