

When it was game over, it was difficult to accept': Robert Pires on finding life after football

Level 1: Elementary / Pre-Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. How much do you know about football? Decide whether these statements are True (T) or False (F).

1. In the USA, *football* means *American football*, a sport similar to rugby.
2. Real Madrid is the oldest football club in the world.
3. The biggest football stadium in the world is in Brazil.
4. The most expensive player in the world in 2024 is Spanish.
5. The youngest player to win the World Cup was 18 years old.
6. The oldest player to win the World Cup was 40 years old.

2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

advice

career

challenge

season

retire

1. When you _____, you stop working because you are too old.
2. A(n) _____ is the period in a year when sportspeople play their sport.
3. A(n) _____ is the jobs that you do.
4. _____ is an opinion that someone gives you about the best thing to do in a situation.
5. A(n) _____ is something very difficult that you have to do.

bankrupt

charity

divorced

invest

teammate

6. If a person is _____, they are no longer married.
7. If you are _____, you have no money and cannot pay your bills.
8. A(n) _____ is someone who plays in the same team as you.
9. A(n) _____ is an organisation that helps people who are poor or ill.
10. If you _____ your money, you use it to make more money.

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b. Use some of the words from task A to complete the sentences.

1. It is never too late to change your _____. Don't be afraid to follow your dreams.
2. American football _____ goes from September to February.
3. When Messi and Cristiano _____, it will be the end of an era.
4. Many rich people will leave their fortunes to _____.
5. Some professional athletes go _____ after they retire. It's difficult for them to find a new job.

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Ed Aarons

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- 1 Robert Pires will never forget retiring from football. "I didn't want to stop because I had been playing for 19 seasons and football meant everything to me," says the ex-Arsenal star, who was part of the France team that won the 1998 World Cup and Euro 2000. "Even now, football is my life and it's in my blood, so it was very difficult to accept."
- 2 Luckily for Pires, he found help. He first met Stéphane Ehrhart – a former player who is now a careers expert – in 2009 while playing for Villarreal.
- 3 "I always said: 'I have time.' But time goes very quickly," Pires says. "When you are playing, it's the best job in the world. You are very focused on your club and you need to be very good every game, so you aren't thinking about life after football. So that's why when I met Stéphane, it was very important for me – he made me think about what will happen when everything is over. He gave me good advice and explained to me what the challenges were going to be."
- 4 "When I first talked to Robert, I was quite surprised – he had played at the highest level in several countries but really had no idea what he wanted to do when he retired," Ehrhart says.
- 5 About 30% of former players get divorced after retiring, and around 40% of former professionals become bankrupt after five years. According to Ehrhart, there are three problems: they are not as healthy because they are no longer training every day, they miss their teammates and family life can be difficult.
- 6 "For most ex-players, all three of these things are going to happen at the same time within six months of retiring so it's not a good moment to think about what they are going to do for the next 20 years. That's why we explain to the players: 'This is what is coming and why it's so important to plan in advance.'"
- 7 At 50, Pires still plays charity matches – "playing makes me feel alive," he says – but believes more advice should be given to players about life after football. "You have to be very careful because money goes very fast. That's why it's important that young players are given good advice about how to invest their money."

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. For how many seasons did Robert Pires play football?
2. When did France win the World Cup with Pires in the team?
3. Which team was Pires playing for when he met Stéphane Ehrhart?
4. What did Ehrhart give Pires?
5. Why was Ehrhart surprised when he met Pires?
6. What percentage of players become bankrupt after retiring?
7. What happens to around 30% of players?
8. What kind of football matches does Pires still play?

4 Key language

a. Match the words in column A with those in column B to make collocations from the text.

A

1. careers
2. highest
3. get
4. family
5. invest

B

- a. money
- b. expert
- d. life
- e. level
- f. divorced

b. Use the expressions from task A to complete the sentences. You may have to adapt the expressions accordingly.

1. It is difficult for many athletes to compete at the _____ for a long time. It requires a lot of time and sacrifice.
2. My friend's parents _____ recently. They were married for 30 years.
3. Many parents today try to have a better _____ and spend more time with their children.
4. _____ is one of the best ways to have a second income.
5. Helen became one of the most famous _____ in the business. She can help you get a job that fits your likes and skills.

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "Professional footballers earn too much money."
- "Doctors are more useful to society than footballers."
- "Football is the best sport."

6 In your own words

a. Use an internet search engine to find information about a well-known sports person in your country who has now retired from their sport (it could be football or another sport). Answer these questions

- Which sport were they famous for?
- What did they win in that sport?
- What are they doing now?

b. Report your findings to the class.