
Juego, Set y Partido

Report by: Lise Jones

The pressures of competition and training place a huge stress and responsibility on the young sports person. Game, Set and Match amply illustrates that attitude, motivation and dedication play as important a role as physical ability and opportunity in the success of a player. The book provides a fictional account of a talented young sports player's progress, as well as a biography of Rafa Nadal, providing a real insight into the highs and lows of a career in sport. The protagonist of the novel is twelve year old Sergio, a talented player in both football and tennis, who has reached a point where he must choose which game to devote his energies to. The structure of the novel reflects the young sportsman's inner conflict, as each chapter begins with the battle for a point in a game of tennis which will determine the path he takes in life. As Sergio weighs up the advantages and disadvantages of each game, we gain an understanding of the physical and mental challenges he faces. Tennis requires more individual discipline, involving an inner battle, where the player is competing with themselves as much as their opponent. In contrast, there is a greater sense of camaraderie in football, but also obligation, and a desire to win at all costs for the team.

Sergio's family and friends are very supportive, and insist that he does what makes him happy. His trainers are aware of their responsibilities to the young player, but are also fiercely competitive, and cannot help but be jealous of the boy's commitment to the rival sport. Sergio realises that his commitment to sport means he may have to sacrifice some aspects of normal life. However, he is mature enough to realise that his dedication to sport gives his life a framework and meaning that it might otherwise lack.

The parallels with Sergio's story and Nadal's career are obvious and deliberate. These are emphasised by the inclusion of the biography at the end of book, which charts the tennis star's progress from the early years in text and photos. The fictional account gives us a deeper understanding of the psychology of a sportsperson such as Nadal, personalising and humanising the everyday struggles, the triumphs and setbacks. As such, it will stimulate children to discover the pleasure of reading and following a story, and motivate them to develop their own talents, in whatever area they may be.

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