



## Statement on the 125th anniversary of FC Barcelona

On this birthday, as on all birthdays, we want to celebrate that we are still alive, that we are still here. 125 years later, we want to still be here. But above all, we want to celebrate that **we remain faithful to what sets us apart from the rest** of the clubs in the world.

Not because of a desire for originality, but because **it was precisely when we insisted on keeping that what set us apart from the rest of the clubs in the world that we went through the greatest period in our history.** We have been the best, won more titles and generated admiration everywhere, when we have stayed true and strongly committed, without reservations, to our unique way of being and doing things.

It is from this certainty that in this celebration we not only want to look back to the 19th century, which saw our birth, nor only to the 20th century, which we lived so intensely and saw us grow, but now, well into the 21st century, which has been spectacular, we want the celebration of the 125th anniversary to launch us into the future.

We are one of the largest and most recognised sports clubs in the world. **We are Catalans**, children of the peculiar way of understanding things that is Catalan culture. We have an increasingly exceptional ownership model, if we compare ourselves to our rivals, because **we are a club owned by members. We are a multi-sport club**. We have created a school, **la Masia**, which it is admired everywhere, with a youth team that never stops bearing fruit and generating talent. But above all, we are one of the only clubs in the world truly committed to **a recognisable style of play**, consciously developed over many years and which everyone associates with us. For the 125th anniversary, we decided to distil these irrevocable signs of our identity into **a single commitment, so firm and so clear, although not always conscious enough, that we even wear it at the heart of our crest:**

### WE WANT THE BALL

It has been 125 years of WE WANT THE BALL, and we say it like that, to celebrate the **firm persistence of a desire** that we have expressed as a collective commitment, from 29 November 1899 until today, and one which was born in the childhood enthusiasm of boys and girls, who chase footballs on a thousand school yards, streets and squares in all corners of the world, and that extends to the eagerness of members and fans, wherever Barça plays, who hold their breath when we fight to keep the ball.

WE WANT THE BALL because we refuse to give up the initiative. For better or for worse, **we have a strong will to lead, to take full responsibility for our destiny.**

WE WANT THE BALL **To enjoy, to share, to win.** To attack and to defend ourselves. To decide our future. To marvel. Because we are certain that we play better if we all play.

It has been 125 years since WE WANT THE BALL and it is the firm persistence of this desire that has led us step by step, throughout our history, towards **the style of play** that stems from it, and which is perfectly **recognisable, admired everywhere and wholly identified with Catalan culture.** It is a style of a fan base of highly diverse origins and very open to foreign influence, and has seen how this style was formed from numerous contributions. The style was solidified as a sign of identity, and it grew until it reached excellence.

**We are a club founded by a Swiss striker, Joan Gamper**, with two of his countrymen, two Englishmen, a German, an Aragonese and five Catalans. From very early on, before 1910, with the contribution of Gamper himself, Scottish players such as Pattullo and Steel, and later the work of coaches like Greenwell, Poszony, or Spouncer, Barça opted for the **Combination Game**, also called the **Passing game, which was the traditional Scottish style of**



**play** . Compared to the English school, more directly inherited from rugby, the Scottish style preferred the short, shallow and diagonal pass to the long, vertical forward kick; the combination of talent and technique, to push and physical strength; the collective game to individualism.

That is to say that **the football of combined attack, the desire to dominate through passing**, have always been there at Barça. They were already there with Alcántara, Zamora, Samitier, Kubala, Suárez, Segarra, Pujol, Fuster, Rexach. With Cruyff, Sotil, Costas, Neeskens, Simonsen and Krankl. With Alexanko, Migueli, Sánchez, Maradona, Schuster, Archibald, Lineker and Carrasco. And it continued to be there with Koeman, Guardiola, Bakero, Laudrup, Stoichkov and Romario. And of course, with la Quinta del Mini, De Boer, Cocu, Kluivert, Luis Enrique, Ronaldo, Rivaldo. With Ronaldinho, Eto'o, Deco, Puyol, Valdés, Piqué, Busquets, Xavi, Iniesta, Messi, Alba, Suarez, Neymar. And now with Ter Stegen, Araujo, Frenkie, Gavi, Pedri, Lewandowski, Mapi Leon, Putellas, Bonmatí...

Representatives of the best schools and traditions of world football have passed through here, of all those schools and traditions that fans keep in their memory because of their **dedication to attacking**, their **spectacular feats**, their **modernity**.

In fact, the 125 years of the History of Barça tell the story of football and its vanguards, both tactical and stylistic, much better than that of any other club. From the Barça of the Five Cups of Daucik and Kubala and the **Mighty Hungarians**, of the World Championship in Switzerland, in 1954, with Czibor and Kocsis, to Messi's Argentina, which won Qatar 2022, or Aitana Bonmatí's Spain that won the **Women's World Cup**, this summer in Australia, passing through the total football of Michels' **Clockwork Orange**, which dominated the 70s, and its evolution into the Cruyff's **Dream Team** in the 90s and Guardiola's **Eternal Barça** in the 2000s, which led to the victory of **La Roja** at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. This is without forgetting the **Brazilian stars** who dominated the world championships of the decade of the 90s: Romario, Ronaldo, Rivaldo, Ronaldinho. All of them wore Barça colours. **If you like football, you like Barça.**

But it wasn't until Johan Cruyff's return to the club, this time as a coach, in the 88/89 season, that we identified this desire of Barça to dominate the meaning and rhythm of the games with **possession of the ball** .

**"If you have the ball, the other team doesn't"**, said Cruyff. The ball as the game's only reference - instead of the goals and, later, the spaces - is an innovation in the history of football tactics that Cruyff introduces to the Dream Team and that Guardiola's Eternal Barça perfects. The other day I was commenting with a good friend who is a journalist that in the centenary we were only able to only celebrate one European Cup. Now there are five, seven, if we add the women's, and let's not say the number if we add the other sections. "The way we always want to play with the ball", said Guardiola, "is because I think all the players, when they were children playing football, understood that what made them happy was having the ball".

In Notícia de Catalunya, Jaume Vicens Vives's x-ray on being Catalan, which is still valid, written in the dark days of the Franco dictatorship, and published in 1954, there was no mention of football or ball. But in the third chapter, "Tool and Work," it seems to do so: "Essentially, **Catalans have suffered and continue to suffer if we cannot work**, if we are not given the possibilities to apply our working capacity to the maximum (...). Not once, but several times in the course of our existence, **we have left the weapon of the lost cause for the tool of everyday work**". It is also in this sense that Vázquez Montalbán spoke of Barça as "the unarmed army of Catalonia". The weapon of football is the ball. Better yet, **the tool of football is the ball**.

The introduction of the **rondo** and other ball conservation exercises, done in small spaces at practice, from the beginning of the 1970s, with Rinus Michels and Laureano Ruiz, and their subsequent evolution and sophistication in positional games as emblematic as the **4vs4+3**, which is used today in training camps all over the world, are unmistakable signs of this commitment to a very specific way of understanding the game, **the recognisable style of Barça** , developed in the lower categories and la Masia, and which has a lot to do with other expressions of the popular culture of this country.

**In the rondo, as in the sardana, as in the castells**, it is not a question of vindicating brute force, but of having a purpose. It is not a question of looking for heroes or of encouraging the search for partial or individual solutions, but of all the components or pieces on equal footing so that they learn to coordinate collectively and in harmony, based on their technical skills and the internalisation of the chosen method. It is through the perfect combination between the pieces that the emergence of the sought-after collective effect is achieved, be it pure beauty,



weightlessness, spectacle or good play. Natural talent is better identified, sharpened and shines brighter, when it is put to use in the group. Just look at the trajectory of the best footballer of all time, Leo Messi, with a natural individual talent beyond measure and a long and fruitful training at la Masia.

In **a culture with Christian and artisan roots** like Catalan culture, with hardly any aristocracy or army, the fascination with technique and method is easily explained. We are the country that when it dances it counts steps and beats, when it takes off the armour it does so in groups that form bunches, linings and bounds, and when it cooks it uses stir-fries, minced meat and romescos, intermediate preparations -typical of our cuisine- as or more important than the final dish.

**The obsession with "how" is built in**. From **Ramon Llull's Ars Magna**, in the 13th century, with the use of diagrams and the combinatorial logic of divine goodness, to Gaudí's trencadís technique, which recovers ceramic offcuts for new uses. The relationship between the components is what makes the successes of the system appear or emerge, the new identity of the whole, which is always greater than the sum of its parts.

We should not be surprised, therefore, that **the process, more than the result**, tells the 125 years of Barça's history. If "Do the simple things well" is a motto of La Masia, in Helenio Herrera's Barça dressing room, for example, the following phrase was hung: "Difficult things take time. The impossible, more time". And not forgetting the fact that Johan Cruyff's "Go out and enjoy" is probably the most famous catchphrase, after "Més que un club".

The successive contribution of players and, above all, of Swiss, Scottish, Hungarian and Dutch coaches, among others, not by chance from **countries with strong commercial traditions and resistance to authoritarianism**, as diverse and culturally heterogeneous as Catalonia, has shaped our style of play over the last 125 years.

Not all clubs, nor all cultures, manifest in such an evident and unconscious way, through a style of play, through a thousand expressions of popular culture, their fundamental democratism and the mistrust of authoritarianism in all its forms, their diverse configuration, the horizontality of their social hierarchy, the benefits of interchange, of technical skill or of the combination of interchangeable pieces. Not all clubs, nor all cultures, commit to **the greatness of the little things**.to become lighter than air, For all this and because we are turning 125, the time has come to celebrate that we are doing so, and that we are very proud of it. To enjoy, to share, to conquer.

At Barcelona Football Club, it has been 125 years of

**WE WANT THE BALL**