

= Supporters of FC Barcelona =

FC Barcelona is a Catalan club based in Barcelona , formed in 1899 by a group of Swiss , English and local players led by Joan Gamper . It has been part of the Spanish top @-@ flight , La Liga , since the league 's inception in 1928 and has won La Liga 23 times , along with 28 Copas del Rey and 5 UEFA Champions League victories . The supporters of Barcelona have played an important part in the formation of the club 's Catalan identity during the club 's 116 @-@ year existence . From the authoritarian rule of Spain under Miguel Primo de Rivera in 1923 , which later ended with the autocratic rule of Franco , various forms of cultural oppression were enacted against Catalonia and FC Barcelona in particular , causing the club to become a symbol of rebellion , although this has been disputed . After Spain 's transition to democracy in 1978 , several support groups of FC Barcelona evolved , most notably the Boixos Nois , who later mixed their support of the club with a demand of secession from Spain .

The arrival of Ronaldinho in 2003 , and Barcelona 's subsequent success in La Liga and Champions League , has been seen as crucial to an increase in the national , and worldwide , fan @-@ base of the club . This development of a larger national fan @-@ base has created friction between the Catalan nationalist supporters , who wish to secede from Spain , and the club 's other Spanish supporters .

There exist four different types of supporters of Barcelona ; one is the soci or club @-@ member , who is eligible to vote in the presidential election of the club and other matters . The penyes , who are closely affiliated with the socis , are fan @-@ clubs , which in the past have been responsible for large donations to the club . Also , there are Barça Fans and this term refers to the official online fan community of the club where these registered fans participate in games and other activities . Lastly there are the ordinary fans of the club , the culers , who do not possess any formal membership .

= = History = =

Before 1909 , Barcelona played in various stadiums , none of which were owned by the club . On 14 March 1909 , the club moved to the Camp de la Indústria which had a capacity of 6 @,@ 000 people , and it was the first ground owned by the club . Barcelona moved to Les Corts in 1922 , which had an initial capacity of 20 @,@ 000 , which was later enlarged 3 @-@ fold to 60 @,@ 000 . The top @-@ row of Les Corts was the origin of the nickname culer , derived from the Catalan cul (English : arse) , as the spectators at the first stadium , Camp de la Indústria , sat with their culs over the stand . The English author , Phil Ball , notes that " all you could see was row upon row of bums " .

In the mid @-@ 1940s , the club invented the notion of penyes , a mix between a fan club and a financial support club , during a time when the club was in need of financial and public support in face of the hostility of Francisco Franco 's dictatorship . The first Penya Solera , was formed in 1944 by a group of supporters and former players of the team . The penyes would later exhibit their financial prowess in 1953 , when they proposed the building of the Camp Nou . Inspiration was drawn from the financial plan Athletic Bilbao , a rival team , used to build San Mamés , where an association of penyes pledged to finance the construction . As a result , the subsequent construction of the stadium put the club into its supporters ' hands , giving the penyes political influence over the club , which still lasts today .

During the same period , Franco 's oppression of Catalonia caused the relationship between the club and its supporters to change . For the supporters , FC Barcelona became synonymous with Catalonia , a feeling incorporated in the club 's Més que un club motto (English : More than a club) . The socio @-@ political impulse Visca el Barça (Long live Barça) , gradually evolved into Visca el Barça i visca Catalunya (Long live Barça and Catalonia) and was the same as a protest @-@ song against the central government in Madrid .

In 1975 , the death of Franco marked the beginning of Spain 's transition into a democracy and four years later , Josep Lluís Núñez became the first elected president of FC Barcelona . Since then , the members of Barcelona , called socios , have elected a club president .

In the early 1980s , one of the most notorious penyes , the Boixos Nois (English : Crazy Boys) was founded . The peña who identified with left @-@ wing separatism , repeatedly demanded the resignation of president Núñez , openly defying his presidency through chants and banners at matches . At the same time , the city of Barcelona experienced a rise in the number of skinheads , who identified with right @-@ wing separatism . The skinheads slowly moved the Boixos Nois ' political ideology from liberalism to fascism , which caused fractions within the group . Inspired by British hooligans , the remaining Boixos Nois became violent , which often lead to mass @-@ scale arrests .

According to the protest organisation L 'Elephant Blau (English : The Blue Elephant) , formed in part by later @-@ president Joan Laporta in 1998 , the former president Núñez promoted the emergence of skinheads among the Boixos and gave them permission to roam freely around the stadium , using them for his own political gain . When Núñez resigned in 2000 , his vice @-@ president Joan Gaspart took over as president . Gaspart publicly expressed his sympathies for Boixos Nois , claiming that he would join the group as soon as he resigned as chairman . The comment caused the Boixos Nois members to occasionally be referred to as ' the chairman 's boys ' .

The same year saw the controversial transfer of the Barcelona vice @-@ captain Luís Figo to arch @-@ rivals Real Madrid . When Figo returned to the Camp Nou with his new club in November 2002 , the Boixos responded to Figo 's perceived treachery by whistling and jeering whenever he went near the ball . The abuse peaked when the Boixos threw a severed pig 's head at him , while he was taking a corner . The match has since been known in Spain as the " Partido de la Vergüenza " (English : The Game of Shame) . It was suspended for 13 minutes by the referee , who took the players off the pitch because of fears for their safety . It ended in a 0 ? 0 draw .

During the first decade of the new millennium , president Joan Laporta , a supporter of Catalan nationalism , repeatedly expressed his support of Catalonia 's secession from Spain and characterised the club as the symbol for Catalan separatism . The politicalisation of the club drew criticism from several club members who accused Laporta of alienating Barcelona fans , both within and outside of Catalunya . By 2003 Barcelona had 1 @,@ 200 penyes around the world , causing other Spanish clubs to copy the concept . With each individual peña (Castilian Spanish spelling) having different names and rules , it has become a custom in Spain to name a new peña after their favourite player or match , and in turn the player usually attends to the inaugural supper .

In the presidential election of 2010 , the rise in club @-@ members during the last seven years caused the campaign to focus on whether to allow votes from non @-@ Catalan members , through internet or post . The balloting committee decided to only allow votes from members who registered at the home stadium on the day of the election .

As of November 2010 , membership of the club is no longer open to the public . Only close relatives to current and former FC Barcelona members can join the club as well as previous members with at least a two @-@ year history of membership . This ruling however will not apply to children under the age of 15 .

= = Fan base = =

In Spain , 26 percent of the population supports Barcelona as their primary club , with another 7 % supporting Barcelona while having another club as their primary . Throughout Europe many fans regard Barcelona as their second club . Since the 2003 ? 04 season , the club 's membership figures have risen from 100 @,@ 000 to 170 @,@ 000 socis in September 2009 , a 70 percent increase . The sharp rise was attributed to the influence of Ronaldinho and then @-@ president Joan Laporta 's media @-@ strategy , which focused on online media in Spanish and English . As of June 2010 there are 1 @,@ 335 officially registered penyes around the world , representing an 11 percent increase since 2003 .

Many prominent people are recognised as Barcelona supporters , including the former Pope John Paul II , who was an honorary member , former Prime Minister of Spain , José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero , Spanish actor Javier Bardem , and Belgian actor Matthias Schoenaerts .

