

Screening tonight, a feature-length football film focusing on a single player

Zidane: portrait of the star as a working man

In a month where World Cup fever has many torn between art and football, tonight's screening at the Herzog & de Meuron-designed St Jakob stadium offers a rare chance to mix the two. Fresh from Cannes, "Zidane: a 21st Century Portrait", directed by artists Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno, follows 93 minutes in the life of the French footballer. Happily for lovers of the beautiful game, they are all on the pitch.

The project started several years ago when Philippe Parreno told his friend Isabela Mora, Art Basel's famously well-connected, Madrid-based VIP relations expert, that he and Gordon dreamed of filming Zinedine Zidane. The idea was to follow him during a match, editing the footage into a real-time feature film portrait. "We're both football fans, and Zidane is unlike any other sports star," explains Gordon. "The ball seems magnetically attracted to him."

Though hardly a football fan herself, Mora volunteered to help—becoming one of the film's key collaborators. "Making this happen required diplomacy, protocol, strategy and personal relationships," Mora recalls. "I drove my Madrid friends crazy. I have a friend based there who is a journalist at the French sports magazine *L'Equipe* and I finally called him to ask Zidane on our behalf." Though sceptical, Zidane granted the artists a meeting. "I'm rarely tongue-tied, but I was overwhelmed by his aura and that 50-yard stare," Gordon recalls. Despite their awe, the artists made their pitch and the French star agreed to play along.

Filmed during the last Real Madrid-Villarreal match played at the Santiago Bernabéu stadium, the project involved a crew of 150, including 17 cameramen, some of whom normally work with directors such as Martin Scorsese and Sofia Coppola. Of course, unlike a regular feature film, there were no storyboards. Instead, on the morning of the shooting, Mora arranged an early-morning tour of a Prado exhibition on the history of Spanish portraiture that spanned from Goya to Picasso, to set the tone.

As it turned out, the game was hardly one of Zidane's better nights. Real Madrid lost 2-1 and the star was sent off the pitch in the 92nd minute, the only time it has ever happened to him while playing in Spain. With more than 30 hours of footage, the team started post-production. For all its simplicity of conception, the editing was a nightmare, says Gordon. The film follows Zidane alone, every move: other footballers in the same game, including David Beckham, don't appear at all. Finally the two artists anxiously showed the film's rough cut to Zidane. "He liked it, though he was surprised by how little contact he had with the ball," recalls Gordon. "But that reflects how the game is. In the end this is not a movie about a sports star: it's more like a bad day at the office, a portrait of the working man."

Marc Spiegler

□ "Zidane, a 21st Century Portrait" by Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno, see Today's Events, p10

