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# The Filipino Invasion of Pool: Setting New Standards in the Game

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In

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## Introduction

The Philippines is often considered to be the pool capital of the world because many of the top players in the sport come from this small group of islands in Southeast Asia (Maniego, 2006). Filipino players are known for their exceptional mastery of the game and innovative strategies that have revolutionized the way the sport is played.

Pool refers to a family of cue sports played on a table with six receptacles, called “pockets”, located around the perimeter “rails” of the table. Players use a stick called a “pool cue” to strike a cue ball, which in turn strikes object balls. The goal is to drive the numbered object balls into the six pockets. The games vary according to which balls are legitimate targets and the specific requirements to win a match (World Pool-Billiard Association, 2004).



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Jose “Amang” Parica

The so-called Filipino invasion of the sport began with Jose “Amang” Parica, who rose to prominence in the 1980s with his devastating offensive weapons on the pool table, earning him the nicknames, *King* and *Legend*. By the mid-1980s, the Filipino invasion of the sport was in full force, with Efren Reyes at the forefront and the younger protégé Francisco Bustamante close behind him. Soon, they were followed by a large number of other Filipino players who captured world titles, individually and as a team.

Pool is a game where strength and height don’t matter, but where skill and strategy are of primary importance. Understanding the reasons why Filipino players excel in pool is a perennial challenge that many have addressed from different disciplines. This chapter contributes to the discourse on this topic from the vantage point of two of the most respected Filipino cue artists who figured at the front line of the Filipino invasion, Efren “Bata” Reyes and Francisco “Django” Bustamante.



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Efren “Bata” Reyes in action.

## Efren “Bata” Reyes

Fellow professional pool players revere Efren Reyes because of his range of expertise across the different cue sports of 9-ball, 8-ball and 1-pocket, a rare phenomenon even among the elite of the sport. He is known as *The Magician* for his amazing tricks on the pool table and for the phenomenal shots that he produces at clutch moments. Efren Reyes has taken out championship titles in the World Cup, International 9-Ball Tournament, and World 9-Ball Open and has led the Philippine team to victory in the World Team Billiards, Asian Games, and Southeast Asian Games.

He was the first Asian to be inducted into the Billiard Congress of America Hall of Fame in 2003 and pool’s own elite players recognized him as the “best player of all time” (Mangahas, 1996). More than a decade later, another survey among pool professionals re-affirmed his status as the best player of the game, “Efren Reyes. He’s the best. Hand’s down. Nobody else comes close. Anyone surprised?” (“Pro Peer Review,” 2007, p. 36).



view video:  
Two incredible  
shots from  
Efren Reyes  
TO WIN!

## Francisco “Django” Bustamante

Francisco Bustamante reached the pinnacle of his illustrious career when he captured the highly-coveted World Pool Championship in 2010. After winning his final match, he stated, “Finally, I am complete as a pool player. Everyone dreams to be a WPA World 9-ball champion” (abs-cbnNEWS.com, 2010). In the same year, he joined his close friend, Efren Reyes, as the second Filipino inducted in the Billiards Congress of America Hall of Fame.

A 23-year veteran of the game, Bustamante has won prestigious tournaments such as the World Pool League Championship, World Pool Masters, Munich Masters, German 9-Ball Championship, All-Japan 9-Ball Championship, and Derby City Classic 10-Ball Challenge, making him one of pool’s greatest international stars. He is renowned for his astonishing break power, “He’s a small guy, but his timing is so strong, he gets the maximum force out of his movement on the break. That’s why he can outbreak guys three times his size. It’s kind of like Tiger Woods when he drives” (“Pro Peer Review,” 2007, p. 38).



Credit: RailbirdJAM/Wikimedia Commons/Public Domain

Francisco “Django” Bustamante.



## What Makes Filipinos Great Pool Players?



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Efren Reyes and Francisco Bustamante have each earned their mythical place in the annals of the sport. Together they have erected the most formidable challenge to any contending team. In 2006, they captured the World Cup of Pool, beating the favoured Americans Earl Strickland and Rodney Morris in the finals. Three years later, they asserted their powerful tandem once more when they claimed the title in 2009 at the expense of the strong German duo of Ralf Souquet and Thorsten Hohman. This chapter focuses on what has propelled them to extraordinary levels of performance in the game, individually and as a tandem. The objective is to gain authentic insight into the support systems and programs of these exceptional performers, especially those components that are specific to their cultural and sport context.

Pool was introduced to the Filipinos by their American colonizers. It was a game initially played by U.S. military personnel as recreation. It did not take long before the Filipinos took to the game naturally. Because the game was suitable for gambling, it became popular among the out-of-school youth and jobless men who played the game on improvised or homemade pool tables. With nothing else to do, these pool devotees would spend all their time playing the game. Endless hours on the pool table built in them the stamina, persistence, and thorough knowledge of the game that are characteristic of many top Filipino players. Most of them were initially jobless, but in pool they found a “job” that provided them income from the money games.

The money game is not just a pastime or a form of recreation for the Filipino; it puts food on the table and is their lifeline to survival. It is within this socio-economic context that the careers of Efren Reyes and Francisco Bustamante flourished.

the money  
game...is their  
lifeline to  
survival

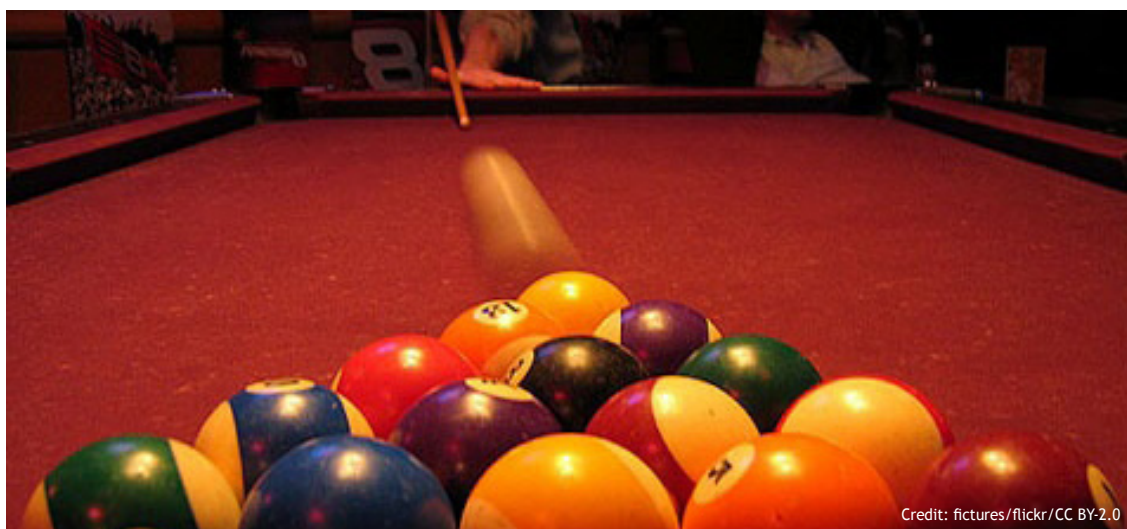
Given this background, it is not surprising that formal psychological services were never part of their development and progress, individually or as a team. As such, there are no sport psychology secrets to disclose. The search for insights to inform our research and practice comes instead from examining their experiences and reflecting on what it took for them to reach the summit of their sport. The main resource of learning in this chapter comes from Efren Reyes and Francisco Bustamante themselves who both agreed to share their life stories in a study entitled, *What Makes a Champion: A Narrative Analysis of Filipino Elite Athletes' Storied Lives* (Guinto-Adviento, 2011).



## The Framework of Investigation

The study utilized narrative inquiry to frame the entire investigation. The basic premise of narrative inquiry affirms the value of storytelling as integral to a meaningful life. Narrative psychologists assert that human life may be described as a series of random and disjointed events unless a story is woven to connect the events into a coherent whole. Consequently, stories reveal our ways of organizing, interpreting, and finding meaning by ascribing agency to the characters that figure in our lives and by assuming causal links between events that emerge in our recollection (Smith, 2008).

The narrative used by an individual to organize a set of facts into a coherent story provides the meaning by which actions are perceived to precede or follow events. Narrative psychologists claim that much of what we understand about human behaviour and mental processes can be fully unfolded from stories (Polkinghorne, 1995). As such, researchers and practitioners are encouraged to pay close attention to the stories people tell. If we are to understand how distinguished pool players like Efren Reyes and Francisco Bustamante have become the champions they are and recognize the psychological processes that underlie their championship, then it makes sense for us to look closely into their life stories.



## The Narrative Interview

Efren Reyes and Francisco Bustamante were each asked to narrate his life story as a champion in the sport. The general flow of the narrative interview was triggered by the following request and question: *“Kindly tell me the story of how it all started for you as a player of the sport. How did you come to be the champion that you are now?”* After each had completed telling his life story, follow-up questions were asked to clarify issues that needed further elaboration. Both interviews were recorded and transcribed. The analytical steps in narrative analysis as proposed by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) served to guide the research. Only those findings that bear relevance to our research and practice in sport psychology are presented in this chapter.



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## Finding Coherence in the Narrative of Efren “Bata” Reyes

The life story of Efren Reyes invokes the saga of a local hero who struggled through hardships and limitations to achieve victory, not only in the sport of pool, but in providing a better life for his family as well. Born into a very poor family, the five year old Efren and his father left their hometown to live and work with an uncle who owned a pool hall in Manila. When the customers left at night, Efren played the game on his own, pretending to be like the grown up players he watched all day. He was not yet tall enough then to see the top of the pool table, so he stacked up empty cases of soft drinks and used them as a movable platform so that he could manoeuvre around the table while struggling to handle a cue stick longer than he was. At the end of a long day of work and play, the pool table served as his bed.

By the age of nine his exceptional skills had made him a favourite pawn of enterprising adults who won money betting on him and passed on a small percentage of their winnings to the young prodigy. Soon, dropping out of elementary school in favour of the game became a practical option for him. By the time Efren reached his early 20s, he was acknowledged as the best player in the land. His next target was to test his talent in the United States. An American serviceman had already seen him play in the Philippines and had spoken about him to other pool enthusiasts in the U.S. Thus, they knew his name, but no one else had seen his face.

To ensure his reputation would not precede him, Efren concealed his name with an alias when he signed up for his first tournament. When he won the competition, he was about to get away with his cover until he mistakenly signed his real name for a fan requesting his autograph. Compelled to admit his true identity, Efren Reyes was quickly tagged as “the man from another planet” because he displayed skills on the pool table that had not been seen before by the American players. His win was significant because he became the first Asian to win in a U.S. pool tournament. Suddenly, Efren found himself in the largest arena of the sport to showcase his genius and earn the biggest prize money of his time.

However, unethical managers preyed on Efren to rob him of his fair share of earnings. On several occasions, they either ran off with the entire prize money or gave him less than his promised percentage. This would have been a hard blow on Efren who made his sole source of income from pool, and to lose it to mercenary managers must have been a major setback. However, his storytelling simply mentioned these episodes as unfortunate incidents or “bad luck” that were eventually reversed in his favour with the coming of an honest manager who continues to handle his career to this day. Nowhere in his narrative did he dwell on these undesirable occurrences. They were accepted as temporary crises that he simply had to weather until the next break came.

Among all his victories, Efren considers his 1999 World Pool Championship as a defining moment for him, as it brought much honour to the sport and to his country. Although he had secured other big wins in the past, this was the first time his championship game was televised nationwide. Filipinos stayed up late at night and into the morning to follow his game. When he captured the crown in Cardiff, Wales to establish the Philippines as a world power in the game, a pool craze in the country ensued. “Bata” Reyes became a household name and his image was used to endorse well-known Philippine brands. Parents no longer discouraged their children from playing the sport that had long been associated with the out-of-school youth and the jobless. Indeed, pool had become a legitimate sport worthy of his countrymen’s pride and support.

pool had become a  
legitimate sport

Efren found much fulfilment in this victory but found the limelight too much to take on a regular basis. While he enjoyed the attention given to the sport, he admitted in his trademark toothless smile, that the flashbulbs from cameras strained his eyes and the long queue of autograph signing exhausted his hands. He could never get used to the attention he would get wherever he went ever since he was recognized at that 1999 World Pool Championship. His continued humble ways have endeared him further to his countrymen, especially among the masses who regarded him as their hero.

The individuality of Efren as the main protagonist in his story stood out in his sheer determination to take charge of his life and steer it away from the life of poverty into which he was born. He did not look outside the confines of his lot to find his own liberation and prosperity. Instead, he took the only thing he had – his mastery of the game – and nurtured it to perfection, consequently redirecting the course of his destiny. The image of the very young Efren taking the empty cases of soft drink bottles and using them as his portable platform to manoeuvre around the pool table revealed his innate ingenuity that would serve him well in pool and in life.



Credit: Vinod Divakaran [www.dohastadiumplus.com/flickr/CC-BY-2.0](http://www.dohastadiumplus.com/flickr/CC-BY-2.0)



## single-minded approach

With his single-minded approach to his goal of achieving a life away from poverty, Efren immersed himself completely in the game and committed every waking hour to it. He constantly watched and learned from older players at his uncle's pool hall, and then practiced unceasingly until he would fall asleep on the pool table. Totally engaged in every component of the game, Efren developed a special intimacy with pool and all its elements. He related to the objects of the game as if they were long-time friends he had known well since he was five years old. As a result, he developed an enormous repertoire of knowledge, skills, techniques, and strategies to crack every puzzle on the pool table. In his own words, Efren described his experience:

*Of course, ever since I was a young boy, I would play from the time I wake up in the morning, and then I would play again when I came home from school. Before I sleep, I play again. Thus, I knew all the conditions of the pool table -- in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening. They run the ball differently during the different times of the day . . . Sometimes, the ball is light; at other times, it could be heavy. The ball can become heavy. Even the pool table can be moist . . . isn't it, when there is dew? That's why it gets moist and then it runs (the ball) differently. When the ball hits the table, it can jump . . . I played them all, from morning to night, I played with them. Even the cue stick that we handle -- it gets moist when it's tired, just like when your hands get very tired and they start to tremble. And then when you do not use it, and it rains, it gets cold, isn't it? So the cue stick becomes moist even when it is stored. Then of course, I wipe it when I have to use it already. It's important that when you play it, it should slide well on the pool table.*

Some of those who have attempted to explain Efren's magic on the pool table have resorted to myths on how the gods of the game must have witnessed the young boy sleeping on the sacred pool table, working by day and playing by night. Thus, according to their myth, the gods agreed to endow him with special powers in the game that no other human would ever possess. Despite this imaginative rationalization of Efren's extraordinary competence in the game, it makes sense that someone who found work, play and rest on and around the pool table would master the game with all his senses. Efren Reyes never had enough of the game. He was unrelenting in his desire to know the ins and outs of the game. Nothing escaped his attention; thus, he discovered strategies to overcome every dilemma that appeared on the pool table.



Credit: Philippe M. Chiasson/flickr/CC-BY-2.0

Furthermore, playing money games took on a different meaning to Efren. Winning put food on the table and paid for the bills of his extended family. Losing meant coming home empty-handed to a large family who relied solely on his prize money. Pool was not his pastime; it was his full-time job, it was his life. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that he mastered and perfected it well enough to make a good living out of it and revolutionized how the game is played.





With limited opportunity in life, Efren could have easily taken the path of indolence or crime characteristic of the topless and tattooed men who littered the street alleys where most open pool halls were located during his youth. However, Efren's heroic journey emerged early in life as he took a different trajectory toward another destination, precisely because he flourished in the very situation that limited his choices in life. There was nothing else but pool for Efren. He carved his own niche within the only option he had in life. Hardships and disappointments failed to derail him from his quest as he kept his focus on the ultimate prize, in the firm belief that his persistent efforts would pay off.

As such, his story progressed steadily toward his goal of attaining a good life for his family as he was establishing himself as the best in the sport. Failures and disappointments did not faze Efren because they were accepted as integral to pool and life. Rising from defeat and bouncing back from adversity was the only way for him to continue his mission. Thus, he became one of the best pressure players in the world.

Further reading into the life story of Efren revealed four *focal themes* that establish the coherence of his narrative.

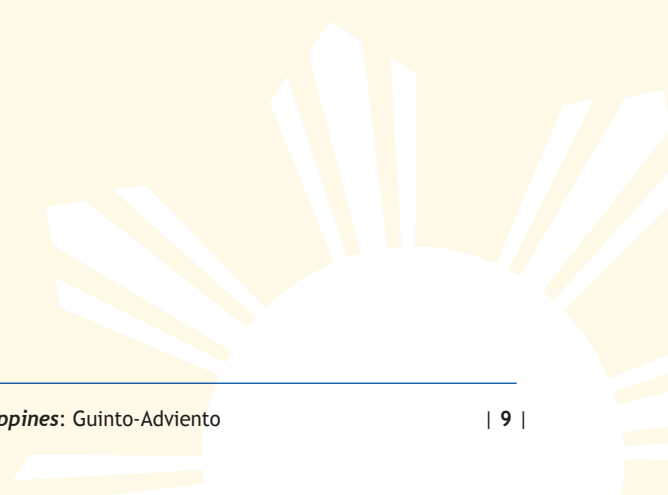
First, by developing his initial inclination for the sport into a passion, Efren discovered the key to his liberation from poverty.

Second, in the process of following his passion, Efren totally committed himself to mastery of the game, developing extensive knowledge and skill that no-one else could rival.

Third, victory came from the dual achievement of a good life for his family and his legendary status in the sport. His ultimate satisfaction came from his family enjoying the fruits of his labour and from the prestige that came from his extraordinary feats in the sport.

Fourth, challenges were considered inevitable in his life but his belief about their temporary status relative to his long-term goal, and his focus on what he had rather than what he did not have, kept him steadfast in optimism to move on and embrace the challenge.

These *focal themes* recurred throughout the narrative of Efren Reyes, providing links to decisions, actions and events, and ultimately, a sense of integrated whole to his life story.



## Finding Coherence in the Narrative of Francisco Bustamante



Credit: RailbirdJAM/Wikimedia Commons/Public Domain

Francisco Bustamante's life story conjures an incredible journey of one man who also rose from the depths of poverty to the heights of prosperity through the game of pool. It had always been a difficult life for Francisco and his siblings who had to contend with their father's measly income from building toilets and planting rice. However, instead of resigning to his fate, he aspired for a life of comfort and prosperity for himself and his family. Fascinated by the activity and the exchange of money in the game as he worked in his sister's pool hall, Francisco found his ticket to a better life. Every night, shortly after the last patron had left the pool hall, the young Francisco would grab a cue stick and practice by himself.

His innate toughness appeared initially as defiance when he dropped out of high school to play pool and when he left for Manila to take his chances in the big city. It always broke the hearts of his parents whenever he would follow his desires instead of heeding their advice, but being the youngest of eight siblings, he somehow got away with his apparent defiance. Soon, his competence matched up with the veteran local players of the land and Francisco took the next step out of the country to take on bigger competitions and higher prize money.

After an impressive finish in a big local competition where he faced off with the veteran Jose Parica for the finals, this young whiz got an invitation from Parica who sponsored him to enter a tournament in Japan. He performed well enough to get the attention of a Germany-based Filipino who offered to take him to Europe where money-rich tournaments awaited. True to form, Francisco took his chances in a foreign land.

His early show of defiance served him well at this stage of his career. Leaving everything behind, he ventured into unknown territory. With no visa to enter Germany, Francisco had to endure a 20-kilometer walk in darkness to cross the border through mountainous trails. When he finally reached Germany, he was advised to avoid policemen who would surely have him deported should his illegal status be exposed. However, he simply refused to give up on his quest for a better life, even under harsh weather and work conditions in Europe.

In order to survive in between competitions, Francisco worked part time in a pool hall of a restaurant called Rick's Café to entice customers to play the game and patronize the business. When the number of customers increased as a result of his presence, the Indonesian café owner wanted Francisco on a full-time basis. His Filipino manager struck a deal with the Indonesian businessman, and for the price of \$6,000 Francisco was, in effect, "sold" to the café owner. After that business transaction, he never saw or heard from his Filipino companion again.

took his chances  
in a foreign land





How Francisco learned to communicate with his Indonesian employer and his German clients is another story in itself. For the first two years, he could not speak to anyone since he only knew Filipino. He got by through sign language and a few German terms. Through persistence, hard work, and a great deal of humour, Francisco eventually learned to speak their language and endeared himself to his German clients. In time, his boss allowed him to return to the Philippines to secure a visa that would allow him to re-enter Germany legally. Within a week, his papers were completed and Francisco returned immediately to Germany where he stayed for a total of 14 years. He established himself as one of the best pool players in the country, winning more than 400 tournaments during his stay there, including the Munich Masters and the German 9-ball championship. Looking back at how he managed to compete in many tournaments while working at Rick’s Cafe, Francisco stated:

## persistence

*I don’t know how I managed but it’s as if I never got tired . . . because every week, I had tournaments and I was still teaching . . . I did not get tired of playing, I just kept thinking to myself, ‘Ah, I need to win, if not, I won’t have money’ -- just like that. Of course, I went there to earn money -- that’s it. That’s what enters my mind, how to earn money . . . It was really hard but at the end of it, there was prosperity.*

Francisco’s seeming defiance during his younger days eventually emerged as mental toughness during his pool career. This characteristic became most evident at the 2002 World Pool Championships when he was jolted with an urgent call from his wife who broke the news of their youngest daughter’s sudden death. Totally devastated, Francisco wanted to forfeit his bid for the championship. However, with encouragement from his family and peers, Francisco accepted that he could not do anything anymore to restore the life of his daughter and decided to dedicate the rest of the tournament to her instead. He summoned all the physical, mental, and emotional strength built over the years and proceeded to demolish several luminaries in the last 16, in the quarter-finals, and in the semi-finals. He led most of the way during the finals but his last miss allowed his opponent to return to the table and finish the tightly-contested match.

## mental toughness

Despite this painful loss, it revealed Francisco’s inner strength developed through years of battling against poverty, of taking his chances with every opportunity available to him, and of sticking it out through difficult circumstances in anticipation of a better life. Thus, his victory at the 2010 World Pool Championship became even more significant as it represented, not just the attainment of an elusive prize to reach the summit of his career, but also the triumph of his unbeatable spirit, and the ultimate victory of a lifelong quest.

## unbeatable spirit

In the context of his steady advancement in sport competence and financial security, Francisco’s narrative took on a progressive plot. Losses, hardships and trials did not disrupt his single-minded approach to his overall goal of providing a life of prosperity for his family while earning his status among the elite players of the sport. Defeat and adversity did not discourage him; instead, they were accepted as essential in sport and life. Despite his best efforts, Francisco acknowledged that luck, external circumstances, and God’s will, all affect the ultimate outcome of events. Thus, even in defeat, he was able to maintain a solid self-confidence and a positive outlook of life in order to resume his quest with sustained discipline and determination.





Although Francisco's story appeared to centre on his fearless pursuit of a life out of poverty, his narrative was not just about a great individual who defied all odds to pursue his dream. Even after he left his hometown in search of a better future, he continued to show profound concern for, and strong connection with, family and community. His earnings were always shared with his family, even after he married and settled with his own family. He continued to honour his ties with his town mates and countrymen long after he left the Philippines. Francisco's life story depicted a network of human relationships that defined him as a champion. He was deeply connected, not only to important people in his life, but also to his roots in poverty. Francisco took responsibility over the welfare of those who were not as privileged as him. He also considered it an achievement to bring honour to his country whenever he won.

His enduring friendship with Efren Reyes, with whom he willingly shared, not just his room during tournaments, but his prize money as well, further affirmed the value of relationship over and above material wealth.

Five *focal themes* emerged to provide coherence to the narrative of Francisco Bustamante.

First, in developing his natural inclination into a passion for the sport, Francisco discovered his gateway to a life of prosperity, not only for himself, but for his family as well.

Second, his courage to take chances in life developed in him an internal toughness that worked to his advantage in pursuing opportunities and moving on from adversities.

Third, in his firm belief in determination and hard work, Francisco put a high premium on persistent effort to get to his desired outcome.

Fourth, victory for him meant the attainment of a good life for his family and the achievement of prestige among his peers in the game. Defeat, on the other hand was accepted as inevitable but never considered as derailing his pursuit of goals.

Fifth, rootedness in the past was important for Francisco because it ensured that he would reach his destination. Staying grounded in his early experience of poverty kept him humble despite his accomplishments. As the main protagonist in his own life story, Francisco is victorious in his quest for a good life.





# Implications for Research and Practice in Sport Psychology

## Primary and secondary influences on sport expertise

From a narrative framework perspective, the primary and secondary influences on the development of sport expertise, in the literature (e.g. Baker & Horton, 2004) are relevant only to the extent that they are contextualized in a storied life. The importance of inherited qualities or learned competencies in sport expertise may be highly dependent on the meanings ascribed by the champion to these qualities and competencies.

For instance, the primary influence of heredity on sport expertise (Baker & Horton, 2004) becomes significant only to the extent that the champion recognizes it as integral to his or her quest for championship. Nowhere in their life stories did Efren and Francisco allude to any form of inherent talent or giftedness in the sport. Instead, a firm belief on the value of their discipline and hard work emerged consistently in both life stories. Although it is still possible that they were simply unaware of the innate qualities that predisposed them to their chosen sport, their perception of the situation and the meaning they attached to what they perceived to be their lack of advantage appear to be the more salient in determining the trajectory of their motivation and effort. As such, it is the meaning ascribed to their inherent advantage or disadvantage in sport and in life that ultimately matters in the pursuit of championship.



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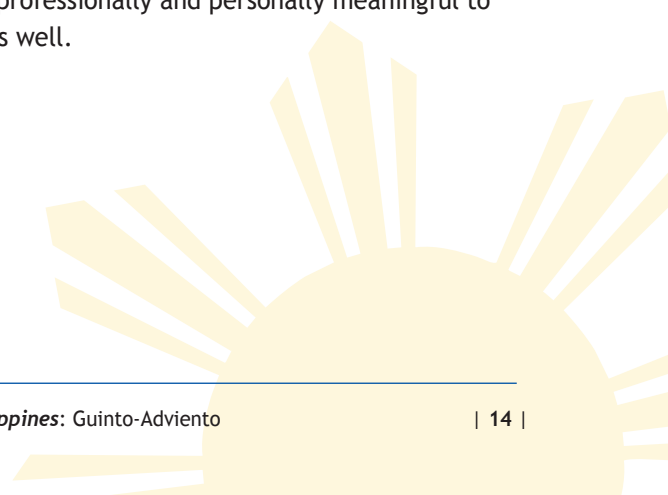


Similarly, the role of familial support and instructional resources identified as key secondary influences in the skill development of elite athletes (Baker & Horton, 2004) has been shown by this narrative study as salient only to the extent that they are acknowledged and valued by the champion. Neither Efren Reyes nor Francisco Bustamante had parents who encouraged them in the sport. They were too busy earning a living. They had no time to watch or cheer them on as their children developed and excelled in the game. They even felt sorry for their sons for dropping out of school to play pool. They only appreciated the careers of Efren and Francisco after experiencing the benefits resulting from their hard work. Yet, nothing in their life stories indicated that Efren or Francisco bore any resentment toward their parents' lack of support for them. On the contrary, they both took the initiative of providing for their respective families, acknowledging their utter poverty, and the need to support them in their old age.

The same may be said for coaches and mentors. Efren Reyes and Francisco Bustamante developed and progressed in the sport without the benefit of any coaching. They simply watched others play and learned vicariously from them. They spent hours on their own improving on what they learned from others and from their own previous games. Watching strong and weak players provided the informal coaching that guided them throughout their careers. They worked on what these observed players “taught” them. In effect, each one discovered and nurtured the “inner coach” within himself. Related literature provides no adequate explanation regarding the absence of coaches in the lives of exceptional athletes like Efren and Francisco. However, their stories suggest that the absence of coaches does not necessarily hinder the development of sport expertise. Given the context and perspective of Efren and Francisco, the apparent disadvantage actually triggered greater reliance on self-discipline and determination to advance in skill and competence.

## Motivation as the driving force in exceptional performance

The current theorizing on what drives elite athletes to push themselves beyond mental and physical exhaustion centres on the construct of motivation as the internal or external force that initiates, directs, or intensifies persistent behaviour in deliberate training. The present narratives offer an alternative view on what drives elite athletes to exceptional performance, suggesting that Efren Reyes and Francisco Bustamante were more than willing to commit to years of deliberate training once they were able to recognize its instrumental value in achieving their goals in life. Deliberate training was driven and sustained by powerful goals that integrated personal aspirations with sport-specific performance objectives. For Efren and Francisco, succeeding in pool meant achieving two meaningful goals: a better life for their respective families plus status and prestige among the elite performers in the field. Their stories suggest that deliberate training, pursued with sustained discipline and determination, must be professionally and personally meaningful to the athlete, as a way to achieve in sports and in life as well.





## Passion in sports

A strong fascination or inclination for pool stood out as a focal theme in the narratives of both Efren Reyes and Francisco Bustamante. This early manifestation of positive regard for the sport eventually developed into passion for the game. Vallerand (2007) defined passion in the context of sport as “a strong inclination toward an activity that people like, find important, and in which they invest time and energy” (p.1). He proposed that if athletes were to devote many years or a lifetime to sport, they must love the activity so intensely that they would pursue it even during difficult times. He tested his proposition with basketball players and dramatic arts performers and found a direct relationship between passion and deliberate training, and an indirect relationship between passion and performance (through deliberate training).

From the narratives of Efren and Francisco, passion emerged as the compelling driving force behind their self-initiated discipline and determination. Deliberate training was simply one of the activities both of them willingly undertook without prodding from anyone else because they were passionate about the game of pool and the provisions it provided for a better life. This brings the discussion to the interrelationship between passion and a dual goal orientation. Passion for the sport, combined with the desire to achieve sport-specific and personal life aspirations, provided the compelling force that directed and intensified the lifelong quest for championship. For Efren and Francisco, it made a lot of sense to pursue excellence in pool because it was their currency for financial security and professional success. Thus, the affective disposition (passion) toward the sport and the cognitive evaluation (dual goal orientation) combined into a potent motivating force that drove them to pursue greatness with discipline and determination.

## Storytelling as investigation and intervention

Drawing the life story of an exceptional athlete provides more than the usual background information required in consultation. From a life story, the focal themes of an athlete’s participation in high level competitive sport can be clarified to illuminate the decisions, assumptions, actions, and events relevant to his sport performance. This becomes a very important step in facilitating self-awareness as essential to self-mastery, and consequently, to self-regulation.

In examining their own life stories, athletes may be guided to discover the thoughts, feelings, and actions that lead to successful outcomes, thereby generating their own blueprints for success. Similarly, they may be guided to reflect on the cognitive, affective, and behavioural precedents of unsuccessful outcomes, so that they may either avoid such precedents or assign new meanings to these outcomes.

While the literature acknowledges the potential cathartic and therapeutic benefits associated with storytelling (Pennebaker, 1997), the link between the development of personal resilience and storytelling, particularly in the field of sport, has not been established. Insights from this discussion direct our future research and practice to explore how storytelling could facilitate the development of personal resilience and provide opportunities to celebrate the toughness of the athletes who recount how they managed, flourished, or thrived in adversity.

## Summary

The Filipino invasion of pool is a phenomenon captured via individual life stories contextualized in the story of the sport in the country. Introduced to Filipinos by their American colonizers, the game easily evolved into a form of gambling that mostly enticed the out-of-school youth and the jobless, both of whom had all the time to hang out in makeshift pool halls in alleys, street corners, parking lots, sidewalks or any open space where people were willing to play the game. Every game has a money bet on it, including side bets from onlookers or bystanders who take their chances on those who are actively playing the game. Practice in the game simply required constantly playing money games.

Such was the context of the life stories of Efren Reyes and Francisco Bustamante, and many of the Filipino invaders of the game. In order to understand the pool player, the sport psychology researcher and practitioner must appreciate the cultural context in which the sport and the player thrives. Both Reyes and Bustamante have become local heroes in the eyes of their countrymen because they represent their own stories of liberation from varied forms of poverty. The endless hours they spent on the pool table have given them a wide range of knowledge and the skills that remain unparalleled by their foreign opponents who play the game for reasons other than a desperate attempt for survival. Their accomplishments have given a new face to the sport, drawing it out of dark alleys into well-lit malls, clubs, and cafés. As forerunners in the Filipino invasion of the game in the United States, they have essentially conquered their conquerors, not through physical strength and power, but through skill and strategy on the pool table. The narrative investigation of the life stories of Efren Reyes and Francisco Bustamante provides a fascinating insight into how their stories develop within a socio-cultural context and how this context was transformed by their stories.



Credit: Vinod Divakaran [www.dohastadiumplus.com/flickr/](http://www.dohastadiumplus.com/flickr/) CC-BY-2.0



In conducting narrative analysis as a research end or as a means to inform practice, one important area of understanding includes, not only the presence of key people in their lives, but the absence of those who might be expected to be in their lives. The absence of technical and mental coaches in the life stories of Efren Reyes and Francisco Bustamante invites us to reflect on what we have always thought to be key characters in a successful athletic career. Although we can hypothesize that their development and progress would have been made more efficient with the introduction of systematic training in the physical and mental aspects of the sport, this remains a presumption that may be difficult to investigate within the paradigmatic frame of the scientific method. Nevertheless, we may continue to draw insight and learning from their narratives and from those who continue the Filipino dominance of pool. While it is not the objective of narrative inquiry to produce universal principles across life stories, it would certainly deepen our textured understanding of what it means to be an exceptional pool player within a specific context.

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## VIDEOS

page	
3	Two incredible shots from Efren Reyes TO WIN! <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=epOlyshGsJU">www.youtube.com/watch?v=epOlyshGsJU</a>

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