

The Captain Class: The Hidden Force That Creates The World's Greatest Teams

Part I: Greatness and It's Origins

Before the first chapter, Author Sam Walker details the story behind Hungary beating England in a Men's Soccer Friendly in 1953.

- 500-1 Odds in favor of England
- Hungary strayed from the accepted jersey numbering system, wore unique shoes and shorts, and displayed juggling techniques (before the game) as a number of innovations to the game.
- Their interchange of positions and fluidity was too much for England to handle in the 6-3 upset, . . . months before a 7-1 win for Hungary in a rematch played in Budapest.
- The team was led by influential players who moved on in 1956, . . . and ended the impressive run of results.

Chapter 1: Alpha Lions

Sam Walker set the parameters for defining the top two tiers of teams in his study.

- 1a The team has 5 or more members
- 1b It's members interact with the opponent
- 1c It's members work together
- 2a The team plays a major sport
- 2b It plays against the world's top competition
- 2c It's dominance stretched over many years

- Once down to 122 teams, he focused on teams with strong schedules and compared his system to the Chess ELO system. He also focused on teams who had sufficient opportunities to prove themselves. In choosing the final list, he isolated the teams who's record(s) stand alone. He chose 16 teams in his Tier 1:

Collingwood Magpies (Australian Rules Football) - 1927-1930

New York Yankees - 1949-1953

Hungarian Men's Soccer Team - 1950-1955

Montreal Canadiens - 1955-1960

Boston Celtics - 1956-1969

Brazilian Men's Soccer Team - 1958-1962

Pittsburgh Steelers - 1974-1980

Soviet Hockey Team - 1980-1984

New Zealand All Blacks - 1986-1990

Cuban Women's Volleyball - 1991-2000

Australian Women's Field Hockey - 1993-2000

U.S. Women's Soccer Team - 1996-1999

San Antonio Spurs - 1997-2016

Barcelona - 2008-2013

French Men's Team Handball - 2008-2015

New Zealand All Blacks - 2011-2015

Chapter 2: Captain Theory

1956-1969 Boston Celtics

- Never had an individual ranked among NBA All-Time Greats
- Bill Russell's career spanned the entire dynasty

Vince Lombardi

- "Individual commitment to a group effort, that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work."

Scientists have proven, the more cohesive and positive a group perceives itself to be, the better it will perform.

Walker discusses how Captains are chosen (pg. 38)

Wayne "Buck" Shelford (All Blacks), . . . players would walk over broken glass for him.

Mike Krzyzewski: "The single most important ingredient after you get talent is internal leadership."

Bill Russell

- Known for his work off the ball (compare to Cryuff's idea of 3 minutes on ball / 87 off)
- Never played for the fans, "I played for myself and my team."
- Couldn't bear to see his team lose
- Civil Rights Activist

Walker discusses what we imagine a Leader to be vs . . . influential players playing through injury and commonalities among Captains to be profiled.

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|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Lacked Superstar Talent | 5. They Did Potentially Divisive Things |
| 2. Not Fond of The Spotlight | 6. They Weren't The Usual Suspects |
| 3. Didn't Lead in a Traditional Sense | 7. They Weren't The Primary Leader |
| 4. They Weren't Angels | |

Chapter 3: Talent, Money and Culture

Walker discusses whether or not a Greatest of All-Time (GOAT) type player was necessary to drive success.

- Only two teams in Walkers top tier had such a player.
- The teams were more likely to succeed had a Captain who led from the shadows.

2010 Researchers at two universities in Texas found:

- The larger the gap between the team's top player and the average on the team, the less successful the team was.
- The best teams had clusters of individuals above average.
- High achievers dominate the rest of the group.
- Collective talent and ability of a group to work democratically was more effective than having a superstar.

Walker discusses “buying championships” and Real Madrid’s Galacticos Project. His claim is that money will buy wins, but not typically championships.

- Cuba’s Women’s Volleyball Team had opponents take them shopping, . . . U.S. Women’s Soccer succeeded while in a wage battle with management.

Walker introduces the idea of dropping Captains and the streak of failures that followed.

Chapter 4: Do Coaches Matter?

Willie Davis

- Always been counted out. Modest, deflected credit
- Vince Lombardi liked that Davis felt as if he’d been denied, passed over for years.

Lombardi: “It’s not whether you get knocked down, it’s whether you get back up.” “Battles are primarily won in the hearts of men. Men respond to leadership in a most remarkable way. Once you have his heart, he will follow you anywhere.”

During halftime of the first Super Bowl (1967) the NFL Packers had a 14-10 lead over the AFL Kansas City Chiefs. As Lombardi entered the locker room, he brushed against Willie Davis’ leg, . . . Davis felt Lombardi trembling. Yet, when he addressed the team, you couldn’t sense any anxiety.

Pep Guardiola only speaks to players when necessary and rarely goes into the locker room.

Yankees viewed Coach Casey Stengel as a “buffoon” and often ignored his instructions.

The Soviet Hockey Team openly despised Viktor Tikhonov.

Chuck Noll and Red Auerbach “never employed anything beyond a limited repertoire of basic offensive plays and left behind no major innovations.”

Puskas often told his teammates to ignore Sebes’ (Coach’s) directions. Puskas once said “it’s not the coach who really carries the burden, it’s the players.”

Alex Ferguson: “At kick-off on match day things moved beyond my control.”

Jock McHale (Collingwood Magpies): “I had no time for a side built up around three or four star players. Give me a fit bunch of players with a good general level of ability.”

- Insisted all players are played the same wage.
- Demanded his own wage was kept low as well. He worked at a local brewery to make ends meet.
- Although he was innovative and developed plays / moves, he wanted “quick-thinking players with a dash of imagination.”

Magpies Captain Syd Coventry

- Rarely scored, . . . cleared the ball, . . . hit opponents, . . . made tactical adjustments
- Enforced McHale’s “all for one” atmosphere.

Part II: The Captains

The Seven Traits of Elite Captains

1. Extreme doggedness and focus in competition
2. Aggressive play that tests the limits of the rules
3. A willingness to do thankless jobs in the shadows
4. A low-key, practical, and democratic communication style
5. Motivates others with passionate nonverbal displays
6. Strong convictions and the courage to stand apart
7. Ironclad emotional control

Chapter 5: The Captains

Walker discusses the political background defining the rivalry between Real Madrid and Barcelona.

- Luis Figo left Barcelona for Real Madrid.
- Carles Puyol was chosen to man-mark Figo the first time they played each other.

Carles Puyol

- Grew up desperately caring about Barcelona, viewed Figo's departure as a betrayal.
- Played down his role of shutting Figo out of the game (endearing himself to fans).
- Grew up in a Catalan Mountain region with no soccer. Played Futbol Sala (indoor) and was only allowed to play if he agreed to play in goal, . . . where he threw his body around to save shots with such abandon he developed back problems.
- Joined his first soccer team at 15. Coaches were so impressed they called Barcelona (Puyol now 17) for a tryout. Four years later, he made his debut for the 1st team.
- Famous for fitness. Last to leave training and often for yoga/pilates.
- Once broke a cheek-bone blocking a shot. After having his forehead split open, ran to the sideline, had skin stapled together and sprinted back to the field.
- Felt 100% effort is the only way to fully respect his teammates and the game.

Yogi Berra

- Struggled so badly as a Catcher, the Pitchers joined forces and created "The Project," to develop Berra as a top Catcher.
- Set the standard for the more than a decade.
 - 1950, Threw out 56% of base stealers (MLB avg was 49%).
 - Played both games of a double header 117 times.
 - Played all 22 innings vs Tigers one day (at age 37)
 - Won 14 league titles and 10 World Series Titles

Puyol and Berra were fueled by others viewing them as not good enough.

Buck Shelford (All Blacks) as Captain never lost a single match. He was a relentless task-master and once demanded a teammate with a laceration to his cheek pass on medical attention and return to the field.

Carol Dweck studied how children react to challenges. Helpless kids are preoccupied with performance. Mastery-Oriented children are motivated by an opportunity to learn. They view failure as an opportunity to improve skills. Mastery-Oriented children don't believe everyone has the same potential, but do believe everyone can improve if they work at it.

- "A person's reaction to failure is everything."
- When it comes to leading teams, this attribute only works if it rubs off on other players.

1913 Maximilien Ringelman conducted a study to test the effort put into a rope pulling task. When people were part of a team, they exerted less effort than when they were alone in the challenge.

1979 Ohio State Researchers had students participate in a shouting experiment. They found the same as Ringelman. The less identifiable one person's effort it, the less effort they put in.

Fordham Researchers followed up on the Ohio State study by pairing individuals and sharing with each that the other was a high-effort performer. The knowledge that a teammate was giving it their all was enough to prompt people to give more themselves.

Chapter 6: Intelligent Fouls

Mireya Luis, Captain of the Cuban Volleyball team in the 1990s.

During the 1996 Olympics, . . .

- called her mother before the semi-final and shared her anxiety. Her mother replied: "I didn't give birth to a daughter so she could go and cry in front of her adversary."
- devised a plan to berate the Brazilians to take their focus off the match.
 - Players were yellow carded and warned throughout the match as they cursed and spit at the Brazilians.
 - The effort worked as Brazil blew a significant lead and eventually lost.

Walker compares David Beckham to John Terry in regard to their view in public eyes.

Walker describes Derek Jeter as highly respected for his morally upright leadership. Yet during his 12 years as a Captain, the Yankees only won 1 World Series Title. Jeter was tremendous for business as the Yankees thrived financially, but didn't win as much as previous generations.

Richie McCaw led the All Blacks in a way that violated the "Kiwi sense of fair play." He often asked referees before matches so he'd know how far he can push the rules. During his 10 years as a Captain, the All Blacks won 95 of 116 matches.

Mireya Luis' impact on the semi-final vs Brazil led to the game being viewed in a confusing way as an embarrassment, yet it was one of the greatest shootouts in Volleyball history. She defends the behavior as just "moments" in her life. Not really her, just moments during competition, . . . means to an end. (Fundamental Attribution Error)

Steve Jobs was a ruthless leader at Apple. He cursed at employees and made people cry. "The process was ugly, but the result was glorious."

Didier Deschamps was "never animated by the desire to hurt someone," but was willing to take yellow cards so the team didn't face worse consequences. His style was to maintain self-control and know when it's okay to foul."

1986, Brenda Jo Bredemeier and David Shields (at UC Berkeley) interviewed 40 athletes to study their thoughts on aggression. They found some athletes can play hard and not worry about other people. One participant shared: “The game is Football and behavior is governed by rules. Before and after, behavior is governed by morals.” Most participants agreed, “Trying to hurt opponents for the sake of inflicting pain isn’t right, but roughing them up for the purpose of rattling and distracting them is.”

Walker introduces the idea of “Surface Acting,” detailed later in the book.

Chapter 7: Carrying Water

Eric Cantona described Didier DesChamps as a “limited” player. He said the best thing you could say about him is that he was a “water carrier.” After DesChamps’ Juventus defeated Cantona’s Manchester United, DesChamps was asked about the comment. He replied: “I don’t mind being called a water carrier.” He was proud to do that kind of work for his team.

Walker explains how athletes became Stars. He profiled Boxer James Figg, Babe Ruth and Michael Jordan. Babe Ruth was once asked if he thought it was right he made more money than President Hoover. He replied: “Why not? I had a better year than he did.”

Walker compares Carla Overbeck, Carles Puyol and Tim Duncan to Jordan. Pele, etc.

Tier I Captains were more likely to not want to be in the spotlight. Overbeck skipped the parade in New York after winning the 1999 World Cup. She didn’t want the spotlight, but once set the endurance standard in the Beep Test (and did it with a broken toe). Puyol let Abidal (after returning to the game after battling cancer) lift the Champions League trophy. Duncan agreed to be paid less so the team would have more money to buy better players.

DesChamps’: “You can’t only have architects. You also need brick layers.”

Pele was not the Captain of Brazil’s best teams, . . . Bellini (1958), Mauro (1962) and Carlos Alberto Torres (1970) were instead.

Chapter 8: Boxing Ears and Wiping Noses

Walker compared Churchill and MLK Jr. to Tier I Captains. Despite the Hollywood image, the top Captains, did not give speeches.

Carla Overbeck built credit to yell at teammates when needed by also noting every good thing they did. Carles Puyol constantly talked throughout games and training. Bill Russell held open meetings where nothing was off the table. Jack Lambert hosted what he called “Sauna Talks” where he was always the last to leave.

Yogi Berra was hazed, but hosted Barbecues to build team chemistry. Not known for speeches, Berra was more known for crazy comments, . . . but in the end, he was a highly effective communicator.

MIT Study showed, . . . the most effective groups are ones where communication is equally dolled out, nobody shrank from the conversation and points were made short and sweet.

Harvard Psychologists in the 1990's proved that Body Language had a larger impression on people than spoken words. In fact it proved that words barely mattered in comparison.

Tim Duncan was a constant communicator and was known to pat teammates on the back, put his arms around players, high five, etc. Gregg Popovic once said of Duncan: "He doesn't judge people. He tries to figure out who they are, what they do, and what their strengths are."

Tier I Captains (in Walker's words): "They engaged with their teammates constantly - listening, observing, and inserting themselves into every meaningful moment. They didn't think of communication as a form of theater. They saw it as an unbroken flow of interactions, a never-ending parade of boxing ears, delivering hugs, and wiping noses."

Chapter 9: Calculated Acts

Jack Lambert grew up feeling undervalued and started his career that way. He felt a need to prove himself to people, led by example, . . . was intimidating, passionate and emotional.

A 1960 book called *Crowds and Power* claimed an individual in part of a crowd, feels he is transcending the limits of his own person.

1990's University of Parma study discovered reactive cells they labeled Mirror Neurons. The study states we have a neurochemical system in our bodies that operates below our consciousness, . . . a "pipeline that can be manipulated by others."

"Surface Acting" is the act of people putting on an expression or taking a subtle action to influence the people around them. "Deep Acting" is the action where one is not pretending, but actually changes their own emotions in an effort to influence others.

Studies have proven that a team leader in a positive mood can increase a group's enthusiasm, help it channel anger appropriately, . . . even perform better on specific tasks.

Walker discusses the power of posing in a confident way (Power Poses) and the reason behind the All Blacks' Haka.

Maurice "Rocket" Richard spoke few words, but motivated the Montreal Canadiens with fury, desire and intensity.

Walker introduces Phillip Lahm and his thoughts on the power of an effective leader.

Chapter 10: Uncomfortable Truths

Valeri Vasiliev (Russian Hockey Player) was a tough kid, . . . drinking, smoking, clashing with authority. He once played through a heart attack. He also fought with his coach after the 1980 Olympic loss to the U.S. (Miracle on Ice). The coach had told the team they all should take the angle of it having been a team loss, but was bad-mouthing the veteran players on the plane home. Vasiliev heard the conversation and fought with the coach.

Carla Overbeck, Yogi Berra, Mireya Luis, Buck Shelford and Syd Coventry all clashed with authorities (each case was over wages). Jack Lambert lashed out against coaches after a strict diet was imposed by the Steelers. Carles Puyol discussed the tradition of allowing the team to

chose Captains as being important to ensure the Captain isn't someone who simply does everything the coaches tell him to.

Vince Lombardi stated a Captain's leadership should be based on the truth and that "superior Captains identify with the group and support it at all times, even at the risk of displeasing superiors."

Walker shares: "There's a line between a level of dissent that's effective for a team and a level of dissent that destroys it's cohesion."

Philipp Lahm grew up molding his style as one focused on serving the team. Lahm has played every position on the field (except GK), once completed 133 passes without a single miss in a match, etc. During his career (Bayern Munich), Lahm often requested the opportunity to share his tactical thoughts, but the staff declined. Lahm was known for criticizing the team in post-match interviews and once contributed to a full page, in-season interview with The Guardian. Although he was fined, his teammates began to speak out in support of his thoughts on tactics. They then won 9 of their next 10 matches and won the league.

Karen Jehn is an authority on group conflict. She has claimed teams with high levels of conflict are often more likely to engage in open discussions that help them arrive at solutions to problems. After studying 8,880 teams, Jehn differentiated between "Personal" and "Relationship" conflict.

Chapter 11: The Kill Switch

Jerome Fernandez (Captain of the French Team Handball Team) gave no speeches, led with low intensity, . . . played through the 2009 World Championship during his father's last days without telling his teammates, . . . "a selfless demonstration of emotional strength."

Richard Davidson, in the 1970s studied why some people are able to bounce back from setbacks while others are defeated by them.

Rechelle Hawkes (Australian Field Hockey Captain) led with no speeches, low scoring, low pace, little time in the spotlight, etc. At the end of her career, her coach changed the leadership model to alternating Captains and a Leadership Group. The following was a period of players lobbying for captaincy, cliques forming, players moaning as Captains were announced, . . . and the first time in 9 years where the team failed to win the World Championship (one year before the Olympics). In her final match (the Final of her fourth Olympics) after taking the Olympic Oath on behalf of all athletes that year, being the most capped Australian player, . . . she was not chosen as Captain. She blocked out the humiliation, focused on her team and led the team to a third Olympic Gold Medal in 4 tournaments.

Richard Davidson studied the effects of meditation and whether people could train themselves to be more resilient.

Maurice Richard (Montreal Canadians) was a French Canadian, part of a group often treated as underclass, . . . in public and (in Richard's belief) within the NHL. He felt Referees and even the Commissioner conspired against his team. After contributing to a newspaper article calling out the Commissioner, who suspended one of Richard's teammates for a fight he didn't start, Montreal Canadian fans started a riot. It was viewed publicly as justified and has since been believed to be the event that gave french speaking Canadians a voice to advocate for better treatment.

Toe Blake, a former Canadian, was named as Richard's new coach in 1956 and worked closely with Maurice to control his anger. His penalty minutes fell, he was named a Captain, assisted more goals than he had in the past, . . . finished his career winning 5 straight championships.

Part III: The Opposite Direction

Chapter 12: False Idols

Roy Keane (Manchester United), once said he'd rather die than lose. He gave no speeches, didn't often score, wasn't showy, had no interest in stardom, etc. He had a lot of yellow and red cards, was known for public brawls and even road rage. He was also known for fighting with teammates, even giving teammate Peter Schmeichel a black eye one night.

"Bracketed Morality" is the idea that athletes enter a zone where they do things they would never do in society. "Instrumental" Bracketed Morality will lead a player not to injure someone, but to further a goal. "Hostile" Bracketed Morality describes the actions of someone willing to injure someone regardless of the consequences.

Psychologist Mitch Abrams studied the ability of athletes to play angry and the benefits they reap from doing so. Anger can lead to a surge in the sympathetic nervous system and increase strength, stamina, etc. and decrease the perception of pain. However, it can decrease fine motor coordination, limit problem solving / decision making and other cognitive processes.

Yogi Berra once shoved an umpire after a perceived bad call. Carla Overbook fought with a Trinidadian player, . . .

Walker compares Roy Keane and his lack of ability to control his temper to Maurice Richard who learned to control his.

Psychologist Michael Apter of Georgetown theorized that: "aggression is driven by the pursuit of a pleasure sensation that comes from seeing a rival's fortunes reversed."

Case Western Researchers (2000):

- "Every person is born with a different mechanism for controlling negative emotions."
- "Restraint 'Tanks' will either be empty or full at any moment depending on how often we're forced to draw from them."

Michael Jordan was an exciting player in his first 6 years in the NBA, but had a losing record over the first three and often went out in the first round of the playoffs. He belittled teammates, lobbied to have teammates he lost faith in to be traded, etc. In 1988 Bill Cartwright joined the Bulls and became a quiet leader who mentored younger players. He was first to practice / last to leave, "carried the water," provided practical communication. Jordan didn't like him, made fun

of him, picked on him, etc. In 1990, Cartwright was named Co-Captain with Jordan. That season, the Bulls won the NBA for the first time. It was only then that Michael Jordan recognized Bill's influence. He even claimed "it was Bill that made the difference" that year.

Walker details Jordan's drive, based on his need to prove himself to the people who discounted him. He claims Jordan needed to feel slighted to play his best. Jordan's Hall of Fame speech was filled with shots at players, coaches and executives who once disrespected him.

Chapter 13: The Captaincy in Winter

Walker discusses the current phasing out of Captains.

NFL has regulations on Captains, the 2012 NY Jets had none (and went 6-10). The 2014 Celtics traded their Captain and went without one instead. When Derek Jeter returned to the Yankees, they retired the idea of a Captaincy. By 2016, four NHL teams played without Captains.

In 2011, Arsenal named Robin van Persie Captain just before the final year of his contract. It was a move to build his allegiance with the club. Brazil in 2014 changed Captains from Thiago Silva to 22-year-old Neymar, it's young star (the tournament was an embarrassment to the country). The New York Mets signed David Wright in 2012 and immediately made him Captain. The Edmonton Oilers assigned 19-year-old Connor McDavid (in 2016) Captain, the youngest team leader in NHL history.

Recently the pecking order or Coach-Captain-Star has been flipped.

In 1978, James MacGregor Burns wrote the book *Leadership*. He divided leadership into two distinct types, "Transactional" and "Transformational."

- Transactional: The person in charge cares most about making sure their underlings follow orders and that the hierarchical lines of an organization are strictly maintained.
- Transformational: Leaders focus on the values, beliefs, and needs of their followers. They engage followers in a charismatic way that inspires people to reach higher levels of motivation / morality / achievement.

Walker describes Tier I Leaders as:

- Conscientious, principled, inspirational, and connected with teammates.
- Often lacking in talent and charisma.
- Avoiding speeches, shunning the spotlight, performing thankless jobs in the shadows.
- Not always "steadfast exemplars of virtue."

Reuven Gal (1982) was an Israeli Army Colonel. After studying medal-winning soldiers, he constructed the formula: Leadership = P x M x D (Potential, Motivation, Development). He claimed if you take three men and put them in the same situation, one will view it as desperate and hopeless, . . . one as stressful but challenging, . . . the third as a fascinating opportunity for excitement.

Walker claims "Captains are like the Verb in a sentence." The verb is not as memorable as the nouns, evocative as the adjectives, or as expressive as the punctuation. But it's the verb that does the yeoman's work - unifying the disparate parts creating the forward momentum."

Richard Hackman (Harvard Psychologist) described the following four ideas:

- Effective leaders know some things.
- Effective leaders know how to do some things.
- Effective leaders should be emotionally mature.
- Effective leaders need a measure of personal courage.

*Leaders have to operate in the margins of what members presently like and want rather than at the center of the collective consensus.

Deborah Gruenfeld (Stanford Psychologist) found effective Captains often behave as less than deserving of the role.