

Discovering Happiness in Football Fields: Partial Biography of an Indian Football Player

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Abstract

Dharmaraj Ravanan is a football player born and brought up in village of Tiruchchirapalli district. His parents are farmers and nobody in his family has a sports background. Dharmaraj started casually playing football during his secondary school stage and rose to represent India in the 'Under 23' category. He had the opportunity to be trained by noted coaches and play with the most efficient players in the country. For him playing is not only a process of learning but also a matter of happiness. He has played for several clubs in India and has visited several countries. Over the years he has gathered wide experience and hopes to coach the future defenders of famous football teams. The present study follows a liberal sports historiography approach and attempts to briefly bring out his biography.

Keywords: Football, Tiruchirappalli, village, dedication, matches, learning, practice, national, international, player, coach.

Introduction

Indian people in general are said as better in intellectual attainments than physical abilities. Our marginal performance in International sports events such as the Olympic Games, Asian Games, and the like is a major reason behind the development of such views. Some scholars attribute the slackness to the economic backwardness in the country. This myth was broken initially by the Indian Hockey team which won several gold medals in the Olympic Games conducted in the twentieth century. However, the growth of the Indian Cricket team and its massive wins that synchronized with the development of mass media proved the Indian strength to the world. It caused a large number of young people to dream of a career in cricket and private investments and sponsorship for the game flowed without limit. At one point in time, a realization to provide equal importance to other games emerged. Particularly, with the introduction of globalization in the country, multinational corporate companies that spread their wings took to themselves the responsibility of developing sports in part. Meanwhile, Indian states such as West Bengal and Goa constantly encouraged football teams and players and contributed to sustaining the life of the game, and made the ground readily available for further improvement. All these nuances set the background for the launch of several talented players in the country.

Dharmaraj Ravanan is one among such players who is significant and unavoidable in the game of football. The present study is a descriptive study of his emergence and achievements. Although, perceptions pertaining to sports has started to change it cannot be deemed to have mainstreamed games like football. Therefore, the methodology adopted for the study follows the grammar employed for writing marginalized socio-cultural practices. As such observing the overall course of his career and sketching the general trends is the purpose of the present study. His interviews stored on youtube, and details available on other websites form the main source for the study as also newspaper reports. The information available about his coaches found in Wikipedia are also very useful for the study. His way of living and approach to sports seems to be comparable with the ideas of great martial artist Bruce Lee who said 'be like water.' Water is life and it takes the shape of the object in which it is

stored suggesting its flexibility. It can smoothly divert from its course and can also cause severe havoc. Its usual character is calm and runs to reach a target. If obstacles are laid in its course it makes new paths. Therefore, the hypothesis that states 'Dharmaraj Ravanar's approach of life and career is characterized by water and he has reached the target through taking a course like it.' The structure of the study is classified into 'Beginnings' in which his introduction with football is discussed followed by 'Coaches Identified' in which his learning and practice are sketched and finally in 'Milestones and Perceptions' his achievements and views pertaining to the game are outlined.

Beginnings

Dharmaraj Ravanar was born in a village classified into the Tiruchchirappalli district. His parent's orientation towards identifying themselves with Indian cultural roots was well-informed in making the choice of their son's name that combined key characters from Ramayana and Mahabharata. Dharma is the upholder of truth whereas Ravanar – celebrated as a King of Tamil origin particularly in the recent past – was an ardent devotee of Lord Siva and a man of talents, discipline, and strong will. Over and above all, like in many his parents also placed certain expectations on the child. He grew in a joint family environment marked by love and care. Particularly, he was emotionally close to his grandparents. Nevertheless, he was sent to a boarding school to begin his formal learning. Normally, schools in Tamil Nadu place utmost importance to conditioning the character and discipline and it is the effective demand in a boarding school. Enduring difficult emotional and physical situations became the pattern of life for him about which he rarely complained. He also realized that he is in a team and the aspirations of the team and his own are one and the same. The unique situations and experiences he underwent enlightened his mind and he started believing that happiness combined with morality is the purpose of life and the happiness in his heart should convey his impulse to others and convince them to fall in his line. Hence, his worldview was filled full of optimism.

In his life journey, he landed at Bishop Heber School and enrolled for the ninth standard. He was part and parcel of the new era emerging in the new millennia where opportunities transcended national boundaries and the length and breadth of the world shrunk. Information pertaining to anything and everything was available in the internet and wider scope for carving self-identity also surfaced. Dharmaraj Ravanar was positively a typical product of this period. As an enthusiastic teenager, he explored the special features of the school. He found the students of the school excelling better in the sphere of sports than academics. He also found the administration supporting the interests of the students in the case of their not violating moral principles and social expectations. Therefore, being a person with an abundant spirit of sportsmanship he was attracted to sports and as the school had the best team in football he accepted the challenge of entering it. His level of energy, stamina, the attitude of mind suited the game best. The major aspect of his decision to play football was not interfered with by his family. Unlike several families in the country that place full importance on academic pursuits and expect their wards to prepare for professional education at the higher level, Dharmaraj's family allowed him to remain happy with his choice and received happiness from his satisfaction. Soon Dharmaraj Ravanar discovered that he remained happiest when he is on the football ground playing the game.

He does not seem to fix targets and kept playing for playing sake. His free mind playing elevated his position and attracted the fans of the game. In the beginning, these fans could be none other than the fellow players and the physical instructor of the school. With all their support and encouragement, Dharmaraj found his way into the sports hostel meant for football training located at Neyveli and enrolled for the eleventh standard in a local school. Entry into a sports hostel at Higher Secondary level is a rare phenomenon but that took place in Dharmaraj's life. He studied commerce major in Higher Secondary but devoted his time to improve his talents. After spending two fruitful years in the sports hostel, he got admitted into the bachelor's degree programme of St. Joseph's College, Tiruchchirappalli. The usual aspiration of a player in the previous generation will be to enter the

state team at the junior level followed by a finding place in the university team and so on so forth and finally find a decent government job with his sports talent. Thereafter, many players would start stagnating. But Dharmaraj Ramanan decided to expand his horizons. He was selected to serve in the government-owned Indian Bank. But he placed playing football above employment.

Coaches Identified

Employment in the Indian Bank was in a way a great blessing for it took him to Chennai city. The Indian Bank team in Chennai enjoyed a unique status in the Tamil Nadu Football Association. Moreover, in Chennai, football is receiving new attention at that time and many financially capable interests were exploring the possibility of providing impetus to other games at par with or at the least next to cricket. As a result, a competitive environment emerged and players made every attempt to project the best out of them. For Dharmaraj it was a process of further learning from every player. Having fixed his position as a key defender assuming the position at 'Center-back' he has to observe the technique and subtle potential of every player and realized the uniqueness in everyone and internalized his observations. At the same time, he was encountered by the guilt feeling of not rendering justice to the job he is allotted in the bank. He has to be in his bank if he is in station and perform regular duty between 10 AM and 5 PM. This demand hindered his practice sessions and the timeframe required to take rest. This limitation and Dharmaraj's expectation to find a way out was addressed during a match played at Bangalore.

In that match, Dharmaraj and eminent coach Armando Colaco mutually discovered each other. Armando Colaco is the first Indian coach to have redefined the game and made it into a stylish sport. He is also a noted expert in reading matches and players. On his side, Dharmaraj is known for his good looks and gentle behaviour in and out of the ground and he rarely loses his temper. His biggest plus point was the faster recovery time after meeting with an odd circumstance and maintain his inner happiness while in-ground. This made him appear different and naturally appealed to the minds of everyone. Particularly, on that day while Colaco was observing Ramanan was standing at a height of 5 feet and 10 plus inches as a tough bulwark between the opponent team and the goalpost maintaining the equanimity of mind. In his strategy of 4+4+2, Colaco expected strong defenders to play an additional role and contribute to the winning of games. In Colaco's calculation, Ramanan will fill the gap of an able defender. Therefore, he threw an offer to join his squad entitled Dempo at Goa.

In such a situation, most of the players will make a choice not to leave a secured life guaranteed by a government job. If the case is one of an unmarried person it also increases the prospects of marriage alliances. But for Dharmaraj to become a disciple of Armando Colaco and learn the intricate aspects of football became the most preferred priority and the members of his family did not hinder his pursuit. Thus, he packed from Chennai to Goa – a place where he not only shaped his talents further but also chose his wife. Dempo Sports Club held all characteristics expected by Dharmaraj to kick-start his professional career. Not only the expertise of the coach Armando Colaco improved his sporting abilities and vision, but also he enjoyed learning from the warm attitude of senior players. However, after completing a year he left for Mohun Bagan in Kolkata where he played between 2006 and 2007. But the professional outlook that he internalized over the years did not match with the trends in Kolkata although all-time greats such as Bhaichung Bhutia have played for Mohun Bagan a few years before Dharmaraj could join it. However, he gave out his best for winning the Federation Cup of 2006. Thereafter, he returned to Mumbai to join Mahindra United. For the period between 2007 and 2010, he spent with Mahindra United and learned further from extraordinary coaches such as Derrick Pereira and David Booth.

Milestones and Perspectives

His tenure in Mahindra United coincided with his representing the 'under 23' National Team which added to his prestige as a player because just 16 to 18 players under the age group representing several states and

professional clubs would be filtered and allowed to play. Dharmaraj maintained his position for a period of near about three years between 2008 and 2010. From 2010 to 2014, he joined Churchill Brothers in Goa. Being a familiar place that witnessed the beginning of his professional career, he was launched to the next level and made the captain of the team. His contribution in winning the Durand Cup and IFA Shield in 2011 was the major reason in his being rewarded with captaincy. He proved his worth by winning the trophies in I-League and the Federation Cup in the years 2012-13 and 2013-14 respectively. Having proved himself as an accomplished captain of Churchill Brothers, Dharmaraj shifted to 'Pune City' where he played for the period between 2014 and 2017. 'Pune City' also provided him with space to make guest appearances for teams such as 'Bhartat FC' and 'SC de Goa' in the years 2015 and 2016 respectively. In 2017-18, he received the opportunity to play for 'Chennai City' and moved to Srinagar to strengthen the 'Real Kashmir' team there. After completing a year there, he moved to Kozhikode in Kerala and is presently representing 'Gokulam Kerala FC.'

Dharmaraj has moved closely with people of diverse states such as Goa, Bengal, Maharashtra, Kashmir, and etc. He has widely travelled out of India covering parts of Europe and he recounts his goal against Qatar in the Asian Games hosted by China. His favourite player at the International level is Thierry Henry of France who was a striker. He has been influenced by the stylish game played by London's Arsenal Foot Ball Club which he wished to be professionally a part of. In fact, Dharmaraj's body language, hairstyle, and overall outlook resemble a Westerner. May be these were requirements to reach the minds of the fans but he is a person who is strongly rooted in culture. Discipline and perfection are his natural appetite and he during childhood even dreamt of becoming a police officer. He has constantly maintained that his favourite destination is always his home – the atmosphere into which his Goa-native wife smoothly settled – and his much-applauded food is South Indian. He also finds more words to appreciate Mahesh Gawli, a defender like him who also played for 'Churchill Brothers' and completed his tenure when Dharmaraj was making his entry. His optimistic vision pertaining to the future is more significant than all of this.

Dharmaraj Ramanan hopes to convert his experience and learning into a coaching career while nearing the verge of retiring from his professional playing life. Though his value is placed above the ten million scale in 2019, he is of the realization that retirement has to be taken when energy has not dried out. As a prospective coach, he breaks the myth held by the previous generations pertaining to the physical capacity of the Indian players viz-a-viz their counterparts in the developed countries. The striking power and speed according to him can be improved through systematic training. Good physiotherapists and dieticians support teams on Indian soil as these were found to be major impediments earlier. Earlier a player who underwent an irreparable injury had no scope to cope with the questions about his future but these are all addressed these days. He also has the appreciation for the perceptive change in training the players by appointing special coaches for particular positions in the field as also the mechanisms evolved to reduce the stress during defeats.

Conclusion

Observing the course of Dharmaraj Ramanan's life and career one can find stable and steady growth. He has self-scripted his destiny and has started without a background, motivating force, promoting godfathers, so on and so forth. Yet, he did whatever pleased him and made him happy without violating the moral codes of society. Earning money and fame is an inevitable goal of human life but Dharmaraj never made it to be his top priority. He was always loyal to his coaches as well as senior players and remained disciplined. His happiness made his teammates endure tests of time and impressed his employers. He proved his statesmanship when an opportunity to represent the nation arrived and despite being a defender proved his mettle by delivering a goal against Qatar. At the most appropriate time, he was made captain of a reputed football club and he justified his elevation by winning prestigious cups for the team. The speed in which he recovered from setbacks is the lesson he could leave for the coming generations in which his contribution is expected to be a coach specializing in defending. Thus like water

Dharmaraj Ravanan has the potential to take the shape as warranted by the situation and productive power to his team and a destructive force to the rivals. Hence, the hypothesis that reads ‘Dharmaraj Ravanan’s approach of life and career is characterized by water and he has reached the target through taking a course like it’ stands to be proved.

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