

Football, European Integration, National Identity: The Case of FC Barcelona*

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Abstract

This paper, drafted in a rather essayistic format and laced with a heavy dose of opinion, reflects on the impact of the Bosman case and its consequences on the evolution of football in Spain in general and in particular on the sports performance of F.C. Barcelona in the second part of the 90s. The main thesis consists of a critical view of how the roster was transformed from a "dream-team" mixture of some of the best players in Catalonia and Spain with some world star figures into a denaturalized conglomerate around an axis composed of no less than eight Dutch players imported by coach Louis Van Gaal. The club leadership placed its bets on this transformation as guarantee of success for surpassing the golden era led by coach Johan Cruiff. European titles and victories against Real Madrid, the ultimate objectives, never came. Simultaneously national and local identity suffered, leaving a negative sports balance and serious economic losses. The Bosman revolution as applied in Barcelona, consequently, has to be considered as a negative experience that will take a considerable effort to be corrected.

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Introduction

This is a special paper that does not claim to reflect a standard scholarship. It is inspired by opinion, not by objectivity. It is based on the conviction that in an ever-changing world, certain fundamentals remain. In the modern or post-modern world, you can trade cars, transfer to another school, or move to another house, state, country or province. People may switch religions and faiths. Political parties and ideologies can be exchanged. You can split with your spouse of many years. You can adopt the children of other parents and disenfranchise your own. But you will never dare to change the soccer team of your preference. You are supposed to be faithful to same one from the cradle to the grave. Football teams, especially in this globalization era, are the ultimate sign of personal, regional and national identity. Today, this dogma is in danger.

Scholars remind EU observers that the European Court could, in theory, be composed of fifteen Russian judges, simply because the legislation does not mention any citizenship requirements.¹ They also boast that there is no legal limitation for members of the Parliament to be elected in countries different than their national origin.² With federal enthusiasm they point out that the next mayor of Málaga could be German. In fact, the mayor of Palma de Majorca could be born in Hamburg due to the rate of German investment and the amount of German residents in the island.

However, these are either dreams of European integration or they are simply limited exceptions to the general rule – Europe is still basically bounded by state borders. In contrast, reality in football is becoming dramatically integrated. In theory, an Italian Serie A game could be played by eleven French and eleven Germans, with the entire French and German World Cup teams forming the opposing teams. In fact a Spanish team once played with eight Dutch players. This is the result of the Bosman Revolution,³

¹ John McCormick, The European Union, Boulder, CO, Westview, 1999, p. 161.

² McCormick, *ibid.* p. 145.

³ For the text of the ruling: European Court of Justice, December 15, 1995, and Carl Otto Lenz, "Conclusions de l'Avocat Général M. Carl Otto Lenz - Affaire C- 415/93", Tribunal de Justicia de las Comunidades Europeas. 20 septiembre 1995. Among the juridical commentaries, see the one authored by Jean-Louis Dupont, attorney for Jean Marie Bosman: "Deporte profesional y ordenamiento jurídico comunitario después del caso Bosman", Revista de Instituciones Europeas, vol. 23-2, 1996, pp. 487-504. Among the early juridical analysis, see Andrew L. Lee, "Comment: The Bosman case: protection freedom of movement in European football." Fordham International Law Journal, February 1996, 19, 1255. In the context of the Spanish legal profession, for a review of the juridical consequences, see the studies of Juan de Dios Crespo Pérez, "El caso Bosman: sus consecuencias", Revista General de Derecho, 622-623, 1996; "Análisis de los últimos conflictos jurídicos en la era 'post-Bosman' del fútbol profesional", Revista General de Derecho, 642, marzo 1998; and "Secuelas jurídicas del caso Bosman", Revista de la Liga de Fútbol Profesional, nº 13, 1997. A selection of other studies by Spanish scholars include: Berta Moreras Martín, "Sentencia Bosman. Perspectiva de aplicación y alcance." Revista Técnico-Laboral. Consejo General de Colegios Oficiales de Graduados Sociales. 1997, Vol. XIX, No. 72; Remedios Roqueta Buj, El trabajo de los deportistas profesionales, Valencia: Editorial Tirant lo Blanch, 1996; A. Bañegil Espinosa, "La aplicación del Derecho Comunitario europeo al deporte después de la sentencia del TJCE sobre el caso Bosman" Actualidad Jurídica Aranzadi, nº 228, 1996; José Bermejo Vera, "Comentario de urgencia a la decisión del Tribunal Europeo adoptada en el 'Asunto Bosman' ". Revista Española de Derecho Deportivo, nº 5 - Editorial Civitas. Junio 1995; R. Blanpain, R. y M. Candela Soriano, El caso Bosman: ¿El fin de la era de los traspasos, Madrid: Civitas, 1997.

a decision of the European Court of Justice that equated all EU citizens in the playing field regardless of the country or the club to which they belong. As a consequence, the pressure to obtain EU citizenship is such that forgery and corruption have erupted in wild forms. The globalization experienced by the sport and its business environment is so intense that in the future referees may have to check notarized passports instead of the soles of substitute players. European football after the Bosman case has changed,⁴ possibly too much for some. In fact, if the trend initiated by the Italian courts holds, all citizens of the world may be free to play for any EU team.

As a pedagogic rule, I try to persuade students to avoid personal and narcissistic references in the drafting of their papers. “Leave that for your memoirs”, is my typical suggestion. Some simply can’t wait until they are already famous and can have an impact on historical developments. I can’t wait either. So, I’m going to violate my own code and offer some justifications for my personal insertion into the history of football, European integration, and Spanish (and Catalan) national identity.

This urge to reveal how useful personal references are in this dubious scholarly venture was recently prompted by one apparent minor change in the line up of one of most important teams in Spain and Europe, if not in all the galaxy –Football Club Barcelona, also known as Barça. Somewhere in the middle of the season the team seemed to be without goalkeepers. Since the time that Andoni Zubizarreta was traded to Valencia barely six years ago, the goal has been guarded by six goalies of different origins: three Catalans, one Dutch, one French, and one Portuguese. When French Dutruel and Catalan Arnau got injured almost simultaneously, the alarms sounded in the club headquarters. The coach had to call in the keeper of the second team, now in the second level of the Second Division (in fact, the Third Division), who was barely 18 years of age. Rumors had it that there was a rush to sign up a world-class figure. Meanwhile, José Manuel Reina, the son of a former goalkeeper of Barça, filled the post. Fans were skeptic and feared that the end of the dream would resemble the outcome of a famous television program, “Reina por un dia” [Queen for a Day]. But coach Serra Ferrer gave him the confidence for some months until himself was fired for lack of good results. Now, here it is the first personal reference.

A touch of history

On Christmas morning of 1933, during a traditional and friendly match that Barcelona used to typically play against a foreign team, also while the President of the Generalitat de Catalunya was about to be buried, the second goalkeeper of Barça (the first was injured) got beat up by the Austrian Donau. It was then that a barely 20-year-old young goalie of the third team was up to bat. According to press reports, he performed correctly and survived⁵. He was my father.

The difference between the events of 2001 and 1933 is that Reina was honored in his petition for a chance. My father, once the other two goalkeepers recovered, went back to obscurity. The other difference, of course, is that Reina, back in the bench after

⁴ Jay Branegan, “The Man Who Changed the Rules”, *Time*, March 17, 1997, vol. 149 no. 11.

⁵ FC Barcelona. Acta del partit. 25 desembre 1993. Club files.

Dutrue! was reinstated, is already paid as a professional, whereas my grandmother had to wash my father's uniform. Yet there are many similarities between those times and the post-Bosman era. Barça has been pretty consistent since its birth.

The era when my father was training in the club was dominated by one of the best goalkeepers in the history of Barça. He was a Hungarian named Franz (Francisco) Platko. In fact he was so impressive that he was the subject of a poem written by one of the most important Spanish poets of the century, a member of the Generation of 27, Rafael Alberti: "Oda a Platko". "Tall blond bear from Hungary," was what he called the goalie⁶. The Basque poet Gabriel Celaya also dedicated a lyrical comment about the Hungarian goalkeeper, stressing that he was not the cause for the defeat of Athletic Bilbao, but that many penalties not called by a "blind referee" were.⁷ Other famous poets have also succumbed to the fascination for goalkeepers, such as Spain's Miguel Hernández (who died in a Franco's prison),⁸ and Henry de Montherland.⁹ Soccer has been a frequent subject for writers of the Spanish-speaking world,¹⁰ and it has become a serious issue for historical,¹¹ political,¹² economic,¹³ sociological¹⁴ and even religious analysis,¹⁵ including

⁶ "Oda a Platko." Julián García Candau. *Epica y lírica del fútbol* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1996), pp.141-143.

⁷ "Contraoda del poeta de la Real Sociedad." García Candau, *ibid*, p. 141.

⁸ "Elegía al guardameta." García Candau. *ibid*. pp. 145-146.

⁹ "Les émotions du 'solitaire' ". *ibid*. p. 139.

¹⁰ See, for example, the anthology of short stories composed by Argentine Real Madrid former player Jorge Valdano, *Cuentos de fútbol*. Madrid: Alfaguara. 1995. See also: Javier Marias, *Salvajes y sentimentales: letras de fútbol*, Madrid: Aguilar, 2000. Uruguay's Eduardo Galeano is a frequent author of soccer-oriented commentaries. See his book-compilation entitled *El fútbol a sol y sombra*, Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1995, translated into English as *Soccer in sun and shadow*. London: Verso, 1998.

¹¹ William J. Murray, *The world's game: a history of soccer*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996.

¹² Pascal Boniface, *Géopolitique du Football*, Paris: Edicions Complexe, 1998; Stephen Wagg (ed.), *Giving the game away: football, politics, and culture on five continents*, London: Leicester University Press, 1995.

¹³ Jorge Martínez. "Fútbol y desarrollo económico en América Latina", *Diario las Américas*, April 1, 2001.

¹⁴ Juan José Sebreli, *La era del fútbol*, Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1998; Richard Giulianotti, *Football: a sociology of the global game*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1999; Jon Garland, Dominic Malcolm and Michael Rowe (eds.), *The future of football: challenges for the twenty-first century*, Portland, OR: F. Cass, 2000; Joseph L. Arbena (ed.), *Sport and society in Latin America: diffusion, dependency, and the rise of mass culture*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1988.

¹⁵ Ana Laura Pérez. "El fútbol es el único y verdadero idioma universal", *Clarín digital*, August 27, 2000.

nationalism¹⁶ and integration research as this session of ECSA demonstrates, considering the hard-line position taken by the EU.¹⁷

However, while the norm has been to have Spanish goalies (the three best have been Zamora, Ramallets and Zubizarreta), the rest of the team has been populated by numerous foreigners since a century ago, when the club was founded by residents of Barcelona that were mostly foreign. Its first president was English Walter Wild and its vice president was also an Englishman - D.J. Parsons. Its captain was a Swiss named Hans Gamper, dutifully rebaptized in democratic times as Joan. English and Swiss players, who barely spoke Spanish and only few words in Catalan, dominated the first game.

This foreign origin of FC Barcelona is not a rarity in the history of the game. As in other countries in Europe and Latin America, British merchants, sailors and residents founded most of the old Spanish clubs. Spain's sports geography is laced by names such as Sporting, Racing and Athletic, as it happened in other countries from Italy to Argentina. Experts constantly have to correct unguarded aficionados from incorrectly pronouncing the name of a team from, the Italian city of Milano, as Milán in Spanish. It is Milan (not Milano), as that is the name in English, because as such was founded by British. The same logic applies to the strange syntax expressed by the official name of the Barça team –as Fútbol Club Barcelona, derived from a translation of Football Club Barcelona. Only in the Franco era was it academically corrected to read Club de Fútbol Barcelona. Since the end of franquismo it is back as it “should” be.

The English origin of many clubs in Spain is also reflected by the fact that the coach is called “el mister”. It is sort of surrealistic when French or Dutch players are interviewed on TV and comment on the possible lineup by saying that “el mister will decide”. He may be Majorcan, Andalusian, or Argentinean, but he is “el mister”. This comes from the times when the coach was, of course, a mister. He was English. They were the only ones who knew the game. Their vision was dogma, their orders were the code, and their charisma was unquestionable.

FC Barcelona, since the times when the Wilds, Parsons, Wittys and Gampers played, has been led by a disproportionate number of foreigners. In fact, the best eras have been dominated by towering foreign personalities. Hungarian Ladislav Kubala, made the old Les Corts field seem small after Barça won all the available tournaments in the early 50s when coached by the Check Dauzick, Kubala's brother in law. The years of Argentinean-born Helenio Herrera as coach were presided by the role filled by Hungarians Sandor Kocsis and Zoltan Czibor, Brazilian Evaristo de Macedo, and Paraguayan Eulogio Martínez. Then came the first of the Cruiff eras, who was first a player in the 70s. During the brief stint of British coach Terry Venables, German Bernd Schuster was the playing figure. After the failed stay of Diego Armando Maradona, Barça exploded with Cruiff's comeback as coach in the 90s.

¹⁶ Antonio Jorge G. Soares. *Futebol, malandragem e identidade*. Vitoria: Secretaria de Produção e Difusão Cultural, 1994; Alan Barnier. *Sport, Nationalism, and Globalization*, Buffalo, NY: SUNY, 2001.

¹⁷ “The European Union and Sport: Current situation and outlook”, April 19, 2001, <http://europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/lvb/135001.htm>

Nasty games between Madrid and Barça in the 60s seemed at times battles fought by Brazilians, Argentines, Hungarians, Uruguayans, Paraguayans, and a few Spaniards. That was the time when the borders of soccer were wide opened and the change of citizenship was the norm. The national team of Spain had inserted Di Stefano, Puskas, Kubala, Martínez, and other nationalized foreign players. After the impressive performance in the Brazil '50 Cup, the first world tournament of the post-World War II era, for a quarter of a century the Spanish national team scored poorly. Absent in several finals ('54, '58, '70 and '74), the Spaniards were eliminated in the first round in '62 and '66. Spain's only honor was the championship of the predecessor of the European Cup, played in Madrid and Barcelona in '64, coinciding with the 25th anniversary of the Franco regime. Spain defeated the Soviet Union, a symbolically significant triumph. Although there was a modest opening towards the East in the 60s, Spanish passports still banned Spanish citizens from traveling to "Russia and satellite countries." A few years back, the Spanish national team withdrew from the European Cup competition when it had to travel to Moscow in the elimination rounds. Spain boycotted the '56 Melbourne Olympics because the Soviet crushing of the Hungarian uprising. In any event, at the end of the 60's, Spain's soccer authorities resorted to nationalist measures by tightening the importation rules. Then, the picaresque counter-attacked.

One morning in the late 70s, a bored journalist was waiting to get a court report for one of his articles about a legal procedure. With nothing to do but wait on a dusty bench, he began to read the entire official notices on the bulletin board of a municipal court in Barcelona. He glimpsed an official notice of a marriage to take place, as prescribed by law, so people could have a chance to voice their complaints if necessary. A tagged official paper announced the impending marriage of an Argentinean citizen to a Spanish woman. The journalist read it carefully and got a scoop. Famous 1978 World Cup winner, defender Tarantini was getting married to a Spanish young lady so he would qualify for Spanish citizenship and thus be able to play for FC Barcelona. The discovery soon revealed that his bride-to-be was a secretary of the lawyer of a rising star in the business and art as an agent of soccer players. Scandal hit the press. The signing of Tarantini was derailed and I really don't know if he got married. However, the flood gates of using loopholes were open as a prediction of the future.

When the ban on foreign players was imposed, Spanish soccer authorities were inflicted by a fever of old-fashioned imperial nostalgia for the Americas. They used the generous immigration and citizenship laws based on the custom of the "us sanguinis" to award Spanish passports to the children or grandchildren of current or former Spanish citizens. They were called "oriundos". Families in Montevideo or Asunción suddenly rediscovered the papers of a grandfather who had migrated to the Americas from a harbor in Galicia. One Argentinean player was so candidly ignorant about Spain's cities that when he arrived at the Madrid airport, he said that he was very happy to be able to live and play in the city of his ancestors --Celta. The citizens of the town of Vigo (where club Celta de Vigo belongs) are still laughing.

The Bosman revolution in Spain

After the implementation of the Bosman ruling, confusion reigned supreme with the counting of how many (legally-documented) foreign players were allowed on the

field. Coaches had to carry two different kinds of tactical book notes. One was for the line up, and another was for matching the legalities of the substitutions. The result was that in an important game Jorge Valdano, who then was the coach of Real Madrid, sent an extra non-EU player to the field and had to retract fast. His punishment was being banished to the stands for several games and nothing else. His mistake was justified. Players are just players. There was talk that assistant referees would have to check not only the soles and the passports of the players, but also the certificates of authenticity extended by two states, FIFA and UEFA.

The love affair between Spanish teams and foreign players and the international success of the best clubs has resulted in Real Madrid being voted as “the team of the century”, the frequent award of the “golden ball” prize to star players in Spanish teams, and the impressive placing of Spanish clubs in the last stages of the Champions League and the UEFA Cup. But the Spanish national team, in spite of the fact that it has managed to qualify for all finals since 1974 and is usually ranked among the best 6-10 teams in the world, has never managed to do better in World Cup than reaching the quarterfinals. The “Liga de las Estrellas” is a foreign scenario, where a minority of Spanish players excels.

For a couple of years after the Bosman decision, it seemed that Spain was leading the resistance of full implementation of the ruling. Spanish authorities (siding with French, Italian and English federations) wanted to offer a counterproposal of a maximum of five players that would not qualify for the national team.¹⁸ But nothing else better dramatizes the globalizing of the Spanish league more than the fact that in a game between Real Madrid and Atlético, only three players were born in the Spanish capital, while eleven were foreign. The soccer labor market contrasts with any other sector of the economy –nowhere else in Spain more than 40% of the workers are foreigners by origin.¹⁹

Apparently, the Bosman ruling created another division in the European continent. By priming EU citizenship, paraphrasing Winston Churchill, it seemed that a sort of new iron curtain, from the Arctic to the Adriatic, had descended upon the European continent. Integration fever from the East, detecting discrimination, came to the rescue in the form of legal procedures made by players from Central and Eastern European countries and even Russia and Turkey. Backed by the labor agreement with the EU equalizing working rights with the status enjoyed by EU citizens, basketball player Belarus Malaja and soccer player Valery Karpin, among others, went to Spanish courts demanding equal rights.²⁰ Another taboo had been shattered –the ban of sports professionals going to court. The expected consequence is that a Basque basketball team, Vitoria’s club Tau, has only two Spanish players.²¹ The Spanish Association of Soccer

¹⁸ “Carlos Scgovia/Jesús Alcalde. “Ofensiva de cinco países”, El País, 28 abril 1998.

¹⁹ J. Alcaide/ C. Izquierdo. “No estamos contra las cláusulas. sino contra el abuso,” El Mundo, 5 enero 1999.

²⁰ Javier Olave. “La ‘revolución’ Malaja se abre paso en Eurpopa”, El Mundo, 11 noviembre 2000.

²¹ E. O. de Arri. “Sergi Vidal y Dani García. los únicos españoles del equipo victoriano,” El País, 5 febrero 2001.

Players got alarmed over the Karpin's revolution and demanded that the Spanish parliament act.²²

While the rest of the Europeans were considered EU citizens, players on the other side of the Atlantic searched for EU passports through a variety of means. The result is that today as much as 64% of Spain's league players with EU passports have not been born in Europe.²³ As many as 21 of them playing in Spain are armed with Italian passports, due to the fact that the generous nationality policy of Italy only demands some proof of ancestry, including great grandparents. In Italy, ten players not born in Europe are playing with Spanish passports. South Americans only need two years of residency in Spain to opt for Spanish citizenship. While Barça only has Rivaldo as a non-EU citizen, Vigo's Celta has eight and Coruna's Deportivo has nine. Depor has played many games without a single Galician. The exception continues to be Athletic Bilbao, the only club that refuses to sign any player who is not Basque by birth, training or ancestry. Real Sociedad de San Sebastián discontinued a similar policy some years ago, but it does not incorporate "Spanish" (from other parts of Spain) players, and instead the club has been systematically hiring a handful of foreigners from all backgrounds. In contrast with the importation of foreign players in Spain, Spanish footballers are a rarity in other European leagues, a pattern that replicates the exceptions of Suárez, Peiró and Del Sol who played in Italy in the 60s. Among the factors responsible for this lack of exposure is the better pay offered by Spanish clubs, the cultural resistance posed by Spaniards to mobility, and the perception that their quality does not fit the profile of Italian or English leagues. While a majority of coaches of the First Division in recent years were foreign, a sort of nationalistic reaction has taken place and in the 2000-2001 season five out six of the best teams are led by Spaniards.

The deluge of new foreign-born Spanish citizens landing in Spanish teams with flashy passports has led to the discovery of outright forgery, some of it of the picaresque type and some due to possible criminal activity and corruption of public and diplomatic officials. The most recent and spectacular example has been the discovery of the possible forgery of the new Spanish passport presented by Barcelona's RCD Espanyol player Delio Toledo.²⁴ It happened to be signed by a Spanish consular official that, at the date the document was signed, was on vacation far away in Asunción, Paraguay. When Espanyol tried to register Toledo as non-EU player, claiming that the alleged forgery of the dubious Spanish citizenship papers was unknown to the club, the request was refused by the Spanish federation. Other similar cases were reviewed and the players were reinstated after checking the authenticity of their papers. Toledo was banned from playing in Spain for the remaining of the season and sent back to Paraguay on a loan to his former club. He probably will be back in Barcelona next year as a non-EU citizen with no questions asked. "Don't blame me for trying," seems to be the agenda. As in England and other countries, now the federation is demanding to study all passports and added documents. In France as many as 28 players and 11 clubs are under investigation

²² Planetfútbol, 30 noviembre 2000.

²³ Cayetano Ros. "El 64% de los comunitarios de la Liga española no ha nacido en Europa," El País, 24 enero 2001.

²⁴ Sergio Heredia. "Toledo se despide del Espanyol". La Vanguardia, 4 abril 2001.

for fraud. In Spain, two "Italian" players are under scrutiny. In Italy famous Argentine star Juan Domingo Verón and Lazio's president Cragnotti ended up as defendants in court procedures over faked documents.²⁵ Portugal has been detected as a source for allegedly forged passports.²⁶

It is not surprising that in the mist of this controversial atmosphere the Italian Federal Court, the top soccer body, led what appears to be the trend of the future that will revolutionize the world of football a little bit further. Under the pressure of legal studies and suits, the court declared as illegal all limitations for the use of non-UE players in the Italian leagues.²⁷ The distant origin of this decision is the so-called Ekon case, for the Nigerian player who was not permitted to play for the Third Division Reggiana. Legal studies have pointed for years that the tap imposed on the number of foreign players is unconstitutional and discriminatory because it violates equality under the law regarding national origin. Once a worker has been admitted legally into a country, the law has to apply to all the same. Claimants have drawn the parallel with a company that will allow some workers to have holidays on certain days, while others will have to renounce to vacations based on national origin.²⁸ As a consequence of the Italian ruling, while in France pressure mounted to raise the number of foreign players from three to five,²⁹ in Spain soccer authorities responded that a change was not possible until 2005 due to agreements between the league and the players association.³⁰

Meanwhile, another serious consequence of the Bosman case was assuaged by an agreement reached between the FIFA and the UEFA, the associations of players and the European Commission. The issue of transfer was resolved through a complicated, multi-tiered system that seeks to avoid the collapse of modest teams while complying with the European Union's basic demands regarding the free movement of people.³¹ Basically, the new system contemplates the duration of contracts (the minimum being one year and the maximum five years), a transfer season once a year, a protection mechanism for modest clubs, compensation for training, and an arbitration body. For players under 28, a minimum commitment was set at three years, with a suspension of up to six months if the

²⁵ Daniel Martínez. "Verón y Cragnotti irán a juicio," El País, 8 mayo 2001.

²⁶ Javier García. "Portugal, 'epicentro' del fraude," El País, 30 marzo 2001.

²⁷ Daniel Martínez. "El fútbol italiano suprime con efecto inmediato el cupo de extranjeros por club," El País, 5 mayo 2001.

²⁸ Vidal Morales Madrigal. "Pateras de oro," El País, 6 mayo 2001.

²⁹ EFE. "Francia quiere aumentar el cupo," El País, 8 mayo 2001.

³⁰ J.J. Paradinas. "Inviabile en España hasta 2005," El País, 5 mayo 2001.

³¹ "EU Comission threatens to take UEFA to court over Bosman Case", January 17, 1995, <http://www.nando.net/newsroom/ap/oth/1995/oth/soc/feat/archive/011796/soc54913.html>
 "Taylor wins players a voice in post-Bosman shake-up", February 23, 1996, <http://www2.nando.net/newsroom.sports/oth/1996/oth/soc/feat/archive/022396/soc43606.html>
 "Bosman ruling will not damage small clubs, lawyer says", November 28, 1995, <http://www.nando.net/newsroom/sports/oth/1995/oth/soc/feat/archive/112895/soc23682.html>

contract is broken. Players over 28 have to comply with contracts of a minimum duration of two years.³²

Based on the Italian precedent, in the near future all limitations will be terminated. On top of the full implementation of the Bosman case, the equalizing of the non-EU players with the citizenship of countries with a special labor agreement with the EU, the pressure to obtain EU citizenship, either by fast residency or the discovery of European ancestry, will be too much. With the expectation of wider opportunities for contracts,³³ threats of discrimination suits will be hovering over the UEFA landscape. Pressure to shorten the residency requirements in any EU country in order to enjoy full mobility will result in a token limitation. In a few years any player of any origin will be able to play in Europe.

The flying Dutchmen and Catalan national identity

The excessive implementation of the Bosman decision has hit Barcelona in its center of gravity. Four seasons ago when Dutch Louis Van Gaal was named coach under the aura of his success at leading Ajax, he was given a free hand by Barça president Josep Luis Núñez, who wanted to bury the memories of his nemesis Joan Cruiff at all costs. Van Gaal came with two Dutch assistant coaches and a couple of signed players (an obscure goalkeeper, Ruud Hesp, and a rather unknown midfielder named Phillip Cocu, the player that is ironically considered the most regular in performance). Then, one by one, like an oil spill that expanded with no obstacles, over half of the Dutch national team arrived in Barcelona, including Kluibert, Zenden, Reizeger, and even Bogarde. In a tour de force, the De Boer brothers (Frank and Ronald) pressured their club and joined what is was dubbed Ajax "B". Former Barcelona player, the charismatic Ronald Koeman, creator of the goal that gave Barça the European trophy in '92, was also hired as another assistant coach in charge of player development for the second team. Fans and neutral observers rubbed their eyes facing what appeared to be a transplant of the Dutch soccer school in Barcelona. For some strange reason, Núñez thought that it was possible to recreate the mystique of Cruiff but without Cruiff, as a player and as a coach, in a clockwork orange experiment, masterminded by a new Dr. Frankenstein –Van Gaal. The Dutch revival behaved more like a rusty German machine, where artists like Rivaldo were given a script to be followed with little space for creativity. Catalan players felt out of place.

³² CNN, "Done deal," March 5, 2001. For a sample of reports following the evolution of this arrangement: Andrew Ward, "Manchester United moves to calm transfer fears," *Financial Times*, October 3, 2000; Christopher Adams, "Fee axe 'could ruin clubs' ", *Financial Times*, October 30, 2000; Patrick Harverson, "Football transfer proposals ready," *Financial Times*, October 31, 2000; Rosemary Bennett, "European leaders to back football transfers," *Financial Times*, November 14, 2000; Mathew Garrahan, "Soccer body heading for clash," *Financial Times*, January 12, 2001; Alberto Sanjuán, "Blatter: 'en 2004 se podrá corregir la decisión,'" *El País*, 15 enero 2001; "Los futbolistas, contra el pacto," *El País*, 16 febrero 2001; Gabriela Cañas, "La CE admite sanción," *El País*, 17 febrero 2001; Sandro Pozzi, "Bruselas sancionará en función de su edad," *El País*, 28 febrero 2001; Sandro Pozzi, "El nuevo régimen aportará una mayor seguridad jurídica," *El País*, 6 marzo 2001; Alberto Palomar, "Traspasos con distintas reglas," *El País*, 8 marzo 2001.

³³ *El País*, "Fútbol de pasaporte", editorial, 10 febrero 2001.

When critical journalists demanded explanations for this alarming dutchification of the club, one public relations official responded that in the Cruiff era the Barcelona roster had eight Basque players. In the best years, 5 or 6 of the regulars were Basques. It is true about the sympathy expressed in Catalonia for Basques. However, even taking into account the easy integration of Basque players in the history of FC Barcelona (forward Txiqui Beguiristain even managed to speak Catalan and he is now a TV commentator), equating the Netherlands and the Basque Country is a farfetched dream of globalization and European integration which irritates a lot of centralists in Madrid and other parts of the Spain.

Simultaneously, Van Gaal got rid of most of the home-grown Catalan players known collectively as “la Quinta del Mini” (named after the popular name of the small stadium where the Barcelona “B” team plays) or “of lo pelat” (because of the bold-looking Iván de la Peña), among them established locals such as Albert (Chapi) Ferrer (transferred to Chelsea), and replaced with other young players of his own selection. The reality is that with the exception of Xavi García, none of the pedrera (quarry, as the local farm is called) has managed to capture a prominent post. Even when Guardiola recovered he was relegated to the bench, although he had excelled in the under-21 Spanish team.

Fans were nervous but gave Núñez and Van Gaal a chance. The objective was to go back to the lead of the Liga, to exceed Cruiff’s unmatched exploits (four Ligas, one Champions, one Super Cup) and beat Real Madrid, the ultimate objective, and the only goal that really counts most of the time. This could be accomplished at all costs, including sacrificing social and national identity. In some games as many as seven Dutch players were in the spotlight (and eight for several minutes in one match). The rest were comprised of two Asturians, one Brazilian, one Portuguese and one solitary Catalan (Sergi, when Guardiola got seriously injured). Even Sergi was purged by Van Gaal and substituted by Zenden who was transformed into a defender.

When the accomplishment of two Ligas and one Spanish Cup was not enough to balance three consecutive fiascos in the Champions League, Van Gaal and Núñez resigned almost simultaneously. Reality set in and FC Barcelona had lost its identity, and the rush to transfer some of the Dutchmen was placed at the top of business and sport agendas. But this could not be done at any price. In addition to this economic factor, the scenario also includes the fact that the Dutch like to live in Barcelona with good food, good climate, friendly people, and good contracts. It is not by coincidence that both Cruiff and Van Gaal have stayed to live in Catalonia after leaving the club. The 2000-2001 season has shown that as many as five Dutch were irreplaceable as regular starters. In spite of the transfer of Hesp, Ronald de Boer and Bogarde, Zenden has stayed in Barcelona due to difficulties in getting compensation when Barça tried to trade him to an Italian club. Meanwhile Frank De Boer, Reizeger, Cocu, Kluibert, and Overmars, a new Dutch arrival (the ninth Dutch player signed in four years) have been in the regular line up. Ironically, the initially unknown Cocu has been the most effective player, and predictions are that he will stay for years under a profitable contract. The rest, little by little, will eventually leave when their contracts end, if not before. Some they even may force their transfer, such is the case of Kluibert, who did the unthinkable admitting that he would not mind playing for Real Madrid.

Still, the club survived and in mid April was still fighting for a spot in the finals of UEFA and the Spanish cups, aiming at least for a spot in the following Champions

League. The replacement of Majorcan Serra Ferrer by Catalan Carles Rexach will probably result in the hiring of a new foreign coach this summer, a well-known figure that would match the historical pattern. With a few notable exceptions, Barça has managed to capture important titles only with foreign coaches. The Van Gaal experiment will be buried for a heavy price, both at the sports level and sociologically. In spite of all that, FC Barcelona as an institution still survives. Why?

The main reason for this survival in identity is because the club has been perceived as an emblem of Catalan integration by many sectors that do not enjoy a social or economic spot in other circles. “Barça és més que un club” [Barça is more than a club] - it is a culture.³⁴ Barça is a peculiar case of civic nationalism –you belong simply if you want to belong. It is alright if you don’t care about Barça and soccer, but it helps. It is Catalan, but a sizable number of the fans speak Spanish as their first language, or were raised in homes of immigrants. The club is in Barcelona, but a notable number of its supporters live in the other interior half of Catalonia, and soccer fans in other parts of Spain side with the team in order to not support Madrid. Some fans do this as a rejection due to the perception of Real Madrid as centralist, and at times a favorite of the Franco dictatorship. Although some observers claim that some of the successes of Real Madrid were propelled by favoritism bestowed by the Franco regime, actual facts make this difficult to demonstrate.³⁵ Barça is a trophy of the middle class and bourgeoisie, but it came out of the dictatorships of Primo de Rivera and the Franco eras with an aura of opposition and persecution, substituting for banned political parties (Its stadium was closed for booing the national anthem in the 20s and one president was in fact shot by Franco during the Civil War.) In the democratic era, Barça leaders have managed to resist the pressure of the political parties to capture its spirit, particularly the efforts made by the *Convergència i Unió* coalition led by Generalitat President Jordi Pujol. Announcers now speak only in Catalan, with the subsequent irritation of centralists, but the Catalan players have to use Spanish with newcomers who rarely learn the native language.

Let’s proceed once more to dwell on personal memories. Would my father approve of this?

Being generous and opened-minded, I think that, in general, yes he would approve. While he played as a young man for FC Barcelona, he later earned part of our living at RCD Español (now renamed as Espanyol, to the irritation of later centralist purists) working in the ticket booths on Sundays, rain or shine, for 30 years. Resting for three decades in Les Corts cemetery (a block from the Camp Nou, and a few blocks from the apartment I acquired moving from the Sagrada Família neighborhood), a fan of languages, he would generally approve. Not a fanatic, he would welcome any foreigners, EU citizens or not, oriundos, Basques, and even Madrid players. In a way, my father’s mentality was not different than the one espoused by his generation of modest origins. The son of Aragonese parents, he, as many thousands of Barcelona residents, knew very well that Catalan and Spanish integration was the key for peace. In fact, in contrast with the Basque conflict, there is no language confrontation in Catalonia.

My father had no clear scholarly notion about European integration, he had vague ideas about the birth and development of the Europe of Jean Monnet (he only crossed the

³⁴ Jimmy Burns Marañón. Barça: la pasión de un pueblo. Barcelona: Anagrama, 1999.

³⁵ See the analysis by British historian Duncan Shaw. Fútbol y franquismo. Madrid: Alianza, 1987.

border once to the south of France), but he enthusiastically supported me in traveling to the UK and France in the 60s, and in learning English, a language he managed to decipher thanks to the fact that in the 30s foreign films were not dubbed into Spanish. He meshed very well with tourists and visitors in the bullring, and he would enjoy listening to Australian and U.S. players at the Tennis Club Barcelona where he also worked in the tournaments for more than 25 years. In fact, he died of a hard attack near the central court in the fall of '71. He and thousands of Catalans welcomed that foreign invasion.

Catalonia, the city of Barcelona, and FC Barcelona will survive this travesty of integration. The picture will probably go back to show a more balanced team, where the best of Asturians and Basques combine with a handful of first-class home-grown Catalans, plus three or four of the best players of unquestioned world-class prestige, as in the Cruiff era, when Barça was known as “the dream team”, replicating the U.S. '92 Olympic Basketball team. We will probably have another real “mister”. The coach and the players will continue using Spanish as a lingua franca.

The present and the future

However, something has changed completely –greed and flow of money may have made the team distant and only accessible through TV. What happened at the end of the 80s when fans stayed at home, even though seats (held as season tickets by socis abonats) were not technically sold out, may repeat itself again in the future. There is no way to predict if young Catalans will opt for a few spots in future “dream teams.” If the code of the Núñez Doctrine justifying the hiring of a second-class French player on the basis of the TV ratings for the profitable French market survives, there is very little hope for future generations. My father, without a doubt, would not approve, considering that the Reina or the Arnau cases were episodes, and they constituted exceptions to the rule that has been generating since the mid 90s as a result of the Bosman revolution.

He probably would not approve of the abuse resulting from the citizenship process of alleged descendants of Spaniards and the use of the courts to obtain explicit declarations for equating citizens of non-EU countries giving them the same rights as EU players. My father's generation learned the hard way about the goodness of the seny, the sort of balanced measurement in human actions, as opposed to the rauxa, the exaggeration and excess in behavior. It is the difference between discretion and scandal, between the Romanesque art of the churches in the mountains and Gaudí's architecture, and between Miró and Dalí. It is the same difference between integrating foreigners and being swallowed by them.

In general how have Barça fans evaluated this revolution? The point of reference continues to be the Cruiff era. Ultimately what counts are only two facts: national/international titles and victories over Real Madrid. Of the two, regarding modern national identity, the rivalry with Real Madrid comes first.³⁶ Any help is welcome. Some would say that while the first aim (titles) could be obtained by different methods, it still requires time. The second, search and destroy Real Madrid, in the minds of radical fans (not the majority), should be obtained at any cost, even if that means that Barça could be composed of eleven Dutchmen. The middle-of-the-road supporters would tend to lean towards a reasonable balance where Barça's profile would resemble the tradition. But the

³⁶ Julián García Candau, Madrid-Barça: historia de un desamor. Madrid: Aguilar/El País, 1996.

ultimate goal remains –to be ahead of Real Madrid. If that can be accomplished by more Romarios, Stoitchovs, Laudrops and eleven Dutchmen, then so be it.

On one hand, nothing seems to have changed in the Camp Nou, a stadium forever without a name, so that “new” means eternal. Some of the spirit of a familiar field (the huge stadium is still called “Camp”) survives. There is still an air that it is a family affair in some sections, but a lot of fans have lost old friendships and don’t seem to know each other in the stands. The same can be said at half time when the well-to-do mix in the corridors of “la tribuna”. But a sort of apartheid has taken hold and now most of the fans cannot reach the directius (board members), who are now more than fifty, and can only be content with seeing players in the distance when they arrive at the stadium. Journalists seem not to have changed at all, partially segregated to their sections, booths, and pressrooms. They are still friendly and still suspicious of newcomers, a generally closed click but ready to open their arms like good old-fashioned Catalans.

Every season when I manage to see a couple of games a semester in my frequent trips back to Barcelona (I try to schedule lectures and the reading of papers around some good games), I have noticed a gradual change that is mostly economic, but also social. Tickets went up, drinks and food are expensive (but seem to be consumed in notable volume), and the merchandising souvenir boutique is outrageously overpriced.

The moat that surrounded the pitch disappeared with the latest remodeling of the stadium when the floor was lowered. Fences are gone. But more security guards have taken the place of the old-fashioned police and friendly employees. The people are treated less and less as such. The fans are gradually considered as the mass that needs to be scrutinized and tamed. They are only consumers and they receive treatment based on what they purchase. There is still that personal touch given by members of the staff that know the names of hundreds of fans and old friends. There is still that flair of provincialism from the times when the fans were originally called “culés”, because they sat at benches at the old pre-Les Corts field at Carrer Indústria and their backs were seen from the street. However, this familiarity is inexorably threatened.

To compare the present and the future of European soccer with the dimensions of the U.S. NBA and baseball leagues is not an acceptable or desirable procedure. The European integration process has little to do with the American experience of unified federalism, its long tradition of mobility, and the low level of state loyalty professed by U.S. citizens. In an era of globalization and the perception that Brussels’ inspired directives are imposed by force, the disappearance of some important cultural identifiers is not advisable, especially when properly channeled it can avoid violence. If the Europe of the nations could be in danger, the Europe of the cities and football teams is not only desirable, but is necessary, to hold together a needed social fabric.

The price for tolerance, equality, open borders and integration seems to mean that in the not too distant future there would be no difference between the experience of attending a match at San Siro or Old Trafford. As a Barça fan, attending a game at Santiago Bernabeu stadium wishing for a Real Madrid defeat will lose all attractiveness. Contemplating the unique ceremony of a match at San Mamés “Catedral” in Bilbao will be a boring experience. With this perspective, give me back the old times, please. Congratulations, Bosman and Du Pont, but let’s go back to sanity. Let the good old times come back again.