

Brown Soccer (Saif. . .He's Out)
Casey Shearer and Christopher Brown
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A few weeks ago we wrote a column questioning why soccer cannot catch on as a major spectator sport in America. Perhaps we missed something. Even here at Brown University where the soccer program appears to be thriving, something pulls at the players of the men's soccer team, causing them to wonder whether they should continue playing the world's game.

There is something that should be known.

A few weeks ago three strikers on the Brown Soccer team quit simultaneously. Josh Anderson '00, Saif Mansour '00 and Phil Lynch '00 decided, as a group, to stop playing soccer for Brown and under coach Mike "Danny" Noonan (His philosophy: be the ball.) This fact is worthy of our investigative talents, yet would not be as suspicious if it was not in the face of a number of other soccer players refusing to play last year and earlier this year. Goalkeeper Aaron Esmailzadeh '99 quit at the start of the season, reducing the number of juniors on the squad to a paltry four, from a class that was in double digits when they arrived at Brown as freshmen two years ago -- and there are only two seniors on the team. It seems as though the soccer players are dropping from the team like flies. What is going on here? Are they all getting lazy? Are they disenchanted? Is the girls hockey team not giving them enough support? (We'd personally have to rule this one out after seeing them drunk, yelling, and in spandex, cheering in the game against Princeton). Wouldn't they rather be playing on the field than watching from the side lines? There is something that needs looking into -- we believe it's elementary, dear Watson.

It is well known that Josh Anderson was named high school player of the year by Parade magazine last year and has played exceptionally for the Brown squad - a major asset indeed. His presence was a potent striking threat to opposing teams' defenses and was a large part of the Brown offense; in fact he scored a hat trick in his final match before turning in his jersey. Saif Mansour, from sunny sunny Santa Monica, CA, was also a significant part of the Brown offensive game. In sunny sunny land, at Santa Monica High School, he was breaking all kinds of school records and was a real standout (keep in mind it's hard to stand out in Los Angeles) and was a good find for Brown. Together with Lynch, this core of sophomore strikers was a solid set for Brown's offense, and their loss will, no doubt, be felt. Along with these three, and Esmailzadeh, two other all-american quality players, Dana Quick and John Beck also decided not to play for Brown; Beck was so turned off that he left to play for Cal Berkeley instead. What's the diagnosis doc? This requires closer inspection. Is there a little fat man yielding a shotgun inside the Brown soccer organization, scarring off our good players - protecting his junkyard? There must be a simpler explanation.

The three sophomores quit because of personal problems with the coach. Each player had his own set of issues with the coach - and these were personal. Why then did they quit as a group? It seems, upon second look, that the issues were mutual, not in their specific aspects, but because they all stemmed from the same source -- a discord with the same fundamental problem. This problem is coach Noonan. How can the coach - if the coach does indeed have control - afford to let the future of his team slip away? Perhaps

this is too harsh, though. There is a fine line for a coach between being strict enough, ruling his squad with an iron fist, instilling an ample amount of discipline, and also giving the players enough room so that they feel like they have space to improve and are happy. One can see this struggle even in the NBA by remembering Pat Riley and Magic Johnson, when Johnson basically forced Riley from his post as coach of the Lakers because Johnson was fed up with Riley's firm hand. No one can say that coaching young college athletes is easy, particularly when there is so much pressure to do well and have a winning record. This said, there is something inherently wrong in the Brown men's soccer program that requires changing - if for no other reason than the fact that a major core of young players felt like they could no longer play under the coach.

Phil Lynch simply said that "it wasn't fun anymore." He felt like it was a "waste of time." He distinctly identified the problem as one that the coach was responsible for. Lynch said the coach was not malicious, but that he was not sensitive to the various personalities that the team consisted of, and did not respond to these differences and to the individuals. "He was going about it [coaching] in the wrong way." Saif Mansour had similar complaints and chose not to get into the specifics of his problems with the coach; he didn't think it was fair to "shoot down the coach." For Monsieur Mansour, the problem was not one having to do with playing time but he explained that "we were not being treated fairly." When asked if he regretted his choice to leave the team, he simply explained that it was a decision that had to be made; nevertheless "nothing was clear cut about it," he said. Mansour has the love for the game and is not ready to hang his boots up; he continues to stay in shape and practice, although not with the team. Josh Anderson essentially voiced the same opinion as the other two players and also would not specify his individual problems with the coach but noted, as the other two did at the beginning of their interviews, that the soccer team has been doing very well since the three have quit. In fact, the Brown Soccer team is two games away from winning the Ivy league. Anderson voiced that it was not necessarily that the skill of the team has improved, but saw the three players' departure as a type of wake-up call that enabled the team to go out with more determination to win than before. Despite this fact, can the team be happy now that they have lost some of their very future and potentiality? Imagine what they could be doing with a squad of happy soccer players, winning for each other, rather than struggling to win in the name of their dissatisfaction. For it is not only these players that are unhappy with the coach and the organization - it is only these few who have acted upon this discord.

The fat man shoots his gun: *Blam! Blam!* (Where's Jake?)

Would someone unload that shotgun!

The fact is, there is almost always some tension between the coach and his players. This is similar to the tension that a king has with his subjects - he at once has to lead, please, have control, and leave room for individual expression. And the players, being autonomous in the actual games and making the decisions must reconcile this individual expression with putting full faith in the coach. . .no one is saying this is easy for either party. The Brown Men's soccer team is not the only team with discord between players and coaches. In two highly publicized occurrences in the NBA last year, starting players had midgame shouting matches with their coaches resulting from the dangers of the tension players and coaches must face in interacting with each other. Former Phoenix Sun and current Los Angeles Laker, Robert Horry became so enraged at

Suns coach Danny Ainge that he threw a towel at him during a game. This dispute was solved by shipping Horry off to the Lakers for Cedric Ceballos. The other incident involved Lakers guard Nick Van Exel and coach Del Harris. During a crucial play-off game against Utah last May, Harris wanted Van Exel to call a time-out. Van Exel ignored him and Harris promptly substituted for Nick "The Quick" (tempered). Van Exel yelled at the coach and kicked over a chair. The Lakers ended up losing the game and the playoff series to the Jazz. It appeared the Lakers had a major problem on their hands, they were going to have to choose between their coach or their point guard. Fortunately for the Lakers, Van Exel and Harris made up and the Laker front office did not have to make a difficult decision. This makes one wonder: why haven't the Brown players and coach Noonan been able to come to terms with each other?

All three sophomores agree that Noonan knows his soccer. But as Mansour explained, "Being a coach is more than soccer knowledge." Noonan was unavailable for comment, so his position has not been expressed in this article. Nonetheless, as expressed earlier, the problem remains that the players are dissatisfied and are leaving. Let's play ball gentlemen! Enough rough housing. We're making a plea for both parties to put aside personal differences and to play for the good of Brown soccer and for soccer in general (what a grand notion). The soccer team is winning - so something is working. Perhaps the coach has a plan. But imagine a plan that involved the currently playing squad in addition to the much, now unspired, potential talent watching from the bleachers. Can you see it? We can.

Casey Shearer B'00 and Chris Brown B'00 are happy watching the games from the sidelines because there is popcorn there.