

# In memoriam Professor Raúl Horacio Madero (21 May 1939–24 December 2021)

Jiri Dvorak 

Raúl Madero was born to a conservative Argentinian family in the city of Buenos Aires. His grandfather (Eduardo Madero), the architect, city planner and developer of the Puerto Madero waterfront, was extremely well known. Raúl received a basic education at a Catholic boarding school in Buenos Aires. As a child, he had already discovered his passion for the game of football, though his parents and other family members preferred that he play tennis, polo or other sports which in their opinion were more sophisticated. Nevertheless, Raúl managed to train and play football secretly during his free time with the support of the priests at his boarding school. Raúl told me his story about how football changed his life—with a smile on his face and a glass of good Malbec in his hand—when I visited him in the late 1990s.

## A LIFE DEDICATED TO FOOTBALL AND MEDICINE

Once his undeniable football skills were discovered, Raúl started playing professionally for Boca Juniors but soon moved to Estudiantes de La Plata. During the period 1963–1969 he played 179 games for Estudiantes on what he fondly called ‘my team’, and in the years 1964–1969 he played on the Argentina national football team. He was known as a firm, elegant and fair defender and for these attributes he gained the respect of opposing players such as Pelé and Bobby Charlton. Raúl achieved success as a player by winning the local first division football league (Metropolitano) in 1967, Libertadores Cup in 1969, Copa Interamericana in the same year and the Intercontinental Cup (today’s Club World Cup) in 1968, in a memorable final versus Manchester United.

It was a shock to his teammates and fans when Raúl retired from professional football at the peak of his career at the age of 30 and decided to attend medical

school. He did so with his close friend Carlos Bilardo, another Argentinian football icon. Raúl specialised in orthopaedic surgery, as Sports Medicine, which was his passion, did not yet exist in South America. As his medical reputation grew, he was invited to become a member of the FIFA Medical Committee and quickly became a respected contributor to the FIFA Medical Assessment and Research Centre (F-MARC) established in 1994.

Raúl aimed to establish a football medical committee in every South American country for the advancement of medical research and science in line with the F-MARC standard. He was a strong advocate for fair and safe playing conditions for footballers, defending the consensus against playing in hot environments, and the surprisingly sensitive issue of playing at high altitudes. He knew that playing football in stadiums located above 3000 m without prior acclimatisation could reduce players’ performance and harm their health. He defended his scientific position with high principle even against sports politicians and the presidents of some South American countries, risking both his career and personal status.

## FROM FOOTBALL TO THE COMMUNITY

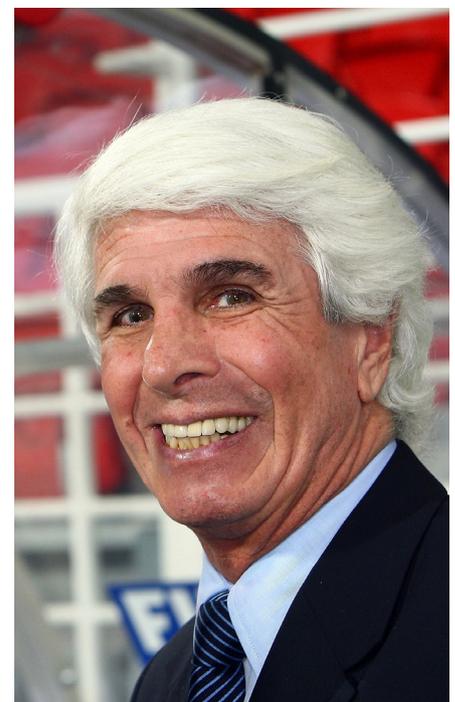
With the support of his international colleagues and scientists, he worked tirelessly to establish a Sports Medicine Department and diploma course at the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina. This became a reality when its doors opened on 18 March 2010. At that time, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, by virtue of his office, also held the role of Grand Chancellor of the University. Cardinal Bergoglio was the official who approved the Sports Medicine Department and Raúl’s appointment as a full-time professor. When Cardinal Bergoglio was elected as Pope Francis I a few years later in 2013, his passion for football was well known and indirectly influenced by Raúl’s passion to use the ‘beautiful game’ to better the world. Understanding the power of football among the general population in South America and elsewhere, Pope

Francis I also saw how sport can positively influence communities.

Raúl’s academic achievements largely revolved around connecting football to health and injury prevention. He was instrumental in developing and implementing the F-MARC prevention programmes, such as the ‘The 11+’ to reduce injuries in recreational football and the ‘11 for Health’ to improve health education for schoolchildren through simple messages about lifestyle, nutrition, hygiene, physical activity and well-being. Raúl used his connections from playing football in several countries in Central and South America to foster programme implementation and research translation to the populations that would benefit most.

## PASSION AND PRINCIPLES TO REMEMBER

Another passion of Raúl’s that some may not know about was playing piano. He played Beethoven and Mozart beautifully, but when he played tangos, the listeners could feel the soul of his motherland to its core and his sensitivity to music. Once, after a meeting with colleagues including Raúl, I invited the group to our house where Raúl and maestro Gustav Kuhn, a former director of the Salzburg Festival, spontaneously played four-handed works that were classical and improvisation on a tango theme. It was a memorable experience for us lucky listeners and an honour to observe this other side of Raúl.



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Simply put, Raúl was a special person and embodied the best for sports and exercise medicine professionals. He came from football and dedicated his medical career to football and health. He was humble, always putting others in front of him. He was a creative adviser to F-MARC who formulated medical hypotheses and helped to test them based on authentic real-life cases, making a strong impact on the development of research activities for a sporting organisation with worldwide influence. Through his ideas, he impacted many scientific works that are published in respected journals. With this tribute, I would like to honour Raúl Madero as

a person, as a medical professional with impeccable principles and as a true friend. These words will no doubt be echoed by his many colleagues and friends who also had the honour to walk with him on his remarkable journey these past decades.

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