

## Interview of Estadio Accesible to Jesús Suárez, Member of Dépor, Technologist in Estrella de Galicia, Creator of the Escoita Project in Riazor and Lead Singer at Mar de Fondo

At Estadio Accesible we have been lucky enough to interview Jesús Suárez, Member of Dépor, Technologist in Estrella de Galicia, Creator of the Escoita Project and Lead Singer at Mar de Fondo. The Escoita Project allows blind fans to access audio-description of matches in near real time. His dream is that the Escoita Project becomes an essential project in any sporting stadium and for all cultural events in Spain. It all started by writing a poem when life put a stilt on him, but his determination and knowledge has led him to turn a problem within football, to a solution for society. He believes that training broadcasters at the university level is crucial to implementing this technology solution at the national level. In his view, the focus of clubs and agencies is on people with a physical disability, but unfortunately there are many invisible disabilities that are not even considered to this day.



1 Jesús Suarez - Credit: Bugliot.com

**Estadio Accesible:** To understand why you're a football fan, it would be interesting to know what led you to be so passionate about football. Not least, to write not only a song dedicated to Deportivo de La Coruña but two songs

**Jesús Suarez:** I honestly do not believe that my love and passion is for the sport of football, but that this passion comes from a team, their colors, a shield and a city, that's the team Real club Deportivo de a Coruña and the city of A Coruña. If I am honest to you, I am not aware of when this was awakened inside me, I think it is something that is carried inside, that is transmitted from parents to children and that surely my mother's love for the Dépor I have certainly acquired that passion.

As I was saying, modern football has led this sport to turn it into something commercial, with no more interest than for private entities to profit from this business. The fans who are the ones who dye the stadiums color and bring their passion for 90 minutes are the forgotten ones of this which is called modern football, they are not realizing that little by little they are killing this beautiful sport.

And as you tell me, it leads me to write 1906, well, the desire to be able to write on a piece of paper how I feel for my city, for my team and in this way being able to make this song I turn my feeling and that of many into something timeless, because the gift that music has is that it is immortal and will be there forever in every corner of my city.

Every time I sing 1906 it's like lightning strikes me, and six years later I keep singing this song and my goose bumps continue to get like the first time I did it.

**EA:** There is no doubt that the pandemic is affecting football fans and in particular the collective of fans with a disability, in your case how the pandemic has affected you as a football fan and singer

**JS:** Well, the case of football is complicated, now I have to follow the games on TV and well, the truth is that, for a visually impaired person, the narrators deduce that all the people who are watching the match can watch and therefore the blanks destroy us since we lose many times the notion of the game with comments that do not really narrate the match.

On the other hand, if I put the radio is still worse, the radios have become bar bars in which more than 5 commentators gather telling funny things, jokes or situations that have nothing to do with sport and therefore the original idea of radio, as it was born at the time has disappeared forever in the world of football. Radio is narrating for people who are watching Television and that's the concept that exists today.

In relation to how the pandemic affects music and culture, as it has been like the impact of a missile on the flotation base of the music world, everything has disappeared, direct, concerts, festivals, etc. In fact, this past year the third album of Mar de Fondo was going to come out and we had to postpone it, for me it makes no sense to take out a record when I will not be able to present it in front of friends and followers of the band.

**EA:** We'd like you to explain to us what a match day is like for you, from planning the trip from home until you return after the game

**JS:** Well, the truth is that it hasn't changed much, I go with my son Juan of 12 years, we leave the house an hour and a half before since we like to go for a snack beforehand, that's an amazing thing that causes me to go see the Dépor, I share with my son moments, talks, etc. We also like to enter the field 30 minutes in advance or so, we like to see the stadium empty, see how the players warm up and have Juan tell me the things that are happening during that time in front of my eyes.

As soon as the game starts I put my helmets on and from there I enter my world to understand what is happening through the audio description, at that moment I tell Juan not to talk to me much because if I do not want to lose the nation of the game.

As soon as it is over we give ourselves a hug regardless of the win or loss at the Dépor game, and we return home via one of the most beautiful places in all of Spain that is the promenade of a Coruña.

**EA:** When you arrive at Riazor Stadium, we would like to know if you receive any personal help when you arrive at the Stadium and if there are any accessibility managers/volunteers who take you to your usual seat

**JS:** Well no, I don't get any special treatment and for visually impaired people there is no support, no help within the stadium. This year as the Escoita service has been activated it is necessary to go to pick up the device in an area enabled for the project. In the same place where the audio devices are offered to us, fans with physical disabilities can get the support from volunteers of the Red Cross who help wheelchair users reach their reserved areas.



*2 Jesús Suárez – credit: DIARIO ABC*

**EA:** In your case, if you're carrying a guide dog, we'd like you to explain if there's a guide-dog regulation in the stadium. If it exists, what kind of rules such rules include. Not least, we would like to know if there are specific areas for guide dogs, their characteristics and capacity

**JS:** Honestly, I do not use a guide-dog, I do not think there is an area enabled for them, but I think talking to the club and they will enable an area so that both, me the user as would be my case, and my guide dog in case of using it. In the seating area where I am at the moment there would be no room for both, the hallways are very narrow and would not have a comfortable place for the guide-dog.

On the other hand, I suppose that the guide-dog will have the same rights as anywhere, a guide dog is considered with the same rights as a person, therefore, they would have to allow me to access with him and be able to place us in a comfortable place.

**EA:** At Riazor Stadium, what offer exists for visually, physically or mentally impaired fans in terms of locations reserved in general areas or in others such as VIP boxes

**JS:** For visual impairment since the beginning of 2020 the Escoita service has been enabled, it is a narration system through audio description using devices that are delivered to the fans at the entrance of the stadium by reservation of them a few days before the matches.

In relation to people with physical disabilities, there are areas enabled to be able to access the match and the stadium, and there are also Red Cross volunteers who at the entrance of the stadium, and notifying your presence in advance a few days before the match, just like the Escoita system, they accompany you to your seats.

**EA:** Does the Deportivo de la Coruña website offer facilities to access online content, buy tickets or some type of documents online in alternative / accessible formats to download?

**JS:** No, today it is not accessible either the websites, nor the social media networks that use images to warn of important information for members. I think, this is one of the important steps that must be taken not only by the club but by all the clubs in the country

**EA:** We'd like to know how many fans with disabilities regularly attend Riazor

**JS:** Well, the truth is that to this day I have no idea how many fans with disabilities can attend any given Sunday. What I really care too about is that all fans, regardless of their condition, can attend and all have the necessary resources are enabled to be able to enjoy the sporting event. Everyone should be the same [at a football stadium], I have not chosen to be blind.



3 Jesús Suarez– credit: DAILY ABC

**EA:** Going to the Escoita Project, we would like to know who, how and when this initiative arises

**JS:** Well, this project occurs to me attending a game of the Dépor B-team, the “Fabrill”, when I came to see that match, I realized that there was no broadcasting or narration of the game, and therefore, I spend 90 minutes looking at nobody, and it was the worst feeling I ever had as a disabled person and I had never felt that way.

When that happened to me and being an IT specialist, I got out of there promising to myself that I was going to come up with something so that no one would ever have that feeling that I had that day again, and that's how Escoita was born.

I had to make a lot of cold calling, I had to find my own funding for the project, and I was very lucky that in the end someone opened a door and gave me hope.

**EA:** Also, what exactly is the Escoita Project and how is it evolving in terms of quality of service for blind Dépor fans?

**JS:** Escoita is an audio description service based on PMR (private radio networks) technology that allows users through devices to access the narration that an announcer is carrying out [for visually impaired fans] within the stadium.

This narration, has no latency and therefore is not delayed as it does today with commercial radios, has no commercial ads since it is a non-profit system and also audio describes everything that is happening in front of our eyes.

Right now we are evolving the system to 5G technology and with the development of an APP users will be able to access the service through their own mobiles, without external elements and the clubs can be registered in the service and in this way it is fully scalable.

**EA:** Based on your experience and contacts Do you know other football clubs in Spain that offer similar services for fans with some kind of visual impairment? If yes, what do you know about the services they offer

**JS:** I have no idea, the truth, but I do think that the Escoita project is a pioneer in Spain and my dream is that it becomes a standard of communication and accessibility tool. Please note that it is valid to narrate any type of event [sport, cultural, etc.].

**EA:** Which agencies or organizations have funded your project or supported you in a variety of ways?

**JS:** Well, within this project, the Concello de A Coruña funded it, and as entities that support and have collaborated: Colegio de Ingenieros de Telecomunicaciones de Galicia, Universidad de A Coruña, Real Club Deportivo de A Coruña, ONCE and Radios Comerciales de A Coruña.

**EA:** How much would it cost to be able to offer this simultaneous audio-description service to another Spanish football club that was interested?

**JS:** Today with the Escoita 1.0 project it is only about the purchase of the devices, I can tell you that the investment that has been made has not exceeded 6,000 euros, and in addition the announcers are students of the University of A Coruña of the Master of Audiovisual Communication.



4 Jesús Suárez, – credit: Real Club Deportivo de la Coruña

**EA:** How important do you think is to have a good relationship with the club and the Board of Directors of Dépor? People like Angelines and José Luis Núñez at the club? Or the A Coruña Council with the support from former Sports-councillor Juan Ignacio Borrego?

**JS:** All of them have been very important in the success of the project, nothing is possible if you do not have the confidence and support of important entities of your city as they are all that you have named. Without them Escoita would never have seen the light and especially thanks to the former sports councillor Juan Ignacio Borrego, if he had not listened to me this project would never have started in this city.

**EA:** How important have the local media in A Coruña and Riazor.org for the project to succeed?

**JS:** Thanks to the support of all the city's media, their support, their narratives, their advice to the young university students who start [training this type of broadcasting] is amazing. I am very grateful to all of them for being always so kind, caring and having close contact with me and their involvement in the project has been superb.

**EA:** Do you think that being the Dépor in Second B and not in the First or Second Division of LaLiga has facilitated or been a drag to get this project forward?

**JS:** This project has nothing to do with football divisions, disabilities do not understand it and everyone should have the right to enjoy something they like, and society and public entities have to provide solutions.

**EA:** Do you also offer the service of Riazor Escoita for the matches of the Dépor Abanca (women's team)?

**JS:** To this day Escoita is installed in Riazor Stadium, the women's Dépor team does not usually play in the stadium, but we have already given some match of the women's team. In fact thanks to Escoita I was able to follow them last year in a Cup match against Valencia. Without this service I would never have gone to see them.

Keep in mind that the project started in February 2020 and in March 2020 everything was stopped by the pandemic. The idea is to implement the Escoita Project in the matches of other sports of the club like Basket Coruña, [Indoor Hockey] Liceo, as well as other club teams including the Fabril and the women's team.

**EA:** Finally, what legacy do you want for the Dépor and Riazor?

**JS:** What for me would be a dream is for Escoita to become an essential project in any football stadium [and cultural venue] in Spain. The fact that Riazor and Dépor have been the pioneers for me is a pride, this team and this city are top notch forever and forever it hurts whoever hurts.

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