

What would Guardiola be without Cruyff?

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Pep Guardiola

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The connection between Johan Cruyff and Pep Guardiola is obvious to everyone, and whoever knows the least about football history knows that the fundamentals of the teams coached by the Catalan coach are a legacy of the Dutchman's ideas. However, it is important to note that Cruyff was not just a master, and that Guardiola owes him more than a revolutionary approach to the game. It is very likely that the world today would not even know who Guardiola is, if it were not Cruyff.

Guardiola's professional career, first as a player and then as a coach, is largely a reflection of Cruyff's very accurate observation. The football that came from his boots, and the football that he idealized and that his players now put into practice, is at least partly a consequence of Cruyff's idea that, in football, intellectual attributes are more relevant than athletic attributes. Without Cruyff, Guardiola would not have been the phenomenal player he was, but he would not have learned that football is played above all with the brain.

It is almost unanimous that a slight player, even if very talented, needs gym work to play at the highest level. Make no mistake: just as Guardiola would never make it to Barcelona's first team if it were not for Cruyff, Sergio Busquets, the

best Spanish player at current EURO 2020, would hardly be known today if it were not for Guardiola. Unable to see in their players more than the sum of their athletic attributes, coaches continue to ostracize the most intelligent, the most creative and the most talented. And then, when they try to replicate some of the characteristics of Guardiola's teams, they do not understand why they fall so short.

In Guardiola's teams, speed in action, excellent technique, vision of the game, decision-making and intelligence are absolutely fundamental, far beyond the athletic aspect. The fact that Guardiola was a player who embodied the best characteristics (vision of the game, decision-making and intelligence), is crucial to understand the football he idealizes as a coach.

Even today, there are those who refer to that Barcelona team from 2008 to 2012 as a team of dwarfs (it was the team with the lowest average height in all of Europe). And yet, that same dwarf team is, for many, the best team in history. Manchester City, who were crowned English champion in 2017/2018 with a record 100 points and a series of other broken marks, had the lowest average height in the English League. The relationship between the style of play and the profile of players that Guardiola chooses to form the squad is undeniable. My contacts in Manchester tell me that the athlete's shape is not even a criterion for Guardiola and that really the players that interest him, for reasons that have mainly to do with the development of the skills that characterize them, tend to be smaller.



Johan Cruyff

Prioritizing agility, speed of thinking and execution in all players and decision-making implies disregarding other characteristics and, therefore, the body profile where they are most effective (unlike Jose Mourinho, who does not even analyze a defender if he is less than 1.92 meters high). The low stature of Guardiola's teams is a consequence of the type of football he prefers.

To play as Guardiola intends, there is no use for quick but unintelligent players, taller players but little in technical ability, or very physically strong players, who leave their body on the pitch and do not lose an individual duel, but who are unable to make right decisions, with or without the ball.

Football with a short pass, a constant search for spaces and systematic combinations and triangulations that Guardiola's teams play is partly the result of living with a coach like Cruyff. Cruyff's heritage is twofold: at the behest of the Dutchman, Guardiola acquired ideas about how to play football, but he also learned to value a certain type of philosophy. So, what would Guardiola be without Cruyff?

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