

## **Redefining Team-Win...More Lessons from the World Cup**

*“We were more selfish as players (in the past). I wanted to do everything but it’s a different game these days.”* Argentinian coach and soccer great Diego Maradona, saying the time when a superstar player could win a World Cup virtually single-handedly is gone.

*“It shows you that a team is not just one player. A player can win the tournament for you, like Argentina with Maradona (in 1996) but, in the end, everything depends on teamwork.”* Spain goalkeeper and captain, Iker Casillas

The World Cup was won by Spain and they were the worthy champion. Even the Dutch coach admitted, “The better team won.” It is true that “Spain epitomized the approach better than anyone, with every player drilled to a supreme level of technical ability, concentration and spatial awareness that enabled them to create patterns of passes probably unsurpassed by any previous nation.”<sup>1</sup>

If we want to be world class and perform at the highest level, teamwork is essential. How does teamwork really work?

### **1. Team-Win demands selecting the right people to execute the plan**

Commenting on how he does his team selection, the German Coach Joachim Loew said that rather than automatically picking the best players, he had a vision of how his team would perform and choose those he knew would carry it out<sup>2</sup>.

In other words, different people are chosen to fulfill different tasks. Not everyone is suited for any project. Who would be chosen to work depends on the project or task at hand.

If we need a strategic task force, we select those who can think strategically – the idea persons, the creative individuals, the big-picture people, and people who are willing to challenge the status quo.

If we need project implementation, we need people who are task-focused, who understand the importance of deadlines, who are strong in operational skills and yet able to gel together to make it happen.

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<sup>1</sup> *Teamwork the biggest winner.* Reuters. Published by The New Paper. July 13, 2010, p 46. Singapore Press Holdings Publication, Singapore.

<sup>2</sup> *Teamwork the biggest winner.* Reuters. Published by The New Paper. July 13, 2010, p 46. Singapore Press Holdings Publication, Singapore.

## **2. Team-Win requires each person in the team to understand their roles and execute them precisely.**

Execution is the key to translate a vision into reality. Holland reached the final having each person executing their roles to near perfection. Robben and Robin van Persie were the star strikers but it was Dick Kyut's unselfish play that created more danger.

Sneijder was the engine of the team but it was Mark van Bommel and Nigel de Jong, who were prowling across the field and creating space for the playmakers to operate in. Then, they have the defenders who were destroying the opposition team's moves. Added to that was the superb goalkeeping of Maarten Stekelenburg.

Everyone played their roles superbly. They could perform them well because of hours, days and months of preparation and practices. Great teams focus on their roles and then rehearse the team play umpteen times.

## **3. Team-Win anticipates what can go wrong and makes changes to their pattern of play.**

One more note – winning teams know how to improvise and change their pattern of play when they take a hit. Many of the teams learn to play with 9 or 10-man. Argentina and England flopped because they were not prepared for the onslaught and goals of the Germans.

When they were down, they panicked and let in more goals. Mike Tyson, former world champion boxer, once said, "Everybody's got plan until they get hit."

The most important preparation in any game, especially the final, is mental and not physical. The mental strength makes or breaks the team. The ability to focus and keep calm, inspite of tremendous pressure, is the toughest to replicate. That is why experiences in high intensity games count.

Crisis reveals the stuff that teams are made of. I believe the Spanish coach must have drummed into each player that the Dutch team was going to play rough and cynical to keep Spain from playing their usual game. And the Spanish team did not crumble under the intensity.

"Brazil, Argentina, England and Italy fell apart under the pressure. Spain thrived and that is why they are the world champions." Gary Lim, a sports journalist was spot on in his conclusion<sup>3</sup>.

## **4. Team-Win requires the players to play to their strengths**

The German epitomizes this best. They have a young team but they can generate great energy and they can run. Counter-attacking was the name of their game. But it takes a lot of energy and faith between a player who can perform a 70-metre pass, and the other team-mate who makes that perfect run to receive it.

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<sup>3</sup> Gary Lim. The Best Team Won. The New Paper. July 13, 2010. P 58. Singapore Press Holdings Publication, Singapore.

Uruguay, Paraguay and Ghana progressed through the World Cup because they played to their strengths, based on teamwork and team play, while other fancied teams, whose hopes were wrapped up with their big names like Wayne Rooney and Cristiano Ronaldo failed miserably.

## **5. Team-Win means there are more than one winner**

One of the most gratifying aspects of this World Cup is the rapturous returning receptions from the country leaders and fans of some of the losing teams.

This broadened perspective augurs well for the understanding of teams and shows a growing maturity about winning. There would be only one winner if we define winning as winning the World Cup.

### **In conclusion:**

#### **a. Team-Win applauds the team not just individual stars**

In the Final, the Spanish team had numerous individual stars, David Villa, the top goal scorer for Spain, Xavi, the playmaker and Andres Iniesta, the World Cup winner. Del Bosque, the Spanish coach was more pleased by the collective effort, "We have hugely talented players on this team. This success, being world champions, is a success for all of us. I don't think we should focus on Andres or Xavi."<sup>4</sup>

#### **b. Team-Win applauds effort not just the act of winning.**

Many football fans around the world appreciated the fact that Japan, Ghana, Uruguay, Argentina players put their best foot forward and gave their all in each game. Even after they left the pitch earlier than expected, these players were welcomed home as heroes and not seen as losers. That makes participating more meaningful.

#### **c. Team-Win manages expectations realistically and winning teams look beyond expectations to do their best**

England's coach Fabio Capello believed that his team would get to the final. Perhaps, he wanted to create a winning mindset in the players and change their attitude as perennial failures. He didn't want them to choke. But the plan backfired. They returned to an England that had high hopes raised but not met. They were completely devastated.

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<sup>4</sup> Associated Press. Des Bosque celebrates – in his solemn way. Published in The New Paper. July 13, 2010. P 54. Singapore Press Holdings Publication, Singapore.

$$\text{Satisfaction} = \frac{\text{Achievement}}{\text{Expectation}}$$

Team satisfaction is a function of achievement over expectations.

Team satisfaction is a function of delivery over expectation. When we deliver what our team expects, this is = 1 or an "OK Team". When we deliver more than our team expects, this is > 1 or a "Wow Team". But when we deliver less than our team expects, this is < 1 or a "Lousy team"

When Fabello raised the team's expectation and his team achieved less than his and England's expectation, he was utterly disappointed and so was England!

Great teams know how to manage their expectations but at the same time, outfly their expectations.

Finally, Team-Win also means remembering those who have gone before us. Iniesta's flashing of the words '*Dani Jarque, Always with us*' printed on his inner vest after scoring the winning goal, when he pulled off his jersey, was a touching gesture of remembrance to the would-be Spanish team captain who had died during a pre-season tour in Italy, one month after he was selected.

They had not played together before. Iniesta recognized that there were others who had gone before him who made team-win possible. "WE wanted to pay tribute to him and we thought it was the best opportunity to do so."<sup>5</sup>

That is what I would call TEAM-WIN.

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<sup>5</sup> Associated Press. In memory of my friend. Published in The New Paper. July 13, 2010. P 54. Singapore Press Holdings Publication, Singapore.