



THE MORAL STRIPEASE OF THE KICKABOUT

XICO SÁ

TRANSLATED BY CHRISTINA BAUM

*It's through an apparently innocent ball game
that men reveal their true character and moral fibre.*

A man can only get to know another after having a kickabout, a *baba*, a *racha* (each region has its own expression), after kicking a ball with his mates. The kickabout is the only kind of moral striptease available to males.

That's when you know and grasp the coincidences and dissimilarities of being alive and grazing on the same dumb pastures of existence. No matter the size of your belly or your lack of breath, play with your buddies on your next holiday, even if it's just for five minutes.

Preferably with family and friends. I'm talking about kicking your brother-in-law's shin hard because you've been hearing things about him; that he's been mistreating your darling sister for no big reason or just pride. The kickabout is a Western without fatalities, but with sincere messages of honour, like the blistering shots on the pitch, where you can humiliate by dribbling or thwacking a shin. To anyone who wants to believe in tactic lies, football is drama, it's a message, an addiction, the deadly crack of the new breed of commentators.

I've just got back from Juazeiro do Norte, where mi madre lives, and, guess what, they only talked about Guarani and Icasa, the two local teams: 4-4-2 or 3-5-2, what position they will play in the next match. That's their fetish. Whatever stuff they say about statistics becomes magic, whether in the Champions League or my beloved semi-arid hell. Ah, a man can only get to know another after a kickabout with his opponents or his team. Luckily, in the first summer match, I had the Frenchman Jean Pierre Duret on my side. A sweeper-keeper who is capable of all the miracles of Father Cícero, Fatima and the Infant Jesus of Prague rolled into one. I never thought that this great lion of the European cinema could make me feel so at ease while playing as a flat-footed defender at dusk in Eudorão, a stadium high up in the "Brazilian Alps" of Caldas, Barbalha, a micro-climate at 18° C, as the scribbler Joca R. Terron – off the field due to misadventures of a footballing nature – will corroborate. When I think of the greatest goalkeepers in history, I will list Yashin, Gordon Banks, Dino Zoff, Rodolfo Rodriguez, Fillol, Taffarel, Neur, Hugo Llores (Santos) and... Jean Pierre.

It was only a kickabout, but who can deny that these weren't the most beautiful saves that I witnessed in the rear-view mirror of a defender that can only see his own misfortunes?