CHAPTER 7

Reason and emotion at the negotiating table

We have to negotiate as part of our daily lives. Sometimes these negotiations are very important, and sometimes less so. You might be negotiating the purchase of a seven-storey building or buying a rug in a Turkish bazaar, or maybe you are bargaining about how much time your children should spend browsing the Internet or negotiating your plans for the weekend with your partner – all these situations involve negotiations between parties, of whom one is demanding and the other is offering.

Negotiations need to be prepared using rational analysis and taking emotions into account. It is obvious that in markets with fixed prices (supermarkets), your negotiating skills are not as important as they are where prices can vary (the Turkish bazaar). But a rational analysis of what is on offer and what is being demanded before jumping in can help us to avoid being tempted or misled by our emotions.

The football world is an exceptionally good place for observing and experiencing how to approach a negotiation, because there is an emotional factor constantly threatening the negotiation processes. Sometimes negotiations go according to normal business practice. Contracts with sponsors or for television and marketing rights of all types are an example of this. But at other times, the negotiations are of an entirely different nature; for example, when players are transferred and salaries negotiated, then all kinds of other factors come into play. The competition with other teams is sometimes ferocious: the different agents representing the players and the clubs have to be taken into account and understood, as well as the cultural differences that
condition the way we should approach the conversation, not to mention the huge sums of money involved, or the press and the risk that everything that happens will end up on the front page of the newspaper the following day.

Once again, some people have innate negotiating skills, while others learn or develop them. Some people had already started negotiating with their mothers over giving up their dummies. But there is also a science that can be learnt and which can make us better at negotiating and more confident at decision making: a science that will help us avoid the feeling we have made a mistake that can’t be put right or that we have been cheated.

**Getting ready to negotiate**

When you are getting ready to negotiate it is always better to be over- (rather than under-) prepared, and not to be overconfident in how well you will perform once you sit down with the other party. It is better to assume your opponent will have done his homework, and if he hasn’t then your preparation will be even more advantageous to you. The adage says that a negotiation is 80 percent preparation and 20 percent talks with the other party, and I think that’s just about right.

In football you absolutely have to be prepared when negotiating with players’ agents, because you know they have prepared very well for the meeting. Agents have plenty of time for this, it’s their job – and a whole year’s income might hinge on a single negotiation. I remember sitting down with Ronaldinho’s brother, Roberto de Assis, to negotiate something and seeing how much he had written in his notebook. He had made a very good study of all the options; but we had, too. We had done our homework well before the meeting and set out everything very efficiently on a spreadsheet on the laptop, with all the financial simulations for the contract.

There are three very good reasons for preparing for a meeting properly. First, you won’t have enough time to do it once the negotiations have started. Second, the other party might take you to places you don’t want to go and which you have to have thought about in advance. Third, you might get emotional.