

Spanish Oranges

By Stuart White
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At the risk of sounding boring I'm still on a World Cup theme this week. Let's face it, it's the only thing on everyone's mind, the only topic of conversation in the pub or round the water fountain in the office. Will it be a case of Dutch courage wins the day or a loud chorus of Viva L'España on Saturday, and who will make the third place runner up? Will it be Uruguay, the only South American team left standing despite all the clever money being on Brazil and Argentina, coming into the run-off? Or those Wunderkinds from the Fatherland who were so near or yet so far going into the semi-finals earlier this week?

Of course I know that by the time you read this, the result will have been decided, the trophies presented, victory celebrated and sorrows drowned, and fans and players alike winging their way back home. And what then? What will fill the void that the World Cup left behind? What will we find to talk about and enthuse about? What will fill our TV screens, our thoughts, minds and leisure hours when the final whistle blows, the fat lady sings and the end is not only nigh, it's truly upon us? After all, a whole year has been dedicated to it – 2010, the Fifa World Cup – so how can it be over and it's only July? I can't predict Sunday's outcome but I can predict a tidal wave of anti-climax, a refusal to totally let go, a period of mourning that will grip us all in the months to come.

World Cup fever was utterly contagious. It spread like wildfire, infecting all around and like other pandemics before it, there is no quick cure – time alone will heal. But as we set about trying to cope with our slow recuperation, there are some positive life lessons we can take from the event. Take the final showdown. Undoubtedly Holland and Spain were both first-class sides or else they wouldn't have made it all the way – but I must confess that it was the Germans that captured my imagination and who I wanted to see in the final. I had been impressed with them more so because of their youth – a team that made the experienced and seasoned English look tired, uncommitted and about as enthusiastic as a vegetarian at a braai. Before going into that crucial game the odds surely must have been stacked on the English side when you think of the players they had and their depth of experience – in the end age and experience had no answer against the onslaught of youthful confidence and Bavarian brawn.

Even the mighty Argy bargies were made to look like rank amateurs in the quarter finals where they were forced to re-live a football Falklands defeat with a devastating 4 goal annihilation. Franz Beckenbauer revealed the team's secret weapon in an interview before the tournament. He said "As in 1986, when we reached the final, and many since then, Germany just does not have the players or talent to do well in this World Cup. But even so, we will do well. Why? Because we always do! We have big competition mentality." So you take this big thinking and mix in some zealous youth with skill and hey presto, a winning formula. It's what I love about youth.

Not the lazy, good for nothing attitude of the adolescents that loaf around our homes and sponge off us right, left and centre forward. I am talking about the flip side of this coin. Youth think big! They don't know their limitations, so they aren't constrained by them – refuse to acknowledge them half of the time and just go for it. Throughout the tournament, other experienced players in major world leagues played timid, defensive soccer – more block, less tackle. In complete contrast, the ridiculously young and genuine big occasion German players like Mueller came onto the pitch with a Blitzkrieg mentality – crush the opposition, capture the ball and fire it into the net as many times as it takes to bring the other side to its knees and admit defeat.

Of course he was conspicuous by his absence in that match against Spain so maybe that unbalanced the team and changed the winning formula who knows, but even so, we should take a page out of Germany's book and apply this in our workplaces. Think big, bring in raw talent, teach them how to work as a team, and then give them the freedom to express themselves. Result 4-1 to us. And from the English side what do we learn? That it doesn't matter how great the individuals may be or how much you pay them – some teams just don't gel. We may not always know the reason why but when the team isn't working as a team you need to change it, otherwise you lose big time. Don't just go with the old boys and the usual suspects – they aren't always relevant or right for the situation.

Sometimes in business you need to go out on a limb, trust your instincts and take a chance. Fabio Capello chose a squad of big guns with an impressive list of stats and individual successes but they proved not to be nearly as big as the sum of their parts. In contrast Joachim Low took his chance on youth and potential and it took them all the way to the semi-finals looking almost invincible. That's the difference between a team that's trying to work together and one with too many own-agendas that eventually self-destructs.

As you read this the 2010 World Cup will have been decided one way or another and it will be all over for another 4 years. But work-wise we've already learned some valuable lessons about team spirit and a winning attitude from the knock-out results. The team that plays together stays together, right through to the final and beyond;
All the talent and experience in the world won't take you through if everyone's pulling in different directions;
If you pay the really big bucks you've a right to expect results;
And sometimes youth, energy and enthusiasm will pull off a blinder with the right supervision and guidance so they don't end up with the corporate equivalent of a yellow card.

Agree or disagree with this? Don's twitter amongst yourselves – tweet your chirps to http://twitter.com/Stuart_Botswana

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