THE BEST OF — EPISODE 333

Borja Sordo

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On episode 333 of the Digital and Social Media Sports Podcast, Neil chatted with Borja Sordo, who leads Accenture's North American sports practice, advising teams and leagues on strategy, operations, and fan growth.

What follows is a collection of snippets from the podcast. To hear the full interview, check out the podcast on all platforms and at www.dsmsports.net.

Introduction and Career Path

“Well, I have a bit of a strange path, all the way here, so I'll start. I'll try to start from the beginning, but I'll try not to bore you too much with the details. But I was born in Spain. Grew up in Spain. I left Spain eventually to go to England, where I did my undergraduate, in London. And then at the time I finished my undergraduate, I debated joining the workforce or getting an MBA. At that time, Accenture had already extended an offer. But I was looking at what else I could do. I'd always been fascinated with the idea of moving to the US. I grew up watching sports.

“So the US is sort of a holy grail for that. And I applied to the University of Missouri to do my MBA, and I was very lucky that they offered me a full ride, and extended me the courtesy of having me come over.

At the same time, I was very lucky that Accenture kindly offered to defer my entrance date to Accenture, so I was able to go do my MBA while having the Accenture start date already there, which is pretty nice. It was amazing, especially from a kid from Madrid, yeah, it's just so incredible to have that kind of experience working with a big firm like Accenture and then being able to kind of fulfill one of your dreams, coming to the US.

“I came to Mizzou. I did my MBA for a couple years. I focused more on finance, but I worked a lot with the media group over there or the, yeah, the media group over there. And then I went back to London. I started with Accenture, as some romantic stories will have it. I met my now wife while I was at Mizzou. And, so I went back to London with a very clear plan of finding my way back to the US so that I could actually come with her, be with her. So Accenture, we worked together to figure out where there was a path for moving over here. We found there was an opportunity to move out back here to work for Accenture in the US, so I took that up, got the transfer, and then was here.

“I joined the media. Well, what was mobility consulting at the time.

But really I worked with a whole variety of clients and then slowly over time at Accenture as my career kind of grew. I worked more and more in the media side of things, working with clients in media and entertainment, theme parks, etc. And slowly kind of got to know the media world a little bit better, the entertainment world better. And then over time, I slowly started to kind of see more in the sports world and, slowly kind of maneuvered my way closer to that. And now, here I am where I'm incredibly lucky to lead the work we do across sports for North America, for Accenture. So a bit of an odd journey all over the place. With one romantic aspect thrown in there, but it's been, I mean, it's an incredible journey. I certainly wouldn't change it for anything."

What Accenture Does

“Accenture is the largest technology consulting company in the world. Which is no small feat in itself. We support clients all over the spectrum, right? Whether it's financial services clients, health and public services, media and entertainment, really the entire gamut. And we help them from anything from strategy work, operations work, technology work. Like at the end of the day, our core mission is to support our clients in whatever they're looking to do to kind of transform their operations or transform their business. And we help them get to ultimately where they're trying to get to. From a sports perspective, that's obviously an incredibly interesting place to be at right now, and I'm sure we'll talk more about it in a second. But that is very much an industry that keeps changing and reinventing itself. And I think that's honestly at the core of what Accenture does is reinventing our clients and working with them.”

Looking Under the Hood: Bringing Moneyball to the Business of Sports

“It's really interesting. Obviously my journey, like most of us, starts as a fan with sports, right? I grew up a Real Madrid fan. Bizarrely, I grew up a Lakers fan because they would show the Lakers games back when I was growing up in Spain and we didn't get a large selection of NBA games. So my journey starts with fandom, right? And so then slowly over time, I start to get into the media world and then eventually sports. So I've kind of see, like my perspective has changed along the way. Right? And so as a fan, you just appreciate the game you're seeing and maybe the broadcast, right? But as you start to get in, like the industry becomes, honestly, in some cases, much more fascinating.

“Like you start to see how the industry behaves, how the industry reacts, how they kind of look at sports as a business versus what other companies might look at as a business.

And you really start to see the difference in approaches. And then now that I'm kind of in this world, right? It's just like a totally different perspective. I feel like when I first took this role, which was a little bit under a year ago, I think I was almost a little bit shocked at looking under the hood, to see like some of the approach to decision making that goes behind the business. And I think it's truly jarring when you look at how analytics, for example, has impacted sports on the field, right?

“How different it is, how the business is run and how I think a lot of entities are still not looking at sports or teams like a business and letting analytics drive some of their decision making of what they should do as a business. I think that dichotomy is super fascinating to me because like we've seen it. I mean, Moneyball is obviously sort of the OG example here, right? But like how long ago was that, right? And like, you've seen teams continue to adapt. And I would argue that some of these teams have some of the most elite data and analytics teams on the planet because they're trying to find tiny edges, a tiny edge anywhere, to be competitive.

But you still see front offices and back offices that are not actually applying the same rules of engagement. Seems like a shame. That's kind of how.”

Responsibility to Fans and Community

“It's funny because like, I don't think in any other business there's such a deep responsibility to what, in essence, is your consumers, right? Fans are consumers, right? Like consumers of your product, consumers of your brand. But like, I think in sports more than anywhere else, like that responsibility is really important. And I think the synergy behind it is really important, right? It is all good and well to talk about how teams should monetize data or should monetize their exposure to grow the business. But that exposure, that data also belongs to the fans, to the engagement, to the experience. And I think you have to find the right balance or that fan is going to slowly peel away from you too.

“Especially in this day and age where there is no hiding, right? Everything is out in the open.

So you more than anywhere else, you have to really carefully balance the sense of responsibility to your city, to your fans, right? Whatever you feel is the right thing to balance it against with the responsibility of like, hey, we also need to think of this as a business. And like you said, there is a lot of capital flowing into sports right now. Some of it is coming in from taxpayers and cities. And it's true that you need to be cognizant of like, how are you like thinking of that capital? But to your point of like, how does that get reinvested into, for example, the city and the Tampa Bay Rays just gave the green light to the new stadium, how does that get reinvested into the community is equally important.

“And I think when I talk about the business, right, it is important to think of running the business of your bottom line of growing the revenue. But it is also equally important to think of the business as like, how do you contribute to the enrichment of the community, the enrichment of the surrounding areas, the enrichment of your fans? And I would argue that the teams that are doing the best have been reinvesting some of that capital into their communities for longer.

Because they understand that growing the reach of a team is more than just growing the reach of the brand. It's growing the reach of everything that surrounds that brand.

“So even if you look at things like the Golden State Warriors. Like the Golden State Warriors have made that area more desirable, right? Like it gets more tourism, it gets more visits. It's a, it's a now it's in a higher standing globally. Right. And like that helps the Golden State Warriors also be more desirable. So it's a balance, man. It's all about synergy.”

“And even then, that brings the perspective of the players themselves, right? Like obviously baseball's huge in Japan in general, but like Ohtani has made a huge difference in the city of LA, right? I was actually just in Japan, in Tokyo about a month ago. Right. And like, I mean, he is everywhere. So like, even then you bring the players piece and it's like, well, hey, like you can start to see the cultural impact that players can have on the city as well. And like that factors into the overall equation too. So that's what I love about this business. It is unlike anything else, right? Like the degree of like passion, but also the degree of like involvement across all these areas with community, with sports, with players.

It's just unlike any business I've ever been involved with. So it's just really energizing to have to think through those things."

"It is sort of a circular economy in that way. And you're right, like brands definitely respond to that. And again, it all factors into growing the business, right? So I think that's going back to kind of the way you originally asked the question, yeah, I honestly think like the business of sports factors in so much more. And I think historically people have been very focused on things like media rights. But like, there's just so many more avenues to increase your valuation, if not your cash flow as a, as a sports business."

Finding the Levers That Move the Needle

“It largely varies depending on who you're talking to, right? Like folks that are now building stadiums and districts might be a different conversation than folks that are maybe more focused on like their day to day operations. The key thing is to understand where you're at and where do you see kind of value being added to the business. So I have conversations with, a few NBA teams right now where the focus is very much in, hey, we just want to see where AI can do for our day to day operations and then activate in a few kind of ideas to see how we can use it both in our operations, but also like in fan engagement, for example.

“That's great. There's meat on the bone there, right? Because there is a lot that can be done. And like we said, like these places, like sports organizations always operate with a really lean mentality.

So like a technology like AI that is sort of fairly transformational but has to be wielded with caution. Let's be careful here. But it is transformational. And so like for a lean organization, suddenly have a powerful AI infrastructure that allows you to do more with less or with the same. That's important. And that can affect your bottom line, right? Or it can help you provide a better experience for your fans. Then you go kind of the other spectrum, right?

“It's like, well, folks that have big, big developments or big redevelopments coming up, that's a whole different story, right? Like if you're building a stadium in a district from the ground up, well, now we're talking about like, how can you really enrich everything from the get go? How can you think through like, what the future of sports experience is in 2031, five years from now, right? What does that look like? What does a better stadium infrastructure look like? How do you make sure that your district and your stadium operates as one? How do you make sure that your stadium operates as a multi-event venue, right? Because that also goes back to your point about taxpayers or whatever the stadiums might be funded. If your stadium can be utilized for more things, that's more revenue coming into the community. Yeah.

But I think it all starts with understanding where they're at.

“And then from there, again, like Accenture is so big that we have a lot of capabilities at our disposal. So if you're looking for technology advisory, we have folks that have literally done they've been cutting wires in stadiums for sports teams, right? So we know the ins and outs of infrastructure. But if you want to have more outreach with a modern digital campaign, we have a whole large agency that can take care of that for you. If you want to be data analytics driven, as I'm talking to a sports entity globally right now, we can help you create an AI driven kind of player insights platform.

“And then of course, we have all the partners so we can work with AWS or Microsoft, we can work with all of them. So there's just, again, it's like it's an untapped area. There's just so much potential. And yes, you talk about seats, premium seating and suites. And I think as a fan, I think it is important that we keep sports accessible. At least I think that to me that's important because I do think that sports, to your point, belongs to all of us in that way. So I do think we need to keep it accessible.

But if you're building a new stadium, maybe you can find a way to maybe even make it more accessible, but also offering some more premium experiences.

“We know people want to pay for those experiences, so you should find a way to incorporate more of them and provide a better service to people that want that. And then somehow find a way to like, then make it accessible to others. Because I'll tell you, man, like the five year old kid that gets to go to the NFL game for whatever and gets to see it like that might be a lifelong fan. And like that lifelong fandom is worth way more than like whatever you can charge for a ticket.”

“I'll give you another example real quick. I won't mention the league right now, but like I recently was at an event, and I went through the merch tent to check it out. And I felt that retail experience could use a lot of help, right? In the sense that it was very old school, right? Big lines, big checkout machines. And now when I was there, on a Saturday, the lines were, I mean, it was like a 40 minute checkout, right? Well, like we have mobile retail, right? Like mobile retail solutions.

Like it's a win for everybody because you're not even commanding any kind of premium for it. You're just making it a better experience for the fan that wants to get back to their seat to watch what they came to watch, but they can now quickly purchase whatever they need. Right? And then you're getting more throughput. So it's a win-win for everybody, right? Like there's so many opportunities for the true win-wins in this industry that it's just, it's just exciting."

"It's little things that add up to like a phenomenal experience and add up to like a better, happier fan or customer. And from a business standpoint you can get more throughput."

Introducing New Technology to Fans

“I mean, for fans, I think, there's always interest in it. And you see it when they're even willing to experiment. I think you do have to be careful. Like if you introduce technology for the sake of technology or it's a bad experience, once you've lost them, you've lost them. So you do want to be cognizant of that and be smart in how and where you deploy it. But I mean, I remember reading like an interesting story a couple of years ago around fantasy football and how it was a family or a group of friends and they decided to include their grandparents into the fantasy football league and it was like they just took to it and they instinctively understood how to use the app once it was installed and stuff like that.

“And it just brought them together. And that's kind of great story.

And I think sports is intuitive for people that have been in it lifelong, because we kind of know what to expect from a sports standpoint. So it kind of makes navigating the complexities of new technology easier, right? Because kind of like you know what you're looking for like, okay, if you're playing fantasy football, you're looking for the RB or the wide receiver. And it kind of simplifies that. And then navigating the technology feels a little easier because you kind of know what you're expected to do, right? You got to fill a team. Okay.

“So I think fans are ready for it. And I think it's a great place to innovate, right? Like sports has always been driving the edge of like a lot of things, right? Like whether it's experience, whether it's broadcasting, like fans always want new. I mean, we talked about it last time we talked about Drive to Survive at Netflix and like sports documentaries have existed for a long time. And maybe you could even say 30 for 30 was kind of one of the first few like really transformational ones. But like, we never had a Drive to Survive type of reaction worldwide as that kind of generated. And so like, I think everywhere, like fans are ready for technology to be introduced and then consumed.

“Sports teams, I think, are actually different conversations, or leagues. I think they're fighting a different battle because I think historically too many decisions have been made without considering the ROI or the value realized. And so you're almost fighting like an old school perception of like, yeah, but you know why we did that? It didn't really do that. Like and I think we've gotten we're so much more mature now that we understand how you can apply a valuation or an ROI metric to these things. So I think now when the conversations that I'm having are more focused on like, yes, we should do this and this is why or I hear you want to do these ten things, let's actually look at them and decide what has the better ROI so we can prioritize them. I think making it tangible makes an impact. And again, it goes back to you have to be able to factor all those pieces we talked about earlier in the podcast around it.”

Balancing Short-Term and Long-Term Investment

“I mean, it goes, again, back to running it as a business. So like any business in the world, forget sports, any business in the world has to balance short term and long term gains, right? Like you need to think through like, where are you going to deploy capital? Where's the return on that capital? How long is the return to that capital? So like, it's no different in sports. Like you should consider all the factors that, at the end of the day, make up your business and say, okay, like how much of my capital do I deploy for short term wins versus how much should I deploy for long term? And then you have to decide like, where do I want my interests to exist? And like, how do I want to kind of deploy that capital in there? And then that's kind of, again, you go through that piece now, I think where sports is interesting is it's a, it's a harder calculation, right?

“One, because in some cases, obviously we have the privilege of, in some cases, having the owners own teams for a really long time. But we also have seen, I mean, most recently in LA, we've seen turnover at league ownership very quickly. And so like if you're an owner and you really don't know that you're going to hold it for that long, then maybe you're looking to deploy it for a quicker turnaround. That's fine. That's what you're focused on.

“Again, I personally, again, it's personal, but like, I would always ask that, you think of more than just the return. You think of the community impact and the fandom experience. But even that, even if you're looking for a most of this is focused on valuation. By the way, I think there should be a lot more to that. And I think revenue and revenue should be a lot more heavily considered when you're looking at valuations. But that maybe is a topic for a different day. But I do think that at the end of the day, if you think about all of these owners that are looking to kind of get out, like a lot of what they're doing is based on their valuation.

“I think that community engagement, that long term thinking helps your valuation be higher. But again, you have to have a plan; no business operates month to month.

Every business has a short term and a long term plan. That long term might be three years, might be five. Some really blue chip companies are looking at even longer than that. But like, you have to have that plan and then you have to kind of act on it. And yeah, it'll tweak, you'll vary it, but you need to have that roadmap. And for us, technology has to be at the core of that roadmap because that's what we're seeing right now, right? Technology is foundational to everything and everybody."

"They'll come back...But like your lifelong Knicks fan, like if you put a bad app in front of them, they're not going to go, well, screw the Knicks. I'm not there anymore. They don't care, right? Like they're fine. They're going to be a Knicks fan, but they're going to tell you, yeah, and the Knicks fans, they're going to tell you loudly like, hey man, that sucked. Right. And so you're going to get feedback so much quicker, right?

"Like most companies like you don't get that. But to your point, like you don't get that, like some of them you do, but like the ones that have really core kind of lifelong fandom, like a Disney or even a Coca-Cola.

Yeah, man, you mess with that product, you're going to hear from it pretty quick. But companies don't have that quick feedback that sports teams have access to, and they really need to capitalize on that."

What the Big Leagues Can Learn From Emerging Leagues

“It's interesting. They are. I mean, there are obviously different businesses, right? In the same way that a startup and a large established corporation are different businesses. I think a lot of these emerging leagues, they're sort of the high school, college kids, like in the garage, like just knowing they have to do something transformational and different because that's how you differentiate yourself. And like when you're coming up, like you don't have that kind of capital, right? So you got to figure out how to do more with less and do it differently. I see it even in like their approach to sponsorship models, right? Like they're looking for different ways.

“They're even looking for equity partners, right? Because they got to offer something different. I was to the Tampa Bay Sun, which is the women's soccer team down here in Tampa.

And like they're having to figure out different approaches to things and how they even move around players and how they acquire new players. I was talking to their GM, Christina, about like, how do you even think of like players and talent analysis, right? Because you don't, it's a different pool and it's different. You don't have as much information. So they have to operate differently. But I don't think that what they do necessarily doesn't apply to the big guys either. Like I think the big leagues or big teams actually could honestly use some of that thinking, right?

“Like going back to like, you're trying to get an edge on something, you're always trying to gain that edge. Like these are ways to gain an edge, right? Find ways to scout internationally, which is something we're working with in the NFL. And find ways to gain an edge there or how do you figure out how do you grow your business elsewhere? Maybe America's tapped out, but like, what about other markets like India, right? Yes, there's cricket, but there's probably opportunity for more. They have to think differently.

But like, I actually would almost challenge some of the big guys to like, look, listen and learn from what some of the emerging leagues are doing because there's things that can be applied.

“Now, obviously the revenue multiplier may not be the same because you're so big, but that doesn't mean you can't gain some valuable info and like realize how you could do things differently and innovate.”

“And remember. Like, these are like exponential gains potentially, right? So like, if you do something that's different, but like applies to each fan, that's an exponential increase regarding the number of fans you have. So like, if you just create a better engagement model, which, honestly, in this day and age with AI powering the workforce, you could totally have two kids in a garage that completely transform the way fans engage with sports. If you do that and you capitalize first, man, like the prize is pretty darn big.”

Prerequisites for Innovation

“That depends a little bit on your size and scale and maturity, right? So if you're smaller, you might not need a full blown data platform, right? For example, like you might get away with less, but like at its core, really, like I would say it's one, you have to find a way to be able to measure your return. So you understand what you're doing, why you're doing it, and then how to measure if you're successful. You have to have a sense of where the industry is headed, right? So we do a lot of work with companies, and some teams like, hey, what is the future of sports? What will sports look like five years from now? You want to have that kind of North Star vision so you know what you're trying to target against.

“And then you have to have a willingness to transform, whether it's the workforce, the technology stack, the operations. Like a willingness to do things differently.

Because you're going to have to know besides that, yeah, you're going to have to maybe do some investments if you're large, I would argue that you might benefit from having some semblance of an innovation centric organization, right? That sometimes. Ideally, that can be kind of like being separated from the organization as a whole. So they're not constrained by typical or current thinking. Yeah. But you, but really it's, I always go back to the same thing. It's, you want to know what you're measuring, how you're measuring it and what you're measuring against, because otherwise you don't know if you're succeeding or failing when you're, when you're creating innovation."

Redefining Fandom and Monetizing Fans Beyond the Stadium

“That's like a whole other podcast. But let's see, I mean, I think you talk about Drive to Survive. I think that's a great experience, like an example to start with, right? Are you a Formula One fan? I don't know, maybe you're not, right, but like, you're certainly a sports fan that likes Formula One in some capacity. Now maybe you're not going to every race. Maybe you're not kind of strutting around the paddock, but you're certainly consuming Formula One as a sports engagement. And the vehicle is a Netflix documentary or series about it. So in some way or capacity that is valuable to Formula One. I mean, we all know that because we've seen what Formula One's done over the last six years.

“So you know that in itself, right? Like whether you're a fan or a sports fan or just a media, like whatever type of fan you are, there's value there.

Now to your point, do you need superfans only? No. I think it's about moving the spectrum continually to the right. Like if you have somebody that goes once or twice a season and you want them to come four times a season, congrats. Like you effectively just doubled your yield for that fan. That's in any other industry, you would be uncorking champagne and celebrating that win, right? It's just the sports metrics just don't align to that. So that's not what happens. But that is a huge accomplishment in itself.

“And then you have the key going to the right. It's like, well, now let's think about like, how do I make my 70,000 person stadium available to everybody in the world in a way that I can monetize almost every person as if it was an extra seat in the stadium. And now you're thinking like, okay, well, what does the at-home experience look like? What's the digital experience look like? What is my retail strategy aligned to that experience? Shape up to be right? Like how does that impact my sponsorship deals, my brand partners, my valuation, my community engagement? Is it good that, should you move all your fans abroad? No, because you're going to lose the heart of what makes sports, sports.

“But nobody's going to complain if like I don't know, NFL becomes the most popular sport in and like whatever country in Europe, right? I don't think it's going to unseat football or soccer, but the point is, nobody's going to complain. But like how you monetize that experience and how you think of those channels are important. And I do think that like, sports is the hottest commodity in entertainment there is, right? Live events are the hottest commodity there is right now. And so you do need to think of like, how do I grow it and monetize those fans that can't attend a constrained physical environment so that I can actually increase my bottom line and that now you're talking about like, okay, let's offer a better app experience, offer a better digital experience, let's offer a more social media content.

“Should you have more vertical video than actually like traditional broadcast? Right? The stats are there; more people consume social media or vertical media, right? Like right now they do traditional broadcasts solely. So like, yeah, you got to figure out how to monetize them in a sort of successful and responsible manner. And then every single dollar above what you do right now. Like that's just, again, going back to it, exponential growth. Yeah. Right.

And we like, obviously every league and team is different. We try to focus on like, okay, what's your core market? What's your growth market? What appeals to them?

“What does that look like? What's the real opportunity to monetize that? Like is the commercial small or large? Where should you focus? And then how do you activate it? Right? Like there's a mixture of media, there's a mixture of brand partnerships, there's a mixture of experience. There's just all these levers that again, like any other business would dream to have and sports has. And I think we're at the forefront of learning how to do that. And how do we actually think of monetizing it? Because I would say it's not been easy in the past to measure that.”

“I mean, it's sort of like the roadmap. A lot of it is simple steps that maybe aren't transformational. But I think sometimes simplicity is also important. Like you first, like figure out your market, your existing market and the opportunities in that market, right? Like you need to understand your core demographics and core market to know what you have. Figure out then your easiest growth path and what the return looks like on that growth path.

So the simpler thing, it would be like, hey, I get 90% of the city to come into my stadium. That's great. How about the adjacent areas? Can I increase that? That's the simple version, but digitally then if you start to think beyond that, it's like, okay, great. Like who's actually watching and where are they watching? Like should teams, for example, own more media concepts? Right? Heated Rivalry, like I don't actually know, but like, I imagine the NHL was not involved in Heated Rivalry, right? You know."

"But I'm sure they were not unhappy with the amount of extra traffic it drove to the NHL. Right. So like, should some of these leagues be thinking about media properties that might enhance the value of the league and the sport? Right? And then what does that type of content look like, but for other demographics? So like ten years ago or 15 years ago, it was like, oh, we need to attract women in sports, right? Like that was a big topic. Well, now it's okay, well, do we need what Gen Z's do we need? What does it look like? And then like, hey, we know where they consume their media, right?

"Like we can tell you where they consume and how they consume it and what they consume.

So it's like, great. How about like a TikTok series or collaborations to drive more towards, I don't know, baseball, right? Which has been historically losing younger demographics. Again, like it's not, and I don't want to sound like I'm saying that leagues are sort of doing the wrong things because I don't think they are. But a lot of the focus you see it is in like, what is their true core competency, which is how do we make the output better? Or like the product better, right? Like pitch clocks and things like that. And that's important. Sports always reinvents itself, right?

“Like I'm a huge golf fan. I'm not a traditionalist. Like I love to play and watch golf, but like, do I think golf needs to evolve? Yeah. And like, if you heard Brian Rolapp talk about the match play being sorry, the Tour Championship now going to be a match play. That's great. I think things need to change in this case. Technically the match play came before the existing format but still. But I do think that ultimately they're focused on their core product. I think now they need to start spinning up and thinking about beyond their core competency, how do we need to think as a business? And that's where people like Accenture can help.

“That's where companies like us can help because we have that exposure to the market abroad. We know what others are doing and we can help you do it. And so you might not have a team that can kind of quickly analyze exactly where all your media is coming from or your eyeballs are coming from, or what the markets look like, but we have all that very quickly available to us. We can come, we can help you, we can shape it, and then we can together figure out how to shape your strategy.”

Personalization Versus the Communal Experience

“Very quickly I can do it all. No, but it is a balance and like it's a balance that differs for different sports, different leagues, different teams. Right. But I think you mentioned that communal aspect, I think at the center of like, whatever that Venn diagram looks like, I don't even know if it's a Venn diagram. Is that a communal aspect? Sports are powerful because it brings communities together or people together. So you can't forget that. But sports are also really deeply personal, right? Like my wife always laughs like when we're watching Spain in the World Cup or Real Madrid, like I go very quiet and I internalize it because I'm so passionate about it.

“Right? So sports is that kind of communal aspect, but also like that kind of personal aspect. So you have to find the right way to bridge those two together.

I do think fans are yearning for better storytelling, for more information, for more understanding. And so you can definitely weave in those analytics. And those kind of pieces. And I do think different fans care about different things. So you and I might sit to watch a football game together, but like you might care about slightly different things. And in an ideal world, the it might change just a little to where it appeals more to me, mine than yours appeals to you. That's okay. It doesn't have to be a giant.

“I guess what I would say is the win is to make incremental, smaller changes that appeal to the individual as much as you can without compromising the kind of core aspect of it that brings the community aspect into it and together. And I think that's where technology is headed now, you can do more of that more easily so that what you get and what I get varies enough that it captures your attention without necessarily changing the conversation we would have at the bar later together.”

Adapting to How Fans Consume Sports

“I mean, I don't think you should ever fight where your consumers are headed, right? I think you should always be a part of helping to shape it. I think the organizations that will ultimately kind of succeed the most are the ones that are setting the trend to some degree. Now, fans are going to find their way, especially nowadays, where people can actually create their own products too. So fans are always going to figure out where they're headed. And you got to kind of read the signals. But again, like I think you can help shape where they're headed and shape how they head there. And I think your job as an organization is to like, be part of shaping that future.

“Should you like, ditch traditional kinds of concepts? No, I don't think so. Right. Like traditional media is still incredibly powerful and lucrative, like you said.

So like, I don't think you should ditch it, but like, should you be looking at where you might be able to integrate it with more modern media or different media and find a way to expand the market or expand the revenue. Yeah, I think if you can increase your opportunity, you absolutely must do so. Even going back to your example with Georgia, like I'm assuming again, I was not involved, but like, I'm assuming that like, somebody did some calculation based on like ROI to say, well, actually like paywalling highlights is going to be better for us.

“Now, the question to me would be like, well, what went into that calculation? Did you factor in all the additional revenue levers? Did you factor in the lifetime value of potential new fans that you're going to create? Like what did you factor into it? Right. Every decision needs to be focused on having a tangible perspective on what it's going to drive. That's where I think going back to the innovation question earlier, yeah, like experimenting in innovation is powerful, but you need to have guidance behind that. Like you shouldn't just experiment for the sake of experimenting. Experiment with a purpose.

And it just needs to track against your value and your revenue and your ROI and the things that make your business up, like fan experience, fan engagement, your product, all of it. It's like one big pot of soup and all of it has to work together if you're going to be successful."

"It's such an exciting industry and I think it has so much potential. It is rooted in like probably one of the most historically traditional kind of things, which is just sports, right? Like operating models, sports. Like it hasn't changed in centuries or it has, but not too much. But like the business around it, I think it is ready to grow and ready to go by leaps and bounds and actually lead us into the future of what it all looks like. So I think we are in a really, really emerging tech period in sports right now. And I just think it's exciting that we get to be a part of it, man."

From Spain to Missouri: The Culture Shock

“I didn't totally know what Missouri was, but eventually I found out, it was definitely a big culture shock. It's very different. I grew up in big cities, literally my entire life up until I went to Columbia, Missouri. So man, that was something different for sure. But I tell you WHAT, I love it. Not only did I sort of meet my wife there, so that alone makes it worth it. But I gotta say, man, like I love the Midwest people. They are just kind and warm. And they'll welcome you with wide arms. And yeah, it's. I love it out there, man. It was also my introduction to college sports.

“And like, that's a great place to go, man. Like I still catch Mizzou games every now and then. I've gone back to Columbia to kind of see what's up and how it's changed. Like it was cool. I still, I'm very fond of Missouri in general and my wife is from there.”

Biggest Lesson From Teaching Spanish

“My biggest lesson from teaching in general, while I was there, often, I think it's what, and it, and it carries into consulting too. Often it's easy to assume that like when somebody doesn't understand you, that it's their fault. And I think one of the biggest lessons I took out of teaching is like, the first thing you need to do is not actually assume it's on them. It's actually look back at how you're communicating, right? It's been really valuable for me in my career to my first assumption be like, well, did I communicate that effectively or not? And could I do a better job of that? Is that why they didn't understand my point?”

Go-To Software

“That's an interesting one. Now I gotta think about that. I mean, obviously I'm using like Copilot and Claude and things like that. And they certainly are really helpful. I don't know that I have a go-to software. I'm like, in a weird way, Like I'm probably more old school and not like I'm still very like, driven by like the relationships I have. So like, this is such a lame answer. But like, maybe I'd say Teams because, literally, like I'm so devoted to this idea of having everybody that I can talk to and understand. And I'm a big, big sort of proponent of like, I never will have all the answers, but I need a really deep network that does.

“So I know it's really boring, although I guess Microsoft would be happy I say this — like Teams is like my go to just because like I spend so much of it just pinging back and forth with people and communicating. But in the new world Claude and ChatGPT, like both are so powerful.

And I definitely use them a lot just to help me research and understand and put things together. Yeah."

"I like to use AI to research and things like that, but like Powerpoints or decks or emails, like I write them all myself. Like, it's my voice. I'd like to keep my voice. It's kind of how I think about it. But yeah, I'm a, as you probably can tell, I'm a very relationship human driven individual. Yeah. So like I love technology, but like, I always default to people. It's just what's kind of at the core of my being so important."

Most Memorable Sports Event Attended

“That's an interesting one. I mean, I've gone to obviously, like Real Madrid matches for me. Just in general, like growing up as a fan. When I was very, very little, those were all memorable. But just to make this kind of more back to the Missouri experience we played, I want to say Oklahoma, in my first year of Mizzou. I think they were ranked number one. And we beat them and we rushed the field, took the goalposts down. And like, again, just being immersed into like college sports, right? Like specifically, which are so passionate. Like that was pretty darn cool. Like that was like, okay, this is, this is different.

“It was like, it was like suddenly I drank the Kool-Aid. And I was like, okay, I get it. And I remember like man, I was on the 50. Like I was just being like, it was cool, man. So that more recently, I'd say that's probably one of the most memorable ones.

Also, I'm a big golf fan, so I will say I was there last year for the Tour Championship. I love Tommy Fleetwood. I just think he's a great role model in a lot of ways. And so watching him win his really first solo trophy, there in person was pretty cool too.”

Favorite Disney Parks Ride or Attraction

“If my neighbors hear this, this is going to sort of stir up a whole bunch of stuff. But, I think all like Everest in Animal Kingdom, always been my favorite. Historically. I just love that ride. But out of the newer stuff, man, I gotta tell you, I love Guardians of the Galaxy. I just think it's a fun ride. I'm working on, like, my kids are not the most roller coaster kids. I'm working on it. I really want to take my six year old on Guardians because I think once he goes on it once, he's going to love it. So yeah, I think Guardians of the Galaxy for sure. And then yeah, historically, I've always loved Everest and I love Animal Kingdom from a Disney Park perspective.”

Favorite Team and Athlete of All Time

“I mean, team side is Real Madrid because I grew up like, yeah like even going back to '98 when we won the seventh Champions League, like I was 11 years old at the time, yeah, man, that was that's my team. Like if you're like, hey, you can only that's it. It's Real Madrid. Athlete, man, I've always been a huge Rafael Nadal fan. Like I love to, I love every sport, if you can't tell. Nadal and I are similar ages, which means that like, as he was kind of coming up, I was kind of getting like growing up. And like, I just, I love Nadal. Like I would watch him pretty religiously, especially in finals.

“And I just also really, I'm always drawn to athletes that I sort of believe embody the sort of core principles behind the sport. And I just have always thought like Nadal was such a great ambassador for tennis, but for the sport, like just the gracious guy in winning or in defeat.

So yeah, I think Nadal's a big one for me. And now we have Carlos kind of blazing the trail again. So as Spaniards, we're pretty lucky in the tennis world.”

How AI Will Change the Consulting Business

“I think often transformational technologies, which AI clearly leads to a lot of speculation and questions around what's going to happen. I think oftentimes something like AI, like the easy thing to think of first is like, well, can we find efficiencies and reduce spend, etc. But I think like any other technology across history, like what you have seen is a period where everybody figures out how to gain efficiencies and then quickly it pivots to like a productivity or increase tool of how we're going to do more and how we can leverage this to generate more. And so I think I've even started to see it across my clients where like, slowly the conversation is like, great, now we have this, how do we do more with it?

“How do we touch more people or create better experiences where before you could do 1 to 10, how about doing 1 to 1 now? Right?

And I think that's kind of where in general the technology consulting industry is headed. It's now there's going to be more demand, more need, and it's the need for how to use it, how to create the infrastructure. And then it's going to be the need of how to productize it and how to like, leverage it. So ultimately, I'm very excited because I think it's shaping and changing how things need to be adapted. And then it's just going to allow us to do more. And I think history shows us time and time again that you don't see a retraction, you see an amplification, how it works."

Best Meal: Orlando and the Meal He Misses From the UK

“Oh man. Again, you're going to land me in some trouble here at home, or with the community in Orlando? Best meal in Orlando. Well, I'm not going to say best, but I'm going to say maybe some of my favorites.

“I'm just going to give you my. So my favorite taco spot right now in Orlando. Which is not even it's not like this isn't like I'm not giving you something that most people don't know, but Black Rooster Taqueria, Mills 50.



That's a good taco, man. The Science Center is not too far. So we'll take the kids, then finish up the Science Center, and take him for some tacos at home. It's a good way to end a Saturday or a Sunday, so I'll say that."

"Favorite food I miss from the UK. So I'll give you both. Give you both. I do like a good Sunday roast, man. Like sitting at the pub for a good Sunday roast in the UK. Especially like on a it's great, I love that. So that's probably the UK one.



Spain man, I just everything in Spain but like just being able to go out and like go with some tapas and just enjoy, like that kind of stuff and then just shout out to my mom, like I do miss a good home cooked meal. Like nothing hits like mom's recipes. So I'll miss that too."



Most Impressive Sports Initiative

“The NFL is always doing a lot of really exciting things, right? And I do love how they're pretty open to doing things differently. Maybe sticking with the NFL like they're doing this. There's like this innovation challenge they did last year focused on bringing innovation to the draft if you saw that. I thought that was great. I just love that because again, like it offered the platform and the opportunity for smaller entities to come and do something different and try to make meaningful change and then to give them such a visible platform to showcase it. I thought, that's cool, man.

“Like that's at the heart of like, you're a big organization, but you actually know how to generate innovation with smaller partners and then give them an audience. So I thought that was really cool.”

First Major U.S. League Championship Outside the U.S. or Canada

“Let's say aggressively the next five, I'd think certainly the next ten years. If you need a bet and we're putting a drink on it or something. Like I'll go with 2032. That way if it happens, I can call you and you can owe me a drink. But like what league? I mean, the NFL and the NBA, to me, are more at the forefront of these things. So I would say one of those two. I would say the NBA. I think the NFL, they’re so much further ahead of like exploring international. But I will say the NBA only because they have a trump card here, which is at the end of the day, like they have, they play a seven game series so they could find a way to play one of those games internationally.

“So I guess if we're going to hold each other to this, then it's NBA, 2032. And we're putting a drink on it.”

All-Star Follow

“I have to admit, I'm not the. I'm not the biggest social media guy either. So. But you know what, man? Like I tell you what. I'll promise you. I'll come back on the pod and I will, I will think through that one bit better and I'll have a good answer for you then.”

Where to Find Borja and Accenture

Accenture.com and at newsroom.accenture.com

And find Borja Sordo on LinkedIn

THANKS

Thanks again to Borja for being so generous with his time to share his knowledge, experience, and expertise!

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