

Artist Interview

Peter Robinson

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I met Peter Robinson during the Xposure event in Sharjah. Calm and quietly attentive, he was seated inside an exhibition space displaying decades of his sports photography from his years as FIFA's selected photographer. After spending a few minutes looking through the work, he came over and, with the warmth and generosity for which he is known, asked about me and Ansel Magazine. That became the beginning of a short conversation built around a simple but difficult question: Among all these years of photographing sport, which image does he consider one of his finest — and why?

— If you had to choose only one photograph as one of your finest works, which would it be?

Peter Robinson:

Perhaps the photograph from the 1994 FIFA World Cup Final. I made it after the match in Pasadena, Los Angeles, when Italy lost to Brazil. On the right stands Franco Baresi, captain of Italy. He has come forward to receive a medal — but not the one he truly wanted. What mattered to me was not simply recording a sporting event. It was the emotional atmosphere between people in that moment. The World Cup trophy sits in the edge of the frame. That is what he really wanted, not the silver medal. It feels almost as though he cannot bear to look at it. On the opposite side stands the FIFA official placing the medal around his neck. What I have always loved in the photograph is the exchange of looks between them — as though they are speaking without words. It almost feels less like celebration and more like a quiet act of mourning. Then there is another detail: a young girl standing in the middle of the frame, smiling. Perhaps she was visiting the stadium for the first time and had no sense of the weight of victory or defeat. That smile adds another layer to the image.

— From a technical point of view, how was the photograph made?

Peter Robinson:

The Los Angeles light was harsh at that hour. The day before the match I brought people into position and tested the light. The shadows were terrible and I realised that on-camera flash would be the only solution. On the day itself I took only one frame of Baresi — just one. This was before digital cameras and endless bursts. The composition had already been decided. I held the camera and waited. I did not chase him and I did not move the frame. Then he arrived, lifted his head, looked ahead — and the relationship between the figures appeared. I pressed the shutter.

— So what makes this photograph special for you?

Peter Robinson:

Because of the strength of emotion inside it.

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