



A Fan of... Football

With the World Cup just about to start, I will be supporting my 'home' team. Honestly though, just watching a good game of football, hard, competitive and entertaining it doesn't matter who is on the pitch. I will still shout at the screen and enjoy the scene with my fellow fans! Malaysia are not playing but the World Cup fever has hit the streets, and not just for the resident Expat.

I then thought 'why does anyone support a football team?'

Last January a letter in The Star newspaper caught my attention. Titled, 'It's all a crazy mind game against football fans' it began with 'I find it strange that many Malaysians are ardent fans and fanatics of some of the football clubs in England'. Fair enough, we are all entitled to our opinion but then 'why shouldn't Malaysians be supporters of the English Premier League clubs?'

Browsing through the internet and thinking of my own reasons for my appreciation of 'the beautiful game' I found a few answers to that question and thought it would be interesting to air the truth, or maybe ambiguity of it all.

*** The fundamental reason.** It's a feeling of comfort. If you support a team, you feel like part of one big family.

*** Now everybody loves a hero.** These guys are our heroes. We don't know them, but for the duration of the game, they are heroes. A piece of skill will immediately excite thousands. They have ultimate power, and for a couple of hours each week they are our favorite people in the world.

*** Shouting at the Opposition.** We love to hate them. It's almost a camaraderie with a lot of give and take and for that couple of hours each week they are our least favorite people in the world.

*** We all love to let our hair down.** This is the one chance each week that most of us can behave badly, shout, cheer, boo, dance, even swear sometimes, and it is perfectly acceptable behavior because everyone else is doing it.

*** Eating and drinking.** I think this is self explanatory!

*** The extremes of emotion.** Ecstasy followed by depression. You win and your head is held high. You lose and you wonder whether you will ever watch a game again. But then reality bites and it's "a win next week and we are back in the running".

*** Football is our Religion..** The unofficial song for the 2008 UEFA Championships. But to quote one blogger: "... if you ask the fan why he follows his team the one thing every fan will all say is 'belief'. ... Football is not a game, it's a religion and the lower down the leagues you go, the stronger the faith" Enough said.....

*** Finally,** and this one amused me. You can't change your team. They are with you for life. You can change your partner, your job, your appearance, even your name, but you can never change your team.

The author of the letter had his own reasons why a particular team, from a particular country is supported...and I quote: '...all

of this happens because of some ingenious advertising campaigns by the agencies who know the real weakness of many Malaysians. They devise a strategy to attract their attention and distract them from the other important things in life and become ardent fans of a new game of brand loyalty'.

Well, yes that's true but football worldwide is big business. We have known that for a long time and accept it is another avenue of entertainment. There are many who detest the glam and glitz of the football leagues and they have their own fanaticisms, their own particular likes and dislikes. That's what having a choice is all about. I am a fan of football, and I will be honest in what it means to me. I love the beautiful game, I love the atmosphere when I watch a match, I love the despair of losing and the delight of winning. I love the fact that it is one thing that will always be there, will always frustrate me, will always amaze me... and will always be a part of me.

So, whoever you are and whatever team you support, get excited for the beautiful game and appreciate it for what it is – 22 players running around, wonderful skills, supreme fitness, hilarious bloopers, a host of goals, a fair degree of acting but a great excuse for letting off some steam and being entertained.....The reason we all love it is because, well, actually, there's nothing better!

And as the amazing Bill Shankly once said.... "Some people think football is a matter of life and death. I assure you, it's much more serious than that."

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