

José Mourinho

A pair of interviews with "The Special One"

Inter Milan Manager Jose Mourinho is special. He'll tell you so. And so, too, will those who work with him, play for him and compete against him. The Portuguese coach has had great success in a relatively short managerial career. Now, after almost a year in charge of Inter, he has the team on track for a fourth consecutive Serie A title. This interview was conducted by Jeffrey Marcus of The New York Times immediately following Inter's 0-0 draw with Manchester United in the round of 16 of the UEFA Champions League.

It was a pretty tense match last night. I was watching you on the sideline. It seems as if you were so excited, the official had to warn you to stay back.

The fourth official is always a problem, not with me but with almost everybody because sometimes they (don't) understand that we are there to work. We are there for the players. We are there to help the game to be better. Compare this with basketball in the NBA, which is a high level of competition: What do coaches do all the time? They run up the line, they speak, they communicate. And here sometimes in football, they don't let us communicate with the players. We don't have timeouts; we have just the halftime to have a direct rapport with the players. And you can imagine in a stadium of 85,000, it is not so easy to communicate with the players, so we need that.

It almost seems as if you want to be part of the game.

I want it. It's a pity I cannot be there. I cannot be inside. I'm not saying I can do better than them – impossible, of course – but at least the motion and pleasure to be there is big. I keep saying to my players that these are the matches that everybody wants to play, everybody as a kid dreams to play. And not many have the opportunity to do it. I didn't have the talent to arrive there. So when players have the talent to be there, they have to enjoy it. They have to play the game not with fear; they have to play the game with emotion... passion, and that's what I try to transmit to the boys.

You have a definite philosophy about the game. How would you describe it?

My philosophy is not so easy to describe. I have a few sentences that describe a little bit what I think about it. One of them is that on my team, the team must be much better than the sum of the parts, which means that we are not playing an individual sport, we are playing a collective sport.

How do you convey that to players?

In our day-by-day work; in every minute that we live together, we live for the team. This is a team work. Team objectives, team targets and individual targets just become part of individual motivation. I keep saying to my players that these are the matches that everybody wants to play, everybody as a kid dreams to play.

If a player wants to win the gold boot or if a player wants to be the best player of the match, these are individual motivations. But the real motivation is the team. After that, if you go to high-level football – yesterday was a great example of it—it is impossible for one team to be better than the other for 90 minutes. It is always the kind of game where one team dominates for a part, and the other team dominates, and then the other team dominates, and it's almost like a box-to-box situation. And I used to say to the boys that we must be ready for difficult moments, and in difficult moments we must stick together and fight together. And don't concede, and don't give up.

In the good moments, in the moments where we are the best side, we must enjoy it, we must use it and we must try to kill the game for us, which we did not do yesterday. But at least we got a draw, which leaves the door open for the second leg.

To be successful at such a high level takes a lot of clarity, focus, but also a lot of patience. Where does that come from for you?

I think you are born with it. Ferguson yesterday, for example, is a good example of it. Passion, motivation and desire don't have relation to age. They don't have relation to the titles we have won before. It doesn't have relation to the men you have on the bench. It is something that you have inside. Ferguson is almost 70. He is full of passion.

I started as a manager nine years ago. I didn't change one single inch; I am exactly the same. I want to win the same. I wake up every day with the same passion to work. I think it's something you have inside. That is why I say that we can be motivators, we can motivate players, but it is something that is genetic. You have to be born with it. You can't improve what is genetic, I believe.

Your self-confidence is well documented. But what do you say to the people who say you are arrogant?

I say, I am not. I say, I am not. I say that at this level of pressure – if you can use the word pressure because I don't like to use it very, very much because I have so many pleasures in what I am doing – that you can cope well with that pressure. But that is well: if you are not self-confident, if you don't believe in your work, you are a step down.

If you are a leader and you can influence people's attitudes and you want people to follow you up and be as strong as you are, you must be strong. I used to say that normally the team is the face of its coach. So if the coach is not brave enough, self-confident enough, arrogant enough, the team will lose qualities. And I believe that is why my teams are always very, very difficult to beat.

The public expression of your self-confidence is epitomized by the comment you made when you first joined Chelsea. Has the "Special One" come to mean something different than what you intended?

I have explained that a few times. I arrived at Chelsea the day after winning the Champions League, so I was a Champions League winner for 24 hours. I arrived there and it looked like I had to prove something to be there.

Now they keep going with the Special One like a nickname, which doesn't disturb me at all. I think almost everybody in football has a nickname. This is mine. It is impossible to get rid of it now. I don't feel more pressure with it because of that Special One nickname. I cope with it very, very well. That's no problem.

People in the United States, I think, find you curious. American football coaches tend to be a particular type of character, but you are different from what American sports fans are used to seeing.

I admire very much American sports. I think when you go into this level of sport in soccer, it is very difficult to learn from other coaches. We can get a few important things and make a transfer out of other sports and American sports, even sports completely different than soccer. In their approach, in their training, especially in the way they analyze the game, and when we try to be a bit more scientific in our approach. American football is very, very interesting.

Of course during a game, I'm the kind of coach who likes to think alone. I make decisions on my own – to read the game, and not many times to communicate or think. I make decisions on my own. But I understand the way they analyze the game is brilliant and the way they communicate is brilliant. And their participation in the game is fantastic. They have the privilege to communicate with players in a way that we cannot do – all the audio communication is fantastic for them. I admire them very, very much.

You make decisions alone, and you are the very public face of the team. Is this by design to take pressure off players?

I try. I try. Of course, in a team you have some personalities that can cope with that pressure. But other ones, whatever profile you like, you

want them to be more comfortable, in their corner, doing their job a little bit away from the press. And yes, of course, I try to do it, I try to do it. I can cope with it. At the same time, I don't play the game. I play the game, but I play the game in the dugout, which is different. They are the ones where the cameras are for 90 minutes, where every skill is important for how the way the game goes. And I believe that during the 90 minutes they are under more pressure than me. So I prefer to be, before the game and after the game, the man where all the rifles are pointed.

You have an interesting relationship with the media. You have good patience, but sometimes it can be difficult for you. How much do you see yourself as a public figure? Is there an act you put on? Are you an entertainer?

I don't know, to be fair. I don't know. I know what I am. I know that I don't want to change. I know that every time I change countries I say, "Your country doesn't change me. I don't know if I change you, but your country will not change me." I don't lose my identity. I am the same man when I come as when I go. Of course, I have things to learn and experiences to get from new countries. But my objective is: Don't lose my identity, especially my personality. And after that, there is always the risk of being loved or being hated. That, I understand: that I am not a person who doesn't touch other people. I believe I make an influence in that direction. I can create some feelings in other people.

That I can easily understand. The public figure—to be fair I don't understand it very well because in my private and social life, I am the exact opposite as I am in my professional life. I am really, really low-profile. Away from the highlights, I don't have an active social life.

Your relationship with your players seems to be the most important to you.

Yes, this is important. Good relation, bad relation; kisses and little fights, but always very honest. That's what I want—to be honest with them, and they to be honest with me. Like in my family, up and down and up and down, but always with the sense that we love each other, and what we do, we do for the good of the team.

You say it's like a family. Are you an authority figure, like the father, or a friend or brother. How is the relationship?

It depends. I believe I am open enough with them to be like an old friend, an older brother. Somebody that they can be open with, feel comfortable to share everything or almost everything. And when I say share, I say every problem, every detail of their lives, even things outside their professional lives. A leader must have a warm heart to share in these day-by-day problems, but at the same time a cold heart because as a coach, making decisions, sometimes difficult decisions, often requires a cold heart.

Inter have three consecutive Scudetti already. What is success for you here at Inter? What is your personal definition, your own standards?

Success for me is another Scudetto. A different one than the others, because every Scudetto is different. No one is the same. So when we have a better Juventus, a better AC Milan, a better Serie A, another Scudetto is not one more. It is a different one, it is a new one—it is probably a better one.

We are in the semifinal of the Italian Cup, so why not reach the final? We already won the Super Cup. And we are in the Champions League competing with the European champions, side to side, strength to strength, until the last moment, which means we can go through.

But for me, success is my work day by day. I think I did enough in my career not to be under judgment day by day, result after result and game by game.

You have said that you didn't want to be a top manager at 40 and a has-been by 50. What if you don't win the Champions League again?

If I don't win again, I don't win again. There are so few managers with a victory in the Champions League, this makes me a privileged one to have won it once. Only a few did it twice. And I want to do it for the second time, of course, and yes, again, when I look to my friend Ferguson who is almost 70, he did it twice. So I am 46; for sure by 70, my second one is in the pocket, for sure.

You clearly have a sense of purpose, but what are your doubts?

My doubts? You know, I put all these doubts to myself and to the people who work with me because they make us improve. So every day is a question mark in one exercise. When you analyze and exercise, when you have feedback, the result is a question mark.

When you go to the game, even after a victory, there is always a ques-

tion mark in the decisions I make, in the decision I should make, in the reasons we did well, in what we didn't do so well. I am a man of question marks. I'm not saying doubts, but a man of questions. So I would say I am not a man of doubts, but one of question marks. I always want answers, and am always looking for answers.

That's why before the game I have no doubts; I sleep very, very well. And after the game, I don't sleep, because I have so many question marks. Not before the game—after the game.

I go to the game with the conviction that everything was perfect, everything was very, very well done. After the game, lots of question marks because I want to improve all the time. So I would say I am not a man of doubts, I am a man of question marks.

What's next for you? What's your future?

Next in football?

In football, yes, but in life?

My future will always be football. No chance of another future. My life is family and football. Family is always with me, always present. Football is definitely my present and my future.

My idea is to try to always motivate myself and to make things enjoyable—with some salt and pepper and something new to motivate myself. I have something in my mind, which is to be the first—because nobody else has done it, no manager did it, no player did it—the first to win the three biggest championships in the world: the Spanish, the English and the Italian.

I did the English. I am trying to do the Italian. One day, I will try to do the Spanish one. At the same time, as you were saying, the Champions League is an incredible competition to win. I did it once, I want to do it twice; there is no doubt. But most of all, I want to be happy. I want to be happy where I am working, the people I am working with, the club I am working with. That's always very, very important to me.

So sometimes, for sure, more important than to achieve these little things that make me live with a different motivation and enthusiasm, is to be happy. I must work in clubs surrounded by people where I feel very, very happy and where I feel loved and that I am an important part of the club's future. That for me is very important.



The second section of this interview was conducted with Mourinho during his third season at Chelsea. It was conducted by The Telegraph.

Does failure as a player drive you as a manager?

I was not a top player, but I could have been better. I was not better because I didn't need football at the time. When I turned 18, my birthday gift was a car. At 18, was I going to university every day in my car. No public buses. No Underground. I had money to go out with my girlfriend (who is now my wife). If I wanted money to go on a weekend holiday, I had money. My father was a football man, and I had money. I had a good life. So I was not the kind of person who was hungry to succeed to change my life.

I was asked by a Portuguese friend yesterday what I do with my money now. I do nothing special. He said to me, "Don't you want a big car? Don't you want something special you dream about?" I dream of nothing. The only thing I dream about is to succeed as a football manager, and I follow that dream.

Where did you get your hunger for management?

As a player I was not stupid. I could understand I would never reach the top. When I was an assistant manager and I was feeling the qualities I would need to be a manager myself, I was thinking I can do it. Year after year I was feeling I was preparing for that.

Could you burn out?

No, no, no. Football doesn't make me old. There is no relation between football and white hairs or losing weight. I enjoy football very much. What I need is sometimes one day off. For me that is perfect. I'm not saying I like the stress. I like my life. I like big matches. The only thing I don't like is that hour before the game where you have nothing to do. There is one hour where the players are having massage, changing, studying the size of their studs. They are doing these things to prepare for the game, and I do nothing.

I do not find football stressful. I do not get nervous. When I get the team

sheet I try to understand who they have on the bench; what they are going to do if they're winning; what they're going to do if they're losing and they try to change the result. I try to anticipate the situation the maximum I can. I try to read my players' body language to see if they're ready for it, if they are calm, extra-motivated or need a word. The night after the game I just cannot sleep.

What about your future? Are there bigger clubs than Chelsea? Milan, Madrid?

They can be bigger clubs, bigger institutions with a century of rich history. They are the clubs with stature. That's why people are not always fair when they speak only about the amount of money Chelsea is spending. They don't put on the other side of the balance the institutional power of these clubs. I play at home against Real Madrid and I have 40,000 people. I go to Madrid and they have 100,000. This is a club without one single European Cup or Champions League. Madrid is the club of the century.

You would be a better manager if you were a hypocrite?

My bad qualities are that I don't care about my image. Because of that I don't care about the consequences of what I say and do. To have some percentage of being a hypocrite is a great quality in football. I don't have one single percentage of being a hypocrite, and that is a very bad quality in football. I'm not a hypocrite at all.

If I cared about my image, I would do things to protect my image. I would control my speech in certain ways. I wouldn't say what I think all the time because sometimes you get into trouble. Instead of being a manager a lot of people love and a lot of people hate, I would be a manager everyone loves.

You like the dramatic gesture. Is there something of the actor in you like when you ripped your medal off after Porto won the Champions League?

I ripped it off, yes, but when I won the UEFA Cup (also with Porto) I was crying. We score against Barcelona, I dived on my knees. We score against Manchester United, I did nothing. It depends on the moment and what emotions I have inside. I am quite emotional, both as a person and a manager.

Do you use a press conference to send a message to the opposition, the team or the referee?

That's normal. You can pass on some messages in the press conferences before and after games. I don't directly influence the game but, for example, when I say before the game against Manchester United that we go there to win, and we go home with the same difference in points, then it's positive. That is me saying to my players we have two results to play for. The United players have a big chance to open the gap, but they have only one result to play for. When the game is finished they know the result is not good for them, and we know the result is good for us.

You like to remind United of that message?

Yes, and they try to do the same. My influence on Sir Alex is zero. I do it to take pressure off my players, and the fans know they can celebrate a draw because they know we are thinking medium-term and it's a good result for us. Communication is with everybody.

You have an influence on Rafa Benitez, because he always gets uptight.

No, no, no. Matches between us and Liverpool are always very close except we beat them 4-1 one time. Otherwise it's 0-0, 1-0, 1-1. We used to beat them in the Premiership. They used to beat us in a knockout situation. I respect him a lot as a manager and I think he respects me, too. We had problems, we solve problems. Maybe we'll have problems again in the future. If we have, we'll solve them again because we respect each other.

Is there any part of you that envies Manchester United or Arsenal for their more expansive, adventurous football? They use wingers.

We had wingers last season and were told we were not an attacking team. This season we don't have them, so you cannot say that.

But they have a reputation for more pretty football?

They sell their product well.

Everyone says they are more attractive...

Do they?

You are a very good "power" team.

I don't agree. We are a team adapted to the reality, which is why Arsenal cannot beat Bolton at Bolton and why Chelsea under me has played three matches and got three victories at Bolton with zero goals conceded.

You cannot play against Bolton at Bolton the same way you play at home against Watford. Some teams and some managers play every game with the same strategy. Sometimes they beat someone 6-0 and sometimes they lose a game they shouldn't lose. One of the strengths is to adapt to different realities, which is what I'm trying to do with Chelsea in England and Chelsea in Europe. Chelsea cannot play in Europe the same way it plays in England.

Your strategy always seems to be risk-free, good organization and not being caught on the counter?

It depends. If you play at Old Trafford and change a right-back (Geremi) for a left-winger (Arjen Robben), it is a crazy change, not a conservative change. We've played some matches at home with three defenders, some with five players in attack. Chelsea is an attacking team, but against Bolton if you don't defend as we did in the last 15 minutes, you have no chance. How can you stop 10 throw-ins, 10 free-kicks, 10 corners? Bring people back fighting, changing small players for tall players and fighting for every ball.

Arsenal three years ago was the most eye-catching side you'll ever see. Would you like to build a team that pretty?

Arsenal was pretty when they were champions without defeat, yes. Not pretty when they finished fourth when they had to win their last game to qualify for the Champions League. Not pretty when they get zero points in two matches. Pretty when they played amazing and were champions. The key is winning and playing well, playing beautifully.

What do you think of Arsene Wenger as a person and a manager?

He is a fantastic manager, one of the best. I don't think we are the best friends, not even really friends. We are colleagues. We had a couple of conversations when we met in Geneva for a coaches' forum, no more than that. But I have 200 percent respect for the work he's done over the years.

Is it not possible to be close friends with other managers?

It is difficult.

But Ferguson likes you.

And I like him.

You are used to having control in the dressing room. How did you find it when William Gallas said he would do his own thing?

Gallas knows I did my best to try to keep him at the club, so if he wants to be honest, he has to say that - from the first day until the contract problems, which were out of my hands. Aside from that, the relationship was very, very good.

Fullbacks are key for your width in a diamond formation. Was that the attraction of getting Ashley Cole?

You can't play 4-4-2 without fullbacks going forward, especially on the left. On the right side, we have a lot of players who can reach this kind of position. On the left side, I'm not waiting for Lampard or Ballack to give us that width.

I used to see Ashley as an attacking fullback; now he's performing both ways as fullback. He knows we defend with only one midfield player in front of two central defenders. He knows the importance of defending well the inside space. He defends that well. His mentality is absolutely brilliant.

When we see Robben and Joe Cole on the bench, people are disappointed. Do you understand that?

Players pick the team, not me. You think if Cole has an amazing game against Werder Bremen, I don't play him against Manchester United? I play him for sure. Do you think if Robben comes on in the second half against Manchester United and is man of the match, do you think I don't play him?! I play the best players at the time. Makelele, Essien and Frank Lampard are untouchable because of the way they play, not because I love them, Michael Ballack is untouchable because of the way he plays. John Terry is untouchable. Ricardo Carvalho, Ashley Cole and Drogba, they are untouchable. The right back is not untouchable. That is why I try this and that. Sheva (Shevchenko) is not untouchable because of the way he is playing. That is why I play Joe Cole against Bremen or Robben or (Salomon) Kalou there.

In this moment, we have nine untouchable players because of the way they play. I told the players: "Don't knock on my office door. Don't speak with me about why I play or why I don't play. Don't send your friends to speak with the press and say this or that. Show me. I promise you I play the best players." It is easy to select when it is about how they behave on the pitch. 