

OmniBall Online

Interview with Annie George & Jorge Pérez

27 June 2003 | Lovers of football and the Internet are doing themselves a disservice if they do not familiarize themselves with [OmniBall](#), the interactive, online football encyclopedia. (N.B.: The OmniBall site is unavailable as of February 2004.) The brilliant definition of the game by [Jorge O. Pérez](#) ("an eleven-a-side team game played on a grass pitch in which players move the ball around . . ."), which appeared in [issue 6](#), is just the beginning of OmniBall's rich content.

Other features include lists of clubs, players and even an inventory of stadium disasters. According to [En-Linea](#) vice-president [Annie George](#), based in Barcelona, the site contains more than 20,000 entries. These entries will be supplemented, before the [2003 Women's World Cup](#), with a [section on the women's game](#). Pérez and Ms. George graciously agreed to answer questions on the site and their views of football.

GG: You have mentioned the difficulty of finding material with which to build a [women's football section](#) on OmniBall. In your view, is the difficulty that women just do not play football in much of the world, or that few people are writing about it?

AG: There are more than 20 million women footballers, 80 percent of whom are juniors or still in their teens, according to FIFA's "[Big Count](#)" survey conducted in 2000. This shows that the lack of information is not due to the lack of players, but the lack of press and promotion in many parts of the world. It's easy to find information about the women players and clubs in the United States, for example, where the women's game has achieved widespread acceptance and following. It's also relatively easy to find information about national teams and their players in China, Germany, Norway, Brazil and Sweden, where the women's game is also popular and the teams are powerhouses in their respective continents. Other countries such as England and Australia also do a good job promoting women's football. The problem lies when you search for information beyond the major players in countries and continents where the game may be popular or beginning to grow, but the press coverage is still limited. Or in countries where the men's game is everyone's passion, but the women's game is not viewed in the same regard, such as Italy or Argentina.

Furthermore, the women's game is not organized like the men's game worldwide. Most leagues are amateur or semi-professional, so they don't get the publicity that the men's clubs have. But it's changing. You have sites, for example, such as [europeanwomensoccer.com](#) or [footballculture.net](#), where you get news, results, transfers, stories, and so on. And, you have the confederation and federation sites that feature their national women's teams. Many of the men's clubs that have women's affiliates also have areas on their sites that feature the women. But the information is incomplete. And you have to go to many sources to get a real overview of the women's game worldwide. There lies another problem. We with Omniball are trying to provide [one global source for the women's game](#). We are attempting to fill in the gaps, so you can go to one site and find out about the women's game in each country, about the players, the clubs, and so on. It will take more time than the men's section of Omniball, but we have an excellent beginning, and once the data is online we will be updating and enhancing it daily. | [back to top](#)

GG: Is this view of football as representing the "very concept of the organised community" (from **Jorge Pérez's** article) a European view, a perspective in Spain or a statement so obvious that it is not worthy of comment?

JP: Part of this question can be viewed in light of the promotion of youth football by FIFA, by each continent's confederation, and the federations of many countries. These organizations support this sport as an activity that's "convivial" (a word invented by sociologist **Ivan Illich**), beneficial to human beings, life's order and our distinctive expressions. | [back to top](#)

GG: Along the lines of the previous question, is it politics that fails to live up to the ideals of football's "organised community" or has football become so close to politics in much of the world that football has lost sight of its aims?

JP: It would be difficult for sports not to be affected by politics, by money, by power—just as the arts and sciences are. However, although one or more of these expressions can converge at the same time, it doesn't mean that the objective of one or another disappears or is lost. All these expressions—athletics, artistic, scientific, entrepreneurial, political, and so on—make up this idea of an organised community. | [back to top](#)

GG: As others have done, Jorge Pérez refers to football as "the peaceful representation of war" and as "an activity involving struggle." Have these competitive qualities that lead to anxiety and some of football's uglier aspects come to dominate the game's playful side?

JP: Yes, with football you obviously have fanatical groups that provoke deplorable situations and events but the sport also serves to control violence in addition to preventing conflicts. It's certainly better to view two countries facing one another in a game of football rather than on the battlefield. And it's better to see our youth passing their time screaming in a stadium in a controlled environment releasing their frustration and anger rather than on the streets of their cities. At the same time, the majority of football fans go to the matches to watch their team win because the passion for their team is more important than whether it's a good or bad game. | [back to top](#)

GG: Finally, returning to the women's game, in OmniBall's and **En-Linea's** researches, is there any evidence that women's football can restore grace and dignity to a game that, among men, perhaps has lost some of these qualities?

AG: This is only my opinion . . . not based on concrete research, but I believe any sport today is competitive, whether it's a man or woman playing. Because the women's game in many countries on the club level is amateur, you don't have the commercialization and "greediness" that you find in the men's game. But that doesn't mean that if the women's game reached the same level of commercial success as the men's, and women were compensated equally, that you wouldn't have the same situation you have with the men's game. | [back to top](#)