

# LA NUESTRA FUTBOL FEMINISTA

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**For 14 years, La Nuestra Football Feminista has developed its praxis through the articulation of sports training and providing workshop spaces with a feminist perspective in the large informal settlement of Villa 31 Buenos Aires.**

From this double anchor, sport becomes as much an area of leisure, contention, reflection and expression, as a space from where to build a language of our own, a character identity for football played by women and non hegemonic identities, denaturalising oppressions and deploying strategies that allow for individual and collective empowerment, motivated by the raw desire to play.

Sustaining the football practice on the most sought after pitch in the neighborhood, which is a public space, represented the first exercise of resistance to oppression and the denial of space for us to exercise the right to play.

In Latin America and around the world, sport and especially football is one of the most inequitable sectors in

society. On the one hand, it operates to reinforce and deepen stereotypes and inequalities through the hegemonic ideas of masculinity and femininity, but on the other hand when being claimed and resignified by women and dissident identities, it has the power to be the tension in which those same power and opportunity gaps can be problematised and politicised to be deconstructed and re-invented.

This resignification of values, privileges, behaviours and practices builds new identities that have allowed La Nuestra to give a political sense to a sports practice. This social construction, with a (her)story of more than 13 years, is considered as something that belongs to us, as a heritage that has transcended the pitch to be incorporated into our personal and community lives, and both are worthy of being passed on, inherited and transmitted, building new identities in the new generations where gender discrimination and unequal access to opportunities have no place.

This has allowed us to be aware that we are building our own work

methodologies on and off the field and, above all, building concepts and our own critical theory that responds to the realities of women and non conforming identities regarding their realities and opportunities in sport. This path, on the one hand, challenges the academy and patriarchal political constructions to decolonise knowledge and power from a critical intersectional point of view and, on the other hand, it has allowed us to introduce the discussion about access to sport to the broad feminist movement.

### **Impact and collective strategies facing Covid 19**

The social context that emerged during COVID-19 revealed the deep gap of inequities and the difficult conditions that the inhabitants of the community of Villa 31 face on a daily basis. The lack of access to health care, basic services such as water and light, and the high unemployment rate, add to and worsen the historical conditions of marginality and state abandonment. Mandatory social isolation has been especially difficult and painful. So often, women, girls and adolescents must not only live with their aggressors but must do so in crowded conditions and poor housing. Co-existence becomes even more difficult for adolescent

and young women, many of whom have been going through a process of individual and collective empowerment by being part of La Nuestra and who, due to preventive and compulsory isolation, have been immersed and forced to (re) assume more traditional roles under new and greater family dynamics of co-existence and joint use of the domestic space. Many of the players have expressed their anguish and sadness when experiencing this resurgence and reinforcement of those traditional roles and mandates that years of struggle and time on the field had helped to deconstruct. On the other hand, prejudices towards the inhabitants of the marginalised and popular neighborhoods of Buenos Aires have been exacerbated by the exponential increase in cases that occurred a few months ago in Villa 31 due to a lack of water supply for eight days. Many neighbours lost their jobs and others were forced to stay at home without being able to go out to find their daily livelihood.

In this situation, women were the first leaders to occupy the front line to face the crisis, maintaining communal cooking and eating spaces as well as the care of children and the elderly. There were many, also, the first to risk their lives, getting infected in some cases and later dying.

For La Nuestra, this very tough, unprecedented, and complex situation confronted the organisation with new challenges. Our 14-year journey in the neighbourhood, cemented through close and powerful affective bonds, meant that the starting point from which we confronted this uncertain panorama was very strong.

Feminist networks, the organisational power and work capacity of girls and women were and are the strongest evidence of the strengths that this social group possesses, and these tools serve us on each new path and scenario that we are presented with.

Faced with this new context in which the defense of life and dignity prevails, as an organisation La Nuestra was challenged to modify its practices and dynamically adapt our normal way of functioning to respond to the different emergencies. On the one hand we had organised ourselves before the health emergency, but on the other hand, we were challenged by the profound changes that sport in general, and especially the sport practiced by girls and women, was experiencing.

In this pandemic we have seen how the gaps of inequality and social injustice become even more evident

and deeper, and for the organisation, the decision to support the players and their families with food and other basic assistance has been of great emotional and political impact. The organisation of a donation campaign to deliver food, cleaning products and alcohol, reinforced the fabric of new support strategies on behalf of women's networks and feminist care networks. Thanks to these alliances that are woven and reinforced, it was possible for us to sustain this aid for 26 weeks for more than 500 people each week.

From the sporting perspective, we adapted the training sessions to the virtual world, not without considering the different emergencies and difficulties that the players were facing, such as the lack of connectivity, the scarce space that many had and the absence of computers or cell phones to serve as online support. We also made teaching material with games and recreational activities so that the youngest girls had something to spend time with and would feel closer to their companions during the time of confinement.

Beyond all the difficulties, we have adapted to stay close and together, facing the pandemic as allies and standing as tall in this new field as we stand tall in life.

## The struggle for access to Legal Abortion

The increased visibility of women's football in Argentina has occurred within the framework of a powerful grassroots feminist activism that builds on the country's tradition of claims for human rights. Of particular importance here is the Ni Una menos movement, and as a result of the arduous work and articulation of feminists and the women's movement of Argentina, the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe and Free Abortion.

The fight for Legal Abortion has its origins in the National Women's Encounters, an event that has been held annually in Argentina since 1986, bringing together women from all over Latin America to discuss relevant issues and think about collective strategies. Since 2003, the now traditional massive mobilisation with which each meeting closes, began using the slogan that would be embraced by the Campaign: "For the right to decide" and "Contraceptives not to abort, legal abortion so as not to die."

The campaign was officially launched on May 28, 2005 International Day of Action for Women's Health, and at the time of its formation, it was made up of 70 organisations from all over

the country, who from that moment, began to use green handkerchiefs as a symbol of the campaign in reference to the struggle of the Abuelas y Madres of Plaza de Mayo. This powerful symbol is now widely known and has been adopted by many campaigns for legal abortion in South America and the world.

From the beginning the campaign had an approach that raised the need to modify the State health and education systems, starting with the development of sex education programmes with a gender perspective and the guarantee of access to contraceptive methods in an easy and free way, and with the need to achieve access to legal abortion. This road has been slow and difficult, but the campaign has always had the support of the feminist sectors and the women's movement accompanying the multiple actions they carried out over the years. Gathering of signatures, mass mobilisations, vigils in front of Congress, handkerchiefs in sign of rebellion, and simultaneous federal actions were accompanied by a vast majority of women, girls and people from the LGBTIQ collective who took to the streets and raised their voices in the immense struggle for our right to decide over our bodies. The Feminist Football movement has been no stranger to the struggle, and a wide range of organisations and feminists involved in different sectors of football,

nucleated in the Coordinadora Sin Fronteras de Fútbol Feminista, were involved in several actions with the idea of bringing women in sports and those who practise sport, close to the campaign and supporting the movement. In the different marches and street rallies, the Feminist Football movement was present through the claiming of public space, manifesting itself through the setting up of pitches and the proposal to play and celebrate our bodies, our citizenship, our autonomy and sovereignty over our corporealities and decisions.

The struggle that started as a result of this historic collective struggle, which nucleus feminism from all sectors, including football, has today conquered the right to access legal, safe and free abortion.

The first Voluntary Termination of Pregnancy project was prepared in 2006 by the Campaign and subsequently presented eight times over the last 14 years before finally being approved at dawn on December 30, 2020. That day, the Senate approved the Law of Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy.

With 38 votes in favour, 29 against, and one abstention, the approval of Law 27,610 was achieved. ■

*Born in Colombia, I have lived in Argentina for 15 years. Documentary filmmaker, Professional Football Coach and Anthropologist. I like to highlight that I am a migrant woman and a feminist activist. I have been a football player since 1993. Played in Sweden and Colombia where I was a member of the Bogotá Regional Team between 2002 and 2004 and in Argentina I was a player for RDC Espanyol, Club Atlético San Telmo and Club Atlético Huracán. Among other activities related to feminist activism in sports, I am a founding member and Secretary of the Board of Directors of the La Nuestra Fútbol Feminista since 2010 to the present, where I am also in charge of sports training for the youth and senior categories and of the coordination of projects. I currently work in the area of Gender and Diversity of the Subsecretary of Sports of the Province of Buenos Aires. I am the co-author of the books: Law of Advantage, Paper Ball 3, Female Coaching Zone and Opening the Game.*