

Maradona: Darkness and light



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In our heart of hearts, we always knew it would end early.

Despite this, when the news broke, we all thought it was a hoax. A sick rumour perpetuated by some anonymous Twitter click farm shopping for retweets. Anytime now, the story would be dispelled, likely by the subject himself, through some truly absurd act of self-indulgence. Perhaps, as he had once memorably done, by firing an air-rifle from his balcony to the throngs of reporters who had gathered below his gates for quotes?

But alas, for once the rumours were true. As French football daily *L'Equipe* so poignantly put it, channeling their inner Nietzsche—*Dieu est Mort*. God is dead.

Diego Armando Maradona had been a showstopper his entire life. And even in death, he was no different. He managed what even the once-in-a-generation coronavirus had not—cancellation of a Copa Libertadores clash between Internacional of Brazil and Argentina's Boca Juniors. Brazil vs Argentina—an eternal rivalry, only possible to be postponed due to the passing of an eternal soul.

Maradona was only 60, under no circumstances an age to die. But a life of utter excess meant that earthly numbers were always entirely moot for someone as ephemeral as Diego. He was a prodigy at six, a national sensation at 11, a professional football player at 15, a national debutant at 16, the world's most expensive footballer at 21 (and again at 23) and a world champion by the time he was 25.

Staggering as those statistics are—defining the legend of Maradona with pure numbers would be doing him (and the world) a massive disservice. Because with Maradona, like with possibly every great artist in history, it is less about what he achieved and far, far more about how he achieved it. Who wants to look and gawk at numbers when you can talk about how the story of Maradona touched your soul?



PHOTO: COLLECTED

And what a story it was. The kind that almost becomes a fairytale. A story as old as time itself. Rags to riches, tears and glory, light and darkness—it had it all.

It began in Lanus where Diego was born to a fisherman father and a domestic help mother. They soon moved to Buenos Aires in search of work and made Villa Fiorito their home—a slum with no electricity or running water and so violent that even the police stayed away at night. As a toddler, Maradona once fell into an open cesspit.

"Keep your head above the s***, Diego," was what his uncle repeated to him as he pulled him out. It was to become Maradona's mantra in life.

In the rags of his youth, the preternatural talent that was soon clear to anyone who watched him juggle a football (or an orange) offered the most obvious way out. In many ways, it was the fulfilment of the Argentine dream—a supremely talented footballer

escapes a life of poverty and becomes an international star. But Maradona's talent was so pure, so unadulterated and so special, and his personality so magnetic, that he did not just become a star. He transcended to an icon.

So what made Maradona so special?

As a footballer, he was comfortably the best in the world in his era. And perhaps too, tiresome as that debate is, of all time. But then so was Pele, the Brazilian who came a generation before him and shared a similar background. And now, so are players like Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo who too can lay claim to that sobriquet.

Was it then the way he played football?

A Lilliput in the world of Gullivers, all swivel of hips, drops of shoulders, unshakeable balance with the ball always magnetically stuck to the outside of his left foot. Full-on poetic grace in a brutal football pitch where defenders wanted the Faustian bargain—the ball or his foot. An artist in a

Maradona too.

There was Maradona, the raging socialist in an increasingly capitalist world—a tattoo of Fidel Castro on his left foot and, lately, an Instagram account full of Hugo Chavez quotes. There was Maradona, the hapless coach, fat Maradona the meme, stomach-stapled Maradona enjoying a steak with the Salt Bae, the Palestine supporting Maradona, the US-hating Maradona. It goes on and on and on.

And perhaps that was the true off-pitch genius of Maradona. He was everything your teenage idealist self wanted you to be. The patron saint of the underdog who was also the best football player in the world. A seminal talent blessed by God who was also an addict. The man who rubs shoulders with Castro and Chavez but tours the world to pay the bills.

Maradona was never afraid to stand for something, never afraid to put himself out there or bear the brunt of a world on his shoulders. In today's hyper-curved social media world, such a character is unthinkable. This is why his legend practically writes itself.

Duality has always defined Maradona. And nowhere is it better captured than in the six minutes in Azteca in 1986 that probably defined the narrative of his life. England vs Argentina in the backdrop of the Falklands War.

First, there was that salmon leap over Peter Shilton and the hand that guided the ball into the net. The Hand of God, as Diego later called it. And so it came—Maradona, the breaker of rules, the cheat, the man for the shady arts. Darkness.

And then there was that moment.

Maradona, twisting, turning, swivelling and then running—past 1,2,3...6! And goal. Breathtaking, impossible, the single greatest goal ever scored. Small matter that it vanquished the colonial overlords. From Brazil to Bangladesh, everyone cheered. The world exploded. An icon was born. Light.

Darkness and light. Maradona—a story as old as time itself.

There will probably never be another like him ever again.

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Quazi Zuilquarnain Islam is a football fan.

Gender equality is crucial for safe access to water

BIPASHA DUTTA

WOMEN spend around 200 million hours every day to collect water across the globe. According to Water.org, finding a suitable place to collect the water can take an additional 266 million hours each day, especially for the women who do not have toilets in their homes. This strenuous journey of carrying heavy vessels for a long time may have severe impacts on health, especially for pregnant women, including risks of bone disease and osteoporotic fractures. This also reduces the opportunities for women to be engaged in productive work and healthy lifestyles.

Despite much progress, ensuring access to safe water for all remains a challenge for Bangladesh. Bangladesh positions at number 86 among 142 countries with respect to drinking water quality (number one denotes having the safest water). Not having adequate sources of water has continued to increase the burden of water collection on women—two thirds of households rely on women for collecting water when there is no water source at home.

Different projects from government, NGOs and the private sector has led to lots of effort for ensuring access to safe water for women. However, if we want to truly reduce this burden on women, applying the gender lens to the matter is of equal importance. Our society is traditionally a patriarchal one, and access to water and the responsibility of sourcing it is definitely an issue of gender equality.

Any development project may take four approaches in the case of gender programming. A gender blind project will create, exacerbate or ignore gender inequalities in pursuit of project goals, whereas a gender sensitive one will maintain existing gender dynamics and roles in pursuit of project goals. A gender specific project will support and improve outcomes for a specific gender group in pursuit of project goals.

However, a gender transformative project

is one that will actively reduce gender inequalities to enhance achievement of project goals. Gender transformative change seeks to consider multiple spheres of women's lives, where the change will have to occur in the household, within the community, and within systems and structures. These are the sort of projects that we now require to ensure that women are at the heart of project decision-making, and not just silent participants.

The USA funded project Nobo Jatra is a good example of how applying gender specific approaches in the construction of new water and sanitation facilities may contribute significantly to decreasing gendered inequalities. Through this project, existing water and sanitation facilities were upgraded, and latrines were relocated to safe places away from drinking water sources for ensuring safe access to water. Importantly, for women, these changes have meant a reduced need to collect water, improved water quality and improved sanitation services. Besides, this approach also contributed in improving relationships between men and women, between women, and between women and government officials by keeping women in important decision-making roles at the heart



PHOTO: ANWAR HUQ, CREATIVE COMMONS

of the project.

Gender transformative changes have been found to be translated into other domains as well. For example, women's involvement in NGO meetings and their input in decision-making has had positive impacts. Especially at the household level, men and women both commonly described increased confidence of women at home, and increased roles in decision-making processes. At the community level, there was also evidence that women were playing a greater role in community meetings and in informing decision-making beyond their participation in the NGO project.

As noted by a local woman in one of the project's focus group discussions: "Our capacity to get things done has improved. Other women come to us when they encounter a problem. Now, they can influence others in relation to water and sanitation. They share various sorts of information with others."

At a union level Water and Sanitation Committee in Pankhali in Khulna district, participants described improved relations: "Earlier government departments were not giving much attention to public demands. In fact, women were reluctant to visit government offices. But, now, there have been events such as the interface meeting, where government officials were present and people from the community had the opportunity to speak up. They expressed their demands directly to government officials. As a result, women have been encouraged to visit

government offices, and a rapport has been built up between people and government officials."

A recent study conducted by World Vision Bangladesh (WVB), in collaboration with the Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF-UTS) of the University of Technology Sydney and the University of Rajshahi (funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and linked with SHOMOTA project), revealed the effectiveness of using gender specific and transformative approaches so that others could replicate the best practices. For developing gender transformative framework, the study came up with eight recommendations—ensure strong staff capacity in gender and social inclusion, know the context and customise the strategies appropriate to that context, invest in community-based local leadership and ownership of gender-transformative change agendas, engage local leaders' support for gender-transformative social accountability, engage with men to promote gender and social inclusion, promote skill development for women and encourage women's collective action, encourage the practice of dialogue and accountability in order to create citizen engagement (women and men) with the state, and advocate to central government policymakers for structural changes to Water and Sanitation committees, with equal representation of women and men.

However, although women increased their engagement with government service providers and elected officials, the research found that these government officials were less responsive to women's voices than men's. We need to ensure that this changes, and that women and men have equal voice, accountability and empowerment through these development projects. Such gender transformative frameworks are now crucial in making achieving gender equality a central goal in interventions that also aim to ensure safe access to water.

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Bipasha Dutta is national coordinator, Strategy, Innovation and Knowledge Management at World Vision Bangladesh.

ON THIS DAY
IN HISTORY

DECEMBER 1, 1955
Rosa Parks's refusal to relinquish her bus seat

This day in 1955, in violation of segregation laws in Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks refused to surrender her bus seat to a white passenger and was arrested, sparking a 381-day bus boycott led by Martin Luther King, Jr.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

33 Chest muscles, for short

34 Snarl

37 Yard divisions

39 Traffic circle

43 Test type

44 Broad street

45 Yard tool

46 "Murphy Brown" star

DOWN

1 Singer Ritter

2 "I-Rock"

3 Gun, as a motor

4 Small singing groups

5 Like some wines

6 Uncool fellow

7 Stand against

8 Startup assistance

9 Director Howard

10 Snaky shape

16 Like Dixieland music

17 Capital of Ghana

18 Transplant a plant

19 Delmonico

21 Moral system

22 League makeover

24 Do some field work

25 Vacuum lack

30 John or Paul

33 Piper of rhyme

35 Seize

36 Valentine word

37 In favor of

38 History span

40 Director Lee

41 Bemoan

42 Hankering

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

S	T	I	L	L		C	O	D	E	R
E	R	N	I	E		A	L	I	C	E
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BEEBLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT