



Kindness in field.

A life of team.

Text by Dino Zoff
Photos by Marco Anelli

GentleBooklets

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GentleBooklets It is a series of long-form articles written by different authors. The booklets, designed for a quick read, feature texts and images. We have kindly asked to the authors to comment on the term “kindness.” Authors and photographers have donated their work. The motivations behind the project are the same as those of Gentletude, the desire to spread awareness about the need for “kindness” in our society, a society too focused on personal success to remember the basics of everyday living and respect for the environment that hosts us. Our decision to present these ideas in a series of publications is due to the awareness that, in order to stimulate people to think about these issues, it is necessary to present some concrete examples. In this case, the examples will be provided in the texts written by the authors.

Soccer without expectations

When I was young there was no television, all I could have were the “Lo Sport Illustrato” [Picture Soccer] booklets. We could only know real soccer from our stickers. I can say I never withstood the charm of a television- or press-conveyed image. I approached soccer when I was about five years old; maybe as a vocation, surely as a true passion.

I played for the fun of it, without longing to become famous or to go too far. My generation didn't practice any sport, or at least nobody used this expression. We played sports following seasons.

In the first team where I played when I was a child, the eldest mates always put me in the goal post, as it usually happens to those who are thought to be the most lacking. Nevertheless, I was good at saving, so I kept on playing: initially within the village team, then with a professional one. Inch by inch my career took shape, continuing step by step without any special expectation but with a big passion inside.

In my family there wasn't any special enthusiasm when I approached soccer, and a career as a soccer player wasn't even considered. At

the time, soccer was thought to be something rather ephemeral, a hobby, and not a real job. Becoming a player in the major league was equivalent to an impossible dream for a boy like me, who was running after the ball in the courtyard. Passion and the right physical features were not enough: also a great character and persistence were needed. In other words, a unique man had to own many qualities.

My parents were realistic and balanced people. Mario, my father, used to say: “You like soccer? Ok, you can continue with it, but first you have to study or learn to work. If you’ll show to be really talented, you will go on.”

Soccer had to be the second or third choice in life, and had to be taken cautiously: nobody could dream to work as a soccer player and then understand not to have the right qualities while being eighteen years old, with no other choice: no good education or job experience. Basically, soccer was seen as a pastime, something to do after work.

For this reason, while playing in the young Udinese team as a reserve and training twice a week, I worked in Gorizia as an engineer mechanic. When I entered a competitive team, I didn’t stop working. It was inconceivable to

me. I only resigned when I entered the first team in the major league.

This short introduction on the at-the-time soccer world allows me to start tackling the “kindness” subject.

Nowadays soccer can be a door towards a new dimension, where your entire life and your family’s can change completely. It is a risky dimension, because disillusion can be anguishing if you’re not able to see your own limits or your son’s ones.

Being kind means above all love yourself and foster passions with discipline, but it also means acknowledge your own limits, be brave to stand apart and quit without any shame when you can’t match up with something.

How soccer changed

Even though the game maintained approximately the same rules, soccer changed very much in the years, especially because of medias, which became pressing enough to turn players in public personalities or mass idols.

In particular, two features changed with time: press attention to soccer and the atmosphere in the team.

Medias turned soccer in something inflamed





which has to be a show at all costs. Nowadays, people who follow soccer is not only expecting to see a good match, but also wants an idol to admire, to identify with. For this reason, players acquire a double role: they're both professionals and actors. So exhibitionism, tiny dances and choreographies after a goal become normal and part of the role "public personality" players have to play. Audience appreciates it because it is used to this type of shows. These days, if a player becomes successful, he's invited to show up in discos. To me, sport should be a much simpler thing, a lot more truthful, spontaneous, tempered. It should be team spirit and harmony in the fulfilling of common aims. You can't do anything without the team: a champion can't do most of the things if he's alone. Team play is necessary to achieve certain results, and it can be found on the field during the match. Let's just think about the World Soccer Games: it is the moment when intensity reaches its maximum and players feel part of the same great battle. Nowadays it is victory which keeps teams together; however, I still remember a time when the glue was the will of being together beyond the match, a time when everybody shared

their spare time, for instance playing cards. From my own point of view, technology created some distance among players when out of the field, and the will of being together has diminished, reducing communications and sharing moments. It happens more and more often to see players standing apart, listening to music with earphones.

A soccer team could be compared with a business team, where those who work alone damage results and the rest of the team. Within a soccer team there is no winner or loser; individuals are part of a unique organism which becomes strong with the skills of the single components, and which is conscious of aims and knows that only union can become a winning power. I call this shared union kindness; if it was used everyday beyond sport and business teams, many results would be easier to reach.

Sport and kindness

The link between the term “kindness” and a particular memory of my childhood comes natural to me. Anywhere near where I lived, when someone asked for information, the person being questioned always answered: “Comandi” [At your or-

ders!]. I have no idea of the origin of this expression, but I see it as an expression of the kindness, politeness, courtesy; a way to put the others in the centre of attention. Now the word “kindness” sometimes appears to be frivolous, deprived of its original meaning, even trivialized.

Politeness is surely an important feature of kindness, because it brings humility and civic sense. Therefore, I consider kindness a multilayer word which has many nuances: it is common sense, and acting smartly; it is the objectivity for judging, and a kind of inner conscience.

I mentioned common sense because soccer leads to real results, as every other sport. The best wins, and athletic activity is made of numbers that you obtain only if you have strength, determination and many other positive components.

Soccer should teach kindness, becoming promoter of a loyal and respectful aptitude. But, as in any other environment, there are both kind and unkind people. There are victory and defeat situations, and I’m sure ability of accepting peacefully whatever happens depends a lot by the upbringing you received. Generally speaking, I think every sport could help developing kindness: by respecting rules, being loyal with mates and opponents. There are competition and anxiety on the field, but

they're always framed by rules. And after the final whistle the atmosphere becomes relaxed and friendly again.

Soccer: a social phenomenon

When talking about sport, it is necessary to mention the violence expressions that sometimes it happens to hear, unfortunately. First of all, I would like to introduce a consideration: some players become unpleasant and create hostility on the field. They receive hisses by the whole stadium, from supporters and opponents; it is true that some players are only hissed because of their skin color, but sometimes it is the player itself who attracts hisses.

The story is always the same with supporters: you are backed up when you win and play well, but when you start losing you receive a lot of hisses. It is logic, we should not be shocked. Ultras clubs rose twenty-five years ago, sponsored by societies which wanted to support the team. Clubs became more and more important, so that now we talk about "the twelfth player on the field". These clubs started to influence societies and players, and turned from simple support into a real fanaticism, sometimes beyond licit. It is sufficient to think about what happened





in Genoa in April 2012, when ultras created threats and violences. Players are powerless about these facts.

On one side ultras are appreciated, because they're able to convey tension and enthusiasm; on the other one, when cheer degrades in violence, nobody knows how to act. Years passed searching a way to stop this dangerous process, without finding any satisfying solution. Personally, I think violence is in the nature of the world, and it's easier to see it where there are more people. Part of the problem is due to structure decadence, as in Italy: stadiums are old and in decay; I fear soon people will prefer to save money and watch the match on tv, instead of going to stadiums.

Therefore, I don't think stadiums got empty because of economical crisis, but because of structure backwardness and, secondly, due to the fact that society is becoming more and more individualistic. Once, Sundays at the stadium were an opportunity to stay together; nowadays many people prefer staying confined in their own houses in solitude. I think this change in society aptitude causes effects on the meaning of kindness, too: it comes natural to be generous, helpful and affectionate for those who are

used to share spaces. When an individual is isolated, there is social alienation and a tendency to egoism.

The team: aggregation vs individualism

Trainer's task should be above all to create a team, a group, by adopting the right attitude. For this reason it is necessary to possess a strong personality and many technical competencies on soccer. You must be able to gain consensus and appreciation through leadership; moreover, you must be clear and never fear to say what you think, so that players can accept your decisions. I think these are the necessary features to relate with others in everyday life. When I was young, everybody had to wait more before starting to have a career, in any job. Now, with soccer, it is easier to arrive quickly, earning much and at once; the typical behaviour comes accordingly, sometimes even with exaggerated attitudes. The current world organisation exalts these young players and make them feel the head of the planet. However, I must say that over-the-top people always existed.

I would like to say something about individualism, arrogance and indifference. Nowadays we are more and more distant one from the other, and this is a problem that absorbs us. Soccer could

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concur to ensure that people come nearer, take care one of the other, but everyone should commit in every social, professional or cultural context. This is only possible with rules. As a public personality, I tried to set the example, because I felt it as my responsibility; probably I also liked to feel accepted by the external world. However, if this positive attitude is not appreciated or even noticed, it is normal to assume the opposite behaviour in order to obtain attention. I think soccer is now suffering for this reason, because medias, newspapers and people are pushing it towards a clear direction. I have a glaring example of what I'm saying: how many strikers jump to the ground when being just touched lightly, only to get a penalty? It is a very incorrect act. But my consideration does not stop here. The player is 20 years old. He knows his life is dramatized, but he also knows that by acting in this way he has more possibilities to become the team "hero" and win the match. He knows he will be appreciated by his mates, by managers and probably by journalists, who will not hesitate to write he won the match, even though with a shrewd act. It is difficult to go against all of this, you have to own a very strong personality to renounce. Maybe you really have to be trained to sports. Basics of sport: loyalty and strength are

lacking. Many times I asked myself: “You received a penalty and gained a penalty shot. But what will you say to your son? That you were astute enough to gain it, or that you’re very weak and vulnerable and fell?”. It is a matter of education.

Until now it seems my opinion on teams these days is totally negative, but this is not the case. We still have examples of humble, kind and helpful players and trainers. Those people make me feel confident for the future.

Rude acts and kindness

I didn’t suffer many injustices, being honest. In my opinion, this is the result of my attention in avoiding to create problems to other people: I would never have accepted a wrongdoing towards me. Consequently, I never thought of insulting someone for a mistake. However, in the world of soccer rude acts are normal, as for example the recurring racist choruses we mentioned above. Many gross and bad-mannered things happen.

During my career I always tried to carry on consistently the “kindness” concept by behaving honestly. A “kind” sport is made of real rules; you must be loyal and respect your opponent. And I think these rules are valid in every life area. I always tried to be cozily simple, to avoid exaggerations. I was sat-





isfied when I could say: “I received this because I didn’t do anything more out of the field in order to receive this.” I never wanted to be a personality when I was out of my environment. I didn’t do more to get more. I never felt inferior compared with others, because I always felt responsible for the goals I underwent; even those which I could stop, in the rear. During trainings I always tried to improve, to do more, to attempt.

Education to kindness and spirit of sacrifice

When I was young I received important advice by my family, and I want to share it with you. They always showed me the essence and concreteness of things, and taught me not to find excuses for anything. When I hear someone explaining a bad match with the fact he was not feeling fine, I keep myself from laughing. I was already playing at a high level, when a day I came home after a match in which I didn’t save a quite easy ball. My father said: “Why didn’t you stop that ball?” And I answered: “I didn’t expect him to throw”. And he: “Why? Are you a pharmacist, maybe? No, you’re a goalkeeper. If you don’t expect it, who should do it?”. There were no excuses.

I think today this feature is lacking among parents. Once, I remember, I was the national football

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team's trainer, and my son was joining a soccer tournament. He had to be seven or eight years old. I had been asked to give some lessons to the boys, so I explained the basic rules to stay on the field. I was impressed by parents: they talked about pressure and attacking the opponent. Most part of the other team was charging the referee with acting in favour of my team. Children were seven or eight years old. This is the way many parents present sports to their children. Maybe these boys will not arrive to high levels because they are not suitable. It's not so important, we're not all the same. But sport is sincere, it does not lie. We should never forget that children should be boosted to play sports for their health and the game itself, avoiding long and damaging pressures.

A twenty-year long career is a very long one; and I've always been on a mountain range. I can say the line has always been up to grade, I've been lucky. This does not mean I didn't have to tackle some difficult moments, but it is necessary to fight and react. Soccer gave me much, and turned me into a better man. I'm sure this is the real aim of sport: to raise man; if not, it would not have any sense and would be useless. It gave me well-being and honour, I became everything I wanted to become, and a lot more: Honoris Causa Doctor,



Republic Great Official for Merit. Thanks to soccer I feel a better man, above all for the way I tackle things and fears. I can say I'm well-balanced and peaceful. Probably my up-bringing helped me very much. It taught me to take life seriously in everyday behaviours and while working. But I was also taught that life ends, that it's not always easy and serene. My parents were farmers and I always dealt with nature, seasons and practical things. My family was concrete, it didn't let me live in an absent-minded way.

I would like to tell youngsters the same things that probably most parents and grandparents would tell them: to be good, to do things well, always being kind and careful towards the others. If you are working, do it well; any thing should be done well, with the greatest commitment. Don't be resenting, don't try to discredit others, but on the opposite show you're always attentive and helpful. I think everybody should be able to decide to do what they most wish. I always had complete freedom in my life: I could study if I wanted to, I could go to work and learn how to do a job if I didn't want to study. It's a matter of parents responsibility. Many people force their children to study, but it could also happen that they study for five years without obtaining any result. My parents would leave

me without obtaining results for a maximum period of one year; then, they would send me to work. Rules at home were these: seriousness and worth to behaviours, and responsibility to choose a way or another.

I have been lucky, because playing soccer was a pleasure for me. I was satisfied of what I did during the week. I was paid, but I was also working hard, and this finally made me proud. Maybe it was different, at the time; maybe it would be seen as a sacrifice, nowadays. It is a question of generations: I'm not better of youngsters of today. Maybe they received everything, and now it is hard to let what you own be sufficient.

Final considerations

In my life I received many rewards: I've been included in the 100 best soccer players ever list, in the FIFA Hall of Fame, in the Mexican and Italian confederation. I am like a Russian general who walks adorned with decorations. I think I received so much because I worked well, and this makes me proud; I feel respected. I also received some criticism, sometimes even heavy expressions; however, still nowadays, even though I'm not part of soccer world anymore, many youngsters stop me while I'm walking to

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ask me an autograph and to shake hands. This makes me feel happy and satisfied, because during my career I've been said to be a too serious and pragmatic person, sometimes too rigid. Those who didn't stop at what can be seen on the surface and who could know the deepest part of me know these are only false beliefs. I would like to end this tale with a consideration. As everybody knows, the number of our existence seasons is limited. We should not be hostile and fight against time; we should rather capitalize on life, always trying to act correctly, respecting others and practising kindness. It is simply what I've been trying to do since I was a child and still now, day by day, my objective remains the same: try to give the best of me.





AUTHOR

Dino Zoff

Dino Zoff is a football coach, sport director and former goalkeeper. Born in 1942 in Mariano del Friuli, Dino has been European Champion in 1968, World Champion in 1982 and World deputy-Champion in 1970 with Italian National Team, which he also trained from 1998 to 2000. Considered one of the most skilled goalkeepers in the history of football, he tied his football activity mainly to Juventus, the team in which he served at the turn of the Seventies and Eighties. Holder of numerous records and achievements, he is the oldest winner of the World Cup, won in 1982 at the age of forty, as captain of the Italian national team. He occupies the 47th position in the special ranking of the best players of the Twentieth century, published by World Soccer magazine, as well as he is the only Italian player to have obtained both the European Championship title than that of world champion. He also holds the record for the longest playing time without allowing goals in international tournaments (1142 minutes). In 2004, Pelé included his name in the Fifa 100, the list of the 125 best living football players.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Marco Anelli

Marco Anelli was born in Rome in 1968, and he specialized in photography and in black and white printing technique in Paris.

Research is the cornerstone of his work.

Among his major publications there are works dedicated to sculpture and architecture (The Shadow and the Light in St. Peter, Silvana Editoriale, 1999; In the Shadow of the Cathedral, Contrasto, 2010), sport (Football, Motta Editore, 2002 , Pallacorda, Skira, 2004) and classical music (Music imagined, Motta Editore, 2004; Soul Gestures, Peliti Editore 2011).

His most recent project led him to realize the portraits of all the 1.545 participants to the performance of Marina Abramović held at MoMA in New York in 2010, published in Portraits in the Presence of Marina Abramovic (Damiani Editore, 2012).

Marco lives and works in New York.

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GENTLETUDE

Gentletude is a neologism composed of the words “gentilezza” (gentleness/kindness) and “attitudine” (attitude). It pursues the aims for a better world without violence, arrogance and rudeness. A world where caring and paying attention to others, common sense and balanced competitiveness are the most important things. The production provided by the association was completely free, based on the Commons Creative Criteria. Gentletude in Italy is a non-profit organization (NPO), and in Switzerland is a non-profit association.

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(...) Being kind
means above all
love yourself and
foster passions
with discipline,
but it also means
acknowledge your own limits,
be brave to stand apart
and quit without any shame
when you can't match up
with something.