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Edad: 16 años

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Team: Barcelona FC

Favorite players: Ricard Puig and Frenkie De Jong

Obstruction: my first time at the stadium

My first love with football

2010 came, and I was 7. I remember little of that time except my new and bright love for football. The summer of that same year the world cup had started in South Africa, and frankly, I could have cared less. I was happy playing the sport. Watching football was an abhorrent task that required my 7-year-old self's patience, and as readers will most likely know, that is not a trait commonly found in children that age. Playing, on the other hand, was pure gold. My father, and at that time coach, would play with me 1v1, abusing his unruly long legs. And while I thought he was clearly a disgusting cheater, I still enjoyed playing. He tried to convince me to watch the games and I refused. Except on July 11, when not surprisingly, he abused his power again and dragged me to a friend's house to watch Spain against the Netherlands.

I remember little of the setting. The room I was in was dark and small, and not big enough for the many spectators watching. The screen the games were being projected on was huge for my 7-year-old self and heightened the atmosphere of the oppressive dark room. Innocent and naive, I started to watch with arms crossed and mouth firmly closed. But as my father most likely knew, my emotions would change to reflect joy and wonder. The Spanish team was playing, as I later learned, a form of beautiful football. Some call it "tiki taka", others "total football". I firmly attached myself and fell dangerously in love. I can only describe it as a dance with high risk/ high demand. Spain would pass the ball using one to two touches, maneuvering quickly and provocatively around the Dutch team. Xavi to Iniesta, who touched it to Busquets, moving it to Puyol, who switched it to Pique. Each Spanish player perfectly positioned to receive the ball and move to another and even better position. (Continúa en comentarios).

Naturally, the Dutch, in desperation and confusion, resorted to dirty and disgusting play. During the course of those 120 minutes, the Dutch became the greatest antagonists in my life. More than Darth Vader, Voldemort, Captain Hook, and the Monster that inhabited my closet. I hated Robben, Van Persie, De Jong, Blind, Sneijder etc.... This hate climaxed when Alonso was karate-kicked in the chest and De Jong received a mere yellow card. And while the Spanish

dance was working, it wasn't a walk in the park. Holland had chances and almost scored in the 60th minute, making Casillas pull off a spectacular save from Robben.

It was a fight to death, as any world cup final should be, and both sides labored on and on, fighting for that lucky strike that would win them the game. 90, 95, 100, 105, 110 minutes passes, and nothing, the tallie still scoreless. Until in the 116th minute, Fabregas found Iniesta, perfectly onside, one on one with Cillisen. The whole world seemed to inhale, desperately gasping for the ball to hit the back of the net. Iniesta impatiently forgot to wait for the world to exhale, and in flash the ball had found the back of the net, Iniesta screaming inaudibly amidst the screams of the crowd. I was, to say the least, star struck. So many indescribable emotions at the same time. Any football fanatic can relate to this roller coaster of emotions. The final breakthrough that defines a dramatic goal. And the first time I experienced it was that night, with Iniesta's goal. Many times, I ask myself: Why does kicking a ball around a rectangular field of grass result in this roller coaster that so many want to experience and watch? I think back to that goal, to that single moment in time, and the answer is perfectly clear.

Obstrucción: Un jugador

Riqui Puig, una crónica para el futuro del Barca

Empecé a seguir al Fútbol Club Barcelona a los siete años después del mundial del 2010, cuando me di cuenta que el hermoso fútbol total de la selección española echaba raíces en Cataluña. El monstruo culé, dirigido por el gran Pep Guardiola, me cautivó con sus pases precisos y rápidos, enamorándome de casi todos los nombres que me cabían en mi pequeña cabeza de siete años. A Messi le tocaba quererlo. Eso tiene menos misterio que odiar al Madrid, pero eran los tres centrocampistas mis jugadores preferidos, excluyendo por supuesto a la pulga extraterrestre. Busquets, jugando tranquilo y plácidamente en esa inolvidable ancla de líbero, conduciendo el balón de defensa a ataque. Xabi, con su retención tremenda y sus pases de consistente perfección, jugaba de 6, orquestrando el partido al tempo que se le venía en gana. Finalmente, Iniesta, el mago, el bailarín. Jugando de 8 en el interior izquierdo, creando espacio con su perfecto dominio del balón. Estos tres jugadores son, y siempre van a ser leyendas. Los tres son el molde ejemplar de un jugador del Barcelona. Jugadores todos de la masía, jugando y demostrando fútbol total, y teniendo control del balón casi perfecto con la inteligencia que llevaba al gol. Hace poco hubiera dicho que desde que se fue el genio Pep, no hemos fabricado jugadores de ese mismo calibre, que representan tan profundamente lo que es ser jugador del Barca. Afortunadamente me equivocaba: la llegada de Riqui Puig ha cambiado el futuro del Club.

Él es mi nuevo héroe, mi esperanza para otra generación de centrocampistas geniales del barca, y la razón por la que quiero ser Culé.

Yo describo a Riqui Puig como el pitufo culé. Viéndolo jugar es como ver una mancha pequeña azul y roja, que se mueve con velocidad sorprendente a través de un piso verde. Un defensa sin cuidado, y pun! Lea cae el pitufo. No le tiene miedo a nadie. Si te quiere sacar, te saca, si te quiere defender se defiende, y si quiere volar tras tu oreja con un gran esfuerzo de velocidad también lo puede hacer. Lo que le da a un equipo blaugrana muy veterano es frescura. Entra Puig, e irradia un dinamismo infectante, que parece juvenlizar a los pobres viejos barrigones del primer equipo. Aunque tenga veinte años se merece empezar, porque sin él Barca son lentos, y perezosos. Corre sin cesar, por todo el flanco izquierdo, iniciando jugadas, apagando fuegos, y poniendo presión al rival. Como diría mi abuela: "chiquito pero poderoso".

A través de los muchos años que el Barca ha estado jugando, hemos dependido tremendamente de la masía. Pero desde que nos convertimos en el titan, en términos económicos, hemos optado por depender de jugadores comprados. Esto tiene dos problemas significativos: gastamos plata (el club en este momento debe mucha plata), e intentamos integrar jugadores extraños al estilo del Barca, cementando su separación y desastre futbolístico para el equipo. Si dependemos de la una fuente formidable a nuestra puerta, que no solo ayuda a bajar gastos, sino también solidifica la emoción de comunidad entre culés, jugadores, y líderes del club. La razón porque hemos esquivado el talento de la masía al público es clandestino, pero la llegada de alguien como Riqui Puig al primer equipo da esperanza para que estas cosas cambien. Tenemos varios talentos en camino, y Riqui puede fortalecer el puente para los que se gradúen de la masía puedan, hacer el salto al primer equipo.

En Puig, viven las esperanzas de miles de culés, esperando a que tengamos otra revolución de la masía. Otro trío mágico como Busquets, Xavi, e Iniesta. Es una carga pesada, y le va a costar. Pero, es del Barca, y se graduó de la masía. Con ese combo puede con cualquier desafío futbolístico.

Bad Luck For Simeone

I was pleasantly surprised to see Diego Simeone in the lineups for the Argentina vs Colombia special 5th of September, 1993, while rewatching the game today. Being on the younger side of the football fan spectrum, I failed to remember that "El Cholo" was in fact a player, and a good one at that. He made part of a great Argentina team with the likes of Batistuta, Leonardo Rodriguez, and Simeone himself. Being Colombian, "el cinco a zero", which took place on that 5th of September, is now embedded in our culture. It was told to me like a tale, a mystical happening told by elders of a village to kids seeking stories. Only until this day, did I actually sit

down and watch the full game, focusing specifically on Simeone, and the frustration that must have come, playing the full humiliating 90 minutes of that disastrous defeat .

While the score reflected a putred Argentina side vs a glorified Colombian team, reviewing the game with Argentinian narrators, pointed me, in the realization that Colombia was not the far greater side. Both played good games, and it was the pace of Asprilla, Valencia, and Rincon that ultimately deprived Argentina of the needed victory. But on the attack, Argentina appeared, to be completely frank, the superior side. In terms of build-up, movement, and general transition in attack. I am well aware that I am directly jeopardizing my Colombian passport, when I confidently state: we got lucky. Argentina, like many teams often do, were in need of the final finish, and missed countless fruitful chances. There were minutes left when, if not for the marker counting the score, I would have sworn Colombian were being flattened into a yellowish pulp. Messy passing, unorganized movement, Colombia played scared, reaching for the sanctity and apparent safety of the counterattack. Thread it to Valderrama who would swing an inch-perfect pass to our rapid forwards.

I turn now to the present. To Simeone as a coach, the man I know well. Being a faithful cule, Atleti have venously ruined games using a similar style of football, ironically, Colombia were using that 5th of September. Younger fans like myself know El Cholo for his “cojones”, for his indisputable bravery and bravato on the touchline. In short, Simeone is: loud, effective, and terrifying. The man is louder than his players, louder, and sometimes, even more passionate than the fans. He screams in joy when his team scores. In agony, when they fail to do so, disgust plainly written on his face when his solid, three lined, rock hard defence lets one slip past into the net. If his teams failed to match this passion with their own intensity on the field, he would be considered folly by the majority of the football community.

Thus, with this image of Simeone set in your mind, imagine this 5-0 defeat for the poor defensive midfielder. I can't imagine the rage. Generally in terms of his game, Simeone played well, he did his job at least. Moving the ball, specifically switching the ball, he executed in a consistent manner. He dribbled well, creating ample amount of space for his team, and moved tirelessly from attack to defence. His movement was fine but in terms of defense he seemed lazy. You may now ask yourself, how could this man be capable of a lackluster defence job. Well...I'm just as confused as you are. He was lazy in his tackles and general desire to take the ball of his opponents. That to me does not sound like Simeone.

Alas, football can be cruel. Desperately, Argentina clinged to their pride swallowing the full 5 goals, ending in a booing from their own fans. Colombia eventually found their rhythm after the third goal, commencing their true and classy style of possession football. And as the game progressed and Colombia began outclassing their opponents, Simeone was found

resorting to dirty football. The mark of a footballer desperate for a goal, a breakthrough, anything to diffuse the humiliation and sadness of the onlookers, decked in blue and white. Poor majestic Valderama found his feet and legs hacked as he carefully and patiently maneuvered the ball, the main prosecutor Simeone. And he was even shown a yellow card for insinuating an altercation with el Pibe himself.

I cant imagine how depressing the referee's ending whistle was for el Cholo. The poor man was beaten by Colombia, a defeat bordering on annihilation, the mighty Argentina uncertain for next year's World Cup . How would he react now, if he, like me, rewatched this game? I leave the reader with this question, in hopes that they empathize with the cruelty that football can many times be.