soccer

contributors

Sergio ALBA / Universidad de Sevilla
Sandra BEVITÓN / Universidad de Sevilla
Nicholas BRADLEY / Brandeis University
Keely BYRON / Saint Mary's College of California
Marina CABALLERO / Universidad de Sevilla
Daniel CALVO / Universidad de Sevilla
María José de CASTRO / Universidad de Sevilla
Rosa María DÍAZ / Universidad de Sevilla
Tanya FERNÁNDEZ / The University of Austin at Texas
Julie GÁMEZ / Santa Clara University
Mary Kate HULL / Trinity University
Pedro LÓPEZ / Universidad de Sevilla
Gloria MARTÍNEZ / Universidad de Sevilla
Hannah MAURER / University of Oregon
Jennifer RÍOS / Indiana University
Molly RIBERA / University of Wisconsin-Madison
Editor’s Note

Oscar Ceballos

Soccer: more than meets the ball...

Call us opportunists if you may, but we had to devote the fall 2010 issue of más+menos to soccer. Spain, at long last, won the World Cup and we will never be the same. From now on, at times of special need (such as the present is), Spaniards will be able to say: “We’ll always have Johannesburg.”

The Diario de Seville journalist Francisco Correal, who’s been an essential collaborator of this issue of más+menos, tells us that the someewhat-numbing capacity that soccer has over the masses, ourselves included, finds its redemption in its enormous contribution to the recording of our emotional past. It provides many average (and not so average) people with an array of both happy and unhappy neocclusions from which to construct our own biopics: “How did you react when Spain beat Malta 12-1?” “Where did you celebrate the first UEFA Cup victory of Sevilla FC?” and the second? “Do you remember when Betis got relegated to Second Division?” Wait a minute...which of the times are you talking about?

I am indeed a Betis fan, which is not Real Madrid or FC Barcelona. So I have no choice but to illustrate you with some facts, which aren’t either of your interest or your concern. In 1977, I witnessed how the most irregular team in the history of soccer, Betis of course, defeated AC Milan 2-0 at Benito Villamarín stadium to make it to the Quarterfinals of the European Cup of National Cup Winners. My uncle Enrique took me to see it and my mom made me a big sausage bocadillo to eat at half-time. I know that the following day I had a math exam in which I didn’t do well. Months before, in one hot night of June, I saw the same team win the first Spanish King’s Cup of our democracy against Athletic Club de Bilbao, in a little black and white TV. It was one of the most gripping matches of all times (according to Betis fans) though tidity always has it, and that same season Betis got relegated to Second Division, or to the bowels of HELL, as sports journalist like to refer to here to any place where Real Madrid or FC Barcelona don’t play. I remember a very young Rafael Gordillo, later to become the best left-winger of the world and one of the greatest players in the history of Real Madrid and Spain’s national team, leaving the stadium in tears that day. In spite of having grown up (I guess) I’ve never quite managed to push those sour memories away. And since these are, once again, times of difficulty for Betis, the fact that our beloved fellow soccer supporters of the city, the Sevilla or Paléanganas (as we refer to them with affection, are enjoying the most successful period in their history, only contributes to make matters worse. Our Sevilla fan and professor of Contrastive Grammar, Antonio Rodríguez, always tells the story of a young boy who kept asking his father: “Dad, why are we Betiscos?” Sevilla fans already know that their victorious stretch won’t last forever.

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All happy and unhappy matters considered, it’s a great satisfaction to have worked on a magazine in which we’ve managed to interview some soccer players who did their best, every day of their professional careers, to make people’s lives more memorable. We’ve realised that, beyond their professionalism, they were as amazed to have been there as their supporters were and still are. Rafael Gordillo himself did not hesitate for instance to devote an hour of his time, now that he’s about to become Betis’ President, to tell us his emotions about a match, 33 years ago, that he didn’t even played.

“’We’ve learnt working on más+menos 15 that beyond the ball there is a lot. It is his unduplicated status as one of the world’s top players that allows as fierce a striker as gentle a human being, Sevilla FC’s Malian player and UNICEF Ambassador, Sadat Frédéric Oscar N’Kani” to found near Bamako, in his father’s country, the Children’s Village of Sakina. Much like him, though with quite different means and with the blindness of a veteran player, the present day Quixote, Betis fanatic and Jesus follower, Jorge Morillo, runs a project created 25 years ago to reach children of all deprived areas around Sevilla.

We’ve also made the big effort of trying to understand the awestruck do’s and don’ts of soccer-supporting behaviour and have visited several of the oldest clubhouses in Sevilla. We wanted to know what it’s like to have two major soccer teams in a medium sized city like this one and to what extend that rivalry shapes the life of its inhabitants (even, or particularly, if they hate soccer).

We’ve also studied one of the most naturally weird combinations of modern times, soccer and politics, in a country like Spain, which is puzzeled by the permanent, though largely imaginary, threat of territorial division. Is FC Barcelona the Trojan horse that will eventually bring Catalonia to its accession? They probably are. Last night they defeated theirarch-rivals, Real Madrid, 5-0.

Given the dramatic nature of soccer, we now know why goalkeepers are probably the sports professional with the largest percentage of work-related suicides. Though to a group of loyal friends and amateur soccer players who keep all at all every Sunday since 1980, soccer is one of the greatest sources of family bonding and joy. For them, and unlike in the US, it is the children who sit in the stands and cheer their parents... or even their grandparents.

And please do not dare put this magazine down until you learn who a rather shy and rather short and very boyish-looking guy named Andrés Iniesta is. Thanks for being there and let’s hope next time I can write this editor’s note as a First Division fan.
Soccer: the political puñal

The mass appeal of soccer has given politicians a new way to deliver their message. Are the fans listening?

“Ashamed of the whole stadium loudly cheers... Now we all agree, we all agree, the banner is against us in our brotherhood... Barça, Blaugrana, Barça!”

As the Barcelona Soccer Club’s anthem rang out in Camp Nou, their stadium of one hundred thousand people, many hundreds of thousands more followed on television, though they might not have known how to sing along.

Watching the game from his apartment in Sevilla, Antonio Catalan, a 26-year-old university student, hums along with the melody, but admits to knowing neither the words nor the language of the game. Catalan, his like, many fans, has never been to Barcelona. “Barcelona is my favorite team; I don’t need to know Catalan to appreciate the players’ skills and the team’s history,” says Antonio.

In Spain and in much of the world outside of the United States, soccer is undoubtedly the most popular sport. This is why so many politicians have used it for their own purposes. “As long as soccer possesses such widespread appeal, politicians have been and will be there to use it as a platform for their own goals,” explains Carlos Sánchez, a professor at the University Pablo de Olavide in Sevilla.

Given the sociopolitical context of the different regions of Spain, teams from Catalonia and Basque Country often take on new meanings due to politicians’ influences. “I would like FC Barcelona to continue being an instrument of promotion of Catalan culture,” said Joan Laporta, president of the club in 2007. “It’s the essential spirit of Catalonia.”

After his second term as president of FC Barcelona, Laporta created Solidaridad Catalana per la Independencia, a political party which seeks independence from Spain. He was a candidate for the presidency of the Catalans in the recent elections of 28th November, 2010, achieving in fact extraordinary results.

Apart from creating nationalist sentiments, some politicians have even committed direct theft. Jesús Gil y Gil, the former owner and president of Atlético de Madrid from 1987 to 2003, was widely believed to have used his team’s prestige to become the mayor of Marbella. Later, he was incarcerated for embezzlement, perversion of justice and falsification of public documents. “The story of Jesús Gil y Gil demonstrates political corruption as well as economic corruption,” says professor Carlos Sánchez. “His position as the top executive of Atlético de Madrid gave him a lot of power.”

Spain has a long history of politicians using soccer as a political weapon for their own ends. In 1964, the Spanish national team beat the Soviet Union in the Euro-cup finals, which dictator Francisco Franco portrayed as a victory over communist politics. More routinely, soccer was utilized as a form of mass placation on a weekly basis. “FFA is a new, secular religion,” wrote Manuel Valvozquez Montalban, a well-known Spanish author. “Just as a Catholic goes to mass every Sunday, a soccer fan goes to the stadium, television or radio.”

“I don’t need to know Catalan to appreciate the players’ skills and the team’s history,” says Antonio. “The whole stadium loudly cheers... Now we all agree, we all agree, One flag unites us in our brotherhood... Barça, Blaugrana, Barça!”

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This ritualistic tendency has given those who look for fame and power a pulpil. “People come back to soccer every week, nearly every day,” describes María Rico Ruiz, a 35-year-old soccer fan from Barcelona. “It forms an essential part of the social life here.”

Although politicians may use soccer teams for their own advantages, many fans remain unconvinced of the connection. “Politicians aren’t important to me personally, and soccer is soccer—not politics,” says Daniel Calvo Carmona, a college-aged soccer fan. “They aren’t related in my mind, and I think many people feel the same way.”

Not all soccer-politics associations are wholly negative either. Outside of Catalonia, Athletic Club de Bilbao in Basque Country only admits players native to the greater Basque Country, in the north of Spain and the south of France. Professor Carlos Sánchez says that this practice, though quickly fading, is regarded highly by many. “Athletic de Bilbao is a home-grown team, which many view positively. They support their own, and this is generally seen as loyal, rather than exclusive in the negative sense.”

Aides from politics, players’ regional identities often come to the forefront in Spain. After their victory in the World Cup earlier this year, players from Catalonia, Basque Country, and the rest of Spain all participated in the national celebration. At first, the flag that the team members wore was the Spanish national flag. Soon enough, many fans were wearing the flags of their respective regions.

“They’re showing off the pride of their region in some cases,” says José Manuel Lara, a 27-year-old Real Madrid aficionado. “Maybe. At least, it’s well known that some players are decidedly nationalistic.”

For Antonio, the Barcelona fan, the flags did not detract from Spanish unity, but actually solidified it. “All of the different flags we saw after the World Cup simply confirm Spanish identity as a multicultural nation,” he says.

The nation as a whole remains proud after their transcendental victory. Regardless of politicians’ efforts to the contrary, many fans think soccer continues to be about the sport, above all. “Unfortunately there are certain people who mix soccer and politics,” points out José Manuel, but the majority of fans are out for the sport and we forget the rest while we are watching.”

“The grace of ball handling, the skills that players build over the course of years,” says Antonio. “This is why we watch. It’s not to see one region’s political programs, it’s to see the beauty of the sport.”

Camp Nou now continues to ring with the voices of one hundred thousand fans, urging their team to victory, with the full confidence that many, many more are following along around the world. “The whole stadium loudly cheers... We’re the blue and clanet supporters it matters not where we hail from.”

Above: The Catalan players Piqué, Xavi Hernández, and Capdevilla, the Asturian Villa, the Canarian Pedro and the Basque Xavi Alonso, congratulate the Puyol (also Catalan) after he scored the decisive goal for Spain in the semifinal of the 2010 South Africa World Cup against Germany.
among them. “They all include children, and they are the most important thing.”

Discovering Humanity
Born in the Sevillian district of Triana in 1957, Jorge Morillo believes his life’s purpose is to help others. With profound religious conviction, and an absolute love for soccer, Jorge believes his life was destined for what he is discovering every day. “I speak from my heart. I am in love with God and all of life.”

He believes that thanks to God, his life has taught him to find humanity in the world. “Luckily, the real reward I have found in my life is the human quality of the areas where I work. This is very important, because we may live in different realities with different experiences and perspectives, but above all we are all human.”

Francisco Narbona Arbole, Fran, a 24-year-old student from the Polígono Sur, started to help Jorge in March, and since then has become his most consistent volunteer. “I wanted to help others. There are many people in the world that help others, but here in Seville, there isn’t anyone in the streets. And since I like to play soccer, I thought this would be the best way for me to contribute,” Fran explains.

He shares Jorge’s view of the importance of the humanitarian aspect of the project. Although society rejects these areas of Seville and considers them to be dangerous, Fran’s involvement has given him a different perspective. “When you walk down the street, people greet you and respect you. There are good people here like in any other area in the world.”

This outlook has convinced Jorge that a solution to the social marginalization of these areas exists. Thus, he continues to educate in the streets even during times without many economic means.

Educar en la Calle receives support, monetary or otherwise, from donations and people in the community such as the Fundación Telefónica de España. But it does not have any connections to official institutions. “The Council of Seville has almost no interest in the project. In the majority of places, I am in the background. Therefore, the story of my project has not been discovered,” Jorge says.

New Developments
On just his third visit to the location in the Cerro Blanco area, Jorge Morillo parks his bright green van in an open field near a small playground. As he begins to set up orange cones for a makeshift soccer field, two young boys approach him. Jorge introduces himself and tells them that he is going to play soccer and invites them to join. Seemingly uninterested, they continue walking in the direction of the playground.

Jorge has seen this before. He says that when he introduces his project to a new area, the children hesitate at first, but soon enough they join the game. “This is the start of building relationships. Hopefully they come back with their friends to play.”

Within minutes, another young boy approaches his van. “Is it true you are going to play soccer?” he asks.

As more children begin to gather around his van, Jorge begins to talk with them while handing out soccer jerseys. He tells them about his project and experiences, and informs them that every Monday at this time he will come to play soccer with them.

Soon enough, more than 25 children gather on the field. Jorge divides them into teams, and upon his whistle, they begin to play. After the game, the children gather around the van once again as Jorge hands them containers of yogurt. He smiles and talks with them while he begins to learn their names.

“I am building the story here and it is very important that the children are the protagonists. It is good that so many came to play. This is a good start.”

These official institutions do give recognition to his project, however, and Jorge has thus recently been awarded the honor of “Defensor de los Derechos de los Niños” by the Junta de Andalucía, the region’s governing body, for “his personal attention as an ‘Educator of the Street’ to children most disadvantaged.”
Between two posts: a goalkeeper’s home

A position designated by different rules, uniform, training and mindset. The psyche, penalty kicks, and evolution of goalkeepers and their inherent ability to make Spanish reports shout “Without goals, there is no soccer!”

"What kind of a goalkeeper is the one who is not tormented by the goal he has allowed? He must be tormented! And if he is calm, that means the end. No matter what he had in the past, he has no future.”

Judged by the absence or presence of goals, a goalkeeper holds the decision of the game, literally in his or her hands. The goalie game is pressure, persistence, part of a moment of relief then repeat. José Carlos Jaen Sanchez, sports psychologist and professor at the University of Seville, notes that “torment is one of the worst enemies of sports. When one doubts, when one does not believe... it is difficult to act with effectiveness. Beliefs help humans direct their conduct towards an end. If one does not believe, if one does not even try, mediocrity settles in.”

After allowing decisive, or really any goal, goalies must overcome these blows to their confidence and maintain their composure and dominance. England’s tie to the United States in the 2010 World Cup, will be remembered as a failure by the goalie, Robert Greene. The tabloid shocked the failure to all. The sport news showed the mistake and the pain of defeat on the goalie’s face, over and over. After such public scrutiny, Greene was subsequently replaced by a goalkeeper that had not suffered such a severe blow to his psyche. When asked what motivates a goalie, Lee Yashin, a goalkeeper, said, “a great time all professional soccer goalie, reply, “what kind of a goalkeeper is the one who is not tormented by the goal he has allowed? He must be tormented! And if he is calm, that means the end. No matter what he had in the past, he has no future.”

French forward, Michele Platini strikes the ball rolling into the goal as he crawls back, desperately attempting to stop the inevitable.

Goalies only options for success in such a close situation followed by occasional moments of joy—driven by its flow and energy is one of apparent inaction. They are prepared for anything, the expected and the unexpected, the normal and irregular, the shots and the opposing penalty box to head in the equalizing goal against Sakhtar Donetsk in the UEFA Cup 2007 round of 16. He wins the cup for Seville F.C. in a penalty kick shootout, saving three potential goals against Espanyol.

Miguel Rodriguez, ex-goalie of Seville F.C.’s B team from the 50’s, quickly sketches out a half soccer field and indicates how soccer was played in the past. “There was the goalie, the defense, the middle line and forwards. It has changed a lot.”

In the past, goalkeepers would not rush to the opposing penalty box, leaving their goal exposed, in order to attempt a header. Goalkeepers remained in the box, a domain where they could use all of their talents, especially their hands. As years progressed, goalkeeper training has taken on different aspects. Child players do not normally start their career as goalkeepers, but transition from a field position. Defender was my position for 8 years before switching to goalkeeper. Adrián San Miguel del Castillo, goalkeeper for Real Betis B, says “I switched to playing goalkeeper when my team’s goalkeeper left. They needed someone for the position, so I volunteered to take their place as a substitute.”

Since “pure” goalkeepers are a nearly non-existent entity, coaches have in recent years incorporated goalies as a multi-faced player with responsibilities of preventing goals and acting as the final defender. A rule change in 1992 that prohibited goalkeepers from handling the ball with their hands if intentionally back-passed to them is noted by Bauman, my coach and former goalkeeper then. “The biggest change over the years that I experienced was this, as well as our need to have more foot skills.”

Goalkeeper training now incorporates foot kills and defensive positioning to prepare this diverse defender. In the recent years, goalkeepers have even become offense players, as Palop demonstrated; becoming the 11th man in the penalty box in crucial games, to give their teams a higher ratio of shots, as Palop demonstrates, players are now putting on the defensive, a diverse goalkeeper. By diversifying the position, goalkeepers become even more of a threat, with their unpredictable vision of the game and their inherent leadership from the back.

Goaler as a gender-neutral term in English. In Spanish, I am referred to as la portera or the female goalkeeper. Though a distinguishing factor, it is nothing new after years played in a position, diving for saves, acquiring routines, and repeating so many diving exercises that I forgot that falling to the ground is something normally avoided, unless the show is for the benefit of the referees to draw a foul. My most memorable goal scored against me, and I remember it well, was when a flock of geese flew at me from the right as a forward ran equally as fast towards me with the ball, to protect myself or protect the goal. Though a rare circumstance, goalkeepers are prepared for anything, the expected and the unexpected, the normal and irregular, and in this case, geese in lieu of a save. As we gave up the position, between two posts, we were not loners on the field. Rather we are welcomed to a home shared by goalkeeper around the world.

“Change” shouts my friend as we play pick-up soccer. A call everyone hears approximately every 10 minutes, signaling that another person must take their turn as goalkeeper to take my hand-my time in goal. As I head for the net, memories, muscular and mental, remind me in years of my volunteer-duty to take my turn as goalkeeper, but rather was the goalkeeper for my team. Each game consists of 90 minutes of vigilance, guarding a goal, adjusting angles, observing the game, and protecting our chances for a win.

Iker Casillas, goalkeeper for Real Madrid, and captain and keeper of the Spanish national selection lifts the 2010 World Cup trophy above his head in exaltation. Between two posts: a goalie’s home shared by goalkeepers around the world.

British poet Simon Armitage summarized a goalkeeper’s career saying, “Goalkeepers are, by definition, failures, for they put their faces where others put their studs, and their chosen function in a sport defined by its flow and energy is to be in a kind of sabbatical in soccer followed by occasional moments of joyful intervention.”

The Ricardo Zamora Trophy named after the Catalan “El Divino” goalkeeper Ricardo Zamora, was credited by the Spanish magazine Marca in 1958. The award goes to the goalkeeper with the lowest “goal-to-game ratio.”

The first goalkeeper to ever wear goalkeeper gloves was Amadeo Carrizo, an Argentine goalkeeper that played for River Plate in the 40’s and 50’s.
The rivalry that unites a city

Over a century ago, following the establishment of the Sevilla Fútbol Club, an internal managerial disagreement resulted in the founding of Sevilla’s second soccer team, Betis Balompié. So began the unique rivalry between Sevillistas and Béticos.

Since their inception, the Seville Derby has been known for violent incidents, with broken windows and glass being a common occurrence. However, despite the occasional outbreaks of violence, the rivalry is most notable during the Seville Derby, which is held only in years in which both teams compete in the first division. The derby is considered to be a more blue-collar affair compared to other rivalries in Spain.

The Seville Derby is a friendly, healthy, non-aggressive rivalry, according to Sánchez. He explains that in the last ten years, the press attempts to exploit the rivalry. “The press has played with this sentiment a lot. They look for the worst in the aficionados.” Because of this, he refuses to speak with or even admit reporters from newspapers, like Diario de Sevilla, ABC, or Diario de la Región.

For sure.” They did: 2-0.

Morales is first and foremost a Sevilla fan. “I always believe in Sevilla in my heart. Maybe not always in my head, but always in my heart,” he says. “Here in Sevilla, soccer is religion.” Morales agrees.

Sevilla will win for sure tomorrow. For sure.” They did: 2-0. Sevilla and Betis will not face each other this year because, for the second year in a row, Betis plays in the Second Division, while Sevilla remains in the First. So they are eager to see their teams face off once again, maybe this year in the Copa del Rey, the second most important tournament in Spain, in which both clubs are classified. “It would be a very emotional derby,” says Francisco Moreno.

A Sevilla vs. Betis game played in 1924.
In his six years with Sevilla FC, Carvajal faced off against Betis twice. “I scored a goal against Betis in one game. I remember we celebrated a lot after that. A lot,” he explains, the satisfaction visible in his face. When he faced his old team, though, he did not feel like he was playing against his friends, as they were more like associates. “I didn’t have much of a relationship with the other Betis players. I didn’t know them very well because I didn’t play for the team very long, and I played for Betis B. I played in very few games.”

Carvajal’s parents, though devoted Béticos, attended all of his Sevilla home games to watch their son play. “They’re huge Betis fans, but they didn’t care who I played for. They just wanted to see me play.” Still, he says his father never donned a Sevilla jersey. At the most, his mother would wear a Sevilla scarf, but nothing more.

After a knee injury ended Kiki Carvajal’s professional career in 1997, he studied three years at the University of Seville and in 2000 obtained his diploma in physical therapy. From 2001 to 2008, he entered into the Sevilla FC organization once again and worked as a physical therapist for the team. This complicated Carvajal’s identity as a soccer fan even further. "Some of the players would call me 'Bético,'” he remembers, beaming.

Today the former player works for a private physical therapy consult, and remains a dedicated Betis fan. However, he admits that he follows Sevilla more closely, but only because they play in the first division. Because of the difference in leagues between Sevilla and Betis this year, he says the rivalry is not as strong, not as passionate. “If a Bético and a Sevillista meet in a bar, they can’t argue. There’s still a rivalry, but it’s nothing like if both teams were in the same league.” Along with the rest of the city, Kiki Carvajal awaits the day when both teams will face each other once again.

In 2006, Sevilla’s star player Frédéric Oumar Kanouté launched a project to establish a Children’s Village in Mali, África, one of his homelands. Two months ago, it became a reality.

The Children’s Village, named Sakina, brings together various services and facilities to care to the needs of orphaned and vulnerable children near the Malian capital city of Bamako, explains the European-African player. Sakina is an Arabic word meaning tranquility, serenity, inner peace, and also gives way for the word residence, all things that this place close to the Niger river hopes to provide for all the children who enter it.

Kanouté’s work as a famous sportsman in Seville, Mali, and the world has also made him an important community leader and activist. “When Kanouté was just a boy he loved to visit and play with his cousins in Mali but he could tell there was a huge need. He always knew some-
The children’s village consists of a housing complex where the kids live with their house families up to a secondary education for all, and a training center where they can learn skills for a professional career. The children who are allowed to live in the village are 5 to 18 years old, but they are not the only ones who benefit; the French-Malian player, father of three children. All locals from neighboring towns are invited to use the facilities of the village with the exception of housing. Today, Sakina already has its first 150 children, 25 of them. Although he hasn’t been able to see the opening of the village himself the plans to next ten years they expect Sakina to have its own vegetables and animals, and, most importantly, to be running in a self-sufficient way. One of the main goals in planning the village was to have it eventually live on its own without the aid of donations. Up to now the children’s village has been run with the aid from many donors like Sevilla’s Rotary Club, who helped construct the health center, or from the benefit soccer game Champions for Africa, put on in the past three years by famous or lesser known African players, many of them from African descent. The funds from this match go toward educational programs. The next ten years Sakina will be held in Madrid on December 27. Sakina’s children’s village is the biggest and most successful of the projects that works on, but it has others, such as livestock donation and the maintenance of a development fund, according to the foundation. By participating in livestock donation a person is able to donate a chicken or goat to a family in Africa or Asia. This animal not only feeds the family but also brings them income. For example, a chicken could provide eggs and chicks that the family could sell, and use the money to sustain themselves. The development fund allows people to donate money, and helps set up farms for families in Africa and Asia. Besides this, Kanouté is also known for helping the Seville’s Muslim community: it is said that when he knew that a small mosque was about to be evicted, he bought the place to avoid it. As soon as he puts his feet in the street, be it in Seville or in Bamako, Kanouté is always surrounded by children, happy to see and touch that hero. He believes that every one of them deserves the right to live as part of a family. He decided to do something for them when he saw all the homeless children in his father’s land. “Whether from the United States or Spain, you don’t realize things until you live it, until you go and see things with your own eyes.”

Kanouté and Sevilla FC: the best years in the history of the club

F ederic Oumar Kanouté is considered by many the best forward player in the history of Sevilla FC, for which he has scored 115 goals. He is the team’s fourth scorer of all time, the top scorer amongst his foreign players and also of Sevilla’s international competitions. He is rated as one of the top earners of professional soccer in the world. After playing in France for three years (Olympique de Lyon) and in England for five West Ham United and Tottenham Hotspur, Kanouté joined Sevilla FC in 2005. Since then, the club has witnessed an unprecedented success both nationally and internationally. Kanouté’s years will be very difficult to match: two European championships in 2006 and 2007, two Spanish Super Cups in 2007 and 2010, one European Super Cup (2006), and one Spanish Super Cup (2007). Kanouté is an influential striker who does his job with as much efficiency as elegance. In August 25th, 2006 he scored the second goal of Sevilla FC against FC Barcelona in the final of the European Super Cup that his team won 3-0. When he doesn’t have his day, the team suffers. Kanouté did not score in the final of the European Super Cup that his team played against AC Milan in 2007 and Sevilla FC lost. The player from Mali also scored the only goal in the Copa del Rey final against Getafe in 2007. In 2008, he was the striker of the goals in the magnificent victory of his team over Real Madrid to win the Spanish Super Cup.
Unforgettable: 116th minute into the 2010 World Cup final played in Johannesburg. Andrés Iniesta beats Dutch goalie, Maarten Stekelenburg. Spain wins. / REUTERS

“Unbelievable! To most soccer fans, the prospects of winning another major football tournament and putting in an incredible show on the world stage is the dream of a lifetime. However, the timing of such a victory in South Africa is no coincidence. It is the result of a long-term effort and strategic choices made by the Spanish football federation and the national team.”

“Before Andrés Iniesta’s goal:

and the big businesses in Spain are realizing that the world is becoming more global and more diverse ample for other sectors of Spanish society. “The national pride that we have had for so long didn’t matter if you were Basque or Catalan or Galician.” This new unity also meant that something would have normally been rare and a red and yellow soccer world championship. “Winning the World Cup means that we all feel that we are ‘in the same boat’, regardless of where we are from.”

Winning the World Cup could not have come at a better time for Spain. Rivera describes the overall sense of disillusionment before the tournament: “In July, almost everything was going wrong with Zapatero, with the economy in such a poor state… but the national teams’ victory was like a breath of fresh air for Spain—finally something was going right.” In the middle of economic crisis, the World Cup victory encouraged the Spanish people, driving those who had a job to keep working hard and motivating the unemployed to continue searching for a job. “The national team became an inspiration for people,” agrees Paz, who watched the game from the stands next to teammate Antonio

“Meet José Antonio Díaz, perhaps better knownst to most soccer fans, the pro-

Antonio, along with twenty of his closest friends, plays for a team of “veterans” in Seville’s Club Náutico. On Sundays, they meet to eat, sleep, and participate in discussions and debates about the game. The concept of family is impossible to ignore in Seville—anyone who plays soccer in Seville is highly reminiscent of a long dinner table at a family gathering. And the group just keeps getting larger as they order more tapas: some of the players’ wives join them in the club, and at least someone seems to know every young boy that runs past in a soccer jersey. It is somewhat chaotic, but Antonio notes that the team also provides him with the comfort and tranquility of a family. He grabs the arm of Gina, the wife of team-mate Guillermo Pickman, and exclaims, “She’s the best thing that ever happened to my life.”

“Each week, there are many children at the games to watch their fathers play.”

“As the team eats together after their Sunday game, the concept of family is impossible to ignore each week. The large table covered with food and drinks is really reminiscent of a long dinner table at a family gathering. And the group just keeps getting larger as they order more tapas: some of the players’ wives join them in the club, and at least someone seems to know every young boy that runs past in a soccer jersey. It is somewhat chaotic, but Antonio notes that the team also provides him with the comfort and tranquility of a family. He grabs the arm of Gina, the wife of team-mate Guillermo Pickman, and exclaims, “She’s the best thing that ever happened to my life.”

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Many fans and players will never forget the day of June 25, 1977 at Vicente Calderón stadium in Madrid, when Real Betis Balompié, the underdog, surprised all of Spain by becoming the first team to win the Copa del Rey championship. “It was a very complicated game. They were much stronger and favored by most,” expresses Juan Antonio García Soriano, Betis right-winger in the final.

Oscar Ceballos, editor of más+menos and a big Betis fan, relays: “I must have seen their photograph posing on the pitch just before that match a million times. I think every betico knows the names of those players and the exact position of each one of them in that historic picture by heart. For some reason, I am the only player who smiles. He’s almost laughing, as if he didn’t take the match seriously or as if he was certain of their victory. The rest of them look so serious, like convicts in a round of recognition. Perhaps too worried to confess: “Since I couldn’t play in that game, I suffered a lot, especially when watching such a gut-wrenching series of penalty shots,” says Rafael Gordillo, star player of Real Madrid and the Spanish national team’s best left-winger of the world, he doesn’t actually hit you amid the excitement but they get together at one of their favorite restaurants to catch up and occasionally reminiscing amongst the excitement of that day with us. Manolo, Maruja, Joaquina and Enrique.

Athlete de Bilbao’s surprise, Betis played their hearts out during the game, which began to run plans for any celebration. “Their fans and team had already made merchandise saying they were the champions,” remembers Joaquina, who also recalls there being many more Bilbao supporters in Madrid. But she adds that, outside of the stadium, all of Spain was on Betis’ side. Driving into Madrid and waving the green, white, and green Bilbao flag, she remembers how taxi drivers would beep at them in support, and they were given free rounds of beer at the bar where they stopped for lunch.

The winner would be decided in one of the most thrilling penalty kick shoot-outs of all time, in which Eusko, the Betis goalkeeper, became a hero forever. The last Betis kick of the first round was from their best player, Cardeñosa, but he struck it to the right, just outside of the goal. Dani, the Bilbao specialist, was up for a possible kick from Julio Cardellosa, midfielder and main star of that Betis team. “Athletic’s main problem was coming into the game very confident of a win. The Basque supporters had bets amongst themselves on how many goals they were going to beat us by,” says Cobo. “Knowing their mindset pushed us to play harder.”

“Our team went looking for a great outcome against a very experienced rival,” says Gordillo. In overtime, there was a reflection of what had occurred during regular time as Bilbao took the lead again with a score from Dani. However, as things were coming to an end, López gained control of the ball and scored again for Betis, tying the game at 2-2.

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In 1935 Betis won the Spanish First Division National League, the last tournament played before the Civil War broke. The dictatorship did not suit the team well and it got relegated into third division in 1947 for almost a decade. Betis eventually returned to second division in 1954. After the 1977 Copa del Rey, Betis competed in the UEFA Cup Winners’ Cup surprisingly making it to the quarterfinals after eliminating the all-powerful AC Milan. That same year, the team is relegated to Second Division, again, after a pitiful campaign in the First Division. That’s the contradictory nature of a club that boasts the awkward honor of being the only one in Spain to have won the First, Second, and Third Division titles. Following that victory in 1977, Betis has sunk on a number of occasions to the second division: in 1978 for one year, in 1989 for another year, in 1991 for three years, in 2000 for one year and in 2009 till the present. However, the team has also enjoyed some memorable seasons since them. In 2005, Betis came back on top to beat Osasuna in the Copa del Rey in Vicente Calderón, the same place where they had succeeded to win 28 years before. In 2006, Betis became the first Andalusian team to play in the European Champions League. Now that is leading the Second Division, the béticos believe next year they will come back to the elite.

Gordillo recalls the key reasons for the 1977 success: “The companionship and the bond inside of the locker room. We were very close. As well as being teammates, we were good friends.”

Óscar Ceballos remembers watching the game at home with his parents and with his younger brother David. “We had a small black and white TV, and the reception was very poor. The match went on for so long that my brother fell asleep during overtime,” he says nostalgically. “Nothing will ever be as thrilling as those two and half hours of soccer. Betis had been out of the match so many times that night, that at the end, when Esnaola trapped Iribar’s final penalty shoot, I sensed that some sort of miracle had happened. Even to this day, I feel the same,” Ceballos remarks. “Betis’ second Cup victory of 2005, or Spain’s triumph of this year in the World Cup, aren’t comparable to that moment. I guess things are never the same once you grow up.”

Something about the Copa del Rey

The Copa del Rey, the King’s Cup, was created in 1903 to celebrate Alfonso XIII’s coronation. It has had several denominations, but it officially regained the name of Copa del Rey after Franco’s dictatorship ended in 1975. The Fútbol Club Barcelona has the most wins, 25 in total, followed by Athletic de Bilbao with 23, and Real Madrid with 17. Real Betis has won it twice, whereas its rival in the city, Sevilla FC, has won it five times, being the current champion.

At present, 83 teams compete: all First and Second Divisions ones, the best from Second Division B, and the champions of Third Division if they’re not the second or junior team of any of the previous clubs.