

ANA URQUIJO

President of Athletic Club de Bilbao



Ausarta, negoziatzailea, uste sendoetakoa eta joera nagusien kontra ibiltzen ohitutakoa da Ana Urquijo. Kluba une gogorrek igarotzen ari zenean, onartu egin zuen bere bihotzeko Athletic taldeko lehendakari izateko erronka, bere egitekoa hori zela iruditzen zitzaiolako. Hala, 108 urtetan gizonek gobernaturiko erakundeko lehen emakumezko presidentea bihurtu zen. Abokatutza eta higiezinetakoko agente lanak gauzatu zituen kemen berarekin ari da lanean. Eremu hauetan ere aitzindari izan zen gainera, Bizkaiko Abokatuen Elkargoko Batzordean sartu zen lehenengo emakumea baitugu.

Soccer is no longer a man's game

For Ana Urquijo, lawyer and estate agent by trade, it has not been easy to take charge of this position of responsibility in tempestuous times for her beloved Athletic. Her incursion in this man's world, however, was not something she considered lightly. When she was 12, her father bought her a season ticket for Athletic and together they watched an infinite number of matches, at home in San Mamés and away. From the stands, she has been able to appreciate the growing number of female spectators and football fans over the years and in the last five seasons she has witnessed the women's soccer phenomenon emerging in her own club.

What has changed in soccer for the presidency of Athletic to fall to a woman, after 108 years of being held exclusively by men?

A lot of things have changed, women participate in all lines of work and this should be reflected in positions of responsibility. Soccer is a reflection of the change which has occurred in these 108 years of club history.

In 1990 she was the first woman to join the Club's Board of Directors, a male haven until then, and in

her professional life she found herself a place on the Board of the Bizkaia Lawyers' Association. Did these experiences help her make herself heard and for her decisions as president to be accepted by other members of the Board of Directors?

I have been with the club for some time and I have lived through a series of experiences which have meant that I deal constantly with men. I can see that men have also evolved and have learnt to live alongside women in government teams. You learn to be in a management team and contribute, from your position as a woman, what is necessary for the decisions which are made to consider all points of view.

Do you have to rule with an iron fist to be the president of a first division club or is it better to use a velvet touch?

I don't believe that either iron or velvet gloves are necessary to be president. You have to know how to make decisions at all times and I don't think that this feature is specific to men or women. It is a matter of keeping a cool and analytical head at crucial moments to make the right decisions for your institution or

company. If at any time this has to be done from a firm position, then that's how it's done although sometimes you need to use a little tact without losing any forcefulness.

I suppose you enjoy soccer because your father taught you to appreciate it. What would you say to women who hate this sport because they associate it with tedious Sunday afternoons when their husbands and boyfriends go to the match and come home either euphoric or depressed depending on their team's result?

My father taught me to appreciate soccer, but what your father tries to teach you doesn't always have the same effect. You become a fan or you don't and I can't say anything to women or men to change their minds, although it's true that more and more women are going to matches. Women need getting a taste for soccer, but never in terms having it imposed on them, because that doesn't work.

You've had a season ticket since you were very young. Have you seen a big increase in female members since then? What percentage of the 34,373 season ticket holders are women?

Approximately 13% of members are women, but I hope that with the new pitch, when we'll be able to offer more season tickets, more women will join as there is already high demand.

A few years ago, it was unthinkable that Athletic would have a women's team and that they would win four Superleagues. Do you believe that women's soccer is sufficiently valued by their own clubs, society or the press?

We have just celebrated the women's team winning a new title and in the last few years we have seen that this has increasing repercussion on society and it's reflected in the press, which is logical as it is a new sport and can only get better.

Do you like defensive or attacking soccer?

I like soccer, including attacking and defending as the match dictates. In any case, when you see a great show with a lot of goals I admit that it is more fun to watch, although football is a compendium of attacking and defending.

Do you collect players' autographs or were you not the type to accost them to get a signature? Who were you a fan of and who is your favorite current player, even if they don't play for Athletic?



You have to learn to make decisions all the time and I don't think this is a particularly male or female characteristic.

You have to have a cold and analytical mind to make the best decisions for your institution or company.

I still keep some photos from when I was young of some players that I liked back then. In current soccer, I'm not going to mention anyone because I like everyone in Athletic, they are all great players and I admire them all. If I had to pick out a player from another team, I love Messi, from Barcelona; he's a great player who's still got a long way to go because he's still young. I also like Rooney, from Manchester, who demonstrates all the characteristics I like, a compelling technical player.

As President, you have had to lead complicated projects such as constructing the new playing field. Will people talk about the Ana Urquijo era? Will there be a 'before' and 'after' for your presidency?

I've taken over the presidency at a complicated time, although it's true that I've had to deal with difficult and delicate situations. I'd really like my time at Athletic to be remembered as someone who came with the intention of working constantly for Athletic and put Athletic above everything else.

Have you still not been in the players' dressing room?

Yes, I really don't think it's my place. I usually go in after the matches when they're already dressed.