

A view from the top. The roof of the Mandarin Oriental Barcelona gives a unique perspective on Cruyff's hometown Barcelona.



Barça de Cruyff

Johan Cruyff garnered worldwide fame as a football player and coach. Today he promotes education in and through sport while managing the retail brand that his name has become.

*Text Jelle Brandt Corstius
Photography Roger Neve*

When he retired as a player and wanted to become a coach, the legendary number 14, Johan Cruyff, found that he had to prove himself all over again: “They said: ‘you were a pretty good player, but what do you know about coaching?’ At first I believed them, but now I know that I have been through the University of Life. After all, I have dealt with many directors at football clubs who are more used to working in banks; they had no footballing background. I, on the other hand, know exactly what a player is capable of and what he might be worth.”

It is the inevitable fate of every travelling Dutchman. No matter where you go – be it a Siberian village or a metropolis in India – as soon as you mention Holland, one name springs to everyone’s lips. Of course, everyone always pronounces it differently – and never correctly – but that doesn’t matter because you know they are talking about Johan Cruyff, one of the most famous footballers of the 20th century.

After spending much of his playing career at Ajax and finishing it in Major League Soccer in the US, he was hired as coach of Barcelona, the city where he still lives today. These days Cruyff is still heavily involved in sport, particularly through his Cruyff Institute, Cruyff Football and the non-profit Cruyff Foundation.

Man on the move

We are standing on the roof of the Mandarin Palace hotel in the heart of Barcelona. Cruyff – dressed casually and sporting a tan (“I’ve been doing some gardening”) – has just driven from his summer house in the hills near the city. Having spent the last few weeks travelling to Mauritius, Israel and Malaysia, he now has time to relax and plans to spend three weeks in Spain. “In Malaysia, we spoke with the Minister of Sport, Khairy Jamaluddin. He was very enthusiastic and gave us the go-ahead to start work in the schools immediately. It can happen that quickly sometimes,” he says, with his own unbridled enthusiasm.

The city looks beautiful below us, bathed in the morning sunlight. Originally, Barcelona was just a collection of separate villages, and when Cruyff conquered the place for the first time – with a 5-0 defeat of Madrid that couldn’t have come at a better time for the Catalans – it was still not much more than that. The city has grown rapidly in recent years, partly thanks to the Olympic Games being hosted here in 1992. A seagull taking a drink of water from the rooftop swimming pool betrays the city’s proximity to the sea.

“The Catalans are survivors,” he says. Cruyff can identify with that mentality, as he comes from a family of survivors himself. “After the war, my family had to start all over again, and they opened a vegetable shop. And life as a footballer was all about survival, too. When I began my career, being a footballer wasn’t all that special. But then the player’s associations began to spring up.” Cruyff goes and stands on the edge of the swimming pool. “The only diploma I ever got in my life was my swimming certificate,” he jokes.

He tells me that – like the Dutch – the Catalans are well known for their strong will. And Cruyff is no exception. We get into his car and drive to a Cruyff Court, a small football pitch in a suburb of Barcelona. He drives competitively, to put it mildly, and wriggles his way through zebra crossings even when pedestrians have the green light. “I’ll be able to nip through here,” he explains breezily.

Foundations of change

On the way he tells me how the idea for the Cruyff Foundation came about. “It was 1980, I was playing for the Washington Diplomats and living in the Georgetown area. There was a disabled six-year-old boy living next door to us and we became friends. One extremely hot summer’s day, I was relaxing in the swimming pool when he suddenly jumped in to join me. His parents couldn’t believe it. They had never been able to get him anywhere near a pool before because of his fear of water. But for some reason or other he seemed to trust me, and so wasn’t afraid to jump in. All right, it wasn’t the Olympics, but he was participating.

“Kids can make great strides forward when you give them the chance to join in through sport.” And so the basis for the Cruyff Foundation was formed, with its objective to give disabled and disadvantaged children the chance to participate in society through sport. >

Taking it all in stride, Cruyff moves easily from his work with young athletes to the launch of his new perfume. Location: Mandarin Oriental Barcelona

Photo next page: Centre of attention. The local press surround Cruyff at the opening of the Johan Cruyff store in El Born

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A household name

Johan Cruyff is one of the most famous football players and trainers the world has ever known, and he is still a household name around the globe. Cruyff was born in Amsterdam in 1947, the second son in the family. The young Johan Cruyff grew up in the working-class neighbourhood of Betondorp, only a stone's throw away from De Meer, the old Ajax stadium.

Cruyff began training with Ajax at the age of six and made his debut in the first team in 1964. At the time, he was only the second ever fulltime professional footballer in the Netherlands. After a successful stint at Ajax, he went on to play for Barcelona. With Cruyff in their team, Barcelona were crowned league champions for the first time in fourteen years and were undefeated in the 25 matches they played the season after signing Cruyff.


At the age of 31, Cruyff was keen to end his career but played on for financial reasons. He signed up for the fledgling Major League Soccer in the US, where he played for the Los Angeles Aztecs and the Washington DC Diplomats. He finally brought down the curtain on his playing career in Rotterdam with Feyenoord FC, Ajax's archrival.

Totally Orange

Cruyff also played for the Dutch national team – often referred to as the 'orange' in the Netherlands. He and the team became extremely popular at home and around the world in the mid-1970s, with the highlight being the World Cup final against West Germany in 1974. Their way of playing – total football – still influences global football.

After retiring from play, Cruyff became a trainer at Ajax and went on to coach FC Barcelona, which blossomed under Cruyff's leadership. After leaving coaching, Cruyff established his Foundation and Institute. Both are active worldwide training athletes and creating safe environments for children to play. Find out more at johancruyff.com.

Johan Cruyff is married to Danny Cruyff. They have three children: Chantal, Susila and Jordi.



'I used to be well known to 3 billion people around the world; now it's 4 billion'



Cruyffisms

Cruyff is famous in his homeland for his quirky use of the Dutch language, often whimsically referred to as 'Cruyffisms'. Though not always easy to translate directly into English, his peculiar nuggets of wisdom include:

- ~
You can't score if you don't have the ball
- ~
Every disadvantage has its own advantage
- ~
You can't score if you don't shoot
- ~
Before I make a mistake, I see it coming and then don't make it



Street in El Born Barcelona

Facing page: Café Bormuth,
Carrer del Rec

Cruyff's picks

W Barcelona

One of Cruyff's favourite spots for business meetings, the seaside hotel is often referred to as Hotel Vela (Sail Hotel) due to its striking shape. **Plaça de la Rosa del Vents, 1** w-barcelona.com

Jardí Botànic de Barcelona

A museum and lavish botanical gardens overlooking the city. **Montjuïc Park** jardibotanic.bcn.es

Nou Camp

Home of FC Barcelona since 1957, this stadium is located in the east of Barcelona. **C/Aristides Mallol, 12** fcbarcelona.com/camp-nou

El Born Cultural Centre

Old and new architecture are artfully merged to create an impressive new landmark commemorating The War of the Spanish Succession (1701 to 1714). **Plaça Comercial, 12** elborncentrecultural.bcn.cat

Johan Cruyff Flagship Store

Recently opened in the El Born district, the store/museum offers sports clothing and products, including Cruyff's own brand. **Plaça Comercial, 3** cruyffclassics.com

Mandarin Oriental

Discover contemporary Catalan style with a prime location on the famous Passeig de Gràcia. **Passeig de Gràcia, 38-40** mandarinoriental.com/barcelona

Production *Sandra de Cocq*
Styling *Linda Gerritsen* Groomer *Ivan Gomez* @ *Kasteel* agent 1st photography assistant *Bart van Staveren* 2nd photography assistant *Sean Mitchell Henry*

At the football pitch (part of a school for special education) we meet Xavi, a teacher who is also a football coach. He explains that the pitch was nothing but a barren field not that long ago. A boy with Down Syndrome spots Cruyff and immediately pulls on his goalkeeper's gloves. Cruyff being around means only one thing: football. The kids crowd around the Dutch ex-footballer and Cruyff obviously enjoys seeing the energy and delight that sport brings out in children.

Cruyff is still wound up when we drive off. "A pitch like that makes you feel like a kid all over again, doesn't it?" He adds, "there are some things you can't do if you're disabled. But just being able to join in removes a huge barrier. I can still remember the first Cruyff Court we made, in a poor suburb of Amsterdam. When they finished laying the pitch, the first thing we thought was: 'well, we'll see if the goalposts are still here in a week.' Our hopes weren't very high. Years later, I returned and the pitch still looked good as new. If you give kids who have next to nothing something to take care of, they treat it like it is their own baby. A boy actually came up to me and told me that I wasn't allowed to eat on the pitch!"

Local hero

We arrive at the Mercat del Born. "They uncovered an archaeological treasure here under the market and have now turned it into a fantastic museum." The local Catalans throng around Cruyff; everyone wants a photo with him. It's a bit like Obama trying to give someone a tour around the streets of Washington. While Cruyff poses with a street cleaner who steps out of his vehicle for a photo, he tells me, "I've been trying to live a normal life since I was 20. I don't go in for all that TV chat programme stuff. And I keep my private life strictly separate from my work."

It would be impossible to have lunch undisturbed in any tapas bar in town. So we have a bite to eat in the new Cruyff store that is set to open later that evening. We sit at the bar near the checkout. Cruyff keeps it simple: a baguette with tomato and garlic. He opens a small black box. Inside is a photo of a young Cruyff reading a newspaper under an olive tree. His wife Danny took the photo during their first trip to Spain together, before Cruyff came here as a footballer. "It's my perfume," he explains. "Each ingredient has something to do with me: from the leather of a football and the eucalyptus of the massage table, to the

dressing rooms and the showers." Alongside Agua de Cruyff, the shop also sells his own brand of clothing and shoes.

"I've been a brand for over forty years now," says Cruyff. "You just become one, despite yourself, and even more so these days thanks to social media. I used to be well known to three billion people around the world; now it's four billion. You have to be careful about what you sell; it can also work against you. We make sure that there is always a personal link between me and the product. We never think 'let's make something else and stick 'Cruyff' on it.' Like an ice cream or something." He turns and points to an old poster of himself sporting the name of the new perfume.

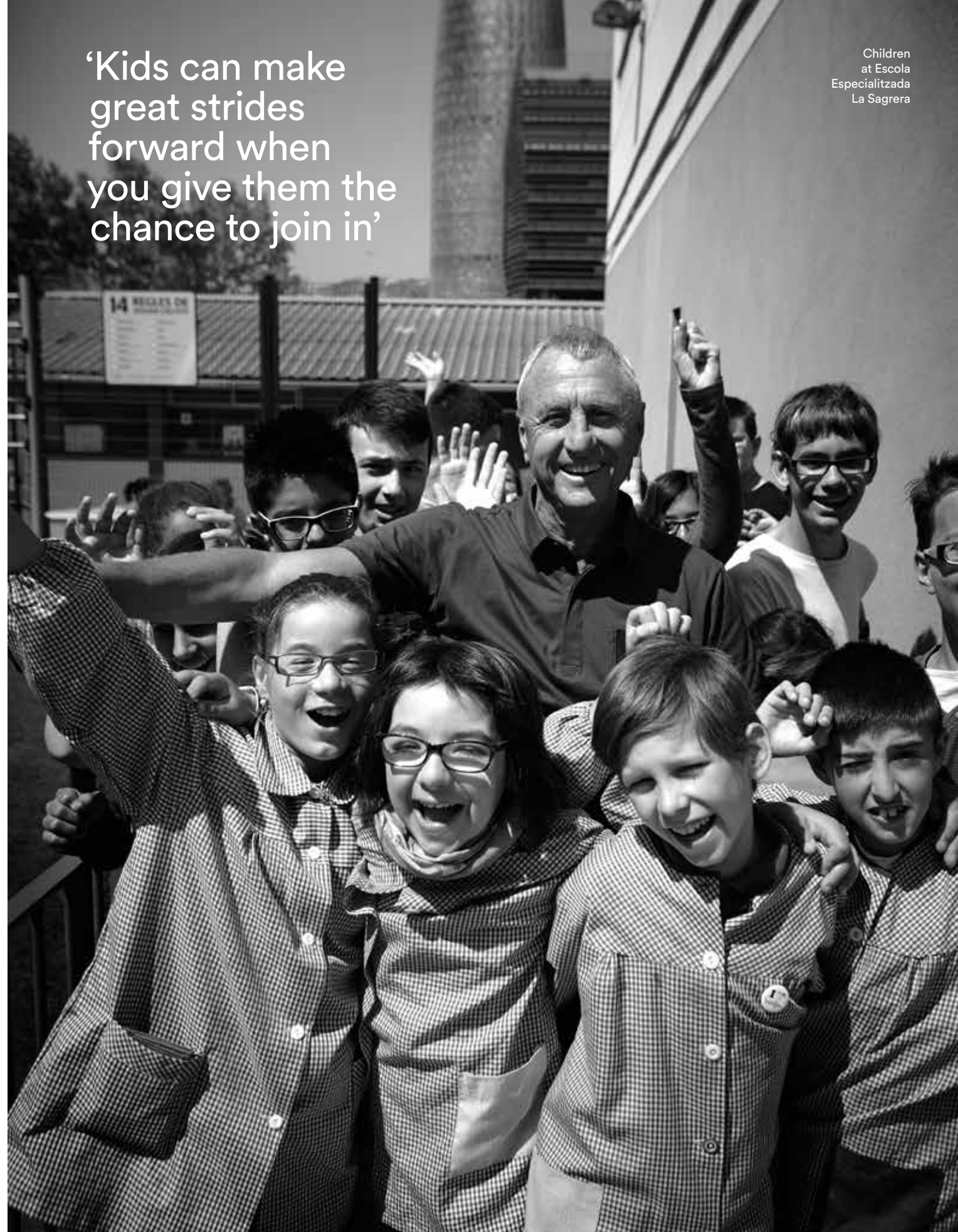
A lot has changed in football since Danny took the photo used for the Agua de Cruyff packaging. "99% of players come from normal families, but just try staying normal when you become fabulously wealthy overnight. Many clubs fail to address this. You're training a person, not just a footballer. This is a problem all over the world. Thousands of kids are brought from Africa to play in youth teams in the West. What happens to them if they don't make it big?" That's why he started the Cruyff Institute for Sport Studies, which gives players the opportunity to receive education during and after their careers and prepares them for life after sports.

What are Cruyff's thoughts on the World Cup in Brazil? "We'll first have to see how many players arrive fit at the tournament. Not many, I think. The national leagues are so demanding these days that they undermine fitness levels." He pauses before continuing: "The pride of a lot of South American nations is at stake. And no European team has ever won a World Cup in South America."

Cruyff is famous in the Netherlands for his idiosyncratic one-liners. And he doesn't disappoint now either, wrapping up our conversation with another little gem: "There is no future without a past". ■

Many thanks to: Mandarin Oriental Barcelona
Praktik hotel Rambla Barcelona

'Kids can make great strides forward when you give them the chance to join in'



Children at Escola Especialitzada La Sagrera