

THE VALUE OF THE BALL

THE INSTRUMENTS OF
EXCHANGE IN THE HEART OF
THE GAME

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship with the ball began for me, as it did for almost all children, as an "object gift", as a birthday gift from my father when I was a kid.

From the very beginning, therefore, thanks to the sentimental, affective and emotional component resulting from the paternal gesture in a family environment, a symbiotic and natural bond with the ball sprang up for me.

The ball became the most precious object for my field of expression which was the game of football at home, in the street, alone or with friends, between dreams of becoming a great footballer and the desire to have fun and score goals to beat the opponent, whoever he was.

This relationship was consolidated even when began to be more and more frequent the transition from the typical recreational game of childhood, to the first more structured experiences in football and five-a-side football clubs.

The ball, in this transitory phase, between childhood and adolescence, from a simple "object" of recreational game became a "tool" of team play, expression of a form more complex than collective play.

Thanks to the ball, the horizon of the game widened from the family and friends circle to that of the new family, the football family.

And the game, from recreational expression, turned increasingly into competitive expression, as a projection not only of an idea of individual and collective movement, but also as a personal enhancement of belonging to a group, a family, of devotees of the ball. Even if acquiring more and more accurate expressive notions, also linked to the different types of football (eleven-a-side football and five-a-side football), the emotional component was however present. Both by maintaining personal affection for the "object gift" and by expressing collective affection for the expressive "tool" of the team.

The ball in both cases - as a recreational staff or as a collective team tool - was confirmed as the most precious good, the supreme good of the game.

Losing it - during any game situation - therefore unconsciously meant not only lose the object of high personal value (- daddy's gift -), but also the an indispensable tool to express belonging to the team-group, to the team family.

Losing the ball therefore became a sort of individual and collective football "crime" to be repaired in the most decisive way, either on the street with friends by weighing the game personal, but above all on the field, in the competitive field, through teamwork.

With my transfer to Barcelona, Spain, all these founding elements were expanded, deepened and perfected, reinforcing the awareness of the centrality of the ball and its management, individually and collectively, as an expression of the football game.

It was in any case a natural evolution, with the ball being understood both as an "affective object" and as a "collective instrument", but with a finalized cultural deepening to improve the ball administration skills during the match phases, either from a personal point of view ("the ball is mine") or collective ("the ball is ours").

The very perception of the loss of the balloon no longer revealed itself as a simple football "crime", but also as a stimulus for reflection not only to work out the best football "crime", but also as a stimulus for reflection not only to elaborate the best conservation strategy, but also loss prevention strategy, and of course of recovery.

In short, the ball and its management became the fulcrum of a personal and collective of more structured interpretation of the game, which in fact also laid the foundations of the winners from the future Barcelona in Liga and Europe.

The arrival in Italy allowed me to enrich and consolidate my technical and tactical background, but this time according to different types of football philosophy. And not necessarily focused on the ball object/instrument, but rather on the alternative occupation of space and the consequent disposition on the field also in function of the adversaries and their respective doctrines of football expression.

The cultural diversity of the Serie A, by the multiplicity of the approach or by the contrast of the notions dear to me, has allowed me to further nourish my reflection on centrality of the ball in the expression of both the personal and collective game, completing convictions and principles, even in the application of opposite football fundamentals.

Foundations that have in fact exalted, putting them to the test, the universal mechanisms of approaching the game through the universal and natural prism of the ball object/instrument.

In this sense, the intellectual disparity of "masters" such as Gianpiero Gasperini at Genoa and by José Mourinho at Inter can be summed up in a comparison of experiences: in the interval during the derby in Milan on 29 August 2009; in the management of the attack maneuver of the rossoblù club.

If both technicians required the control of the game through the verticalisation of the maneuver, the method to obtain it was diametrically opposed.

Mourinho at Inter preferred verticalisation between the lines, as it was evident to me at the end of the first half of the 2009 first leg derby. After the first 45' we were ahead

by 3-0 over Milan. A difference obtained with very close criteria of play and ball management to what I felt most appropriate to me. In the tunnel at the exit from the locker rooms Mourinho ordered me to play the rest of the match, however, focusing not on control but on the disengagement and on the vertical openings, behind the rossonero defensive lines. In the second half we only scored one more goal, for the final 4-0, but that year we won anyway the treble.

At Genoa, Gasperini required a more elaborate management of verticalisation. Not only by means of direct passages between the lines, but favouring an organised structure of passageways. Often, it happened to me in my role as regista, to serve number 9, Milito, in direct mode, for direct verticalisation. For Gasperini it was necessary to verticalise exploiting the intermediation of the players on the three-quarter zone. In this system, the maneuver not only developed vertically, but it also allowed me to participate in it in a proactive way, being able to present myself in the opponent's area and thus multiply the resources to score goals. With a game of vertical passes directed at the forward - Gasperini made me notice instead one day -, I could maybe put Milito in shooting condition but I would automatically exclude myself from the action and consequently reduce the creative teamwork alternatives to get to the goal.

In France, finally, the educational and intellectual path of the concept of the game expressed through the centrality of the balloon, it has gone from theoretical value to practical expression and pedagogical.

And not only in Carlo Ancelotti's PSG, but in particular in the one managed by Laurent Blanc, through an overwhelming domination in a championship with technical and tactical precepts in general antipodes to this approach.

A Contrast that has only exalted the superiority of a philosophy applied in a first time as a player on the pitch, translating the experience of individual management synthesis to service of the ball collective, in technical and tactical terms; and subsequently as coach of the PSG Under 19, in the function of transmitting these founding principles to young people, for a global and stratified vision of football, but based on the primordial and natural element of football: the ball.

Hence, the proposal of this thesis to entrust a reading of football through the centrality of the ball as "affective object/work tool", also in its psychological meaning (Part One), understood as team and individual mastery to cultivate through specific technical exercises, in order to guarantee the widest possible choice of construction and evolution of the collective and personal game, illustrated with a practical case of action where the different aspects dealt with here are included (Part Two).

PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

During my career as a footballer, I have often observed as teammates self-restricted during training sessions and matches, from a technical point of view, causing a reduction of the team's tactical scope of action, as well as individually.

High level football is a sport in which responsibility for performance is shared, but here the technical element of the individual is also predominant, which is identified in the capacity of the control and management of the ball.

The ball can be defined as a working tool but through which the following are expressed the skills of each team member, i.e. the working group united by the main goal of scoring, and in full, of victory.

A goal that can be achieved through a variety of approaches and schemes and interpretations of the game, according to the characteristics of the players, opponents and the strategies put in place; but which starts anyway from the basic element: the touch of the ball that has a primordial value from a technical point of view, with its implications on the game action, from a mental point of view as a tool of implementation of the different psychological stages that contribute to global training of the individual, but also affective/emotional ones that go back - as mentioned above in the introduction - to the embryonic value of the ball as an object.

Hence the importance of the mastery of the footballer's working tool, namely the ball that in its central peculiarity of the game of football also becomes the conductor thread of a series of reflections on the mental approach of the individual and its consequences on the result and expression of the team, understood as a complex of personalities who may or may not be in tune to achieve the common goal.

THE PERSONALITY

Returning to the observation, in career, of those comrades who limited themselves in expressing their technical mastery skills, therefore the importance of control emerges the professional competence involved in the translation of the definition of the ball from a working tool to a tool for the realization of the individual player and, consequently, that of the team to whom he belongs.

The ball from a simple object of play/work, becomes in this way an instrument of improving mental and psychological skills to meet the challenges, objectives and difficulties arising from its professional use, but which bring collective benefits relevant, according to a virtuous cycle that allows the individual to realize himself and to contribute - according to its own cultivated and improved means - to the attainment of the satisfaction of the team.

It is therefore necessary to first define the personality of the individual player/individual, shaped by genetic predisposition and the first fundamental childhood experiences, in a specific social and cultural environment where he was able to express himself.

A definition that is linked to the fundamental evolution of the relationship with the ball that dates back - as mentioned in the introduction - to the player's childhood period and his emotional and affective relationship with the ball object.

On the other hand, according to some studies supported in the field of youth, up to the age of 11 years the affiliate dimension of doing sport with friends, meeting new ones and having fun remains predominant and then widens in search of the excitement of competition, and of the enthusiasm that comes with it until the age of 14; to develop and maintain not only the adequate physical fitness, but also, and above all, sports skills that enable to impose itself, to make a difference as an individual in the collective, and thus contribute to the achievement of the shared objective within the group/family representing the team.

Consequently, without going into the Freudian meanders of definition and personal development, it is necessary, however, to understand the concept of impulse as an endogenous drive towards the outside, characterized by an origin, a destination and therefore an object.

The personality, according to the philosopher Umberto Galimberti for example, represents the whole psychic characteristics and behavioural patterns of the individual who in their integration constitutes their irreducible core, even in their multiplicity and diversity of the environmental situations in which it expresses itself and operates.

The personality therefore allows to integrate and organize physical and psychic elements, to facilitate the individual's adaptation to the environment.

The individual/footballer in fact finds himself acting in a complex context, expressing himself on several levels, from the time of training to the match continuum, in a specific place, - the stadium-, exposed to the pressure of thousands of fans and the media, both in a way that is punctual (the match), both daily through newspapers, TV broadcasts and last but not least the social networks.

The importance of expressing one's own skills with serenity therefore becomes fundamental not only for the direct expression of the individual footballer, but also for his relationship within the work group/family/team and with the external environment.

Each of these levels of expression presents potential difficulties that contribute to the inhibition of the player himself, through a limited or conditioned use of the ball understood - again - not only as a basic tool of the work, but as multiple revealers of the psychological-mental potential on which to intervene in order to facilitate the creation of a virtuous team spirit, which enables the required objectives to be achieved.

THE STRESS

Achieving a goal must be approached as an exciting challenge, inevitably accompanied by a dose of stress, however, as a vital element in the mechanism of adaptation and survival of the individual.

Stress and its management thus become an initial indicator of personality of the individual/footballer and his or her ability to keep it within a tolerable limit such as not to interfere with decision-making processes, emotional, cognitive and behavioural.

The first element of stress derives from the football player, precisely from his capacity to master the ball through which it aspires to integrate itself into a team, carving out a technical relational space with his teammates, with the primordial intent to be able not only to express oneself, but also to experience oneself in a phase of creativity of the game, perhaps making mistakes that are not subject to excessive criticism, and in any case, always with the intention of completing the path that leads to the goal of victory.

In this context, the stress linked to the lack of technical mastery of the ball and of its management derives from a feeling of limit perceived as threatening, due to a request of the environment and catalogued as excessive with respect to the perception of one's own ability to cope with it.

The mechanism in practical terms is revealed for example in the impression of the isolation of a player both in the work phase in training, and - with more harmful consequences - in match.

Not only through the lack of involvement by the team of the player/individual who does not express with personality skills appropriate for the job of the group, and its aim of victory, but also in the act of "hiding", denying availability to the partner in areas of the pitch and phases of the game generating more situations of difficulties and therefore stress.

In this sense it is interesting to hear jokes during a broadcast on a social media of the former champion Didier Drogba on his experience in Chelsea where he found himself compared to technically less gifted teammates and for this reason - in his anecdote -

considered inferior but above all unreliable, as well as being the object of ridicule in veiled way in the presence of the companion, but direct and more ferocious in the chats of minigroups of colleagues.

With the need of identifying the solution and the problem, its ambivalence must be taken into account if we consider, for example, the theory of the sociologist Aaron Antonovsky who noted how stressful events are opposed to resources on the one hand personality characteristics, and on the other hand those specific environmental characteristics such as the network of supportive social relations.

To extend, therefore, the links with direct teammates with whom the moments of difficulty are shared.

THE STRESS MANAGEMENT

Returning to the indispensable ability to manage stress, induced by internal and external stimulation, it is necessary to reinforce the principles of coping and resilience.

The first, coping, is considered in psychology as a process that strongly tests the individual's resources, through actions and emotions connected to it, in order to essentially reduce the risk of harmful consequences that could result from a stressful event, and contain negative emotional reactions, as highlighted by Francesco Riccardo in *Educazione allo Sviluppo del Potenziale Personale* (ed. Calzetti Mariucci). Resilience, on the other hand, can be understood, according to the terms of the psychologist Edith Grotberg, as the human capacity to face life's adversities, overcome them and emerge from them strengthened and transformed.

In short, resilience also includes the ability to use the experience born from difficult situations to build the future.

But this intrinsic capacity must be brought out, cultivated and developed in the player precisely through the fundamental working tool, which is the ball, creating a habit, reinforcing its natural and spontaneous use for personal improvement and collective interaction, from the moment of training, thus allowing mutual trust to develop between individual and group, propagating harmony and shared respect for choices and objectives, reducing the possibility of conflicts arising that may compromise the team bond, performance and therefore the result.

In the course of my experiences as a footballer, in this sense, I have found that in Spain, for example, there are intrinsically no more qualities among players, but certainly work is being done to establish greater confidence with the ball, understood as a primordial expression of the player's craft.

Going back to my experience in Brazil, I can certify that the work of the footballer, in training, cannot disregard the ball, as it is considered as a natural method of expression of the player.

As opposed to situations of preparation linked to an exasperated use of the tactical component that can have beneficial effects on the predisposition of a team to occupy space, depending on the different phases of the game, but risks depriving the player of the habit of the personal relationship with the ball, perhaps touched only a few times during an entire session.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The ball intervenes instead also as a means to develop the emotional intelligence of the player himself, which is at the basis of the relationship that constitutes the essence of team spirit, between the differences of individuals.

Emotional intelligence in fact favours communicative exchanges, the ability to solve problems, stimulating the individual and collective constructive process.

It is also true that only when one is aware of one's personal competence can one master a social competence, understood as the ability to manage relationships with others, through empathy, social skills that foster collaborative ties, consolidating consensus and support around oneself.

Also in this reflection of Riccardo, the parallel with the indispensability of the serene use of the ball emerges from arrogance, since the main purpose of emotional intelligence is to help make optimal decisions, fully aware at a rational and emotional level, in order to positively involve others in the achievement of a shared goal.

Again Riccardo stresses that within groups, each member should be self-aware, because awareness is the starting point of any change.

Self-awareness is cultivated within the team even when the coach, in order to satisfy the players' need for satisfaction, according to the studies of Tammy Horne and Albert Carron, prepares behaviours and exercises that allow to improve personal skills, involving the commitment of all players.

In a working group, collective satisfaction is also achieved when the individual manages to find and impose his or her own technical identity within the group. Thus are developed personal motivation, social cohesion, intergroup collaboration, reasoning in terms of "We", limiting the problems of rivalry, negative for morale and results.

COMPETENCE

Net of the resulting tactical knowledge, the ball as a tool also becomes the main expression of the competence of the individual player, where competence means the ability linked to knowledge and experience acquired in a given field of activity: that is, knowledge and know-how combined.

In professional contexts, therefore, the ability to provide effective performance best expresses the meaning of competence also understood as dexterity in the intentional and effective use of one's knowledge in production and problem-solving.

The ball, therefore, becomes in my opinion the expression of competence for the production of team play, according to the tactical values chosen, but also for facing the opponent.

Through the expression of the football competence of the ball, one does not limit oneself to the mastery of execution, therefore understood as the technical ability to control the ball, but broadens the reasoning to a certain representation of the structure and criteria of this competence, as a potential expressive element of a global and collective idea of team play.

Thus becoming an essential pivot connected to the ability to master complex situations that arise in every match.

AWARENESS AND EMPATHY

Without ever losing sight of the need to contribute to the development of the player's/individual's personality, leading him/her to face with confidence and greater certainty the moment of stress caused by an unnatural relationship with the ball that induces him/her to limit his/her own expressive possibilities on the pitch, we come to the theme of self-awareness.

Concept that allows to foresee how to face with greater preparation the various situations that life / match involves, adopting behaviours and attitudes functional to one's objectives. It also displays skills and abilities that produce flexibility and behavioural versatility, in individual and collective terms.

Through self-awareness, the ability to control emotion is increased, bringing it from a harmful intensity to a stable level, thus transforming it into something pleasant that facilitates a state of serenity, indispensable for self-control, of the expressive tool that represents the ball, and of one's role within one's own community, the team.

Awareness therefore also leads to an easier management of stress, until now attributed to the lack of mastery of the expressive instrument of the ball for a player.

Having identified this technical lack in the mastery and management of the ball as a potential source of stress, however, it should be remembered that the solution also involves the possibility of communicating the discomfort effectively, both verbally and non-verbally.

Therefore, the impact of empathy, understood as the ability to put oneself in the other's shoes and perceive emotions and thoughts in this way, should not be underestimated.

The lack of mastery of the ball control technique risks multiplying the obstacles to a healthy communication, useful not only for the individual to feel part of the group, but also for the group to avoid further forms of censorship.

Censorship understood in this case as a lack of willingness on the part of teammates to involve the element considered less technically gifted, which exposes the whole team to further stressful situations through its lack of personality and awareness in its own means.

In addition to the dangers induced also by the ability of the opposing team to identify with equal ease the weak point of those who oppose them and to put the consequent move into practice in order to benefit from it.

In practical terms, therefore, the lack of empathy can facilitate the censorship of the spontaneity of the passage and circulation of the ball between players.

As a consequence, the indispensable glue of team solidarity that allows to face the obstacle with an "us" attitude, or in any case denies a wider resolute potential, effectively reducing the number of possible solutions with the exclusion of the partner considered less suitable, deteriorates.

The lack of technical mastery of the ball can induce the player to defuse the mechanism of empathy, but also the rest of the teammates to avoid reproducing it, if by empathy we mean the ability to immerse themselves in the reality of others in order to understand their points of view, thoughts, feelings, emotions and pathos.

In practice, the principle of sharing on which the concept of team solidarity is based, of belonging to the group with its tactical but also emotional implications, is blocked.

The consequences are potentially harmful because they can directly undermine the equilibrium of the group's life, causing a negative spiral in the reciprocal attitudes of individuals.

The more gifted elements not only tend to isolate the one who is less at ease, but also limit their work, considering that the more physical role is rightfully played by those who have less technical skills.

This is the typical case of attackers with great technical skills who reject defensive work, considering it a duty for those comrades who do not have sufficient technical skills to compensate by doing at least the dirty work.

An attitude that leads irremediably to the disintegration of the relational fabric on the pitch, pushing even the least self-confident player, less gifted in mastering the ball, not only to renounce exposing himself during the possession phase, but also to renounce involving himself more vigorously in team work, precisely because he is rejected by others or in any case no longer willing to be considered as an element of inferior rank within the team.

This triggers a process of deterioration of the individual and collective possibilities of choice, with a limitation of the prospects of the game and the identification of the adversary's weaknesses, with the additional risk of being further destabilised by the adversary's attitude if he is able to grasp and exploit the weakening of the collective strength he faces.

CRITICAL THINKING AND CREATIVE THINKING

Hence the importance also of the concept of critical thinking, understood as the ability to examine the situation and take a personal position on it, according to Galimberti's definition, which explains how this ability is the foundation of a responsible attitude towards experiences, and autonomous with respect to environmental conditioning.

It is therefore more essential than ever to insist on the will to give the player a mastery of the technical means of control and management of the ball, in order to facilitate not only the freedom that can be traced back to critical thinking, but also the ability of resolution induced by creative thinking.

When creative thinking is understood to mean the ability present since childhood to think possible alternatives of solutions to difficult situations, by blowing up behavioural patterns that act as a brake. As it happens - in this key of interpretation - with the doubt caused by the technical limit, perceived by the footballer himself in the control and management of the ball.

Creative thinking is linked to the principle of sharing and exchanging ideas, so indispensable to team play. Albert Einstein stated that if logic leads from point A to point B, imagination leads everywhere.

Therefore, fighting self-censorship, the personal limitation induced by one's own technical limitations in the mastery of the working tool that represents the ball, guarantees inexhaustible and infinitely precious psychological-mental resources for the player and the coach who can thus count on individuals able to make decisions directly on the pitch, without succumbing to the fear of losing the ball, of losing it to the team, and consequently losing credibility in the eyes of his teammates and not least of his opponents.

If the stress in this regard becomes intense and unmanageable, the higher the probability that the individual/player will give up the decision process, or decide to postpone it from time to time, weakening the fabric of the game. In the field it translates precisely into the problem of not making oneself available to one's companions in the construction of the action, self-censoring, self-excluding.

The problem of the inability to make a de facto decision arises, according to the terms of psychologist Gaetano Kanizsa, also taken up by Riccardo, when an individual motivated to reach a goal cannot do so automatically or mechanically, nor even through instinctive activity or learned behaviour.

Training in the mastery and management of the ball allows, in this sense, to develop not only skills with the aim of solving the problem to be faced in preparation for the match and then on the pitch, but also critical thinking, creative thinking and the management of the emotional aspect in dealing with mates, environment and opponents.

In fact, the focus on technical training of mastery and management of the ball induces a phenomenon of "debridage", of debridement, also typical of the brainstorming process, which in the training of creative thinking allows to identify a greater number of solutions for each problem.

Knowing that in general when you have only one resolute possibility you feel caged; instead conflict emerges in the case of two possible alternatives; while with three alternatives you can actually feel free.

The same can be true on the field of play, if the conditions are created not only tactically, but also psycho-mental conditions suitable to allow the player to elaborate and face the choice with the necessary security, spontaneity and certainty in his own means with respect to the ball, and to refer to his teammates, with whom he can interact and from whom he feels protected; with respect to his opponents on the field and to the environment that puts him under pressure.

The latter paradigm, however, can have beneficial effects not only for the player with limited technical skills, but also for the player with high technical competence, who can thus express his skills with greater freedom, putting them at the service of a team from which he feels supported and protected. And this is also thanks to the fact that he has extended his trust to those companions who are less technically gifted, but who are motivated and strengthened in their role within the team, through commitment and growth in the mastery and management of the ball, nourished by the mutual empathy cultivated also in training.

It is so easy to go from a team with a few protagonists to a team of protagonists, according to one's aptitudes and skills put at the service of the collective. Where even the star player contributes to the collective effort because he or she takes the advantage not only of the team, but also of a personal one, in order to express his or her talent and collect the deserved honours. And if the team's star player is also applied to perform, for example, a sacrifice in ball recovery, the collective strength of ball recovery is automatically reinforced. Even when it is lost by the less technically gifted player who in turn finds himself comforted by the collective compensation of his own limitations.

Strengthening the personality of the subject/player therefore increases creativity and communicative capacity, because by nourishing technical mastery in the use of the ball, mental wellbeing is promoted, which in turn increases the motivation to take care of oneself and others.

SELF-EFFECTIVENESS

As a result, in this virtuous process, comforted by a careful maturation of individual technical skills, the awareness of self-efficiency, understood in the sense of the Canadian psychologist Albert Bandura, as a conviction about his ability to organize and perform sequences of actions necessary to produce certain results. The result is the conviction of being able to face every test effectively, feeling up to the event, with specific tasks, putting motivation, personal resources and action into play.

The parallel with the player's role on the field is also clear considering that if the individual considers that the result of his or her performance may vary according to his or her direct commitment, he or she will develop higher expectations in order to successfully reach the goal set; also convincing himself or herself that this result may be repeated in the future, consolidating perseverance in overcoming the difficulties that may arise when performing his or her task.

Without underestimating that - according to the approaches of Schunk and Zimmerman mentioned by Riccardo - mastery and presence of models of effective

individuals who positively face challenges, stimulate the learning of new skills and strategies in others.

From here, therefore, the experience lived by observing average technical capable companions who, in a virtuous collective context fed by highly technical elements and well-disposed to contribute to a common goal without prejudice, increased with the passing of the months and the training, their level of mastery and management of the ball. Bringing an increasingly essential contribution to the expressive possibilities of the team itself on the pitch.

The anxiogenic moments thus became potential challenges, stimulating and positive, contributing to the acquisition of further motor skills and therefore technical skills. In short, strengthening the collective awareness of the team's strength.

Riccardo, in the book already mentioned, recalls how, in the sports field, the athletes who are more confident of their effectiveness show greater ability to concentrate, above all through the control of intrusive thoughts and an adequate management of stress factors, accepting the risks of competition to a greater extent, showing themselves ready to face the inevitable moments of crisis.

The psychologists Jessica Militello and Patrizia Steca also point out how the sense of personal effectiveness is crucial both during training, promoting high level building and improvement, and during competition, when optimizing the choice, providing effort, execution and orchestration in the various activities. Without forgetting that the conviction of increasing one's own capacity increases the intrinsic satisfaction of performance, making it interesting.

MOTIVATION

This is a further step that, again through the use and appropriation of the technique of mastering the ball, also leads to strengthening motivation, understood as a force that pushes to act, directing the behaviour towards specific goals, supporting the effort required to achieve them, acquiring and managing external, environmental stimuli.

A motivation understood as intrinsic in that it allows the individual to perform an activity because it is stimulating, a source of pleasure, feeling satisfaction in feeling increasingly competent, regardless of external stimuli typical of extrinsic motivation. And therefore able to assume the correct behaviour without being discouraged by the difficulties linked to one's activity.

As a result, adversity becomes part of a whole, to be managed - according to AA.VV's 1983 Expectations-Values model. - precisely as part of a game, waiting for

the right moment to show one's potential and skills. The athlete therefore gets to give his best in the balanced search for his own limits, finding a stimulus to improve, thus nourishing the virtuosity of the team. This leads to a state of adhesion not only to one's own abilities, but also to integration with the context in which the subject finds himself expressing himself.

THE FLOW

In an ideal model, where global harmony is established at team level, the individual/player can converge towards a state of flow, understood as a mental condition in which the athlete finds himself so immersed in his performance that he experiences an experience of serenity and concentration, of total absorption. A sort of trance that can combine physical activity and consciousness, in a maximum concentration, essential ingredient for the excellence of performance.

Pelé himself, Riccardo remembers, described his flow as "a strange calm, euphoric with the impression of being able to run all day without getting tired, dribbling anyone, almost physically crossing the opposing team".

Without wanting to aim at making every player a potential Pelé, it should be underlined that all the components described so far in their psychological meaning, actually find a common thread of their expression in the concept of technical mastery of the professional/affective instrument of the ball.

For each stage, in fact, the acknowledgement of the usefulness of the appropriate and serene use of the ball, allows to favour and consolidate the psychological-mental aspects that contribute to the athlete's maturity.

Last but not least, it is evident that the technical and psychological maturity of the individual footballer contributes in turn to the development of a model of collective intelligence that animates a team, without the natural hierarchies imposed by the personality and competence criteria of individuals being detrimental to the life of the group/family in order to achieve the common goal, represented by victory.

STRENGTH AND OPPONENTS

This global expression of the personality and consolidated skills of a team has a direct impact not only on the team's performance, as the sum of the mutual completeness of the individuals, obviously orchestrated in a context of a predisposed game philosophy and tactics; but also on the opposing team that finds itself facing a collective and unitary block, ready to make a common sacrifice in the face of

adversity, with a paradigm of shared and protean game that values individual skills pooled to achieve the goal for which everyone takes the field.

Consequently, cultivating the single touch of the ball, intended as a basic element, as a first emotional gesture linked to childhood, as a spontaneous sign full of feeling and pleasure, develops a natural relationship with the ball that leads to the development and strengthening of mental and technical resources, to contribute to the deployment of the expressive capacity of the individual and that of a team strength that not only facilitates the resolution of the moment of adversity to be faced in the game, but will also inhibit the opposing team forced to add an additional hostile variable.

Thanks to the individual's habit in the natural and serene use of the ball, it contributes to forming a global group deterrent effect towards the opponents, who are forced to adapt their game to include an additional risk of danger, not only induced by the difficulty of contending the objective with the opposite group, but also by that caused by every single element that benefits from the technical, physical and mental coverage of the rest of the team.

This paradigm that I would define as collective inhibition of the opponent contributes to transferring an additional stress factor to the opponent due to the difficulty of including in one's own game the risk of suffering that of the opposite team, which implies a further consumption of precious mental and indirectly also physical energies.

In a more concrete way, a team that finds itself in front of a supportive, harmonic, polyvalent group in the different skills compensated by an attitude of sharing the qualities of each one, beyond the individual limits and the common objective, will be induced to assume an attitude at least cautious even in the simple work of pressing or recovering the ball, fearing to expose itself to the complete and reactive strength of the opponent.

This strength is expressed not only by the more technical individualities, but also by the less gifted ones which, however, thanks to a specific training of daily improvement in the mastery and management of the ball, contribute to complete the potential of the group.

Reinforcing the overall awareness, the ability to manage stress, to face the phases of the game with more confidence and courage, thanks to a deeper awareness and knowledge of one's own means, both individual and collective, in a positive spirit that frees and multiplies creative resources and freedom of action in the field, facilitating the conviction of being able to successfully achieve the goal set. Everything, however, begins with the first touch of the ball, the basic element of the game, and the first intimate moment of judging the value of a football player.

TECHNICAL ANALYSIS

The concepts expressed in the previous chapter, of "a supportive, harmonious and multi-purpose group in different skills", emerged from my personal football experience, but also from the observation of various tactical phases in the matches I studied and observed.

THE LEEDS UNITED EXAMPLE

Observing, for example, the game from Leeds United coached by Marcelo Bielsa, I found those elements of "collective technique" trust present in all the individual players, thus actively participating in all the various phases of the game.

In order to better explain the concept of collective "technical trust", let's take a look at a Leeds United team under construction in the opposing half of the field: often you can see the central defender, Stuart Dallas, leaning horizontally against the lateral midfielder, Jack Harrison, calling the opposing team's pressing towards them in order to obtain advantageous spaces behind the pressing lines.

Having obtained this effect, or tactical advantage, it is very interesting to note how the central defender remains at the disposal of the team-mate in possession of the ball either 1) proposing himself in the space created or 2) requesting the ball to himself, and then replaying it diagonally vertically, again to use the advantage of the space created as a result of the pressing, towards the other midfielder on the opposite side.

I take for example this typical action, among the many of his tactical baggage, by Marcelo Bielsa to highlight some points that I consider important:

A) The most evident one that concerns the awareness of all the elements of the team to be tactically useful protagonists in the development of the game, determined by the confidence in themselves in the possession of the ball; determining lines of passage or proposing themselves in the spaces by all the elements happens, in my opinion, only thanks to a conscious and natural relationship with the instrument of the game, the ball.

B) That the possession of the ball must not be confused with a sterile, and therefore useless, series of horizontal passes, but rather must be preparatory to the most effective and rapid verticalisation possible. It is often confused - it is not for me to say whether rightly or wrongly - the concept of possession of the ball with a game transmitted through horizontal lines; these examples of Bielsa's game - among the many available evoking the Argentine technician - allow instead to explain how the theoretical concept of ball possession must absolutely provide for vertical transition in the shortest possible time.

C) Emphasising precisely the rapidity I mentioned above, it is fundamental to develop to the maximum, together with the development or improvement of one's technical skills, also an ideal physical form, precisely to allow one to maximise the advantage of the spaces achieved thanks to the possession of the ball.

D) I think it is interesting to describe also the concept of freedom of choice made in this case by the central defender Stuart Dallas, when he opts either for the movement, with or without the ball, in the spaces created behind the lines of the opponent's pressing, or in waiting for a specific passing line. I believe that these mechanisms, which obviously derive also from the tactical indications of the coach, gain their maximum effectiveness only thanks to the conscious application of the players themselves and that this derives not only from their knowledge of tactical strategies, but also from their natural and, where necessary, improved relationship with the tool of the game, the ball.

THE GERMANY 2014 EXAMPLE

As far as the other phases of the game are concerned, and more precisely in a situation of non-possession, the movements made by the German national team, coached by Joachim Low, during the 2014 World Cup played in Brazil and the 2016 European Championships played in France are very interesting.

It is evident how in their tactical organization the principle is well present in the players "to think about attacking while defending and to think about defending while attacking". In fact, in the match played against Italy, during the 2016 European Championships, I was very impressed by the difference in balls recovered in the opposing half between the two teams: 5 balls for Italy, 22 for Germany.

The German players, when they lost the ball, all positioned themselves at a maximum distance of 5/10 metres from their opponents, ready for immediate pressing, immediately complicating the exit of the ball for Italy.

These are elements that also reside in Jurgen Klopp's tactical philosophy, in the non-possession phase, when he himself declares: "Counter-pressing is one of the best plays, the best moment to win possession of the ball happens when you have just lost it and your opponent is still in the phase of orienting the lines of passing the ball, making him spend useless energy trying to keep the ball in vain".

Concept that translates into high pressure, always with the ball at the focal point, always with two players positioned in the central part of the court to maintain the essential balance.

There were moments in the game when the defensive line of Germany was no more than 10 metres from the area of Italy, with the intention of suffocating the restarts.

It remains evident that if the counter-pressing is not carried out quickly, or if the central parts of the pitch are not immediately covered, the lethality of the opposing restarts is given greater possibilities, making it easier to possess the ball. In the 2014 World Cup Germany's pressing was even more evident, as highlighted in the match against Brazil, where the positions of the two fullbacks, Howedes and Lahm, and the three midfielders - Khedira, Schweinsteiger and Kroos - were constantly in the opposing half in support of the pressing actions of the attack line formed by Ozil, Klose and Muller.

Also in this case it is worth mentioning the constant advanced positioning work by the midfielders in order not only to prevent the usual easy phrasing of Brazil, but above all to regain possession of the ball as quickly as possible.

Among the many potentially useful examples, I chose the examples of these two teams, Marcelo Bielsa's Leeds and Joachim Low's Germany, to reiterate the following concepts in which I believe a lot:

- A) To obtain a dominant kick you must not be afraid of the ball.
- B) For an attack kick you have to want and get possession of the ball.
- C) The defensive phase must be aimed at the fastest possible recovery of the ball.

It is clear from my analysis that the ball is always the focal point of my attention, because I believe that when the team positions itself in a consistent and homogeneous way with respect to the position of the ball, not only do the tactical options of the opposing team automatically reduce, but above all the tactical and physical effectiveness of your team is increased.

CONCLUSION

With the path I have travelled so far, I wanted to highlight the primordial value of the ball object, from its sentimental and emotional incipit linked to the pure recreational concept of childhood play, from which the ambition to make it a choice of professional life branches out; thus deepening the influence of its indispensable mastery, from a mental and psychological point of view, both individual and team, to allow to transpose to the highest competitive levels its virtuous effect, as a tool of the trade; in order to reach the examination of those technical exercises that in my opinion in their daily practice can contribute to the best preparation of the match, intended in turn as a moment of catharsis because it is the culmination of the final satisfaction of taking the field, as a recognized member of a group directed to the conquest of the goal of victory.

Independently of the types of exercises that can be adopted by each coach, I would like to underline how particularly profitable is the reproduction in training of potential match situations, using an equivalent number of players for each phase of the game: from the defensive exit to the construction, up to the finalisation, without neglecting the recovery and relaunch manoeuvre. But always and in any case in the presence of the tool of the trade: the ball.

This is the only way to allow the player to complete himself, through the constant presence of the ball, and to feel not only at ease from a technical point of view, but also prepared from a tactical point of view, in a collective context that enhances the personal qualities that he was able to comfort during the week, through a constant "dialogue" with his teammates.

A "dialogue" that takes place in the most similar context to the real moment of collective expression, through the shared universal language: the ball.

If we want, the more we practice and cultivate this common language, the more the dialectical exchange becomes flourishing, and the final play engaging, fully exploiting the talent of each component that takes place precisely in the "momentum" of the game, understood as collective expression.

Reproducing the different potential perspectives of match action also makes it possible to hook different types of exercise to each training session. In my opinion, this variety is also essential to get out of the routine of daily work, which can lead to a flattening of the training itself and compromise the virtuous balance that the centrality of the use of the ball entails.

Getting out of the repetitiveness of everyday work contributes to a climate of curiosity and enthusiasm that is indispensable not only from an individual point of view, but also to team spirit, which is in turn comforted by the reassuring effect of being able to

deal with what has been tried and tested in virtuous and creative, but still pragmatic, terms during training.

Where, in any case, the ball must remain as the central point, precisely to develop and consolidate individual characteristics, at the same time facilitating the collective amalgamation.

In short, even in training, the ball becomes the common thread that has the multiple effect of facilitating the reproduction of as realistic patterns as possible to be applied later in the game, acting in turn as an intermediary between the different phases of the game, but also between the various team departments, as well as between the individual players.

All of this by fostering an anti-routine approach that defuses the risks linked to the repetitiveness of the gesture, which inevitably leads to a drop in concentration and the quality of the work produced.

A coach therefore cannot ignore an organic approach, as organic in its complexity is his team, understood as a harmonious complex of individualities that work daily to take the field together.

The fact remains that the intrinsic victory of each coach, beyond the result, lies in being able to create a context of daily work that allows each individual player to feel at ease, increasing their technical skills, making them an indispensable element of the team, in turn reassured by the consolidation of the team spirit that compensates for their limitations, enhancing their skills, in order to be able to deploy the best elements available.

This virtuous movement is obtained by the choice to impose the constant presence of the only element that involves an emotional charge that blossoms from the playful activity of childhood and blooms, to propagate luxuriantly, until the competition of the highest level.

An instrument of play that then becomes that of any professional player's trade.

And this unique universal element, which - according to the trace that I wanted to illustrate in this thesis - crosses the temporal dimension, from childhood to adulthood, allowing to develop the sentimental sphere in multiple psychological and mental effects, stimulating in an organic way the technical work, single and collective, also to overcome repetitiveness daily, it's simply the ball.