

The Simplicity of Football - and its Complications

A good football team displays, among other things, simplicity in the way it plays. Simplicity in resolving the different situations arising in each match and that may or not involve the ball.

It is the judgment used in making decisions that becomes apparent.

The level to which this angle is elaborated, executed with the deepest intensity.

Undoubtedly, the most difficult thing to achieve.

What a lot of complications the absolute majority of teams and players on this planet transfer to football or to the very action of playing, whether they are at amateur or at super professional level!

Thinking, applied to the range of actions planned and carried out during coaching or in a match, should be subject to simplicity. For it is this concept that, to my mind, provides the means to achieve the group's objective on the basis of the sum of individual participation, a better distribution of the efforts made, and within a shorter time-frame.

It is one thing to want to try and score a goal solely on the basis of individual action, and something very different to achieve it by group action, which helps to overcome individual limitations.

Though simplicity is a concept that can be displayed only with the deliberate search for actions in the game that will highlight this feature, and therefore then define a style, it is also true that it is a virtue that only a very few players and teams are able to put into practice.

And what a lot of beauty emerges when this virtue is displayed. Without a shadow of a doubt.

The truth is an enormous amount of situations taking place in a match are resolved in fractions of time, and this feature has a decisive effect on the end result of a match: one moment more with the ball at the player's feet and the possibility of scoring would have been lost, because that moment is the one that would have given the defence the chance to recover their position. One instant longer with the ball at their feet and the team is no longer in possession of the ball. And on more than one of these occasions, it is the adversary who manages to score.

Though the example is pretty elemental, this is the way complications start getting in the way.

So... why isn't it possible to play with greater simplicity?

Most likely because the way football is played is the outcome of different kinds of complications that are the result of each one's own past.

Complications that are not only inherited, which in itself is a hindrance, but which reproduce over and over again.

The difficulties or problems a team faces are rather like certain illnesses: they are not as easy to detect as one might suppose.

Their origins and intentions are manifold.

A team's failure indicators are sometimes related to tactical concerns, sometimes to physical training or lack of technical or creative skill, sometimes to overall motivation, sometimes to the absence of a spirit of cooperation, sometimes to external problems transferred to the team, sometimes to mistaken choices by the players or to a wrongly assigned function, sometimes to the negative inclination of this or that member, sometimes to issues relating to the connections and roles within the group, sometimes to individuals or the group underrating or overrating performance, etc., etc.

And yet other times, they are due to the lack of yearning or interest, or the incompetence or lack of awareness of the central characters themselves, whether players, coaches or managers.

Determining what these problems are is the first thing a coach should do.

Point them out and never ever be willing to trade or surrender them, for they will never be willing

to surrender to us. Or do you think perhaps the lazy attitude displayed by a player throughout his life is willing to surrender to us? Is it possible to surrender to lack of commitment and devotion, or to the pressure and influence the environment so frequently exercises?

It would be a fatal error for any coach to attempt it - a fatal error not only for himself.

A situation that is more than illustrative to understand why so many teams and players are unable to achieve their own objectives, and remain excluded from the job football could have given them. Simply because they attempted to surrender what should never be surrendered.

The rival team is under no circumstances our enemy.

The first enemy, who should be vanquished before any other, has always lived with us and within us, preventing us from attaining our own personal achievements.

This is the enemy we should seek to erase from our memory, for otherwise failure will occur over and over again with no opposition.

Let us start by giving this enemy a name and surname.

Now, once the difficulty has been determined, the hard work begins.

This is when the coach will have to battle against opposition. Opposition against anything he seeks to bring forth to benefit his team: he will seek to elicit new things, things the team is lacking.

And new things, as I once read, have to find friends fast.

Getting a player to recognise and accept how much or how little he needs to improve his performance is a really fascinating task, and extremely exhausting.

It is not just a matter of getting him to recognize it and accept it but also of convincing him that work is the only way to achieve improvement.

I say it is exhausting when a player denies or rejects work as the way to excel, even to the point of crushing the reason for existence of any coach.

Only because of this the defeats and failures are marvellous moments that come at the appropriate time to expose this illusion - in other words, to display the falsity of their perception.

And I say the purpose of this is only to expose their illusion, because failure can be a vehicle for learning if we allow it to.

It will never be possible to learn from failure when personal pride or an attitude of denial close the doors to any type of analysis or review.

This is what happens to those who never manage to achieve success. Because success, among other things, is as generous as it is capable of admitting both the mistake and the work required to remedy it: the logical moments of any growth process.

A clever player is always alert to the possibility of failure - or, to put it in another fashion, to the possibility of being unable to achieve his own success.

This is what marks the difference with another who is not so clever.

He is alert to his own progress, to rejecting the idea of knowing it all (which does not happen to laymen who invariable err in this connection), and likewise alert to struggling against his own sloth, one of the most powerful enemies of success.

A player or team having worked to attain that greater or lesser percentage required will then go out in search for their prize.

They will go out in search of the prize they are entitled to because this is what they have been working towards.

And they will have no fears or doubts about accepting the prize they are entitled to.

They will take it without asking permission or wasting time.

I believe it is the right time to recall here that failure rears its head when we least expect it.

Most likely because we have not as yet managed to create a new reality, and provide newer and

richer experiences for our memory - experiences able to replace our customary options and resources with these new ones that will bring our goal within reach.

The confidence attained by the team that has achieved its aim has its source in the very scene of the effort.

Confidence does not derive solely from the indispensable words of a coach before each match. Confidence builds itself up and is recorded on the memory as and when the effort is made.

Confidence or a winning attitude cannot be bought in a shopping mall. They are the direct result of experience, experience clearly aimed at bringing out the best in each one.

The effort I am referring to is in no way related to a larger number of hours of training. The effort I am referring to is related to the attitude and the decision to stretch and go beyond one's own personal limitations. This is the key to all that will come later.

And, conversely, when this is not among the resources the player is naturally imbued with, his coach will find it a difficult task to try and build him up.

Achieving success requires forgetting what works well, because if it works well it simply flows on its own.

What is the benefit of sitting waiting and considering what is working properly?

What a good coach should consider is what is not working well, or what is not working properly as yet, because this is what will allow his players to progress until they achieve the sporting perfection he seeks for his team: the maximum of their possibilities as a team.

The team that receives the champion's accolade has been able to achieve this perfection after resolving their own difficulties. And they did it long before they came face to face with the rival team.

The rival team comes later - a very long time later.

It will, therefore, be a very important task for the coach to determine the limitations of his team, highlight them clearly, and then find the adequate response for each situation - to be able to overcome failure, of course.

And there will be as many responses as players there are on the team, as situations there are in each match, as matches there are in a championship.

Failure as an option should also teach coaches it is necessary to choose who will be on their team, and to do so very carefully.

A coach should never jeopardise the interests of his team.

The priority should always belong to the team. Because the team is his objective - never a single player. In the first place because football is a team sport, and in the second place because the team represents so much more than 11 players: it represents an institution, a segment of society, and even a country.

Everything I have cited so far, and anything else that could be added as a problem or difficulty, can be improved on.

It can be improved on to the extent we are willing to accept what is lacking in us, to the extent we are able to include work as the tool that will enable us to become better and improve.

For not even the most skilful coach in the world will be able to change the luck of a team when this desire is not present among the team. This, to my mind, is the worst of human shortcomings.

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