

ANGEL DI MARIA

Angel Di Maria is considered one of the great talents of his generation, known as quick, tricky and agile. He is often praised for his creativity and vision, with exceptional ball skills and set piece delivery.

Di Maria has played for major teams in Argentina, Portugal, Spain, and England. In 2015 he visited Aspetar for a medical assessment before joining Paris St Germain in France.

Career highlights include winning the FIFA U-20 World Cup in 2007, and Olympic gold the next year. In 2014, he helped Argentina reach the final of the FIFA World Cup. A UEFA Champions league winner in 2013-14 with Real Madrid, Di Maria has also won numerous other league titles, which now includes three Ligue 1 titles with PSG.

After many years playing for the elite clubs of the world, he has remained a true footballer, allowing his on-field performance to do the talking. Di Maria opens up in this interview on his experience with medical staff in different countries, coping with injuries when they happen in important matches, injury prevention, and the importance of sports medicine and technological advances in the modern game.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

National Team of Argentina

2007 Won FIFA U-20 World Cup

2008 Won Olympic Gold Medal

2014 FIFA World Cup Finals Runner-up

Real Madrid

2011 Spanish Cup

2012 Spanish League & Spanish Super Cup

2014 Spanish Cup

2014 UEFA Champions League (Voted Man of the Match)

2014 UEFA Super Cup

Paris Saint-Germain

2016 French Cup & French League

2017 French Cup

2018 French Cup & French League

2019 French League

You began playing football at a very young age on the recommendation of a doctor – due to your very active nature, did you play other sports as a child too?

No just football because in my house the only sports equipment we had was a ball, so I went straight to playing football on the doctor's advice that I take up a sport.

Is it true that when you moved to Rosario Central, the club gave your local team 35 footballs as 'compensation'?

Yes, it's true! It was a very small club, they were running out of balls, shirts and other equipment. For me, it was very important moving to a club like Rosario Central having played only for my local neighbourhood club.



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Having played in Argentina, Portugal, Spain and England, have you noticed differences in the sports science and medical care provided in each country?

I don't think there are many differences between different countries or teams, but what I have noticed are the improvements in sports science technologies and research which allow even the tiniest injuries to be treated. This is not because of one club or another, it's because new materials and techniques to improve the condition for players have developed over time.

What is the worst injury you have had in your career?

The worst was an injury to my right quad, because I was out for around three months; I injured the same area three times in a row.

After the initial injury I wanted to return to playing too quickly and I got injured again which took over a month to recover from. When I returned I suffered the same injury and was out for a month and a half.

You have come through much of your career without any real major injuries that have kept you on the sidelines for a long time, why do you think that is? Has sports medicine played a part?

Yes, of course all the technology, equipment and knowledge available helps. But I also think luck plays a large part. In football, it only takes one awkward step or movement to get injured. I just hope I don't suffer an injury like that because I have spoken to friends and

other players who have had those types of injuries and they can be very difficult to recover from.

Do you think your style of play (fast dribbling and changes of direction etc.) could put you at particular risk of injury?

Yes, I think all of the injuries I have had happened during a sprint or long dribble. They can easily result in muscle tears and from time to time it will happen. But that is my way of playing and I will continue to play the same way. You can't change that style of play just because of the risk of injury.

Do you do any injury prevention training?

We do specific training to avoid injury, but there are lots of factors that can contribute such as tiredness or fatigue, and over the course of a season, it is not easy to control these factors. Some players don't get injured much, others suffer many injuries. I've been lucky not to have many injuries which have kept me off the pitch. However, I have suffered injuries in very important games, such as those during the World Cup and the Copa America. I think this can be worse than injuries which keep you out for a long time.

How important do you think sports science and medicine is in football to give the top teams the edge over their opponents?

From what I have seen at the clubs I have played for, it's clear that the big teams can help their players perform better than smaller teams, who cannot afford expensive facilities such as altitude chambers. Clubs who can afford the new technologies will be able to treat injuries better and help players recover faster, and this makes a huge difference.



Image above: Di Maria training in the Aspire Zone, during the PSG Qatar Tour 2019 in Doha.



Image left: Angel Di Maria during the Ligue 1 match between Paris Saint-Germain and Montpellier Herault SC at Parc des Princes in Paris, 2018.

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Image: Di Maria celebrating after scoring a goal during the French Cup match between Sochaux and Paris Saint-Germain in Montbeliard, 2018.

What makes a good team doctor in your opinion?

I'm not sure what makes a good doctor. It is essential that the doctor has good contact with the other medical staff such as the physios. If they communicate well the staff will know exactly what they need to be doing with each player to help them the most. But I certainly think it can be easier for doctors at big clubs, who have all the best facilities available. Doctors at small clubs have to do their best with limited resources. When I was at Rosario Central, sometimes my injuries might have only be treated with massage, because they had to their best to help me recover with what they had available.

What relationship do you have with the club doctor? Do you speak to them every day or only when you have a problem?

I usually speak to the doctor every day. Doctors will normally approach you and ask how you are doing, if you are tired, if you have any pain, how you are finding training. It is important to have a close relationship with the doctor and communicate with them a lot.

You have won many honours at club and international level. How do you prepare yourself psychologically for a big game such as a cup final?

I don't think there's much difference in any game. I don't feel a big difference in a cup final, as you have to play your best in every game. I play the same way for a small club, for a big club or for the national team. So personally, I don't make any big changes.

And how do you recover after a game?

I would have a cold water bath, see the physio if I need to, and get a good night's sleep.

Do you ever have difficulty sleeping after a game?

Always. I have talked to many fellow players and we all have problems sleeping after a game because sometimes you might have a coffee before the game and the adrenaline afterwards. You also find yourself thinking about the game when you try to go to sleep, about how you played, the decisions you made and what you could have done differently.



But that is my way of playing and I will continue to play the same way. You can't change that style of play just because of the risk of injury.





Image: Paris Saint-Germain players celebrating after winning the Coupe de France Final against Les Herbiers VF, 2018 in Paris, France.

Going off injured in the World Cup in 2014 and the Copa America final in 2016 must have been difficult, what do you do to recover from disappointments in your career? Do you have any hobbies outside of football?

My family, spending time with my daughter and my wife. When these things happen it's very painful. When you are playing, you have to do your best for your team. But when I am off the pitch, spending time with my family is the best way to clear my head.

You are known both for your skill and your work rate on the pitch, do you think talent or hard work is more important to get the best results?

You have to have both. If you don't work hard and put in the effort talent alone will not be enough. Ability alone cannot win games and for this reason, I think hard work is more important than talent.

Your nickname is 'Fideo' (Spanish for 'noodle') on account of your slight build. Has this ever caused you to struggle with the physical side of the game? Have you ever been asked to bulk up by a coach or trainer?

No coach or doctor or anyone has ever asked me to gain weight. And I've never had problems because of my physique. I always give my all on the pitch and I think because of that it has never been an issue. Sometimes a taller or stronger player will not fully commit to a tackle or challenge and can be beaten physically by a smaller player who is giving it 100 per cent.

You have some experience in the debate of priority of playing for your club and your country after Real Madrid asked you not to play in the World Cup final. Should clubs be able to make such decisions about their players on international duty? Who should have the final say on whether or not an injured player can play; the player, the coach or the doctor?

FIFA is very clear on the rules for this. When you are playing with the national team, they have the responsibility and their staff makes those decisions. When a player is with the national team they are only thinking and talking about playing for your country, you can't think about your club. It also works both ways, as you can get injured playing for your club and be unavailable for national selection.

Jake Bambrough