Barcelona's right-back philosopher out to make world a better place.

Internacional | 24-02-2007 | 12:41

A crowd gathers in the sunshine at the Camp Nou, hoping for a glimpse of their heroes - a fleet of luxury cars pulling away to cheering and applause. A BMW here, a Mercedes there, a Hummer, a Ferrari, a Porsche or two ... and a van. Yes, a van. It is not your typical footballer's car, but then the driver is not your typical footballer.
Oleguer Presas rejects suggestions that he's different and is uncomfortable with labels. Sitting in the bowels of the Camp Nou while he explains his beliefs in a soft, thoughtful voice, it is apparent that facile descriptions do him little justice, but there's no escaping the fact that he stands out - and not just because of the beard. Instead, Oleguer stands out because he speaks out.

The Barça right-back is a committed campaigner, an economics graduate who contributes to cultural and political journals with carefully elaborated articles, he supports Catalan literacy crusades and Catalan independence, and dedicated the only goal of his career to a fourteen year old from Sabadell who had been arrested for protesting against the mayor. He is the author of a book called Camí d'Itaca (The Road to Ithaca), which deals with everything from the Franco years to the war on terror and even anorexia.

He is also the author of an article entitled De Bona Fe (In Good Faith), which was published in Directa, a Catalan social journal, and then in the Basque newspaper Berria. In the article, Oleguer questions the independence of the Spanish judiciary, using the ETA terrorist Ignacio De Juana Chaos as an example of the hypocrisy of the system. It is a system he distrusts, right down to its party political representatives, insisting: "No party represents me. I feel closer to civil society than political parties; the only thing they really want from the people is a vote every four years. That's not the democracy I believe in."

Oleguer's article was a reflection on the state of law and De Juana was just one example, but the fall-out was intense. He was portrayed as supporting a convicted terrorist with 25 deaths on his hands. The press attacked him, the former Bolton striker Salva Ballesta said he deserved "less respect than a dog turd", and boot sponsors Kelme dumped him. When Barça visited Valencia, he was whistled and booed with every touch.

Wouldn't it have been easier to keep his mouth shut? "Yes," he says softly, "but life isn't easy. If

we want a better world, we all need to roll up our sleeves. It's easy to moan to your friends and then do nothing. The consequences I suffer are nothing compared to what many people go through. What did sadden me, though, was that most didn't actually read the piece. If people engaged in dialogue with intelligence and disagreed, then fine, but they didn't."

And yet Oleguer is realistic enough to recognise that snap judgements are inevitable, that the headlines would focus on De Juana. It is a product, he believes, of a world where superficial imagery triumphs over analysis in wave after wave of information. "I often ask myself why we went to war in Iraq, why people weren't more scandalised by it, why they didn't do more when polls said they were anti-war. That's one of the great questions. But we live in a society where the news is voracious," he says. "There are stories that are hugely important but within a week they're forgotten.

"For me, it's shameful that [Iraq] was destroyed. And now they say: 'Oh, actually, no, there weren't any Weapons of Mass Destruction after all but we're going to stay here a while because there's such disorder'. But, that disorder was created by you! It's clear that there are imperialistic, economic and strategic interests behind the war but the news moves on and everyone focuses on something else. We have to stop and reflect a bit on where we are going, about imposing a more sustainable type of development, with genuine cooperation."

But doesn't football serve the same function, could it not be seen as a modern day opium of the masses? One to which Oleguer contributes? "It is helpful to rationalise the game, but football does matter," he says. "Because people give it importance."

And for Oleguer, nowhere is that more significant than at Barcelona, the club that presents itself as a Catalan flagship, an anti-Francoist resistance force. Oleguer writes in his book that: "When Barcelona win the league, we become the Army of joy finally able to face up to [Franco's troops]. We imagine ourselves halting that pack of tanks, responding to their bullets with song, laughing in the face of the fascist ire."

It might sound far fetched, and Barça's history is far less clear-cut than the official version would have it, but at least with Oleguer there's no shallow lip service to the legend, no ¡Visca Barça, Visca Catalunya! Now, where's my cheque?. "For me, Barcelona is genuinely special," he says. "It is the invocation of a country, representing Catalan identity and culture. Barça was a conduit for a feeling when people could not express themselves and for me it's a dream to be here at such a successful time."

In Good Faith, by Oleguer Presas (translated by Sid Lowe)

Ignacio De Juana Chaos has spent the last twenty years in jail. Reduced according to the penitentiary rules put in place by the previous government, he had been condemned to an 18-year sentence for the crimes he committed. However he remains in jail on remand, pending the final resolution of the case which has been opened against him because of two articles published in the newspaper Gara. The high court [Tribunal de Audiencia Nacional] judged that in those articles, De Juana Chaos committed the crime of making terrorist threats and condemned him to 12 and a half years in jail. De Juana Chaos has decided to go on hunger strike in protest against that ruling and is prepared to take his protest to the ultimate conclusion [his death].

The State of Law [estado de derecho] - that phrase that has been repeated so many times you would think it was an advertising campaign - does not permit the death sentence nor life

imprisonment. Likewise, there is no room for euthanasia. I will allow myself to be guided by good faith and will therefore presuppose that the State of Law has not stopped trusting in its own laws and still does not want to impose the death sentence or life imprisonment. Guided by that same good faith, I will assume that there is no political intention to make euthanasia legal. I will suppose, again guided by good faith, that the content of De Juana Chaos's articles is sufficiently explicit and unambiguous as to keep a man in jail, despite the risk that he may die there. I would like to believe that in the State of Law freedom of expression exists and that in this case, just as in the Egunkaria case or in the case of the actor Pepe Rubianes (to cite just two examples), there is sufficient evidence to try those involved. If that were not so, everyone would be protesting long and loud like they do when freedom of expression is denied in other countries, such as Morocco, Cuba or Turkey. Good faith obliges me to believe that in the State of Law, justice is equal for everyone, that political pressure has no part to play and that judicial independence really does exist; that when the Minister of Justice Lopez Aguilar announces, in reference to the De Juana case, that "the government will construct new punishments and sanctions to avoid such releases", those words have no influence on the judicial sentence.

Actions speak louder than words, they say. Well, David Fernàndez in his book Crónicas del 6 y otros detalles de la cloaca policial, informs us of the following events: the ex-Civil Guard General and the man responsible for the horrors of Intaxaurrondo, Enrique Rodríguez Galindo, was condemned to 75 years in jail for the assassination of Lasa and Zabala but served just over four years, claiming health problems. Julen Elorriaga was also released for health reasons: condemned to almost 80 years in jail, he served just 3% of his sentence. After conning the whole of Spain, De la Rosa is able to enjoy a generous house arrest because of depression. Rafael Vera, condemned to 10 years in jail for the GAL-led kidnap of Segundo Marey, spent just eight years in jail for the same reason ...

David, in his book, talks mainly about torture and torturers; about how the justice system seems to see different degrees of severity based not on the crime but the perpetrator of the crime; about how the media machine works so as to criminalize certain forms of dissidence and not others; of how the police create the evidence necessary to implicate people according to their political interests; of how the government does not want to know about the reports put together by the United Nations' special investigators on torture or even hear about organisations like Amnesty International, who have claimed that in this [Spain's] State of Law, torturing does take place.

But now, on top of all that, it turns out that the attorney's office from the Audiencia Nacional has asked for the Egunkaria case to be dropped because, they allege, there is no proof. It turns out that, in November 2004, a court in Strasbourg condemned the Spanish state for "not investigating" the tortures denounced some twelve years earlier by 17 supporters of Catalan independence - it was necessary to silence discordant voices during the Olympic Games. It turns out that, in November 2005, Zapatero pardoned four policemen from Vigo who had been suspended and sentenced to 2-4 years for beating, insulting and humiliating the Senegalese citizen, Mamadou Kane. It turns out that Aznar had done the same in December 2000: 14 policemen convicted for torture were pardoned. One of them was a reoffender. It turns out ...

... that I do not know what to think. Too often the State of Law has dark spots which make me doubt. It smells of hypocrisy. And too much hypocrisy can make you lose that good faith.

Fuente: Loste

Autor: Loste