

# El clasico essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

THE BATTLE OF THE SPANISH GIANTS Football (soccer), the beautiful game, can become a matter of life and death for some clubs and its supporters. Cultural, as well as regional differences contribute to the fierceness of the clashes and performances of players in such matches determine whether they will be entirely loved or hated. A mistake or a moment of magic can create history but can also result in brawls, fights, clashes and even riots.

We often find ourselves in the front-line watching different football competition- the English Premier league, Champions league, German league (Bundesliga), Spanish league (La Liga), the Nigerian league, World Cup or other football competitions. With football, as with any sports, there is no more powerful reflection and show of greatness and dominance than to compete against a powerful arch-rival, a nemesis whose very existence fuels and propels passion and against whom, one's own greatness is either confirmed or found wanting.

Throughout the history of sports, different sportsmen and women have been able to show their greatness in different sports. Such competitions between two very strong opponents serve to enhance, even define a competitor's prowess and there cannot really be a victor if the nemesis is yet to be vanquished. Only few rivalries in sports can compete with the spectacle, the passion and the sheer football brilliance of a match tussle between two Spanish football giants- FC Real Madrid and FC Barcelona.

The rivalry between these two has become such a loud issue in football such that any meeting between the two is simply, elegantly and without exaggeration known as ' El Clasico'. El Clasico (also known as El Derbi

Espanol) is the name given in football to a match between Real Madrid and Barcelona. It is contested twice every La Liga season and if the clubs meet in other competitions. It is the second most followed football match worldwide after the Union of European Football Association (UEFA) Champions League finals and it is watched by millions of people.

The rivalry started as Real Madrid and Barcelona are the two largest cities in Spain and both are the richest, most influential and most successful football clubs in the world and with Real Madrid viewed as representing Spanish nationalism and Barcelona viewed as representing the Catalan nationalism. Officially, Barcelona has a total of 77 trophies while Real Madrid has 74 trophies with Athletic Bilbao coming in as third with only 32 trophies. The clash, to some people, represents different clashes between the Castilian Spanish and the Catalans while to some, it represents a clash of established order versus a progressive social movement. Yet, to others, it may still represent the forces of oppression versus those of freedom and equality. Such attributes and more, good or bad, have been invested in El Clasico over the decades. But for a true football fan, a match between these two is simply a great football match between two great clubs. Going back in history, on 13th May, 1902, Barcelona defeated Madrid 3-1 and to date Real Madrid faithful have found that hard to swallow.

The bloody and reprisal-ridden Spanish civil war that scrubbed across Spain in the late 1930s played a powerful role in propelling the rivalry as Real Madrid was seen to represent the imposition of Spanish culture and Francisco Franco's Nationalist agenda on the fiercely proud Catalans of Barcelona who supported the republican side in the conflict. With Franco's

victory came the imposition of proscriptions against the cultural and linguistic differences of groups such as the Basques, the Catalans and others. This period, however, witnessed a tremendous growth in membership of FC Barcelona.

By joining the club, the Catalans could demonstrate their way of life and give voice to their language. On the football field, Real Madrid dominated when the clubs met from 1925 through 1952. Real Madrid won 22 of their league matches while Barcelona won 13. Cup ties were nearly even in the that same period with Barcelona taking a slight edge with four victories over Real Madrid's three. More so, it was during that period that Barcelona suffered their worst defeat ever to their greatest arch-rival, losing the second leg of the 1943 Copa Del Rey semi-finals 11-1 at Santiago Bernabeu (Real Madrid).

In 1953, Real Madrid's controversial signing of the Argentine, Alfredo Di Stefano fuelled the intensity of the rivalry. Although, unlike the North West Derby (rivalry between Liverpool and Manchester United), Derby della Madonnina (Associazione Calcio Milan and Internazionale Milano) and other rivalries, Real Madrid and Barcelona have seen transfer of players between the two clubs for instance, Michael Laudrup and Bernd Schuster went from Barcelona to Real Madrid in 1994 and 1988 respectively while Luis Enrique moved otherwise in 1996.

However, the most celebrated and controversial transfer which caused the most intense reaction was the transfer of Luis Figo from Barcelona to Real Madrid in 2000. The rivalry intensified when Real Madrid signed a trio of Zinedine Zidane, Ronaldo and David Beckham. It was a star studded team

but unfortunately, something did not quite click. They won La Liga but for a team that prides itself on how it performs in Europe, its failure to reach the Champions league since 2002 is galling.

Meanwhile, Barcelona double- Samuel Eto'o and Ronaldinho drove the team to final match and even won the Champions league title 2006 and in 2009 Barcelona has been running the show since then as the biggest club in the world. There is still no escaping the golden circle of Lionel Messi, Xavi and Andres Iniesta and the sheer brilliance and stylistic game of Barcelona remains unshiftable.

The award of the FIFA player of the year-Ballon d'Or (the golden ball) have served to indirectly fuel this fury as the two most astonishing players from both teams- the Argentine, Lionel Messi and the Portuguese, Christino Ronaldo strive to win that title each year as a show for their competence and prowess. While the Portuguese has won the title once in 2008, Messi has won it three times from 2009-2011. Messi has joined the likes of Johan Cruyff, Marco Van Basten to cling to the title three times. He has become the second player to have won the title three times in a row after Michel Platini.