FC Barcelona’s 2018-19 Potential

How will FC Barcelona fare in this season’s competitions and what is needed to accomplish their goals?

I’ll come clean right away, I’m a lifelong FC Barcelona fan. My favourite player is in fact Leo Messi. There will be bias in this post. Now that that’s out of the way, let’s get to my commentary.

Personally, I believe that Barcelona is prepped to have their best season since Lucho’s first. Their archrivals have lost a 50-goal-a-season player and haven’t added anyone significant either. In this, Barça has their potentially easiest domestic double of recent memory. Likewise, the Champions’ League titans look vulnerable for the first time in the past 5 in their hunt for their next continental title.

Meanwhile, from a roster standpoint, Barça have upgraded in every position. However, the question remains, will Barça be able to move on from the loss of Andres Iniesta from the squad. While he was used more sparingly than years previous in the last campaign, who will be responsible for replacing his creativity and stability in the midfield. It would appear that Coutinho is the player who is most primed to take the role, but it appears that he might be a fluctuating member of the midfield, given his prowess on the left wing as well. Personally, I believe Coutinho is the most suited player for the LCM role and should be the undisputed starter in the position.

This brings me to my next point; what formation is ideal for this current Barça. Under Valverde last season, Barça relied heavily on a 4-4-2 formation, a large difference from the 4-3-3 that was used in all the seasons I can remember before that. However, I feel that this often made the team vulnerable in the midfield and the usual Barcelona domination at the center of the position. I think it is to this formation that Barça must return. The midfield of Busquets, Rakitić, and Coutinho is strong and ready to be the world’s best. All three are proficient in playing the quick tiki-taka passes that was once synonymous with the Blaugrana midfield. This is the year Barcelona can bring the midfield back to the forefront.

Another question lies in the forward line. Is Dembélé ready for the spotlight? Can Suarez still perform? Yes. To both. The formation should have Dembélé on the left, Suarez in the center, and of course, Messi on the right. This forward line is a combination of speed and finesse. Even when Suarez might be falling off a little bit, there is the option to drop him, play Messi as a False-9 and insert Malcom into the line-up. Defensively, Barcelona is sound as ever and anchored by one of the best goalkeepers in the sport doesn’t hurt. It is up to the Valverde to ensure that everyone is well rested and there isn’t a drop-off in performance in February/March as has become routine.

From a tactical perspective, Barça has lost a lot of its identity. While still dominating the midfield against weaker mid and low-tier teams in La Liga and the Copa del Rey, the midfield domination of 2008-2014 has been lost against a lot of the bigger teams. No longer does Barcelona have the best midfield in the world, they play against them in the greatest rivalry in football. It is in this area that they have to strengthen tactically. The largest issue is that the team lacks the creativity and close passing of years gone by. Suarez and Dembélé are constantly making runs, they just need to be fed appropriately. However, the team is reluctant to play the risky passes and through balls necessary to match the runs of the forwards. It is for this reason that Messi often gets relegated to dropping very deep for the ball and harbor the responsibility.

Ultimately, the team must stop this Messi-reliance if it hopes to challenge for titles. This doesn’t mean that they have to stop relying on Messi, no team would do that should they have him in their ranks.

If the team is able to inject creativity and risk into its style (the conservative approach often backfires, see the Roma quarterfinal game last season that didn’t happen) in order to really be a threat for continental superiority this year. And that is the goal of the team. To win the Champion’s League is rightfully the club’s aspiration for this year. The team has won the domestic double repeatedly over the past decade. However, having Real Madrid win the Champion’s League 4 of the last 5 occasions and an embarrassing self-destruction in Rome has left the Barça faithful starved for European glory. In order to achieve this goal, Barça must rotate the squad efficiently and effectively and remain well-rested throughout the season.

This season can be one of great success or failure for the Barcelona giant. The team is prepped for their best season in years, but so are their expectations. The year will be a tide for the fans either way, a return to the glory, or fall towards a second-tier superpower.

A Commentary on Fear

What is it that causes fear within yourself and what is it that you truly fear?

As a preface I will state that I have never deeply studied the human mind or the human consciousness, I’ve just read a few books and philosophies regarding both. This serves as a commentary from my own experience and my belief towards a variety of topics concerning fear.

Fear has a uniquely human aspect to it. Animals can be said to experience fear; a gazelle knows to fear a lion. A question arises in why the gazelle fears the lion. And how does that compare to human fear. A gazelle lacks consciousness to understand its fear. It fears the lion from the day it is born till the day that it dies. Humans exhibit a similar fear, but it is not prevalent in all cases. A baby doesn’t fear spiders like so many adults do. This is an inherited fear, and one is very conscious of it if they exhibit it. A human will make precautions to do so, and simply thinking about fear can cause emotional distress within someone. I have my doubts regarding whether the same happens to a gazelle.

Secondly, what causes the basis for a fear? There are two predominant bases, safety and the unknown. However, the latter is unique to humans as a result of self-consciousness. In the former arises most humanly fears, the fear of heights, fear of others who are clearly hostile. Why would anybody want to feel pain when it can be avoided? It is logical to fear such things so as to prevent self-harm. The latter is that which is interesting. In the latter is where one sees the fear of the dark, or the fear of death. The fear of the unknown is birthed in our ability to know. We understand patterns and abstraction, resulting in us to have a comfortability in knowing the world around us. Once the lights switch off and we no longer know what’s even two feet in front of our face, it results in a fear.

When faced with the unknown, the mind starves to have knowledge of anything it can. However, if you do not know what you don’t know, there is no struggle for knowledge. If I do not know about a certain life-threatening disease, I have no desire to have knowledge of it or fear it. For I cannot even conceptualize the disease in the first place. But once I am made aware of the disease, I know have cause to learn more about it and fear it. Similarly, a blind person is not afraid of the dark. It is the knowledge of light that causes weakness in the dark. The known is what provides power to a person, rarely is a person fearful of something that they can control.

In lies a factor that joins the two bases. Powerlessness. In both the cases of the unknown and the fear for one’s safety, an adjoining aspect is that of powerlessness. The main fear in height lies in the falling aspect and the main fear in the falling aspect lies in the inability for one to stop themselves from near-certain doom. When you are unable to change the course of your own day, one feels insignificant and hopeless. A truly deep-rooted feeling that causes a great deep pain.

There is one fear, shared amongst nearly everyone, that combines the two bases. The fear of death. The most well-known and discussed fear throughout history, nobody is able to understand what it entails. It has haunted conscious beings forever such that they’ve latched onto stories regarding its nature and what happens following it. Regardless, there is nobody that knows what death feels like and what happens after you die. It is in this reason that the afterworld has been conceptualized. Humanity on a whole cannot live without the unknown nature of post-mortem experience and as a result, has created an extension of what it does know, the time during which it lives. More than that, we’ve created one that exists with bliss, without what it fears.

To summarize, in humanity, we have two fundamental fears. That of the unknown and that for one’s safety. It is upon these two that we build any other fears that one might experience. It is within consciousness that humanity experiences a greatly unique version of fear.

The Impact of Artificial Intelligence

How does this emergent technology impact industry and the future of human life?

Artificial Intelligence is the hottest craze in emerging technology, impacting every field in the workforce. I’d love to say it’s unlike any major technological development before, but it’s not that dramatic. The computer revolutionized technology and after that, so did the internet. There are constant developments in the strength and utility of technology within not just the industry, but everyday lives.

But there is a difference in artificial intelligence. For the first time, humans are not responsible for ensuring every aspect of the industry is performed by humans. The power of computers has finally reached the point where no longer are we training computers, they train themselves. For the first time, it really appears like computers are reaching the point where they are not just aiding us in our work, they are replacing us in our work. This is what’s causing such a large issue with artificial intelligence. Elon Musk, the king of nerds himself has stated that we have to be careful with AI. How could it be that someone who is so for the advancement of technology, be in favor of cuffing the advancement of AI?

The answer is in that he too, fears the power of having computers and their ever-expanding capabilities, opened up to near-sentient thinking. The movie apocalyptic world is not only a possibility, but feasible enough to picture regardless of how distant into the future it might be. In its current state, artificial intelligence does its work through optimizing mathematical relationships in trial and error. Yet, isn’t that also how humans do it. We learn from our experiences and mistakes, similar to how artificial intelligence learns. The only difference is in the variety of items that humans can learn simultaneously. Programs are designed to do one or a couple of things, rarely can they accomplish the vastness to which humans are able to consider. However, with things like IBM Watson able to respond to a variety of questions as though it is a conscious being. It is able to continuously learn from information that it is fed. What is to say that it isn’t human?

If something is able to respond like humans and able to learn like humans what is to say that it isn’t human. Where do we draw the line between humans and computers? Computers don’t age, can infinitely upgrade, have much higher processing powers, what’s to say they aren’t super humans. The major difference between the two is that we are able to readily respond to our environment. We have senses to be able to gather information readily from the environment. In this we are able to be constantly learning. Yet, self-driving cars are able to learn from their environments through sensors and some smart algorithms. So, I guess you can say they are humans, they might be a little dumb, but they are.

Okay, I may have lied. It’s not the sensors that make us humans, human. It’s the emotions that do. If there’s anything that we have hardly seen from computers is the ability to have emotion. Whether that is a weakness or strength is not what I’m trying to discuss right now but that’s simply the difference. It is the only separation that keeps humans human. The question is, will computers ever be able to replicate emotion? The human body is just an assortment of chemicals, so what’s to say we won’t be able to replicate the same assortment of chemicals but within a computer.

Sooner or later, we will have to face the reality that computers and AI will be a revolution in humanity, how we play it from there is to be seen.