

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

## Level 2: 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. Find the following words in the text. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. a noun meaning the period of the year when a particular sport is played  
\_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 1)
2. a noun meaning the process of changing from one situation to another  
\_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 2)
3. a noun meaning something that needs a lot of skill, energy and determination to achieve  
\_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 3)
4. an adjective meaning officially without money and unable to pay what you owe  
\_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 5)
5. a verb meaning become less or worse \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 5)
6. a noun meaning an expert in a subject who is often asked to talk to the public about that subject  
\_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 7)
7. a two-word noun meaning the place where sports people change their clothes before a game  
\_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 7)
8. a noun meaning an organisation that gives money and help to people who are poor or ill, and who need advice and support \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 8)
9. a verb meaning use your money with the aim of making a profit from it  
\_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 8)
10. an adverb meaning in a reasonable and practical way \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 8)

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

1. A footballer's career usually \_\_\_\_\_ after they turn 30 years old.
2. American football \_\_\_\_\_ goes from September to February.
3. When players retire, one of the things they miss the most is the camaraderie in the \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Many rich people will leave their fortunes to \_\_\_\_\_ instead of their children.
5. Some professional athletes go \_\_\_\_\_ after they retire. It's difficult for them to find a new job.

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Ed Aarons

1 May, 2024

- 1 Robert Pires will never forget what retiring from football was like. "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 when I said it was game over, it was very difficult to accept."
- 2 Luckily for Pires, he found help. He first met Stéphane Ehrhart – a former player who is now UEFA's career-transition 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 – this guy had played at the highest level in several countries but really had no clue what he wanted to do when he retired," Ehrhart says. "Not every player is ready to receive advice. But all my career, I've had players asking me for that kind of advice and they didn't really know where to find information."
- 5 About 30% of former players get divorced after retiring, and around 40% of former professionals become bankrupt after five years. According to Ehrhart, three particular areas are an issue: declining physical health because they are no longer training every day, missing out on the network of friends provided by being in a team and the effect on family life.
- 6 "For many years, you have been the family's provider but now you're at home with nothing to do and feeling a bit lost. We're trying to help players realise that it's more complicated than just trying to find a new

job. For most, 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 Pires, who works as a pundit for French television, trained with the Arsenal team after he had retired. "It was very good for me but very hard to not be a real player any more. It was very special to be in the dressing room every day. But now I don't have that and it feels like I've lost something."
- 8 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 – you earn a lot when you're playing but the second life is very long and you need to prepare for that," he says. "That's why it's important that young players are given good advice about how to invest sensibly."

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### 3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. How long 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. career
2. highest
3. get
4. family
5. invest

#### B

- a. money
- b. advice
- c. life
- d. level
- e. 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 gave me great \_\_\_\_\_. She helped me get a job that fits my likes and skills.

c. Choose three expressions from task A and write personalised sentences.

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### 5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "Professional footballers are paid far too much."
- "Doctors and scientists are more useful to society than sportspeople."
- "Sport should be amateur, not professional."

### 6 In your own words

a. Use an internet search engine to find information about a footballer (or another professional sportsperson) who has successfully changed career as Robert Pires has done. This sportsperson could be one from your country or a well-known international figure.

- 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.