



Football: An Arena of Indignation

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Football is, it must be conceded, a global sensation. What undoubtedly began as an amusement between children has become a sport that holds so much weight and significance financially and culturally, that it even holds a principle share in the identity of many. In this identification with, or indeed projection *onto*, a particular club, the vicissitudes of mood and wellbeing of the individual and the club are intertwined.

For the sake of explanation, let us turn our focus to Newcastle United, where we see a vivid representation of this intertwining. Newcastle Upon-Tyne, a city deeply traumatised by the Thatcherite atrocities of the 1980s, has seen Premier League season after season finishing either with mid-table success, or relegation to a lower league (and immediate subsequent promotion). For a club as large as Newcastle United, regularly selling-out their circa 52,000 seater stadium, this makes little sense, but I reason that there is a complex psyche running through club, city and residents that plays a part in these results.

Due to the more recent political landscape of the 1980s - and clearly stretching into the annals of time before that - we see there is a huge population of disenfranchised individuals in the North-East corner believing themselves (and rightly so) to be unfairly treated. This unfair treatment has awakened in the Geordie conscience a sensitivity that is noticed in the calming lilt of the Geordie accent, but the sensitivity to this deep pain is at times, too hard to bear. 'That's not fair,' is often expressed in Newcastle as, "Haway man!", as you might have heard. It appeals not to the surprise, but to the clear and obvious truth of the suffering epigenetically and culturally inherited. The outburst appeals to the common good, and says, in a mere two words: "I am certain you know better than to disadvantage others, you yourself have experienced disadvantage. Don't become like the oppressors, we have to stick together in justice and common good." We see that played out politically as the North East voting (for the vast majority of elections), more socialist.

There was, however, no choice *but* to bear the injustice as the calculated inequity of the Conservative Party policies swept through the North with threat, and indeed use, of violence against protest. And so, a deep resentment for even the slightest odour of injustice and a simultaneous yearning for the ambrosia of success in spite of it, play off one another so that the very yearning for success, whatever success *is* permitted, flowers from the seed of being intentionally disadvantaged.

Though to find light from darkness sounds like a poetic triumph, the reality is that the mind lets go of causes as willingly as it releases what it deems to be success. Each flower of success grows and then sows the seed of injustice. If one were to take away the marginalisation rooted in the psyche, the success pictured is no longer coherent. Without the seed, how can the flower grow? If we look closer, the success wished for is more accurately 'to overcome,' and overcome an oppressor at that. The definition of joyous success therefore, demands a simultaneous heartbreak at failing to succeed due to the external influence of others more powerful than themselves. It is an eternally elusive fantasy crafted to give hope in troubled times, but ultimately forbids ascendancy.

If this old worldview is not released, the fertile soil of mind will persistently cycle injustice through the culture and its endeavours. The long-laboured-over flower, crafted from the traumatised innocence of early Northumberland awakening, must be recognised for what it is and subsequently, with sincere and serene gratitude and reverence for its contributions, be plucked from the soil and put to rest in the compost heap. Success must be re-imagined, and the bloom of the flower from the seed of equality, confidence, self-assurance, and transcendence from the need for external validation is more beautiful than any germinating from the seed of what has now become self-flagellation.

Clubs that truly succeed, and succeed consistently, clubs such as Manchester City and Real Madrid, do not play as if they are trying to win so as to prove anything, and so there is no one to judge or arrest their efforts and success but themselves. When you watch City or Madrid play football, they play infused with self-assurance. They aren't *trying to become* the best team, they *are* the best team, and they will not hesitate to demonstrate to anyone the evidence of that foregone conclusion. Deeper, when looking at the individual components of the

team-unit that we identify as 'players,' the most effective and valuable players are those who are not caught up in trying to prove to the crowd, to the referee, to other teammates and opponents, to the world watching them, that they are the victims of injustice. They are fouled, and continue. They upright themselves and without a complaint, a moan or even so much as a glance at the referee, they move into a better attacking position to take advantage of the opponent's inability to conquer their skill, resolve and mastery of the sport. In contrast, there is scarcely a more pitiful sight than a player pirouetting on the spot and proceeding to roll on the turf in pantomimic torment after a mere glance against a defender's electromagnetic aura, solely to be 'awarded' a 'foul'. That is, the prize of being certified by an authority that you were indeed, victimised and hard-done-by. This, I contest, is the success of the loser, in its most literal sense. It is the success that takes, as its crowning glory, the performance of suffering and the ever-failing attempt to overcome it. The archetype of the eternal underdog.

Of course, when fouled and met with genuine injury, both players will be sore, but the flailing limbs and pretence of agony present in a facade is easily distinguishable for any onlooker from actual pain. Genuine injuries offer little doubt for the spectator or clubs involved. The splash made by a spurious and offensively suspicious dive in the closing minutes of a match inside the opponent's penalty box soaks the sport in a wave of shrinking, squirming embarrassment.

So we can see that in a competitive team sport, any and all sense of indignation and self-righteousness must be stamped out at source. The morale, that is, the psychological narrative, as we see in the case of Newcastle United, has the deepest impact on performance. The true wealth of team sport is not accumulation of individual geniuses - though that helps - it is instead the transmutation of individuals - genius or otherwise - into a thriving, self-assured, autonomous, synergistic unity we call 'a team'.

In expansion, the team is not itself a victim, it is simply a system of organisation. Each team meets others and as a result, the overall system of organisation that we call 'the sport of football', transforms in order to achieve the ultimate end of getting the ball between the posts of the opponent's goal. The methods by which this is accomplished are called tactics, stemming from the Greek meaning

‘ordered or arranged’, in other words, ‘organised’. The team, therefore, is found in the organisation of itself.

Without organisation there is no team, merely individuals scampering around on roughly two acres of heated grass looking to make themselves appear better than the team they purportedly play *as*. The importance of this lies in the obvious reassertion that Individuals cannot be victorious in a team sport. They are inescapably outnumbered. Individuals find themselves playing against an ethereal adversary that exists in no particular individual and in every individual. The captain of the team represents the pinnacle of what is possible when it comes to embodying the organisational ethos in any given player, but still, the best captains are seen, time and time again, setting the example of calm and self-assurance: stick to the tactic.

The individual fragments the team and is usually found publicly lamenting, often demonstrated with excessive and eccentric arm-waving aimed at no one and everyone, how unfair the on-field authority is treating them. This appears to stem from a tight orbit of self-assurance centred on being the best *player*, not on an indivisible part of the best *team*. These players are therefore equally likely to be the most intense celebrators of their own goals with the spotlight on how excellent they, as individuals, are. If a pass of theirs goes awry, or a shot they take goes wide, the fault almost unilaterally lies in the feet of a team-mate, not their own. Endlessly forgiving for any errors they cannot avoid accepting responsibility for, and admonishing of any tiny error of others. Head-shakes, complaints to the heavens, grand gestures of disapproval, none of which serve the team but merely the ego of the individual ‘genius’.

Indignation is the point of schismogenesis that fractures teams, and results in poor performance. If we bring Newcastle United back into the picture, we can see the indignation fostered in the culture from the political disasters of the 80s is released and interacted with on a large scale (again, 52,000 seater stadium) typically twice a month, or more frequently if away games are included. This seems to be one way in which the city of Newcastle is processing its collective trauma. The zealous chanting, the loyalty of the fans and the staggering passion and support at St. James’ Park so palpable you could almost bottle it, are not diminished in any way by this suggestion. The fact is, what is being rallied around

is the exquisite functioning of a team, the exquisite functioning of unity. St. James' Park, "The Cathedral on The Hill", is a place to gather for Geordies to vehemently support and take part in crafting through voice, song and cheer, the antidote to their centuries-long subjugation: a collective capable of self-sufficiency, autonomy, and most importantly, thriving and joyous unadulterated and pristine success, on their own terms and for no one else but themselves.

I say that this is the reason for the proliferation of the global phenomenon, the international spectacle that is football, fútbol, futsal, futebol, Fußball, calcio, soccer, 'the beautiful game'. Humans can, very easily it seems, enjoy and support an active engagement in the 90-minute experiment of dissolving the importance of individuality and acting as a single unified whole to see just how beautiful, just how glorious it can be to watch. Real Madrid's stance that no individual is bigger than the club is an acknowledgement of this. The indignation of a player will not bully the club into submission, but will simply hasten the exit of that player. They have no time for it. Although paradoxically, by this method, Real Madrid consistently seem to create superstars. All it takes to explain this is to watch almost any interview with Jude Bellingham since he joined Madrid as he perfectly embodies the attitude I have just explained. For example, when asked in a post-match interview how he's able to make so many good decisions, replied, "[It's] just my team-mates really." [1] When asked about his 15 goal tally he replied, "Yeh it's not bad but it's important that I keep going and help the team win trophies..." [2]

The team wins the trophy, no individual wins the trophy. The indignation is a resignation of the *esprit de corps* that is the only way to success. No doubt, the public performance of the resentment towards injustice wins the outrage of the crowd in a moment, but ultimately at the cost of the spirit of the game and long-term success of the club as a whole. Any strong protests and resentment a player displays tells tales of it lurking within their individual psyche and speaks to their emotional immaturity pulling at the sleeve of the club as it reaches for glory.

On the other hand, the young player may have simply picked up the habit from watching others, raised with the aid of the village of international football. If trophies and success is the goal of the club, these behaviours must be stamped out with all the urgency of an ember in a dry forest. If one member drops out of

the team by playing only for themselves, they weaken both themselves and the team. The team immediately becomes one man short and as a result, the feeling of disadvantage and indignance spreads like a disease through the lifeblood of the team, dismantling it from within.

Emotional intelligence and self-actualisation is therefore, I'm sure, the key to transforming divers, whiners, moaners and fakers into strong, autonomous, masterful, team-focused, unreactive but fully present and truly *professional* footballers. This will create a monstrously powerful team and club and in turn, a strong and unrelenting source of inspiration for the fans and in turn for the fan's home town or city.

But it is a two-way street. Each fan, each supporter of unity, must do their utmost to dissolve that indignation within themselves and avoid blame, disinterest, pedestalization or vilification in their active support and arguably, their daily life too. Doing so has more lasting benefits for each individual than silverware in the trophy cabinet of their favourite club. The feedback loop of fans and club is short and has great potential for greatness or disaster. In reality, fans and club are in fact one organism it is incumbent upon all involved to find an appreciation and an understanding of the game and of themselves that is holistic, recognising the impact they have on the nature of the seed out of which success will spring. To eschew the enslavement of their mood, their sense of pleasure, wellbeing or self-worth to the master of a goal tally is simultaneously the grounded sense of self necessary to help swing that same goal tally in their favour.

When individual success is neglected in favour of team success, both are inevitable. But, if team success is secondary to individual greatness, neither dare show their face.

References

- [1] https://www.youtube.com/shorts/_Urch8b_Fhk
- [2] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcfnAYhKGHg>