

STEWART MCGILL & VINCE RAISON

THE ROARING RED FRONT

THE WORLD'S TOP LEFT-WING FOOTBALL CLUBS

FOREWORD BY
PROFESSOR TONY COLLINS



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Cádiz

Founded:	1910
Stadium:	Estadio Nuevo Mirandilla
Capacity:	20,724
Nicknames:	<i>Las Piratas, El Submarino Amarillo</i>
Ultras:	<i>Las Brigadas Amarillas</i>

– VINCENT RAISON –

THE FIRST thing I learned about Cádiz was that it was not pronounced Cádiz, with the emphasis on the *-diz*, but Cádiz, with the emphasis on the first syllable, like Cardiff, but quicker. Much quicker. Because speech is so fast in Cádiz, there isn't time to say all the letters. Consonants and vowels are discarded with such regularity that you half-expect to find them piling up around the city's palm trees and pretty squares.

But speech is about the only thing in Cádiz that is too fast. The pace of life in this southwestern corner of Andalusia is noticeably relaxed after the pointless rush of London. The people are warm and welcoming; the lunches long and languorous.

We arrived in the Old City by train from Seville, its ancient walls announcing a place of great antiquity. Indeed, it was founded by the Phoenicians around 1100 BC, long before the rest of Spain. They called it '*Gadir*'. A singular place, not isolated, but standing alone.

'Cádiz represents a city, a province, and a way of living life, very different from what is lived in the rest of the Spanish state,' said Jose, a lively member of the *Brigadas Amarillas*, Cádiz's ultras, a

man steeped in the character of Cádiz. ‘We are the oldest [city in Spain], and that has carved a deep feeling of belonging.’

Despite its natural gifts, Cádiz province is the poorest in Andalusia and one of the more impoverished in Western Europe. Sun and sea can mask a great deal, but in recent years, the city’s population has declined somewhat. Among the causes of this is the city’s peculiar geography: it lies on a narrow strip of land hemmed in by the sea so there is limited new land to be developed. And because Cádiz is built on a sandspit, sinking foundations deep enough to support high-rise developments is too expensive to be viable.

All this explains why Cádiz’s skyline hasn’t actually changed that much since mediaeval times, why it’s such an old city in terms of demographics. There’s a slight feeling of sadness at forgotten glories you get when walking around the town during the day. But not around the stadium on matchdays; that’s a joyous celebration of *Cádizismo* and an affirmation of all the good things that football can bring to a people: a focus for a party, a vehicle for creativity and community vigour.

Our contact in Cádiz, Samuel, had arranged a stadium tour for us with some more of the *Brigadas Amarillas*. They were proud to show us the Nuevo Mirandilla Stadium, home of Cádiz CF. Constructed in 1955, it has twice been completely rebuilt. Originally it was known as Estadio de Ramón de Carranza, but was renamed after a public vote. De Carranza was a Francoist mayor of Cádiz linked with the *coup d’état* of 1936, which led to Franco’s fascists forcibly taking over from the democratically elected leftist government. Franco would rule Spain until his death in 1975. Most people over 60 in Spain remember life under fascism, a rare and unwelcome living European memory. Thousands of Franco’s political opponents were killed during the White Terror and political repression continued to target liberals, socialists, communists, Jews, Romanis, atheists, feminists, trade unionists and gays throughout his reign. So fuck that guy.

Watching Dino Zoff and Paolo Rossi lift the World Cup in Spain in 1982 for Italy, I was oblivious to the fact that the

country was only a few years from fascist rule. It would have been unimaginable to hold such a global tournament under Franco.

Cádiz chooses not to honour those dark days under the General. While there is nothing uniform or unanimous about the politics of the population, both the city and the province have impeccable leftist credentials. The mayor, José Mariá González Santos, known simply as Kichi, is a member of the Izquierda Anticapitalista party (Anti-Capitalist Left).

‘Cádiz resists,’ he said on being voted in for a second term in 2019.

The city is remarkable in that it holds a 55 per cent stake in its energy supplier, Eléctrica de Cádiz, supplying most of Cádiz with renewable energy. €500,000 of its profits go to the city’s disadvantaged to prevent ‘energy poverty’. This is a stark contrast to many energy companies, whose profits go to shareholders and who will simply cut the supply of those unable to pay, before taking legal action against them. It is no small thing, and reflects an essential difference between right and left; capitalism and socialism. One punishes those who are struggling financially, and one assists them. One blames the poor for their poverty, the other tries to alleviate it. It’s a simplistic view, yes, but hard to dispute.

Kichi managed to garner support not just from traditional left-wing supporters but even from across the political spectrum, partly because he is a *gaditano* (a Cádiz native, the word recalling Phoenician roots), doing his best for his hometown. In a city with a village feel, he is the boy next door, all grown up and now at the head of the *gaditano* family. You won’t be surprised to hear that he supports his local team as well.

Kichi’s partner, Teresa Rodriguez, is also a prominent politician. In the 2015 and 2018 Andalusian parliamentary elections, she was the presidential candidate for Podemos, the left-wing populist party. Podemos emerged from the *Indignados* movement, the outraged anti-austerity campaign that also inspired the Occupy movement and was itself inspired by Latin America’s ‘turn to the left’ at the beginning of the 21st century. Eyebrows were raised that Rodriguez made no secret of her affection for the *Brigadas*

Amarillas (I would call them the Yellow Brigade, but it sounds much better in Spanish). The reason this was considered contentious for someone running for high office is that the *Amarillas* have enjoyed a few rucks over the years, including pitched battles with *Biris Norte*, Sevilla's ultra group and Andalusian rivals.

Jose would dispute that there is any real beef with Sevilla these days though. 'On a historical level, there has always been a rivalry with Sevilla FC, and to a lesser extent, against Betis. Fortunately, there is no rivalry today that makes us hostile towards any normal supporter of any team. Our greatest rivalry would be against any team with right-wing fans.'

But, unthinkable, the right are on the rise throughout Spain, including Andalusia, through the right-wing ultranationalist Vox. Vox have been accused of being anti-feminist, Islamophobic, anti-immigrant and homophobic. They are currently Spain's third-largest party.

Cádiz's leftism is not merely restricted to the city. The Socialist Workers' Party is the biggest party in the province of Cádiz and the region of Andalusia, even with Podemos taking a significant portion of the left vote. The political slant of Cádiz's fans is not an anomaly. They do represent the city and province of Cádiz.

'*Brigadas* anti-fascism is part of our DNA,' explained Jose. 'Our history is marked by the fight against fascism, both at the ultra level, as well as at the social level in our city in the last 39 years. It is our way of life.'

Thanks to Spain's unique history, anti-fascism has real meaning among the ultra groups of the country. Most violence that erupts here has little to do with football and everything to do with politics. It is quite unlike the UK, where clubs tend to be apolitical. Spanish ultras may trace their roots to English hooliganism – an empty, loud expression of tribalism combined with lager – but not their political convictions.

Entering the stadium – past the emblem of the *Brigadas Amarillas*, with its central image of Che Guevara, past the club emblem, and past, what's this? A painting of Andy Capp? It was a

surprise to us, being old enough to remember the violent misogyny of the *Daily Mirror* comic strip, but Andy Capp has become a global left-wing football icon. He represents the working-class roots of the beautiful game, in contrast to the capitalist machine it has become in which players can be traded for more than £200m and season tickets can exceed £2,000.

We walked up the steps to take in the yellow and blue seats around the pitch. I presumed the yellow represented the sun and the miles of impeccable sandy beaches of Cádiz; blue for sea and sky but I was wrong. The colours come from the club's historical connection to an old Cádiz football team, Mirandilla FC and the La Salle religious order it sprang from. From certain vantage points you can see the water of the Bay of Cádiz, making it one of the best stadium views imaginable.

It was good of the guys to show us round and answer questions like, 'So, who is your biggest rival, Sevilla or Betis?'

'Xerez!' They chorused, echoing humanity's strange compulsion to be irked by their nearest neighbour, a reaction repeated throughout the world, even one they rarely play, though other *Amarillas* would later tell us they have no problem with Xerez whatsoever.

In the UK, the rivalries of Sunderland and Newcastle, or Portsmouth and Southampton, for instance, are ignited by the irrational belief that the people just a few miles away are fundamentally *other*: different, or even inferior. Here in Cádiz, many see anti-fascists everywhere as brothers and sisters and only fascists worthy of contempt, whoever they support and wherever they come from.

El Mágico

Just past the image of Hartlepool's 'finest', Andy Capp, we came to a stencil of Mágico González, Cádiz's legendary forward who lit up the 1980s and early 1990s here, whose sublime skills are still remembered in awed reverence.

'He is one of the best players I have ever seen in my life, there is no doubt about it,' said Diego Maradona. El Mágico – the

magical one – was called ‘The best footballer you’ve never heard of’, by *World Soccer* magazine, as his extraordinary abilities were not reflected by his fame outside of Spain and his native El Salvador. There are those who played with him who thought him even better than Maradona, who admitted trying to copy González in training, without success.

Mágico was first introduced to Spain in that 1982 World Cup, impressing in an El Salvador side that did well to qualify. Clubs lined up to sign him, like Paris Saint-Germain, Atletico Madrid and Sampdoria, but he chose Cádiz, where he could continue doing the things he loved best: scoring goals, nightclubbing, drinking, smoking and sleeping.

Doubtless, he could have had a more lucrative and silverware-laden career, but as he himself explained, ‘I don’t treat football as a job, I just play for fun.’ Yes, Messi and Ronaldo have achieved great things, but how good would they have been on 20 Marlboro a day and a bellyful of booze?

With his touch, his vision, his audacity, he was a consummate crowd-pleaser. Why slot the ball into the net when you can lob the keeper and leave the fans awestruck, struggling to take in what they had just witnessed? Why be efficient when you can bring joy? Why simply contribute when you can dazzle?

‘Mágico González did not want to win everything, because he understood life as we in Cádiz understand it,’ Jose told us. ‘He played for fun, to be able to live, and to be able to enjoy himself. He was a poor person with an innate talent in his feet, and who, for example, missed a gala at which he was being honoured with an award because he was playing soccer with children in a courtyard. He is a god here in Cádiz. Those who are too young to have seen him play live know all his goals from videos. Everyone here has experienced El Mágico.’

In his first season with Cádiz, he scored 14 goals and helped them gain promotion to La Liga. In 1984 he was invited to join Barcelona on a tour of the USA. Some say he chose to return to Cádiz because he missed it, others that Barça were put off by his

indiscipline and passed on the tantalising opportunity to have Maradona and González in the same team.

In Los Angeles, Mágico refused to leave his hotel room when a fire alarm went off (set off as a prank by Maradona) as he was entertaining a lady friend at the time, which didn't impress Barça officials, already wondering whether their star player really needed a notorious playmate to escort him to Barcelona's nightclubs.

Returning to Napoli from the 1986 World Cup, a triumphant Maradona heard the fans singing 'Maradona is better than Pele,' and declared that González was better than himself *and* Pele. 'These fans are great but what they don't know is that there is a player even better than Pele and I,' he told a journalist. 'He is Jorge González, El Mágico, and he still plays in Cádiz – he's phenomenal.'

Because of Mágico's genius, he was indulged by the Cádiz coach, David Vidal. His late nights sometimes meant missed training and he would refuse to do fitness training, or any training that didn't involve a ball. Cádiz were lucky to have him, and he was lucky to have Cádiz.

Brigadas Amarillas

The day after our stadium tour we met with Samuel and his partner, Rocío, their friend Natalia and Jose, at Peña Flamenca Juanita Villar, a delightful tapas bar they favoured in the La Viña district of Cádiz, near the city beach and away from the tourists, an area Rocío called 'Cádiz-Cádiz' – proper Cádiz, to differentiate it from the periphery. The football stadium is on the outskirts and Rocío took some pleasure in telling us that she puts her data roaming on when she goes to that part of town.

The story of Cadiz's ultras began back in the 1980s when some young anti-fascists formed a group to express their support for the club and oppose racism and supporters of fascism. They started making their presence felt, travelling to away games in large numbers, noisily supporting their team and putting on pyro displays.

Pyrotechnics are not a part of UK football culture but they are an important expression of visual support on the Continent. Ultra

groups fill the air with smoke from their flares, some coordinated to make a more powerful sight. Fans use all they have to support the team: singing, chanting, waving flags and, yes, setting fire to stuff. Pyros are still something of a mystery to the Premier League spectator, but in many European countries they signify that extreme ultra support, helping to create a fevered atmosphere to inspire their team.

The *Brigadas Amarillas* soon became notorious not just for their away support but also for their political demonstrations at home, where they protested against mass unemployment in their province. Counter-demonstrations meant fights, arrests, fines and greater notoriety, but also stunted the growth of the group.

In *Political Ideology and Activism in Football Fan Culture in Spain: A View From the Far Left* by Ramon Spaaij and Carles Viñas there are some telling insights from Cádiz fans. In the study, some of the *Vieja Guardia* (Old Guard) of the *Brigadas* are described as being too committed to violence. Some have gone on to change their perspective, including Pedro, a fan then in his late 30s, who told the study:

‘We have a long history of violent clashes with fascist groups. We used a lot of violence against that other [fascist] violence but our violence was understood differently by the media and the state.

‘But I also have to admit my own mistakes, and one of them has been to defend our beliefs through violence, putting other possible forms of struggle aside ... some people have been using violence for the sake of violence. Our philosophy has changed a bit though. I am now much more involved in grassroots activities like education and raising awareness.’

Even successive relegations in the 1990s didn’t douse the passion of supporters. People don’t back teams like Cádiz for the glory of trophies. They do so because they believe in something and believe the team reflects the things they hold dear.

It was also in the 1990s that they forged a friendship with Spain’s other notable anti-fascist ultras, the *Bukaneros* of Rayo Vallecano, from the barrio of Vallecas in Madrid, whom we will

meet in the next chapter. It started with letters (remember them?), stickers, fanzines and visits and now, nearly 30 years later, a strong brotherhood that has grown between them.

‘We continue to have an excellent relationship with the ultras of Rayo’, says Jose.

So strong is the bond, they have a saying: ‘*Sangre Gaditana en vena Vallecana*.’ – Cádiz blood in Vallecas veins.

‘Time, travel, and new technologies mean that today we can say we also feel at home in places as far away as Bilbao and Tenerife. In general, we have good vibes with almost all the anti-fascist fans in the Spanish state.’

It’s heartening to see left-wing fans united, celebrating what they have in common, loudly proclaiming their anti-fascism and forming a network of commitment to social justice, especially given the often-fractured nature of leftist support.

The *Amarillas* were generous with their time and more than happy to share their knowledge and passion. Our eyebrows were raised when they arranged to meet in the square a full four hours before their kick-off against Barcelona, but we were keen to get the full Cádiz experience. We’re used to having a couple of pints before a game, but this was something else.

Gradually the square began to fill with yellow shirts, some downing beer, but also, surprisingly, plenty drinking gin and tonic or martinis. A picture of a supposed Barcelona ultra went round. Would they be showing up and causing trouble?

‘Ultra? It’s just a fat guy in shorts,’ said Rocío, dismissively.

Jose had already explained that Cádiz fans tended to be welcoming, but they were not afraid of sticking up for themselves. ‘That is something we are especially proud of. And although Cádiz is not an Andalusian or pro-independence bastion, as such, it is a place that is kind to other fans with anti-fascist and pro-independence tendencies.’

The ‘fat guy in shorts’ was nowhere to be seen though, so the fans were free to stand down. And as the drinks and the sun went down, the singing began, growing ever louder, enveloping more

fans until the square was alight with songs and flares. It was a privilege to be there, as the excitement at the prospect of watching their heroes do battle with the Catalans.

Despite taking on one of the giants of European football, the Cádiz fans were optimistic. They had beaten Barcelona for the first time two seasons ago and Barça were not the team they once were. They had been bitten by their own dog because money does not make a loyal pet. Disastrous financial and football decisions, coupled with loss of revenue due to the pandemic meant that an unrecognisable Barcelona team, shorn of its stars, would face Cádiz that evening at the Nuevo Mirandilla.

* * *

Matchday: Cádiz v Barcelona, September 2021

Stewart McGill

Such was the party before the game, loud, raucous, but wholly good-natured without even a whispered suggestion of aggro, that I wasn't sure I wanted to go into the stadium. However, people had been kind enough to make the effort to secure my possibility of entry and, of course, the artistic needs of *The Roaring Red Front* were calling loudly. The things we do for our readers, eh?

The lack of any tension at the party contrasted greatly with similar affairs before big matches in the UK, evidence of a different relationship with alcohol and a different attitude to having a good time. I was thinking about this as I queued to get into the stadium on a warm late September evening. I realised that even a grumpy old lefty like me could be mellow in a city like this: you're never more than 500 yards away from a beach, the food is terrific, the beer is as cold as the people are warm and there are very few Tories about.

My seat was very high up in a very steep stadium with narrow stairs. Not for the first time I was glad that I could hold my beer and offered myself a little pat on the back. The self-congratulation was only marginally challenged when I had a couple of vaguely embarrassing stumbles. When you get to a certain age you don't actively 'fall', you 'have falls'; things happen to you. However, I

did fully realise then that I was no longer the kid who could run around terraces with five-inch heels on my platform soles and 32-inch flares. I regretted that it wasn't 1975 any more, something that happens a lot.

I've watched Cádiz a lot on television so it was a little magical to actually be in the stadium. It's compactly pretty with calming yellow and blue tones and, as Vince writes above, some of the best views you will see from any football ground. I felt a bit bad about Vince not being able to get into the ground but I knew he'd be looked after in a local bar watching the game with a couple of beers. He'd also be spared having to negotiate those steep steps going down on the way out of the stadium after the match, something to which I was not looking forward.

The atmosphere was terrific, partisan but good-natured with no rancour. Maybe it would have been a little different if the Barcelona crew had shown up, the fat man in the shorts with some friends, but this crowd was 100 per cent *gaditano*. As I was chatting to Jose from the *Brigadas Amarillas* earlier, the yobbo gene was activated by alcohol and I expressed a wish that the *Boixos Noi*, Barcelona's right-wing fan group, would make an appearance: Jose very determinedly concurred with this, I don't think too many in the *Brigadas* are shy about any physical aspects of the struggle.

There was a bit of a show from the stadium lights before the game and the announcer tried a little too hard to whip up the crowd. I don't really like all these imported American attempts at razzmatazz. The *gaditanos* around me, regular, no-bullshit working-class guys who came for the game, also looked mightily unimpressed. In their statement of 9 January excoriating the club's owners the *Brigadas* stated, 'We do not understand what that speaker is doing, cheering in such a ridiculous, artificial and childish way, as if it were an NBA franchise.' They also used the phrase '*tan poco propia*,' roughly translating as 'so little like us,' 'this is not what we are.' This tells you something about the aversion to modern/business football felt by the *Brigadas*. Often the people who run football don't really understand those who watch it and

patronise them as plebs who just like a bit of a circus. The ludicrous opening ceremony of Euro '96 with the knights in armour is the most egregious example but there are plenty of others.

The football itself was competent, but it was one of those games that we used to refer to as a game of Don Howe's Face, both had nil-nil written all over it. Cádiz played well enough against a Barcelona side who clearly did not want to play for their manager and the problems they experienced later in the season were no surprise after watching this game. In the words of the great Jimmy Sirrel, the legendary Notts County manager for much of the 1970s and 1980s, 'If ye dinnae score, ye dinnae win.' Possibly the most profound words ever spoken about a game that many over-complicate.

You know the game's getting a bit dull when you spend an unreasonable proportion of the first half wondering how to best translate and scan the rather distasteful 1970s chant 'You couldn't score in a brothel' into Spanish. '*No podrías anotar en un burdel*' was my best effort; not great regarding the rhythm but a little better than most of the goal attempts on the field. To be fair, things improved decidedly in the second half: Negredo forced a great save from Barcelona's Ter Stegen in the first minute of the half. Memphis Depay missed one that I could have put away even wearing my platform soles, but then forced a great save from Ledesma in the Cádiz goal. Salvi was put through beautifully by Espino, my favourite Cádiz player by some distance, but again Ter Stegen did the job with a fine save. In the fourth minute of stoppage time Piqué went on a charge redolent of past Barça glories and put through Depay for a clear chance; he missed in a way redolent of Geoff Thomas for England against France in 1992. Poor Memphis really did have a bad day at the *burdel*.

As the action ground down to the Don Howe Face, the focus, passion, and hatred centred on Ronald Koeman. He's put on a few pounds since his playing days but the hair is still nicely blond. His black t-shirt and trousers were just a little too tight and he looked like a slightly lumpy fusion of pantomime villain and dame. The *gaditanos* clearly hated him, but probably not as much as his team

did. His sending-off in injury time provoked the most excitement of the evening.

‘All I said to the fourth official was that there were two balls on the pitch. They send you off for nothing in this country. I asked the referee in a calm manner, but let’s leave it as it’s not my problem,’ said Twankey/Captain Hook after the match. The sending-off did seem a little excessive. Maybe the referee didn’t like him either. Barcelona sacked him a month later after a 1-0 defeat at Rayo Vallecano. 2021/22 wasn’t a great season for *Los Hermanos de la Izquierda* but they did at least make a contribution to this story.

The sobering impact of the game meant that I was able to negotiate the stairs without too much embarrassment and I will always remember with fondness my time at the Nuevo Mirandilla and the people we met in Cádiz. Sometimes the game doesn’t matter that much, though I looked forward to a better match-up at the weekend in Madrid when I was due to see Rayo Vallecano v Cádiz in Vallecas. I wasn’t disappointed.

* * *

Recent Seasons

Cádiz may not have a Mágico, but they have a strong team spirit and are afraid of no one. Until being relieved of his duties in January 2022, coach Álvaro Cervera was the closest they came to a hero figure in recent times. When he took over the helm, Cádiz were in the third tier of Spanish football. Two promotions later and they were taking on Barcelona on an equal footing. One of his quotes ‘*La lucha no se negocia*’ – the fight is not negotiable – has been taken on as a motto of the club and is stitched into each Cádiz football shirt. ‘He understood the idiosyncrasies of Cádiz, adapting perfectly to our way of life, customs, and our feeling for this city and club,’ said Jose.

Founded in 1910, its early history includes a merger with Mirandilla FC, friendlies and regional competitions before emerging in the *Segunda División* after the Civil War. It wasn’t until 1977 that they tasted top-flight football, and only from 1985 to 1993 did they hang around longer than a season until now.

Cervera took over in April 2016 with Cádiz's place in the Segunda B playoffs in danger. An inauspicious start saw them take just one point in his first four matches in charge, the last of the regular season, but it was enough to scrape into the post-season contest. But they found their feet in the playoffs, beating Racing Ferrol, Racing Santander and Hércules to secure promotion to the second tier after a six-year exile.

A stirring first full season under Cervera saw Cádiz reach the playoffs in fifth place, before going out to Tenerife. The next two seasons saw them just miss out before finally going up in second place in 2019/20. It would be their first season in La Liga since their solitary year's stay 15 years earlier.

In October, they achieved the impossible: deservedly beating Zinedine Zidane's Real Madrid in the Bernabéu to go third in La Liga, with a goal from Anthony 'Choco' Lozano. In December, they beat Barça. They went on to finish 12th – their highest-ever position – full of confidence that their stay in the top flight could be a long one.

However, the 2021/22 season would prove to be a difficult one. The team would fight for their place in a hugely competitive league – after all, the fight is not negotiable – and they have some very good players, such as McGill's favourite, Uruguayan left-back Alfonso Espino, veteran striker Álvaro Negredo and Choco, their talented Honduran striker. But a habit of conceding late goals heaped pressure on the coach, who saw points slip from their grasp thanks to defensive frailties. Wins at Vigo and Bilbao and an excellent point against Real Madrid at the Bernabéu couldn't hide the fact they went into 2022 without a home win. And so, following an uncharacteristically timid defeat in Pamplona, coach Cervera was sacked and replaced by Sergio González – his brief: to keep Cádiz up. He immediately oversaw an improvement in form, finally getting some home wins, against their brothers from Vallecas and also a very good Villareal side, before an astonishing victory over Barcelona at the Camp Nou. However, by the final game of the season, Cádiz still found themselves in the bottom three, playing away at Alavés and

needing to better the results of Granada or Mallorca to stay up. In the second half, Mallorca took the lead at Osasuna, and Granada got a penalty. Amid unbearable tension, Granada missed their penalty and Cádiz substitute Choco Lozano scored minutes later, allowing them to leapfrog Granada and prompting tears among Cádiz's faithful. With five minutes left, Alavés were awarded a penalty before VAR helped the referee rule it out. When the final whistle went, Cádiz were safe by one point. Cadistas exploded in relief and joy as fans partied long and hard into the night.

But for the *Brigadas Amarillas*, the perilous position at the wrong end of La Liga was not their only concern. They have seen the *Segunda División* before – and worse. What animates them is the direction the ownership of the club wants to take them in. Because Cádiz CF is always about more than just football.

La Lucha

In November 2021, 25,000 metal workers went on strike in Cádiz after failing to reach a collective bargaining agreement. Blockades restricted access to Cádiz's industrial zone, turning the strike into a wider crisis. Cadistas would naturally oppose any attempt by management to use high unemployment and rising prices to persuade the workforce to accept a disadvantageous deal. The owners of Cádiz CF however decided to parade the players for a team photo in the shipyard, asking for 'common sense' to prevail. This was interpreted as using the football team to support the management in their battle with the workers, against the very nature of the club, city and province.

In addition, the president of the club, Manuel Vicaíno, has voiced ambitions to move the club to a new stadium outside the city of Cádiz, disregarding more than a century of history and disrespecting those fans who have shown constant devotion to the club. This is a club with a heart; not a franchise that goes where the money flows.

There had been a suspicion that their president didn't have the club's interests at heart and didn't understand Cadismo. That

sense was confirmed by the repugnant sight of the former Sevilla president, José María del Nido, in the bars of the Mirandilla. A man with known connections to fascism, Nido was sentenced to seven years in prison for corruption and embezzlement. *Brigadas Amarillas* were horrified at his presence.

‘The natural connection between the team and the city has been broken. We are concerned that all the feelings that make us who we are will be commodified to a point as false as it is obscene,’ they said in a stern statement that followed the tweeted picture in the shipyard.

‘Cádiz CF does not understand itself without the people of Cádiz, because the people of Cádiz do not understand their day to day life without Cádiz CF. We want our sons and daughters to feel the passion and pride of belonging to a humble club so they can feel special in a world dominated by so-called big clubs that resemble multinationals. We do not want to look anything like them, with their globalising and impersonal concept.

‘The sports corporation may be owned by majority shareholders in a commercial register, but it belongs to the municipality and its entire province. No one, absolutely no one, is going to put their financial interests or their business or personal goals first without encountering Cadista fans, brigades, and many of their tough fighters defending the values that have always illuminated the club: humility and the banner of Cadismo.

‘We are what we defend. We are simply not going to allow it. You will have us to deal with.

‘Salud, Cadismo y Libertad!’

As Samuel would tell us, ‘There are many people within the *Brigadas Amarillas* who have been pressing for a long time for the group to be tougher with Vizcaíno and now the conditions are there to go against him. In recent years, it has been difficult because at the end of the day we left Second B and in two years we went up to the First Division after almost 20 years.’

Now the president no longer hides his contempt for workers’ rights, his connection to fascist crooks and his ambition to tear the

heart of the club out to see if he can turn it into gold outside the city. And now he will have a fight on his hands. Because *la lucha no se negocia*.

The Englishman of Cádiz

While the stadium was indeed renamed the Nuevo Mirandilla, there was talk that it could have been named after the former Liverpool, Brighton and Manchester City striker Michael Robinson. Thanks to his exemplary work as pundit and presenter, the much-loved ex-Republic of Ireland international had become something of an institution in Spain since moving there in 1987 to play in Pamplona for Osasuna.

After joining a consortium that rescued Cádiz CF from financial ruin, he became director of football. ‘Getting involved with Cádiz was the best thing I’ve ever done. It was maybe the craziest but definitely the most gratifying,’ he told *The Guardian*’s Sid Lowe. ‘I meet so many ex-players who are affluent and don’t like football but I love football. And Cádiz is football.’

Cádiz was Robinson’s favourite city and he had a somewhat hopeful theory that he was descended from there as a result of the Spanish Armada washing up near Cork. Sadly, he passed away in 2020, shortly before Cádiz’s return to La Liga.

‘I believe that the word does not exist that explains what it means to be Cadista,’ he said, but he understood it better than most. He believed in the beauty and emotion of football and felt at home in this strip of land slipping off the end of Spain into an Atlantic idyll. Laid back, fun-seeking, humanitarian – none of these come close to explaining what it means to be a Cadista. Better writers than us will try and fail to capture its essence. Those that know, know, but struggle to articulate it.

Robinson often pondered what made the place and its football club special though and few have come as close as him to defining them.

‘Cádiz is a good socialist place. Warm, relaxed, friendly. It has the most humble, open people. It’s spontaneous and natural and

THE ROARING RED FRONT

they love football. There's an entire society behind the club – a city and a region. There's only 120,000 people in the city yet we've filled our ground for 47 consecutive months – with special people.'

He described the experience of going to see Cádiz as poetry. He loved this place, its people and its football club and it's easy to see why.