

SPORTS LAW TOP SCORER

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She is not just what you see, she is much more. She is one of the big ones. Reyes Bellver Alonso, lawyer, 36 years old, is like that book that becomes more interesting as you turn the pages. The cover, although fantastic, ends up being the least of it. She is a Real Betis football club

supporter, from her heart and from the cradle. Reyes is champion in at least two playing fields; sports law, especially in football, and at home, where her 2-year-old little Manuel is the absolute king



When we meet Reyes, we understand why she is in a league of her own. She is a member of Women in a Legal World, and her passion for sports began in her childhood, within her own family. "In my house we have always lived sports and especially football. I have a very sporty brother who would not let us watch anything on TV but football, cycling, the Olympic Games... and a father who fervently supported Betis and taught me the passion of football through Real Betis Balompié. My life is linked to football, it's part of my family, because I also met my husband at a football match and, up to now, we are still united by the same colours," she explains.

She has a degree in Law with specialization in the European Union and a Master's degree in International Relations from CEU San Pablo University in Madrid, along with one in Business Taxation from ICADE and another in Sports Law from the University of Lleida. She began her legal practice at Ernst & Young Abogados, a stage from which - she tells us - she learned just what she did not want to do in the future, although she is very grateful for it. During this time, she focused on Tax but always dreamt of moving to Sports Law, something she has been doing since 2009. Since then, she has especially focused her activity on international football; with experience in defending players, coaches and clubs before FIFA's dispute resolution bodies and the Court of Arbitration for Sport, as well as on advising intermediaries and sports agents. In 2015, she married Álvaro, her fellow student of the RFEF-FIFA-CIES Sports Management Course, in Seville.

In 2016, she got into something that, she says, changed her life: as the Spanish representative, she carried out FIFA's Female Leadership in Football Programme, and, in 2018, she decided to take the step and founded her own law firm, Bellver Sports Legal Boutique, dedicated to football law and with a very feminine approach to the sector.

ON THE BALL

With this background, her preference for football, she tells us, was skin deep, a totally natural choice. Since 2009, Reyes Bellver has been focused on this sport and not precisely because it is where the most money is moved. "Football moves money, yes, but the truth is I never thought about

that when I decided to devote myself to this world. I just can't imagine myself in any other sport. That's what I like. In fact, my first experience in sports law was in a small law firm in Barcelona. I worked full time for €800, and paid €850 in rent. Besides, I was studying at the same time a Master's degree in Sports Law. I had saved by working in Atos and EY before and also thanks to my family's support, my dream came true. I was 'rescued' by my former boss and now friend, Gorka, to give me the opportunity to work in international football in Madrid. 10 years later I can say that, thanks to everything and everyone, I live off my passion. Football is seen as something frivolous. I think I'm a bit odd in this sense, I like to do and work on things that have a transformative value, with ethics and values. The world can be improved through football. That's the legacy I want to leave to my son Manuel. I studied law because I had a clear vocation to fight against injustice, although in school I said I wanted to be a writer as I always liked to write. In the end, being a lawyer, I have the opportunity to write anyway."

A woman, a lawyer, and also a specialist in sports law and, on top of that, in football. We ask her what it's like to break into two traditionally male worlds. She tells us that it hasn't been and is still not a bed of roses. "It's not easy, it's a very closed sector, but I think that being sure and determined about it helped me a lot. When you know what you want and you train for it, no matter how long it takes or how bumpy the road be, you just know that someday you'll get there. I was lucky enough to meet the right people on that road who gave me advice, such as Emilio, (Reyes wants to keep her mentor anonymous) who guided me and believed in me. That has always given me a lot of strength. I know that this is my place. I have passion. I could be working in other sectors, and I've actually tried it, but I know I'm only happy working in football."

It all began with Invictus. "Invictus was the final paper of the Course in Sports Management that I took in 2015 at the Royal Spanish Football Federation (RFEF). There were three of us in the team; Joao, Álvaro and me. We won the prize for the best project. Our idea was to create a sports management model for football clubs based on values and good governance, thus improving the sports entity, not only in image but also in productivity. We named it after the book and film Invictus, about Nelson Mandela, who used the 1995 Rugby World Cup as a peace process that changed the course of history. That's what I like about sports, the transformative power it has. If it is properly used, we can change lives, we can change the world through football. That's why I'm committed to the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, and I'm confident that my daily work will contribute to a better world."

SCORING FOR THE WOMEN

It is well known that there are many outstanding women in the sports world, but they are generally less known. Reyes puts it down to a problem of visibility. "We know women from the media, but there are more. We have a female FIFA Secretary General and I have to show her picture to my Master's degree students because they don't know who she is. Men have always been ahead of us in terms of visibility in the professional world. We have to learn from that. There are invisible women in sports, and in particular in football, who are great professionals, club financial directors, presidents, general managers, lawyers, HR managers... that's why I think that all women should support each other and help us to get more exposure."

Reyes is very focused on international sports law and works a lot with Latin America. "A few years ago, when I was working with my colleagues Miguel and Gorka from whom I learned so much, we advised on some player transfers or signings, but when I started Bellver Sports I approached it with another perspective and other areas of work. I'm more devoted to advising and defending players or coaches and intermediaries, especially in non-payment cases."

For Reyes, the key is transforming what matters to her and helping achieve a better environment. "Millionaire transfers are indeed attractive, but for me there are many other much more interesting

activities in football. I am passionate about players' defense and I also work to give legal advice to improve regulations, whether it be for clubs, confederations or federations, because you can help improve the system and leave your mark. A legacy, which is something I think about almost every day. What is what I want to leave in this world tomorrow when I am no longer involved? Change, improvement, better football. My dream would be to bring or represent more women football players and advise on the women's league."

IN A LEAGUE OF HER OWN

She is a regular speaker at prestigious international forums, and we ask her about one of her last lectures, focused on "Pregnancy and motherhood in football". "I have been very involved and specialized in women's issues and football for a couple of years now. As far as motherhood is concerned, right now there is no special international regulation on the protection of pregnancy or motherhood, and it is something that is being worked on. Women's football has grown a lot in recent years, which is why there is now a need to regulate it properly," says Reyes. "In this sense -she says- it would be great if more men took their paternity leave. If you ask about paternity leave in a football club, they'd give you a funny look. But they should start by setting an example."

As a good lawyer, Reyes cites those articles supporting what she says. "In FIFA regulations we find, for instance, some specialities for women, such as article 33 of its Statutes. The confederations shall ensure that at least one woman is nominated for election to the FIFA Council. This is what we know as a quota and it is working at international level, because thanks to this article we have six women on the FIFA Council (one from each Confederation) out of a total of 37 members."

Reyes is not only a leader in sports law, but also an attractive young woman. We asked her if being a woman has made her sustain any kind of harassment or abuse. "No, -she emphatically answers- beyond some joke or joking comment, I haven't had to put up with situations like this. I have sometimes wondered if my career would have been different if I had been a man, and maybe I would have been 'just another man' and not 'one of the few women'. From a disadvantage you can create an opportunity."

Reyes was always clear about taking a job that would allow her a work-life balance. "In 2018 I became the mother of my son Manuel, from whom I learn every day. I think the secret is to have a good family team behind you, who can give you a hand. In my case it's my partner. I have a fantastic husband. That year was also special in the professional field, despite being very hard because of my radical change in life. It was the first year that I was recognized and included in the international Who's Who Legal (WWL: Sports & Entertainment) list, as one of the world's leading lawyers in sports law. Up to now, I am still in that list, along with lawyers from the largest and most powerful law firms in the world, kind of a giddy situation."

TEAM PLAYER, TOP SCORER

Her professional career, as well as her association activism, is impressive. She is the founder and president of the Madrid Sports Law Association. She is also the Spain regional coordinator of the Swiss association Women in Sports Law (WISLAW). In 2017, she was awarded the Miki Roqué "Peace through Sport" Award for her work in associations, training and improvement of the sports sector, especially in gender and defense of women issues in sports. "Today, what I am most excited about is having been one of the founders of the Leadership Woman Football platform, for the promotion of women's leadership in football, creating, among other activities, the International Congress on Women's Leadership in Football which has become the unique forum for the promotion of women and gender diversity in this sport. I think these groups are extremely necessary, and I deeply believe in the power of association, because together, we are always stronger."

Although she has been working in sports law for a decade, Bellver Sports Legal Boutique will be two

years old in 2020. Reyes says her way of growing is through partnerships, not around employees or turnover. "More than a firm's brand, I am a lawyer's brand who works in a cooperative way. That's why I decided to make it a legal boutique." Reyes acknowledges that the world of sports law may seem somewhat exclusive in certain regions. "The football lawyer profession is viewed as elitist in some countries. In Spain we have some of the best professionals in the area and we are one of the countries with a largest number of experts in this sector. This is something we should be proud of and promote more."

SHE HITS IT OUT OF THE PARK

Despite her youth, Reyes has successfully managed numerous types of operations. Among others, she has advised football players on doping cases. "I have advised several football players, but the most important case I was involved in was that of cyclist Alberto Contador, in his defense before the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Switzerland. I was part of a very large legal team, with Spanish, British and Swiss lawyers. A very complex and technical case, and hard for the client, but from which I learned a lot."

As member of various disciplinary committees of Olympic Federations, Reyes has been an instructor of disciplinary procedures for the Royal Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) for several years. "I have also advised the South American Football Confederation (CONMEBOL) on sports discipline. With such an enriching experience, I am currently a member of the Sports Discipline Committee of the Spanish Karate Federation. I go out of my 'comfort zone', which is football, to learn from other situations. My job is to make a resolution proposal, together with the rest of the committee, always in accordance with the Federation's Sports Discipline Regulations, trying to apply rules in the fairest and most appropriate way."

We ask her about recent news: it seems that the FIFA and FIFPRO salary guarantee fund for football players will come into force on 1 July. "This is a very good initiative. It will ensure that non-payment situations are regularized, even retroactively. It's a great objective that has been talked about for quite some time and it's a very important step in the labour rights area in the world of sport, although there aren't many details at the moment."

Reyes advises to young people who want to follow in her footsteps: equal portions of tenacity and willing. "Have a lot of passion and get trained. You have to have a clear objective, that's paramount. But then, you have to get trained and be very serious about your training. Loving the sport is just not enough," Reyes smiles. This is her own smile, without any make-up or duplicity. In Iberian Lawyer we are already big fans of her. She is, without any doubt, our Top Scorer.

REYES BELLVER ALONSO CV

- Practicing lawyer (Madrid Bar) specialist in national and international sports law, Arbitration, Sports Management, Negotiation, EU and Competition Law.
- Master's degree in Sports Law from the University of Lleida (2009-2011).
- See began her legal career in Ernst & Young Abogados, but since 2009 she has been exclusively dedicated to Sports Law and especially to international football.
- Training and work experience in the international area, having also taken a Master's degree in International Relations from the Institute of European Studies of CEU-San Pablo University of Madrid, and another in Business Taxation from ICADE.
- Member of various Spanish Olympic federations disciplinary committees
- Sports Management Diploma in 2015, from Universidad Rey Juan Carlos in Madrid and the Royal Spanish Football Federation, in collaboration with CIES/FIFA Centre. Best final project of her class: "INVICTUS: A sports management model for football clubs".
- Founding partner and current president of the Madrid Sports Law Association. Member of Spanish (AEDD) and Andalusian (AADD) Sports Law Associations. Founding member of the Spanish

Association for Ethical Quality in Sport (AECED).

- International Association WISLaw - Women in Sports Law Spanish coordinator.
- Certified by FIFA in its Female Leadership Development Programme (2016-17), being the only Spanish one to do so.
- Regular speaker and academic coordinator in football law related seminars, both nationally and internationally.
- Lecturer, coordinator and tutor in various Master's degrees and courses related to Sports Law.
- 2017 Miki Roqué "Peace through Sport" Award, for her associative work, training and improvement in the sports sector, mainly in gender and women defense issues in sport.

BELLVER SPORTS LEGAL BOUTIQUE

Bellver Sports presents itself as the first Spanish legal boutique specialized in legal advice and consultancy in the world of football. Under the direction of its founder, the firm offers global legal advice, as well as assistance and representation, especially in the international arena. Its mission is to keep the client satisfied, always working under strict professional and deontological ethical principles.

The main values of the firm are: quality, commitment, experience and specialization in advising sportsmen, clubs and federations in international arbitration procedures. But there is one that stands out above all others: passion for sports in general, and for football in particular. They are committed to equality, diversity and the expansion and spreading of sports law in all its fields.

Bellver is based in Madrid, however, it has strategic alliances and collaboration agreements with some of the most prestigious international sport law firms and lawyers.

Article by Desiré Vidal

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