

FOOTBALL AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT The Importance of Soft Skills in Sporting Environments

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, football (soccer) has become the most popular sport globally. This increased popularity has been associated with various public, social and educational issues. In the latter context, the focus has expanded beyond mere history or rules, encompassing the soft skills developed in sports environments. The acquisition of such skills as leadership, effective communication, and teamwork is of pivotal importance to the holistic development of individuals.

In the context of sports training facilities, young individuals acquire the capacity to address disagreements, engage in collaborative endeavours to accomplish shared objectives, and effectively navigate high-pressure scenarios. The impact of these skills on society is significant, as participants trained in these areas contribute positively to their communities. The purpose of this article is to analyse the activities conducted in football schools that help to strengthen these skills. The present study employed a qualitative methodology, incorporating a biographic narrative from a subjective epistemological perspective, thereby facilitating a more profound comprehension of the manner in which football influences the development of these skills.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the role of sports schools in the development and enhancement of children's soft skills. It is therefore vital to emphasise the significance of educational spaces by means of comprehensive approaches that support the development of schools and the context to which they belong. In this sense, the actions of schools and foundations that seek to enhance the growth of vulnerable children and communities through sporting activities are studied.

Conversely, in order to comprehend the impact of these activities on individuals at an early age, the concepts of emotional intelligence, sustainable development and intelligent organisations are posited as theoretical postulates that augment the development of the information in this article.

2. Theoretical Antechamber

The theoretical underpinnings of Daniel Goleman, Jeffrey Sachs and Peter Senge serve as the foundational framework for the examination of the nexus between football, the cultivation of soft skills, and social impact. The authors' ideas on emotional intelligence, sustainable development and organisational dynamics, respectively, broaden our understanding of how interactions in sporting environments help to shape more resilient and cohesive individuals and communities.

In his book *Emotional Intelligence* (Goleman, 1995), Daniel Goleman posits the notion that individuals who possess high emotional intelligence are more likely to achieve success in life. This assertion is based on the premise that such individuals possess the capacity to recognise and manage their own emotions, as well as those of others. This skill is reflected in the football environment, where players learn to manage pressure, resolve conflicts and work as a team, thereby improving their self-awareness and interpersonal skills. As Goleman asserts, emotional control is paramount for achieving a satisfactory outcome in a variety of situations, a skill that is indispensable in sporting contexts for maintaining composure and making decisions under pressure (Goleman, 1995).

Football players on the field must develop both their technical skills and their ability to regulate their emotions in high-pressure situations. For instance, players must learn to manage anxiety, collaborate with teammates, and respect the referee's decisions in a decisive final. These elements of emotional management are described by Goleman. The ability to resolve conflicts within a team can be regarded as a prime example of emotional intelligence in action. According to Goleman, successful leaders are not necessarily the most technical or authoritarian, but rather those who can control and understand their emotions, a quality that sport fosters in young people (Goleman, 1995). Consequently, it can be deduced that these skills have an impact that extends beyond the context of sport.

The argument is made that emotional intelligence is not developed on a solitary basis; instead, it functions to promote sustainable cities. In response to this, Jeffrey Sachs (2015) emphasises in his book *The Age of Sustainable Development* that "sustainable development is not only an economic goal, but also a social and environmental one". Football schools in vulnerable areas fulfil an essential social function by providing young people with a space for personal and community growth, and by keeping them away from environments of violence or social exclusion. According to Sachs, "inclusive programmes that promote social justice and equitable access to opportunities are fundamental to sustainable development" (Sachs, 2015, p. 78). This is clearly evident in sports projects aimed at social change.

It is evident that sports projects in areas affected by poverty and violence, such as those supported by player or club foundations, have the capacity to impart technical sports skills in addition to providing young people with opportunities to enhance their health, escape violent environments and develop skills that will enable them to integrate into society in a more

productive way. According to Sachs, sustainable development must ensure that young people in these communities have access to education and resources, as well as to spaces for participation where football becomes an inclusive platform for all, regardless of their socioeconomic background (Sachs, 2015).

In the context of the triad of sustainability, quality of life, social development and community care are recognised as pivotal components in the development of a society. This notion is applicable to football teams, insofar as each player contributes to the success of the team through a collaborative approach based on continuous improvement. In his seminal work *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge proposes that “learning teams are vital for organisations to be able to adapt and grow in complex environments” (Senge, 1990, p. 141). Senge also introduces the concept of “shared vision” as a key element for teams to achieve their goals, something that in football is crucial for coordinating efforts and executing strategies on the pitch (Senge, 1990, p. 206).

In Senge's view, the hallmark of a successful team transcends the mere aggregation of individuals endowed with distinct competencies. Instead, it is the manifestation of a learning community that shares a unified vision and embraces mental models, thereby facilitating collaborative and purposeful endeavours. Within the domain of football, this prevailing viewpoint is exemplified by team tactics, wherein each player is required to adjust their performance in accordance with the objectives established for the collective, prioritising the success of the team over that of the individual. This philosophy is intertwined with the development of soft skills, such as teamwork, adaptability and problem solving, which Senge recognises as essential for the transformation of any organisation or community.

In addition to the aforementioned points, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established by the United Nations in the 2030 Agenda have a significant impact on a variety of social domains. Football has emerged as an effective medium for promoting several of these goals, particularly within vulnerable communities. The SDGs pertaining to poverty reduction, quality education, gender equality, reduced inequalities, decent work and economic growth, and the establishment of sustainable communities are of particular pertinence within the context of soft skills development and sport.

Table 1. Development of the SDGs

ODS	Features
	Football has been used to alleviate poverty in vulnerable communities. Programmes such as Street Football World have proven effective in providing entertainment, education and economic opportunities for young people. They provide sports scholarships and employment opportunities in the sports sector, as well as training to help young people enter the labour market. Despite the fact that more than 700 million people are affected by extreme poverty, the World Bank believes that promoting sports activities can empower communities and improve living conditions.

 4 DE CALIDAD EDUCACION	Its focus is on ensuring that all individuals have access to an inclusive, equitable and quality education. As an educational tool, football teaches not only physical and technical skills, but also essential life skills such as conflict resolution, teamwork and discipline. Programmes such as Right to Play and the FC Barcelona Foundation combine sport with formal and informal educational approaches, helping to reduce school dropout rates and motivate young people to complete their studies. Indeed, research shows that children who participate in sports programmes tend to perform better academically and are more likely to stay in education.
 5 IGUALDAD DE GÉNERO	Football has played a significant role in the fight for gender equality, enabling girls and young women to participate in a traditionally male-dominated sport. In Latin America and Africa, initiatives such as Fútbol Más have created safe spaces where girls can take part in sports that challenge gender stereotypes and encourage equality. Globally, female participation in football has increased significantly, and organisations such as FIFA and UN Women have launched campaigns like "One Win Leads to Another" to promote equal access to sport. Not only does football remove gender barriers, it also improves women's self-esteem and leadership skills.
 8 TRABAJO DECENTE Y CRECIMIENTO ECONÓMICO	In many regions of the world, football fosters job creation and economic growth. It creates direct jobs in the sports industry, such as coaches and referees, as well as indirect jobs in areas such as tourism, hospitality and marketing. According to a FIFA report, sporting competitions, particularly World Cups, generate numerous temporary and permanent job opportunities and attract investment in infrastructure and services. Football schools provide young people with the opportunity to develop transferable skills, thus fostering inclusive and sustainable economic growth.
 10 REDUCCIÓN DE LAS DESIGUALDADES	Football has proven to be an effective means of reducing racial, economic and social disparities. Through sports programmes in marginalised areas, low-income youth are able to access recreational spaces, education and resources that would otherwise be unavailable to them. In countries such as Brazil, where football is a national passion, many young people in favelas have used sport as a way to escape poverty and crime. At a global level, organisations such as the UEFA Foundation aim to make football accessible to everyone, regardless of their socio-economic or ethnic background. They support initiatives in Africa, Asia and Latin America that help people who are displaced or at risk of social exclusion.



Football can promote social integration, mutual respect, and cooperation in both urban and rural areas, fostering more inclusive and sustainable communities. Sports facilities encourage a healthy and active lifestyle by bringing communities together. Projects such as Football for Peace, which operates in conflict zones, and the Cruyff Foundation, which builds sports facilities in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, have played a significant part in fostering social cohesion and reducing violence. Creating public sports areas improves the sustainability and liveability of cities, in line with the goal of inclusive, safe urbanisation.

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

3. Educational Approach

Within the domain of sports academies, two distinct approaches are evident. The first of these is the educational approach, which places emphasis on cultivating influential skills in relation to respecting social rules, individuals within their respective communities, and interpersonal relationships, amongst other factors. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that participation in physical activity has a significant positive impact on the physical and mental health of the participants.

It is widely acknowledged that football is a sport characterised by diversity, with a set of rules that players are obliged to adhere to. The importance of rules in society is recognised by children from an early age when they learn to interpret the rules in different contexts. A study by the International Centre for Sports Studies (CIES) in 2020 concluded that participation in team sports such as football results in an improvement in respect for rules among 82% of young participants.

A fundamental aspect of football is the collaborative effort towards a shared objective, thereby cultivating a diverse array of competencies, including but not limited to communication, respect, and empathy. An analysis carried out by the UEFA *Grassroots Charter* indicates that 75% of young people who participate in football programmes report an improvement in their interpersonal skills, particularly in terms of confidence and cooperation. Another salient issue is the significance of sport for the mental well-being of young players. A report by *StreetFootballWorld* highlights that young people involved in football programmes are 30% more likely to engage in community activities and demonstrate greater respect for cultural differences, thereby reinforcing social cohesion within communities.

3.1. Competitive Approach

From a competitive standpoint, football schools do not merely concentrate on honing technical abilities; they also prioritise cultivating key competencies that foster success both on the field and beyond. These are considered to be pivotal in fostering a culture of professionalism within communities across diverse geographical and socio-economic contexts.

In a competitive environment, football instils in young people the ability to cope with pressure, overcome setbacks and maintain motivation. The ability to demonstrate these emotional competencies is not only essential in football, but also in other areas of life and in professional settings. Programmes such as those of the Real Madrid Foundation have demonstrated that 70% of young people who participate in its sports schools exhibit significant enhancements in emotional management, which facilitates enhanced resilience in adverse situations.

3.2. Football in Vulnerable Communities

Football schools function as social integration tools, with the objective of assisting children from disadvantaged backgrounds in the development of life skills and the establishment of positive relationships within their communities. The efficacy of UEFA's programmes in mitigating the risk of social exclusion among young people has been well-documented, with a concomitant enhancement of societal inclusion.

Football schools also promote youth empowerment, especially in disadvantaged communities. Initiatives such as Common Goal concentrate on empowering young individuals to assume leadership roles within their respective communities and utilise football as a medium for fostering positive social change. The programme has reached more than 90,000 young people in 27 countries, providing both sports skills and community leadership training.

Programmes such as those of the UEFA Foundation work with vulnerable young people in countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, providing access to sporting activities that foster integration. These initiatives have benefited more than 1.2 million young people, ensuring not only sports training, but also educational and psychosocial support.

The Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) has been a proponent of the Inter Campus initiative, a programme that has been implemented in numerous countries, including Israel, Palestine, Venezuela, Colombia, and Angola, among others. The primary objective of the Inter Campus programme is to foster the development of children between the ages of 6 and 14, with a focus on promoting their social skills and facilitating their integration into diverse linguistic, cultural, and religious environments. The Campus is committed to cultivating an environment that fosters values such as respect, resilience, and dedication. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that these initiatives address the broader issues afflicting communities at large, as evidenced by their programme's commitment to ensuring the provision of sustenance for members of their academies. Coaches underscore the significance of a balanced diet, comprising three meals a day, emphasising its profound impact on the holistic development of children.

In Colombia, a programme analogous to Inter Campus is in operation under the title of Fútbol con Corazón (FCC). This initiative is aimed at the promotion of values and skills among a cohort of over 3,000 children, ranging in age from 5 to 17 years, within the city of Barranquilla. The programme is reinforced by workshops on coexistence, sports practices and final reflections on the activities. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) programme is designed to provide comprehensive training to children and parents who have been invited to participate in workshops. During these workshops, the participants are instructed in the same values and skills, thereby ensuring that the training is comprehensive and achieves the objectives.

The backing of esteemed foundations and sports organisations such as UEFA and Inter Milan serves to expand the reach of these programmes, thereby ensuring that a greater number of children are able to benefit from the knowledge they impart. These programmes contribute to the development of society as a whole, supporting the growth and progress of communities in a holistic manner. Moreover, an analysis of the contexts in which children are raised can facilitate a more nuanced understanding of their needs and vulnerabilities in the context of their training.

4. Success Stories

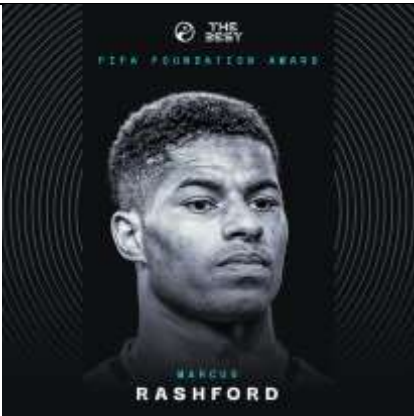
The actions of the most relevant clubs in the world are essential to achieve transcendental achievements in sport and society. The broad reach of these European entities has enabled them to provide substantial support to a significant number of children and individuals worldwide, thereby achieving substantial global coverage. Examples of teams with foundations include Real Madrid (Real Madrid Foundation), Manchester United (Manchester United Foundation) and Paris Saint-Germain (PSG Foundation).

Table 2. Sports foundations

Foundations	Features
	• In the history of football, Real Madrid has been the most relevant team. Its impressive track record and world-class players have earned it a global fan base, which has been instrumental in the success of its programmes supporting various initiatives that already benefit almost 2,000,000 people. • “Los Merengues”, as they are known, have a foundation that operates in more than 100 countries, combining sport and its values to promote social, educational, technological and inclusive factors in a timely manner. These activities are not only focused on children; they also provide fathers, mothers and families with access to nutrition and digital literacy workshops as part of a comprehensive process.
	• The Manchester Red Devils have an extraordinary history. Their resilience and ability to excel in times of adversity have undoubtedly played a key role in building a close-knit community with some of the world's greatest supporters. • The English team has sought to cover a wide range of areas necessary for people's full and integral development. Its programmes include leadership development, psychological support, access to higher education, and the inclusion of girls, women, and people with physical and cognitive limitations in sport.
	• The Parisians have grown exponentially in football and social terms in recent years. The focus they have achieved has made them the most competitive local club and a formidable international rival, generating opportunities to promote their values around the globe. • The French squad has carried out activities that promote development in challenging circumstances, such as the initiatives implemented in the Rwandan refugee camp. PSG provides support in various forms, including food, psychological support and education, to promote community development.

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

Table 3. Top players

Player	Features
 Lionel Messi	Through the Leo Messi Foundation, Lionel Messi focuses on education and children's health. The foundation has built hospitals and supported global efforts to improve paediatric care, including funding a cancer treatment centre in Messi's hometown of Rosario. Messi's collaboration with UNICEF has helped to advocate for children's rights, and his foundation provides educational opportunities for vulnerable communities.
 Cristiano Ronaldo	Cristiano Ronaldo has demonstrated a deep commitment to philanthropy, supporting a range of causes, from children's health to disaster relief. He has worked with organisations such as Save the Children, UNICEF and World Vision, making significant donations such as the €1.4 million he raised by selling his European Golden Shoe, which he used to build schools in Gaza. He has also donated substantial amounts to Nepal earthquake relief and to fund medical treatment for children with serious illnesses. Beyond monetary contributions, he actively promotes blood and bone marrow donation.
 Marcus Rashford	Marcus Rashford is a leading advocate in the fight against child hunger in the UK. His campaign to extend free school meals during the COVID-19 pandemic attracted widespread attention and prompted the UK government to change its mind and support millions of children. Rashford's efforts have received widespread recognition, and he continues his work by partnering with food distribution charities and using his platform to influence social change and combat food insecurity.
 Didier Drogba	Through the Didier Drogba Foundation, Didier Drogba focuses on improving healthcare and education in his native Côte d'Ivoire. He has funded the construction of hospitals and worked on initiatives aimed at improving access to quality medical services. The foundation's efforts have also extended to educational projects, which have a significant impact on local communities in West Africa.

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

5. Psychological Impact

Football exerts a considerable influence on the mental health of young individuals, encompassing the development of their emotional and psychological well-being. The sport fosters the development of several pivotal psychological competencies that contribute to overall well-being, including enhanced self-esteem, resilience, and effective stress management.

Participation in sporting activities, such as football, provides young people with a platform where they can experience success and achievement. A study published in the *Journal of Sports Sciences* found that young people who regularly participate in sporting activities experience higher levels of self-esteem, due to individual and team achievements, which reinforces their sense of self-worth. Furthermore, learning to overcome challenges in a sporting environment has been shown to boost self-confidence.

Football, as a high-performance sport, has also been shown to facilitate the development of effective stress management tools in young people. The *British Journal of Sports Medicine* asserts that participation in team sports, such as football, has been demonstrated to engender a substantial decline in cortisol levels, a stress hormone. This phenomenon is attributed to the provision of a conduit for the dissipation of both physical and emotional pressures encountered in the quotidian environment. Participation in football has been demonstrated to facilitate the release of endorphins, which has a positive effect on mood.

Football has been shown to instil in young people the capacity for resilience in the face of setbacks and the ability to persevere in the aftermath of defeat (Jones, 2019). These are pivotal competencies that extend beyond the realm of sport and into the everyday lives of young people. The concept of resilience, defined as the ability to recover from or overcome adversity, is a concept that is cultivated in sporting environments through the experience of high-pressure situations and the successful navigation of collective challenges. A study by the American Psychological Association (APA) demonstrates that young athletes who participate in activities such as football are more likely to develop a growth mindset and a greater tolerance for frustration.

Football is not merely a sport; it is also a social activity that fosters a sense of community. For a considerable number of young people, participation in a team engenders a profound sense of belonging and camaraderie. Research from the Harvard Graduate School of Education highlights that participation in sporting activities can be pivotal in fostering a sense of community and providing social support, particularly among adolescents who encounter feelings of isolation. Interaction with peers has been shown to foster communication and teamwork skills, which are essential for emotional and social well-being.

Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that participation in sporting activities can act as a preventative factor in the onset of psychological disorders. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) asserts that young people who engage in regular sporting activities are less prone to developing depression or anxiety compared to those who do not participate in such activities. Football, in particular, has been shown to facilitate the channeling of young people's energy into positive and constructive activities, thereby promoting a healthy mindset.

6. Models of Leadership in Sport

Football, as a team sport, fosters a unique environment in which young people can develop both technical and leadership skills. Football's leadership role models are derived from two distinct sources: coaches and players who embody exemplary leadership qualities. These individuals impart their knowledge and expertise to young individuals, imparting the skills necessary to lead effectively in diverse settings, both within the confines of the playing field and beyond. This process of acquiring leadership skills has been shown to have a significant impact on the personal and professional development of young players.

The role of the football coach in the leadership development of young players is of critical importance. A study undertaken by the Coaching Association of Canada has demonstrated that

coaches are responsible for the instruction of technical skills, in addition to the modelling of behaviours such as decision-making, emotion management and motivation. It has been demonstrated that coaches who adopt a positive, collaborative leadership approach are able to inspire players to assume leadership roles within the team. This, in turn, fosters a growth mindset and a sense of shared responsibility.

Within the teams, captains and more experienced players assume visible leadership roles. These players, as natural leaders, provide guidance to the younger players not only in terms of tactics, but also in the emotional management of the team during critical moments. A study in the *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching* has highlighted how those in the role of captain within football teams develop leadership skills. These skills are developed through the responsibility of team morale, conflict resolution and effective communication between players and coaches. It is evident that captains are required to learn how to make quick decisions under pressure and maintain group cohesion. These skills are transferable to other aspects of life.

Football is a sport that engenders high-pressure scenarios, compelling players to make critical decisions at pivotal moments, such as in significant matches or unfavourable circumstances. This experience cultivates a leadership style characterised by resilience and the capacity for expeditious and efficacious decision-making. It has been demonstrated that young footballers who participate in high-pressure situations develop leadership skills that enable them to manage anxiety and take control in difficult situations.

In contrast to the hierarchical leadership model typically observed in other sports, American football employs a collaborative leadership approach. As asserted by the *European Journal of Sport Science*, the most successful football teams frequently implement leadership structures that distribute leadership roles across multiple players. This approach enables all team members to assume responsibility for their individual performance and that of the team as a whole. This approach assists young people in comprehending that leadership entails more than merely issuing directives; it also encompasses the act of listening to, providing support for, and encouraging their teammates.

It is widely acknowledged that young players often learn from observing their role models, as exemplified by the leadership demonstrated by football stars within both their clubs and national teams. Examples of footballers who have assumed leadership roles both on and off the pitch include Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo and Megan Rapinoe. These players have influenced not only their peers, but also the younger generation who look up to them as role models.

7. Integration and Diversity through Football

Football has been demonstrated to have an extraordinary impact on social integration and the promotion of diversity, especially in contexts of inequality, exclusion or discrimination. As a global sport, football has been demonstrated to be a potent instrument in the dismantling of cultural and social barriers, engendering an environment wherein young individuals from diverse backgrounds can collaborate and compete on a level playing field.

Football's capacity to integrate young people from diverse social classes, ethnicities and nationalities is attributable to its universal accessibility. A European Commission report demonstrates that football can serve as an effective medium for promoting social inclusion, particularly among immigrant and minority communities. In several European countries, football programmes have been implemented with the aim of integrating refugees and migrants through sport, thereby promoting cultural understanding and peaceful coexistence.

In numerous underprivileged communities across the globe, football has been shown to function as a secure environment in which young individuals from deprived circumstances can engage with peers from diverse backgrounds and establish favourable relationships. The FIFA Football for Hope programme is an illustration of the manner in which sporting activities have

been employed in social development initiatives within marginalised communities in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The programme functions as a medium through which young individuals can collaborate, cultivate interpersonal competencies and foster mutual respect. These initiatives utilise football not only as a vehicle for promoting integration, but also as a platform to address pressing issues such as discrimination, poverty and violence.

The global landscape of professional football teams is characterised by a diverse composition of players hailing from various nationalities, cultures and religious backgrounds. This diversity is a powerful manifestation of the principles of diversity and inclusion, which are fundamental tenets in today's global society. A study undertaken by Bielefeld University in Germany has indicated that football teams which exhibit greater cultural diversity within their squads are not only more inclusive but also demonstrate enhanced performance. This is attributable to the variety of perspectives and competencies contributed by their players. This lends further support to the notion that diversity is a strength, both in sport and in society.

In addition to its role in promoting cultural diversity, football has played a key role in the fight for gender equality. Notwithstanding the historical challenges confronting women's football, the sport has witnessed a notable increase in global support, thereby facilitating enhanced participation and leadership opportunities for women. A prime example of this phenomenon is FIFA's drive to increase the visibility of women's football internationally, a strategy which promotes equal opportunities for women at all levels. It is evident that sporting events such as the Women's World Cup have not only led to an increase in interest but have also contributed to the fostering of respect and equality, both on and off the playing field.

For many years, football has been a vehicle for addressing racial discrimination. Programmes such as Kick It Out in the UK seek to eradicate racism in football, through the education of players and fans on the importance of tolerance and respect in sport. Initiatives such as these have been instrumental in reducing incidents of discrimination in stadiums and promoting the inclusion of players of different races in leagues around the world.

8. Women's Football as a Space for Cohesion

Historically, the sport of women's football has functioned as a medium for the pursuit of gender equality, offering women a platform to challenge conventional norms and compete on a global scale. Despite considerable progress in terms of visibility and support, female footballers continue to grapple with the persistent challenge of achieving parity with their male counterparts in terms of conditions.

In recent decades, the popularity and institutional support of women's football have increased significantly. The FIFA Women's World Cup serves as a salient example of this progress, marked by a substantial increase in the number of spectators. The 2019 edition proved to be a significant landmark, with FIFA reporting that it attracted over one billion global viewers. Furthermore, the financial remuneration for the Women's World Cup has been increasing, although it remains considerably lower than that of the men's version.

Notwithstanding the enhancement in the visibility of women's football, the discrepancy in remuneration and the availability of resources remains a salient issue. A report by the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) has revealed that professional female players receive significantly lower remuneration than their male counterparts. For instance, while the world's highest-paid female player, American Alex Morgan, earns approximately \$400,000 per year at her club, some male football players earn more than that amount in a single month. This wage disparity underscores the necessity for policies that promote greater gender equality in sport.

Nevertheless, a number of national federations and sporting bodies have initiated measures to address this disparity. In 2022, the United States Soccer Federation declared that it had reached an agreement to implement equal pay for its national teams, representing a landmark development in the ongoing struggle for gender equality within the sporting realm. Moreover, other leagues, such as England's Women's Super League, have increased investment in the

development of women's football, thereby improving working conditions and access to resources for female players.

Moreover, the presence of women's football in the media has also increased. A study conducted by the Women's Sports Foundation has revealed a 30% increase in media coverage of women's events in recent years, particularly during prominent tournaments such as the Women's World Cup and the Olympic Games. This increased exposure has the dual benefits of generating interest and enhancing the representation of women in sport, thereby serving as a source of inspiration for future generations of female players.

The growth of women's football has an impact that extends beyond the field of play. Players such as Megan Rapinoe and Marta Vieira da Silva have become global icons, using their platform to advocate for women's rights, the LGBTQ+ community and other social causes. In particular, Rapinoe has been an active proponent of the campaign for equal remuneration in sport, while Marta is recognised for her contributions to the promotion of women's football in Brazil, a nation where women have historically encountered obstacles in their participation in sports.

9. Conclusion

Football, the most popular sport worldwide, is not merely a source of entertainment; it functions as a potent instrument for the cultivation of soft skills and social transformation. The present article explores the manner in which football schools, foundations and sports programmes contribute to the enhancement of competencies such as leadership, effective communication, teamwork and emotional management. These competencies are of pivotal significance for the holistic development of young people.

From a formative approach, football schools can be regarded as settings in which values fundamental for social coexistence are imparted. As Daniel Goleman contends in his book *Emotional Intelligence*, players not only develop technical skills, but also learn to manage their emotions and build healthier interpersonal relationships. This emotional development is pivotal in preparing young athletes to confront challenges both on and off the field, thereby fostering their transition into more empathetic and aware citizens.

Conversely, from a competitive standpoint, football cultivates qualities such as discipline, resilience, and the capacity to perform under duress, which are pivotal in both professional and personal contexts. The healthy competitiveness that characterises the football environment has been shown to foster a number of key values in young people, including a respect for rules, a sense of cooperation with peers, and a developing understanding of fairness. These are all skills that have been identified as being of paramount importance in order to successfully navigate the demands of the modern world of work.

A close analysis of vulnerable communities has demonstrated the potential of football to act as a catalyst for social change. Programmes such as those of the Real Madrid Foundation and other analogous organisations demonstrate the potential of sport to function as a conduit for social inclusion, aiding children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in evading violence, poverty and marginalisation. The positive impact of football on social cohesion and the establishment of resilient communities is irrefutable, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly with regard to the reduction of inequalities and the promotion of sustainable cities.

It can be posited that football is not solely a sport that fosters competition and teamwork; it has also been employed as an effective tool for violence prevention and peace promotion in various communities affected by conflict or social violence. It has been demonstrated that organisations and sports projects around the world utilise football as a means of resolving tensions, fostering social cohesion, and teaching peaceful conflict resolution skills.

From a psychological standpoint, football exerts a profound influence on players and fans alike, fostering a sense of belonging and self-esteem. The cultivation of teamwork and the

capacity to manage stress in competitive scenarios has been demonstrated to fortify players' mentalities, thereby equipping them with the tools to confront life's challenges with enhanced resilience.

The integration of leadership role models within football teams has also been instrumental in fostering the development of new generations of leaders. It is evident that coaches and captains fulfil a dual role, acting as both tactical guides and ethical role models, encouraging players to make autonomous decisions that serve the collective good. These models of participatory leadership are consistent with Peter Senge's seminal work, *The Fifth Discipline*, which underscores the pivotal role of learning teams and a shared vision for achieving collective success.

In summary, football has been demonstrated to be an effective means of preventing violence and promoting a culture of peace. In communities affected by conflict or high levels of crime, football has been identified as a space where young people can channel their energies constructively, learn to resolve conflicts peacefully and respectfully, and engage in positive activities. Initiatives such as Football for Peace have demonstrated the potential of sport to serve as a catalyst for the reconstruction of social structures in regions impacted by armed conflict or severe economic deprivation.

Finally, football, in addition to being a sport, is a high-impact social phenomenon, capable of transforming lives and communities through the development of soft skills, social inclusion and the creation of opportunities. Sport has been proven to be an effective medium for personal and collective growth, which contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and helps to build a more equitable and supportive world.

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