

## Football - Teamwork Enshrined

There are two situations I would briefly like to evoke because in them the value I assign to teamwork is born and consolidated - teamwork both as the achievement of objectives and as a means of fulfilment.

When I was still a boy and my football techniques had started to give me my first joys, there was an idea that made a profound impact on me, and which I hold even today as one of the most valuable of treasures.

In one of the many football fields I have shared over the years with friends, on a day like any other of my childhood, the idea of associated playing suddenly came to me.

It was like the materialization of a truth that turned up there to illuminate those hours.

I had now found exactly the company I could play football with.

It was like having found my opposite half who could understand and live football in the same way I did.

The ball came and went with the same quality and generosity with which my entire being already felt at ease.

Football was, to me, a fantastic game simply because we could share it.

When associated playing occurred, friendship and joy each agreed to celebrate the goals scored by the other's team. Scored in this way, of course.

It was like a silent language kindled between us, a language of actions with no words. We were in agreement, without even knowing each other.

Those were times when we were really safe from any kind of selfishness.

Football conceived in this way is so marvellous it is even capable of offering the possibility of a dialogue without actually speaking.

My childish and even youthful intolerance towards those who did not feel and play football in this way was eventually dispelled when I understood that sharing is a boundary few can go beyond. There always have been and always will be those who are simply incapable of sharing.

A long time afterward, the exercise of thinking about these things not only helped me to increase my ability to distinguish one group from the other - it also taught me how to choose what was best for me. To know who would and who wouldn't share, who sharing is possible with and to what extent, and who it is simply impossible with. Whether on a football field or in life.

Argentina did not take part in the 1970 F.I.F.A. World Cup held in Mexico. The team was eliminated by the outstanding Peruvian team.

At the age of 14, and filled with sadness at not being able to see my own country taking part, the Brazilian team soon healed that wound.

It was by far the best team I have ever seen in my life.

From the point of view of performance, I believe it was a communion of several things: technique at the service of intelligence executed in a masterly fashion at the feet of each of Brazil's players, fantastic creative ability from the mid-field forward, and the shared effort to recover the ball, distribute it and create sufficient goal situations to keep their rivals on their toes.

Sheer communion of virtues, effort and joy. And as though this were not enough, they had Pelé on the team.

It was thus Brazil built up their victory in each match, consecrating not only their own football, but the very sport itself. Not only because they placed football first on the podium but because they made it stand in the most admirable place - a place that represented beauty to the eyes and delight to the heart.

A veritable work of art.

And as tends to happen with works of art, it required no words to explain it, or podium to consecrate it. The work spoke for itself from that world of its own it had already created.

What they left there is one of the most beautiful memories that remain even today after all the time gone by. It was the best achieved blending of the human race and football I have ever seen. The teams sent by Holland in '74 and Argentina in '86 at times awakened a similar feeling of joy to that of the memorable Brazilian team, most particularly at the feet of Cruyff and Maradona.

Where else would I be able to encounter, then, the source of this worth I attribute to group work other than in these two memories linked by the same feeling of infinite satisfaction and inner joy, experienced at different times, first as a player and later as a spectator?

It is hardly possible for a company to achieve the objectives they have set themselves unless they have previously decided what exactly they want to achieve, what their mission is, the timescales for achieving their main objectives, and the time-frames for their partial goals. Then also, their work plan, the principles, ideas, strategies and procedures to be implemented, the specific role of each of their members, the resources available, the way the company is to be incorporated and organised, channels of communication and the kind of profile they choose to adopt, alternative plans, and so on.

The same happens with football institutions and their teams.

Winning a championship is, undoubtedly, any team's most yearned after dream.

There are, however, a number of considerations that mingle and interact throughout the work and time devoted to achieving an objective.

These considerations, simply because they involve, and are decisive in, our ability to achieve our objectives or not, are well worth the effort of being shown and being kept always in mind.

I intend to present only a few of these here, those I feel are most significant, simply to prove that our success or failure does not depend on good or bad luck, but rather on the way we ourselves act.

For it is precisely all that is outside what we actually do that will get lost in what is foreign or alien to us.

Who better than ourselves to decide on the path we are to follow? Who better than ourselves to decide what the ideas and procedures are that can best defend our objectives, what the strategy of our work should be, and what situations could lead to most opposition to our aims?

Ultimately, our success or failure is in no event the consequence of fate but rather of what we have done rightly or wrongly, and very frequently of what we have not as yet done.

We should ask ourselves whether we have ever desired something good for ourselves, and what we have actually done to make this desire come true. Because though it may seem a contradiction, it is very likely we have not even been able to respect what is good for us.

The sporting dedication of a football team conceived as the result of teamwork is, in my opinion, the best achieved idea.

It is the best achieved idea because the search for objectives, which includes all the procedures and actions involved in that search, do not rest on the virtues and efforts of the team's individualities, which would be highly risky, but rather on the simultaneity of actions and the complementary nature of the roles exercised by each of these individualities.

As may be noted, the end product will no longer be the result of the work of mere individualities. Thus, the search for achievements, which is sparked by teamwork, is very unlikely to be affected by the constant fluctuations in individual performance, or by the frequent changes in the members that make up the group.

Work structured in this manner always allows for members being replaced without this affecting the way the group functions. This also happens with the emergence of individual performance that is not up to the required standard: individual instability can effortlessly be absorbed by the restorative, compensatory work carried out by the team.

Conversely, when the search for objectives is reduced to the possibilities of a single member, the day that member cannot do his best or is no longer on the team, which is something very frequent and even acceptable, what is jeopardised is the very *raison d'être* of that team, in other words, its objectives, which would be an unacceptable situation from whatever angle one might consider it.

No individual situation should inhibit the production capacity of the whole group. Or its performance, its projects, or its objectives.

The same happens with different associations and their projects.

There are those that decided on their own model of association long ago.

The name of their representatives may change, and even their political loyalties, but the model of their association will remain the same.

Then there are the others, whose models change with the change of representatives.

These are, of course, associations without objectives or fixed directions, without even an identity of their own as an association.

Lastly, there are those who do not even have a project, even though they may seem to have one.

The team that seeks support solely from one of its individualities, even though this personality may be the most virtuous, will never be able to act with the same efficacy, or keep up its efforts over time in the way an entire team is able to.

Because the greatest efficacy is achieved with the sum of the efforts and virtues of all the team members, with better results being achieved by dividing work into roles or functions. This is the way task specialisation and distribution of efforts emerge, leading to a permanent alternation between effort and rest.

The strength involved in group-work depends on the interaction between effort, virtues and permanent communication among all the group members.

There is no argument that could prove that teamwork dilutes, weakens or in any way restricts individual virtues. Quite the opposite, any virtues are boosted by the confidence, stimulation and support provided by the group.

A team with only limited technical capacities but true intelligence in its strategic deployment, with strong bonds and confidence in each other, can achieve excellent results against a team of great stars but internally divided as a group, or against another that, because of the style of their game, are capable only of providing opposition with the solitary will of their individualities.

The sporting success of a football team is, on the other hand, the successful result of a job performed not only out on the playing field. It is also the result of the right institutional decisions adopted previously.

The success of teamwork can, therefore, be achieved only by performing under certain conditions.

As an example of this, let us start by imagining the quality of the bonds prevailing in an institution where the word of its leaders is based on honesty and responsibility.

When this word adds up to a promise made and kept, this institution will have attained, from my point of view, the first and foremost of its achievements: trust.

And once this trust has been achieved, doors begin to open on to many other things.

This is the battle won against the greatest enemy of all those that can affect the development of teamwork outside the playing field. I say enemy and not adversary, because on the playing field we will only come upon adversaries, who are very often friends.

A manager, trainer or player may have a greater or lesser amount of resources to make up the structure of a team seeking achievements.

In the worst case scenario there may be things lacking, but even then ways can be considered to supply the lack.

What is hard is to try and build when good faith is not on our side.

Trust is without any doubt the most important achievement initially because, in addition to founding the ethical principles of an institution, it defines a truth and an environment of its own, ushering in a comforting climate to encourage teamwork.

From here on, any action aimed at development as an institution can only be guided by the meaning of this truth. We may be winners or losers, but under a single flag.

Once these principles have begun to be displayed, those unable to rise to the circumstances will clearly be in evidence.

What other considerations contribute to the success of teamwork?

On the institutional plane, all those related to the suitability and management capacity of their leaders applied to the development of policies and actions that benefit the interests of the club - policies and actions aimed at protecting the life, health and growth of the institution.

Just as the effective task of the managers of a football club is not proved solely by the sporting result of their team, the effective task of the team that has become a champion does not only denote they have defeated other teams.

The first thing it denotes is that they have defeated their own limitations, leading to the optimization of their resources to put them at the disposal of group success.

When a team wins a championship, I believe the aim achieved by its managers, trainers and players, the main aim that should be recognised and celebrated, is the successful way in which this structure has worked and which has led to them attaining this teamwork achievement.

A structure created with passion, ideas, conviction and maximum effort.

In connection with the specific issue of the team's performance, it should be noted that the road ahead does not allow any leeway for errors on our part.

Instead it requires its own conditions and promises nothing. Conditions that do not always exist or that are not at our disposal when we decide to start out on a mission of this nature.

What are the conditions required for the success of a mission, long before the specific task is started?

Obviously, the higher number and quality of elements that can be devoted to making this idea come true.

I would exchange many hours of sleep for the privilege of leading a group of players willing to overcome their own individual limitations, to overcome both the inherent difficulties of the work and the inherited barriers of their own personal history and social background, inhibitions and prejudices; a group of players clearly wanting to surpass themselves as sportsmen, capable of recognising their failings and working on them, able to exercise a unifying influence on their fellow players and accept they are part of a group. No more than this.

It would be very difficult to work with people unable to feel the joy and excitement of an idea and love it with passion.

For a love affair to be successful, passion cannot be lacking.

We all know what happens when there is no passion.

The love professed in a marriage is always driven by that passion.

The same happens with football, for all we may be talking about ideas.

The fulfilment of an idea entails difficulties of its own.

While football is a team sport, the ideas referring to group work are not always reflected in the way a team works.

A team going out onto the playing field is not a team until it has been able to prove itself.

Let us suppose now we have found the idea that represents us and have decided to consecrate it.

In fact, the difficulties of a none too successful start should have little significance. The energy and efforts available should be concentrated around strengthening this idea and making it grow with all the care and patience a newborn child requires.

We should know we are building an identity of our own that will represent us as a group and as a team.

It happens with the development of any idea or project. It will always have its enemies. Enemies of its own and enemies of others, declared or undeclared, visible or invisible, aware or unaware, deliberate and not deliberate - but enemies when all is told.

In the face of adverse sports results, of the rapid impact on the confidence of players and managers, of personal indecision and the particular difficulties each of them must cope with, it is hard not to be discouraged by these demands that are in no way favourable.

Over and over again will I remind people that no universally transcendent achievement has ever been attained overnight. Neither overnight nor with all those involved in it from the beginning. The building of an achievement has nothing to do with the urgency of those who contribute to it, however loyal they may be, or of all the people involved.

And this is true to the extent that it is likely the creator and performers of the work may never see it completed.

A response to the extremely high cost paid for this irrational need to gain glory for things done yesterday could perhaps be found in the following reflection: how many teams have we seen attain glory throughout our lives, and how many of them attained it for things done in times gone by?

That far-off Brazilian team confirmed to me there are yearnings that can be achieved.

The team proved it in their maximum performance.

It is not, however, necessary to gather all the virtues of that team to consecrate the wonder of a work well done.

Where is it we can find the wonder? In its originality, however imperfect it may have been.

The team did something it had never before been able to do, something that never before had happened, but they achieved it. And this is the wonder of it. This team gave the world, and the team members themselves, something that was not there before, even if it wasn't a championship.

When that championship eventually arrives, everything that was once invisible now makes itself seen in its entirety.

So many things seemed to come together in that final scene. So many things have been left behind. And so many other new things will appear.

Bringing something new into the world requires the efforts and dedication of a lifetime. I do not believe it can be less.

But we must know that in order to go down that road there are things we must willingly decide to lose forever, while others will be lost unknowingly.

Our path does not accept simply anything, for simply anything is not always good either for our path or for ourselves.

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