

## EXCLUSIVE

Q&amp;A | DARIO CONCA



**How do you find a balance between playing and looking after your baby boy?**

In Guangzhou, I have more time to look after my baby. He is so cute. But when we play away, either in the domestic league or in the AFC Champions League, my wife, sometimes, will bring the boy along. Otherwise, I talk to my wife on the phone when they are not with me.

**Have you become accustomed to life in Guangzhou since arriving a year ago?**

I found it hard at the start. There are two people — my translator and driver — who have helped me a lot to learn about the city. Now I am quite happy living here.

**Do you spend time with your friends from Argentina and Brazil?**

I am a homebound father (laugh). I spend most of my time with my family. But sometimes I will go to a party with some of my Brazilian friends who run barbecue restaurants in Guangzhou.

**Would you like your son to play soccer?**

Education plays an important role in a child's growth. I will send my son to school. But I will not stop him from playing soccer if he has an interest.

**You were watching CCTV5, a major Chinese sports television channel, when we started this conversation. Do you pay attention to Chinese sports? What is your favorite sport?**

I watch Chinese sports on TV quite frequently. I like tennis and golf. I am learning golf, and I know there are some nice golf courses in Guangzhou.

**How do you manage your Chinese micro blog? Do you need your translator to assist you?**

Most times my personal translator helps me manage the micro blog. Also, I have some Brazilian friends who have helped me. All I say online is true. I don't know why some people have misunderstood me.

**Do you plan to stay in China after your contract with Guangzhou Evergrande ends?**

I plan to return to Fluminense after the current contract ends. I have told my friends about that and I have promised my wife to go back to Brazil. But God may have other plans for me. My son was just born in Guangzhou and I have played only one year here.



Dario Conca celebrates a goal for Guangzhou Evergrande in the AFC Championships against Japan's Kashiwa Reysol in April. "The Chinese league has developed a very healthy momentum," he said. LIU DAWEI / XINHUA

# Chinese soccer according to Conca

The 'world's game' is moving in the right direction in this country, says one of its most expensive imports of all-time, **Qiu Quanlin** reports from Guangzhou.

**A**fter playing in the Chinese Super League for about a year, Dario Conca believes he has developed an understanding of how the game is developing in China. "Chinese soccer is growing. But there are big differences in soccer culture, compared to Brazil and Argentina," Conca said.

In an exclusive interview with China Daily, the 29-year-old Argentine international, currently playing for top CSL side Guangzhou Evergrande, praised China's efforts to attract more support from local companies and also introduce foreign stars to improve its development. "The Chinese league has developed a very healthy momentum over the past two years. With more investment from private companies, the level of the domestic league has improved a lot — especially this year," he said.

The signing of top international players including Nicolas Anelka, a former striker with English Premier League champion Chelsea, who transferred to Shanghai Shenhua, World Cup winning coach Marcello Lippi, who was lured by Evergrande, and former Argentine national team coach Sergio Batista, who was recently introduced as coach at Shanghai Shenhua, will inspire Chinese players to greater heights, Conca said.

However, a great gulf still remains between China and South America's elite countries, he said.

"For example, Brazil has 12 clubs in its national league, of which each has a history of about 100 years. They have a very profound soccer culture. In China, you don't see a club with such a long history," Conca said.

After being voted the best player in Brazil in 2009 while playing with Fluminense, Conca agreed to a 3 1/2-year transfer deal worth \$10 million, then a record in the CSL, with Evergrande in July 2011.

A reported annual salary of up to \$10.4 million has put him among the highest-paid players in the world, although the club insisted the salary is actually \$7 million.

"The introduction of more international stars will help China speed up its soccer development," he said.

Speaking about his club's other big signing, Lucas Barrios, Conca said Evergrande was developing an international culture.

"Before his coming, I told him

**"The introduction of more international stars will help China speed up its soccer development."**

DARIO CONCA  
GUANGZHOU EVERGRANDE  
STRIKER

believes China should look within to boost the game here.

"In Brazil and Argentina, almost every child has the dream of playing soccer since they are born. They pursue that dream by practicing hard. That's why both countries have nurtured so many international stars," Conca said.

"They cry and laugh, all because of soccer. All their wishes in childhood are based on soccer."

Evergrande has started a local recruitment program, which will include about 3,150 students aged 7-11 in the club's initial phase of a cooperative school, which will begin on Sept 1.

The school, a project co-sponsored by the Guangzhou side and Spanish giant Real Madrid, will become one of the largest soccer bases in the world.

"The soccer school, to some degree, will help nurture future Chinese stars," he said.

Conca said in mid-July that he will stay with Guangzhou club, despite reports saying the Argentine international wanted to terminate his contract and return to Brazil.

"I am very thankful for the fans' support," Conca said. "Yes, (I had some second thoughts) the last two weeks. But now I will fulfill the contract and promise to stay with the club."

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**ARGENTINE SAYS LIPPI CAN BOOST HIS GAME**

Dario Conca expects the appointment of World Cup winning coach Marcello Lippi at Guangzhou Evergrande to help improve his game.

"As an experienced international coach, Lippi will definitely bring advanced skills and tactics to the team. I will try my best to learn from him," Conca said.

The defending Chinese Super League champion side signed a 2 1/2-year deal with the 64-year-old Italian on May 17.

After spending more than a season with South Korean coach Lee Jang-soo, Conca said the new managerial group would help Evergrande advance further in the domestic and AFC Champions League competitions.

"Some people say that I had a bad relationship with the former coach. I don't care about that. All that has come to an end. I am looking forward to future challenges," he said.

The Argentine international was once suspended for nine matches and fined 1 million yuan (\$159,000) for criticizing Lee after being taken off the pitch during the club's AFC Champions League match against Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors on May 1.

"I didn't mean to show disrespect to anyone. I just want to concentrate on the games and play better," Conca told China Daily.

The Argentine believes he has the capacity to improve his game.

"I am always looking to get better after each match. If I score 10 goals in a game, I will think about 12 goals in the next match. I am very happy to be with Lippi and I will try my best to be better," he said.

Talking about Lippi's relatively defensive tactics, Conca said the team needed to adapt to the new coach's strategy.

"It is unfair to say that the team focuses too much on defense after a 1-0 win or a 1-1 draw. We need a collective spirit so all the players know how to attack and defend after we take a one-goal lead," he said.

QIU QUANLIN

# Fatherhood comes first for proud dad Dario

By QIU QUANLIN

Guangzhou Evergrande striker Dario Conca is playing a great juggling act between being a father and a soccer star.

"I am very happy to be with my baby, although sometimes I feel a little tired since it takes time to look after him after games," Conca said.

In an exclusive interview with China Daily at his villa, where five big wedding photos hang upon a wall, Conca said he is enjoying family life in a far-off country.

"I am very thankful that I can spend time with my family in Guangzhou, especially since my son was born here," the Argentine international said.

However, it is not an easy act to perform, as Conca found out when the Asian Football Association told him not to take his young son onto the ground before the AFC Champions League match between Evergrande and Jeonbuk Hyundai on May 1, but he did so anyway.

"I don't know why they don't like this (taking the child onto the

ground). I am a professional player, but the behavior was just part of my love for the boy," he said.

As a father, Conca said he wants to share every moment of his soccer career with his family.

"One of the ways to show love to the boy, for me, is to bring him onto the field and share all the glories," he said.

So, on May 1, Conca ignored the match commissioner's warning and waved to the home crowd and kissed his son before the match, which the Guangzhou side lost 3-1 to the defending K-League champion.

"I have received many awards and trophies ... but for me, the most important moment in my soccer career is to hold my baby on the ground," he said.

"As a father, you know a baby brings much happiness and joy to a family."

Conca's son, Benjamin, was born on March 15 in Guangzhou, the capital of South China's Guangdong province.

Evergrande's managers declined to comment on the 29-year-old father's move, which had rarely been

seen in Chinese domestic league matches.

"It is not surprising to see many players in other international leagues take their children onto the field. Real soccer fans understand it," he said.

Conca now lives with his family, which also includes his nurse's family, at a villa near Evergrande's training field in the Jinshazhou area, a suburb of Guangzhou.

"My family is getting used to life here. I also have a driver and a translator who have helped me to get to know a lot about the city," he said.

Conca also hopes his son can get a Chinese education during the family's time here.

"It is a pity that he is too young to study in Guangzhou. The child of my nurse's family, about 4 years' old, now speaks some Chinese. It is quite pleasing to see him to say 'hello' to Chinese children," Conca said.

However, the striker admits he is a homebody and rarely ventures out.

"I have some friends from Brazil and Argentina in Guangzhou. I seldom go out with them. You can say I am more like an indoor father," he said.



Dario Conca holds his baby boy, Benjamin, at home in Guangzhou. ZOU ZHONGPIN / CHINA DAILY

A tough domestic and AFC Champions League schedule this year has limited the time he can spend at home.

"When we play away matches, I talk with my wife on the phone. After training and playing in Guangzhou, I always stay with my family," he said.

Cheng Yuansi, Conca's personal translator, is full of admiration for the Argentine.

"He has some qualities that I rarely find in Chinese men - kind-hearted, loving the family and, of course, doing the best in the field he is engaged in," Cheng said.