

# Competitive zeal pushes players on to the next level

## FAITH IN SPORT

### Mgr Vladimir Felzmann

Zeal is defined as “great energy or enthusiasm in pursuit of a cause or an objective.”

Great club managers and coaches manage to sustain this even among mega rich sport stars, which is not easy but, for sustained success, is vital. As in sport so in academia, great and memorable teachers managed to sustain the enthusiasm of their pupils for the subject they taught.

Zeal, which we could call ‘motivational-passion’, comes in many shapes and sizes—some better than others. “Zeal without knowledge is fire without light”, warned Thomas Fuller, an English churchman and historian, now remembered for his writings, particularly his *Worthies of England*, published in 1662, after his death.

Clearly, it is important to target zeal creatively. As we are witnessing now, Putin’s zeal for making ‘Russia Great Again’ is dangerous and potentially lethal. Zeal driven by love of money, fame, glory and excitement also has its dangers.

Arjun Rampal, an Indian actor, model, film producer and television personality who works in Hindi

films stated: “I believe that fitness needs to come from within you. You need to respect your body. Only then will you have the zeal to maintain it. For me, keeping fit is a part of my lifestyle.”

For me, this respect for my body is rooted in the fact that the giver is in the gift. My body has been given to me by God. Not to look after it as well as I can would be an insult to the giver. This would not be a wise move at my age.

Ray Comfort, a New Zealand-born Christian minister and evangelist who lives in the United States, believes there is a link between zeal and being grateful. “I think the key to passion, to zeal, is gratitude. Or to put it another way, the fuel to motivate is gratitude, and gratitude comes by just backing up a little and realising how much you’ve sinned against God,” he said. This is surely worth thinking about.

The great Lionel Messi, who has won a record seven Ballon d’Or awards and a record six European Golden Shoes, has made it clear that “You have to fight to reach your dream.” “The best decisions aren’t made with your mind, but with your instinct,” he said. “A lion doesn’t concern himself with the opinions of the sheep. You can overcome anything, if and only if you love something enough.”

That philosophy – underpinning his talent – has made him the player he is today.

Cristiano Ronaldo who has won five Ballon d’Or awards and four European Golden Shoes, as well as 32 trophies in his career, admitted that “I’m living a dream I never want to wake up from.” He speaks of a constant hunger to grow. “I am not a perfectionist, but I like to feel that things are done well. More important than that, I feel an endless need to learn, to improve, to evolve, not only to please the coach and the fans, but also to feel satisfied with myself,” he said.

Former Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson spoke passionately about wanting to instil values in his players. More than giving them technical skills, he wanted to inspire them to strive to do better and to never give up—in other words, to make them winners. His intense desire to win stemmed in part from his own experiences as a player.

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp has made it clear that “If you want special results, you have to feel special things and do special things together. You can speak about spirit, or you can live it.”

Tennis star Andy Murray admitted an insatiable desire for success. “I don’t play any tournaments to come second best,” he said. “I used to think that losing made you more hungry and determined but, after my success at the Olympics and the U.S. Open, I realise that winning is the biggest motivation.”



Raheem Sterling made his character clear when he admitted that “England is still a place where a naughty boy who comes from nothing can live his dream.”

He shared how his journey to the top began in humbling circumstances. “My mum was working as a cleaner at some hotels to make extra money so she could pay for her degree,” he said. “I’ll never forget waking up at five in the morning before school and helping her clean the toilets at the hotel in Stonebridge.”

Manchester City’s Jack Grealish revealed his zeal when he made it clear that “I have to keep developing and progressing and strive to be as good a player as I can possibly be.”

Marcus Rashford reminded us

that, for him, improving and learning are key. “Learn something new every game,” he said. “Every game is always different, no matter how you try and think about it beforehand. For me, sometimes it’s more important to perform well in training, and know that I am improving, rather than scoring in a game.”

Confucius, a Chinese philosopher, poet and politician whose teachings and philosophy underpin East Asian culture and society, taught this principle: “When you are labouring for others, let it be with the same zeal as if it were for yourself.” This is a great quote for anyone who is a genuine team-player, which is a topic we shall spotlight in two weeks’ time.



“

“Learn something new every game,” he said. “Every game is always different, no matter how you try and think about it beforehand. For me, sometimes it’s more important to perform well in training, and know that I am improving, rather than scoring in a game.”