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Calcio

A History of Italian Football

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The first history of Italian football to be written in English, ‘Calcio’ is a mix of serious analysis and comic storytelling, with vivid descriptions of games, goals, dives, missed penalties, riots and scandals in the richest and toughest league in the world.‘Calcio’ tells the story of Italian football from its origins in the 1890’s to the present day. It takes us through a history of great players and teams, of style, passion and success, but also of violence, cynicism, catenaccio tactics and corruption.We meet the personalities that have shaped this history – from the Italian heroes to the foreigners that failed, the model professionals to the mavericks. ‘Calcio’ evokes the triumphs (the 1982 World Cup victory) and the tragedies (Meroni, the 'Italian George Best', killed by his number one fan), set against a backdrop of paranoia and intrigue, in a country where the referee is seen as corrupt until proven otherwise.Calcio is no longer a game. It is sometimes difficult to define it as a sport. It is certainly big business and a fanatical civic religion. There is no moral code here. Winners are always right, losers always wrong. This history of Italian football reveals all about the richest and toughest league in the world.

Содержание

Calcio

A History of Italian Football

John Foot

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London, New York, Toronto and Sydney

For my dad, who loved football, and my son, who hates it

Author's Note

Readers are advised to consult the glossary at the end of the book.

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PREFACE

'Football is always late in making history'
GIOVANNI ARPINO and ALFIO CARUSO

I've never really forgiven Italian football, or Juventus, for buying my favourite player in 1980. Liam Brady was my hero and a footballing genius and I saw him from the North Bank as he scored against Manchester United in 1978. Later, I watched with awe as he destroyed Tottenham at White Hart Lane with one of the greatest goals ever seen on UK TV. Brady's last act for Arsenal was to miss a penalty in the ill-fated shoot-out that decided the Cup Winners Cup final with Valencia in 1980. I followed Brady's career in Italy religiously, waiting for signs that the prodigal son would return home. After two championships in two seasons with Juventus (the second of which was decided by Brady's ice-cool penalty on the last day) Liam was sacked in favour of Michel Platini. Surely, now, he would return to Highbury. But Italian football continued to employ him for another five years: at Sampdoria, Inter and finally even Ascoli. When Brady eventually came back to England he was a shadow of the player he had been, managing one more season with West Ham (where he scored a beautiful goal against Arsenal) before retiring and finally coming back to Highbury as youth coach.[1]

Italian football, then, stole my hero. Later, this interest in *calcio* (the Italian word for football) began to blossom when I moved to Milan in 1988 – ostensibly to study the origins of fascism in that ex-industrial city. My Italian was picked up largely through watching TV, and trying to follow the innumerable matches screened at that time. I started to buy the pink Italian sports daily – *La Gazzetta dello Sport.* My first vocabulary was football-linked: *calcio di rigore* – penalty; *penalty* – also penalty; *rimessa laterale* – throw in; *calcio di punizione* – free kick; *ammonizione* – booking; *calcio d'angolo* – corner; *corner* – also corner; *il mister* – the manager. Many of the terms seemed to be simply English words, although sometimes they had slightly different meanings. Other phrases were more difficult – *gamba tesa* – going into a tackle with your leg straight out; *espulsione* – sending off; *melina* – passing the ball around uselessly amongst the back four. I started to take the tram to one of the most stunning football stadiums in the world – the San Siro – at that time being refurbished for the upcoming 1990 World Cup.

In my first year in Milan, Inter easily won the championship under record-breaking manager Giovanni Trapattoni. I had found my team. Surely, they would go on to success after success. Moreover, they were the club supported by my future Milanese wife (and, perhaps even more crucially, my future mother-in-law). The good omen of Arsenal's last-gasp championship victory in the same season sealed my decision: it was the wrong one. Inter would not win another championship for 17 years, and even then in the most bizarre circumstances imaginable. In the early 1990s, however, AC Milan were the team to watch. Under the innovative tactical regime of manager Arrigo Sacchi, the city's other team played the most scintillating form of attacking football imaginable. *Catenaccio* (a defensive style of football, made popular in Italy) was rejected in favour of a fast-moving, aggressive game. Plus, Milan had the players to match this style of play. A Dutch trio dominated the early 1990s – dreadlocked Ruud Gullit (who flew back on the same plane as me to London on one occasion, and was followed around town by huge crowds of fans) provided pace, flair and explosive attacking skills. Frank Rijkaard was the midfield general (I also bumped into him at the airport – Milan is a small city) whilst up front prowled the most complete striker of his generation – Marco Van Basten. All this was supported from the back by two of the greatest defenders in football history – Franco Baresi and Paolo Maldini. Teams still played with sweepers when I arrived but Milan's success was to herald the death of that tradition. This was football from heaven. I also noticed that the team's president was a short, balding, charismatic businessman who smiled a lot and interfered with great frequency in his team's affairs. I was to see a lot more of this man through the 1990s. I even ended up studying him. His name? Silvio Berlusconi.

In 1989 AC Milan reached the European Cup final for the first time in twenty years, and they destroyed Steaua Bucharest (4–0). I watched the game on the colour TV in my room. Foolishly, I decided to get a bus across town after the match. The bus arrived, and then stopped after about 100 yards amidst a mass of delirious fans. The driver finally gave up all hope when people began climbing on the roof. The celebrations went on for days. In 1990, Milan won the European Cup again – and on the way to the final they took apart Real Madrid – 5–0 – with a stunning display of authority, skill and power. There was no doubt that Milan were the greatest team in the world at that time, and Van Basten and Gullit dominated the European Footballer of the Year award throughout the early 1990s.

At San Siro, the atmosphere was electric, and vastly different to my experiences following Arsenal and Plymouth Argyle in England. Orchestrated singing was organized by 'head' fans with megaphones, who spent their time watching their fellow fans, and not the game. Fireworks and flares greeted the arrival of the teams. From San Siro's towering terraces, you could see the whole pitch as if it were a chessboard. In anger, Italian fans did not just boo, or whistle: they went crazy. Cushions and more dangerous missiles were routinely hurled onto the pitch. Violence was common, just as the shock of Hillsborough was finally cleaning up the English game. I noticed with pleasure that there were very few racist chants at Italian matches. This was soon to change, and for the worse.

And then there were the rivalries – not so much the local Milan derby – but regional differences appeared to provide the opportunity for violence and conflict. Naples and their star player Maradona were particular hate-figures in the north. During the opening match of the 1990 World Cup, Maradona was booed by the huge crowd during Argentina's warm-up in the San Siro. Cameroon were the choice for the Italians and they duly won, 1–0. Maradona was to get his revenge in spectacular fashion in his adopted Naples, three weeks later, as his penalty knocked the hosts out of the tournament. Milan and Roma also had a long-running rivalry going. At an Italian cup semi-final, attended by 80,000 passionate fans in the San Siro, the tension was palpable. When Milan missed a last-minute penalty and lost, fights broke out. I left the stadium and walked towards the station. Suddenly, a stone flew past my head. I looked up; in front of me stood a line of riot police, complete with helmets, batons and, in some cases, guns. Behind me, I noticed a number of youths (Milan fans, not happy with the result) with handkerchiefs covering their faces. They were hurling rocks and sticks. What to do? Go back towards the fans, or forwards towards the police line? I decided on the latter option. For a second, the line parted to let me through, and then closed again. This whole semi-riot, which lasted some hours, was barely reported in the Italian press.

Media coverage of football was total, and impossible to ignore. Goals were analysed way into the night, from every possible angle, but so were offside decisions, and even lip-read words. This was normal. Referees were lambasted for errors of judgement, and routinely accused of corruption and favouritism. Players were lambasted for one bad performance, managers sacked after a couple of bad results, teams said to be 'in crisis, officially' after a couple of draws. Whole programmes consisted entirely of men shouting at each other about football, for hours. One such programme – *Il processo del lunedì* (Monday's Trial) – had been running since 1980. Local TV stations were also dominated by such low-budget programmes, concentrating largely on the Milan teams in my area, whose every game, training session and transfer was picked over in minute detail. I began to have conversations about football, quickly realizing that English football was simply not taken seriously in Italy. For Italians, English teams still played the long ball game, and the back four consisted of lanky defenders who would never get a game in Italy. When people asked me whom I supported and I told them, many replied, irritatingly, 'Aston Villa?' When I tried to explain who Arsenal were, I used Brady – but very few had heard of my club.

In addition, since the 1985 Heysel disaster, *all* English fans had been lumped together under the collective title of 'hooligans'. This was to prove a reputation that was very difficult to shake off. There were hardly any English players in the Italian league, and even fewer were a success. Milan's experiences with English players had been a near-complete disaster, with the honourable exceptions

of Ray Wilkins and the much-loved Joe Jordan. Luther Blissett's move to Italy had assumed mythical qualities. Blissett became famous for being bad; symbolizing what was seen as the low technical level in the English game.

Italians invariably assumed that their league was the best in the world. There is no doubt that Serie A was and is the *hardest* league to play in. The defenders and goalkeepers are simply the best on the planet, and the tactics are a combination of subtlety and brutality. Winning or losing is all-important in Italy, so if an attacker gets past you, he must be brought down. The 'tactical foul' is a way of life for Italian defenders – and not to be confused with the 'useless foul' from which your team takes no advantage. To be top scorer in Italy was truly a formidable task. To make things even more difficult, own goals were deemed until recently as any goal where a defender has merely touched, or brushed, the ball. Ian Rush, prolific in the English league for more than a decade, managed only seven goals in his single season with Juve. With the advent of the pressing game, there was less and less space for the *fantasisti* – those with great skill who created goals through genius and poetry. Hence the virtual exile of a whole series of discarded *fantasisti*, who became heroes abroad – Gianfranco Zola, Benito Carbone, Paolo di Canio. Even the genius of Roberto Baggio struggled to find space with a top club after his departure from Juventus in 1995. He later preferred to weave his magic in the provinces – with Bologna and Brescia. So many skilful players were produced by the Italian system, but very few were given a chance in the big teams. Winning – at all costs – was too important to allow for the luxury of inconsistency, or skill for skill's sake.

And then there was the pressure – from the media, the president and above all the fans, organized in groups known as *ultrà* since the 1970s and liable to turn nasty if things started to go wrong on the pitch. Inter sacked four managers in the 1998–9 season alone, largely thanks to *ultrà* campaigns. In 2001, enraged Inter fans petrol-bombed the team coach – with the players inside. Angry Naples fans stoned their captain's car as he drove down the motorway in 2003 and in that same season two games in Serie A were called off early due to fan rioting. In 2007 football grounds were closed all over Italy after a policeman was killed as fans rioted during and after a Catania-Palermo derby. Fans frequently go on strike, refusing to support their team or even turn up – they also display slogans attacking specific players, other fans, presidents and managers. Thousands turn up to training sessions, millions tune in to games. This is a country where the most-read daily is still the pink *La Gazzetta dello Sport* (which is flanked by two other sports dailies dealing largely in football as well as numerous monthlies and specialist publications) and where, until recently, millions of Italians did their version of the pools every week, spending billions of lire and then euros in the process. *Calcio* is no longer a game. It is sometimes difficult to define it as a sport. It is certainly very big business. A better way to see *calcio* is as a kind of fanatical civic religion – where loyalty is total and obsession the norm. Fair play seemed to me to be a concept absent from Italian football discourse. Diving was common and not particularly frowned upon – as long as it worked. In fact, commentators often praised the 'craftiness' of non-sportsmanship. There was no moral code here. Winners were always 'right', losers always wrong.

As the 1990s wore on, I quickly began to realize that football in Italy was not only a massive sporting phenomenon, but also something that reflected on, and affected, political, cultural and social trends. I started to understand that it was almost impossible to comprehend Italy without understanding football, and vice-versa. This conviction crystallized in 1994, when Silvio Berlusconi made a dramatic entrance into political life with an organization – *Forza Italia!* – whose very name was taken from a football chant, and whose language was dominated by footballing terminology. Berlusconi, in his own words, had 'taken the field', he had 'formed a team' and he used his footballing success to bolster his political consensus. Football and Italian politics were not only linked, they were symbiotic, and it was unclear where the division between the two lay, if such a division existed at all. This alone would be a good reason to study and recount the history of Italian football. When you add the sheer beauty of the game, the passion and the debate it provokes, every day, amongst millions

of people, the temptation to write this history became overwhelming. In May 2006, Italians were transfixed by what developed into one of the biggest scandals in the history of sport – and became known as *calciopoli* or occasionally *Moggiopoli* after its main protagonist, football fixer Luciano Moggi. Weeks later, their national team won its fourth World Cup. No writer could have dared to hope for such an extraordinary combination of success and squalor, skill and sleaze.

Sometimes, during the work on this book, I have felt like Malcolm McDowell in *A Clockwork Orange.* I have been forced to watch things that, in the end, have made me sick. I did not think it would be possible but, by the end, I had almost fallen out of love with football. After innumerable chat shows, post-match interviews, clichés, violence, racism, hysterical protests, dives and fake injuries, biased referees and corrupt presidents, I had almost had enough. As a kind of final affront, twenty-six years after Brady, Juventus signed Patrick Vieira, another Arsenal hero. But all this was never quite sufficient to stop me watching altogether. I kept going back, and, occasionally, the whole thing felt worthwhile. When Roberto Baggio scored his two-hundredth goal for example, or Adriano crashed in a left-foot shot, or Lilian Thuram, for the thousandth time in his career, trapped the ball, looked up, and passed it elegantly on to a midfielder. These moments, and many others, once made football the beautiful game. It cannot be described as beautiful any longer, especially in Italy, but all is not lost.

As with this opening chapter, the rest of *Calcio* will be organized around the themes which have dominated the thoughts of fans, players and football journalists: referees, teams and cities, managers and tactics, scandals, the media, foreigners, fans, violence, politics, the national team and money.

CHAPTER 1 *Calcio* and Football. Origins and Early History: 1880–1929

The first kicks

In the beginning there were the English. The first games on Italian soil of what we would recognize as football took place in the port towns of Livorno, Genoa, Palermo and Naples. Very little evidence exists of these impromptu games, apart from hearsay. Often they would simply be kickabouts amongst British sailors, perhaps even on the dockside, with some locals roped in to make up the numbers. Italy was on the way to and from India, and many British ships stopped off there. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 led to a boom in English communities on shipping routes. No records of actual football clubs exist until the 1880s and 1890s, and the official birth of *Italian* football is usually traced back to the employee of a British textile company, one Edoardo Bosio, who formed the first club in Turin in the late 1880s, using footballs he brought back with him from England.

Like everything about Italian football, even *these* origins are contested, controversial and politicized. This controversy begins with the very name used for football in Italy (and the title of this book). The nascent Italian football authorities gave the game an Italian name – *calcio* – in 1909. Previously, the organization which ran the game had been known as *Federazione Italiana Football.* This change was a politically inspired one. Nationalist ideals had already permeated those who ran the game in Italy, and there was hostility to foreign players. Hence the decision not to use an English term as was the norm elsewhere. The Germans had translated football into *Fussball*, whilst the French left the word as it was. But the choice of *calcio* was also historical. *Calcio Fiorentino* was a game, with a ball, and a pitch, which had been played in Florence during the Renaissance. The choice of *calcio* was an attempt by Italians to claim the game for their own. *They* had really invented what was now called football many hundreds of years earlier.

Under Benito Mussolini's fascist regime (1922–1943) this nationalization of football was taken much further. *Calcio Fiorentino* was not only identified as the precursor of modern football, but was reintroduced in Florence itself, amid much pomp and ceremony. The games were moved from the proletarian Piazza Santa Croce – where some original *calcio* tournaments had taken place – to the bourgeois Piazza della Signoria, and guidebooks made an explicit link between *Calcio Fiorentino* and football. Even some experts tended to buy this version of events. The great Italian football journalist, Gianni Brera, wrote in his monumental history of *calcio* that the English had merely 'reinvented' the game.[1] Not all went along with this flagrant rewriting of history, however. One journalist refused to use the new term, arguing that he would still write 'football', and that the use of *calcio* offended the traditions linked to the ancient game played in Florence. Over time, despite this small rebellion, *calcio* did become the official word for Italian football.

There was one small problem here. *Calcio Fiorentino* bore very little resemblance to modern football. Ball games had been played for centuries in Italy and the church authorities in Pisa, in 1300 or thereabouts, had banned such games on their cathedral steps. In its original form, *calcio* had been played first by noblemen, and then increasingly by the plebs, in Florentine public squares, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Games tended to take place around important court events. The rules were lax, when they existed at all. In the version of the game that has survived there were two teams (of 27 players each, vaguely set up in a kind of 9–9-9 formation), a measured pitch, and six referees who stood in a small stand on the side of the pitch. Much else was left to the players themselves. The ball was moved by hand or by foot, but could not be thrown, apart from by the three 'goalkeepers' at the back, and points were scored by getting the ball across the opponent's end line, *or* into a kind of goal. Most forms of violence were permitted.

Pictures of *Calcio Fiorentino* show two teams massed together in the centre of a field or piazza, with a few spectators looking on. The players are wearing hats, and some lie injured on the ground. Musicians beat drums in the background. Later, re-inventions of the game codified a whole series of elaborate rules, but *Calcio Fiorentino* itself had been banned because of the increasing violence during and around matches. Ancient signs forbidding ball games can still be seen in some Florentine squares.

A version of *Calcio Fiorentino* is still played in Florence, with games taking place in the spring and summer and attracting significant numbers of tourists and locals. The tournament is now played in its original setting in Santa Croce. To watch a game is a bit like witnessing a combination of pub brawl, rugby match and medieval re-enactment. 'Players' spend much of the time wrestling with an opponent in complete isolation from the ball or the game itself. The 2005 tournament was suspended after the violence became so bad that one team simply walked off. In its 1930s reincarnation, and its current touristy form, *calcio* has been adapted to *appear more like football.* Games now last for 50 minutes and have various levels of officialdom. Team captains are given the task of stopping fights and calming down their own players and winning teams are rewarded with a purebred cow. So modern is the *Calcio Fiorentino* of today that it has its own, highly elaborate, set of anti-doping rules, downloadable from the internet. *Calcio Fiorentino* players can now be banned for more than two years for taking a series of banned substances, including marijuana.

Calcio Fiorentino, therefore, tells us little or nothing about the history of Italian soccer. Fascism had re-invented a tradition. To return to the real history of soccer in Italy, we need to go back to the English, and to those with links to England.

Pioneers

Edoardo Bosio was born in Turin in 1864. He worked for the textile firm Thomas Adams (based in Nottingham), and had travelled widely in the UK and elsewhere. He took a liking to football in England, where it was already a highly popular and professional sport, and decided to import the game to Turin. In 1891 he formed the first soccer team in Italy from players drawn from his workplace. The club was called International Football Club. One problem for Bosio was that his team had nobody to play against. There were no football federations, no written rules, no referees, no pitches. Games were similar to park kickabouts. In 1891 another English player – Herbert Kilpin – reported on a match he had witnessed in Turin. 'I noticed two curious things: first, there was no sign of a referee. Second, as the game continued, our opponents' team got bigger and bigger. Every so often someone from the crowd came on to the pitch, with great enthusiasm. Soon we found ourselves playing against a team of at least twenty players.'

Quickly other pioneers took up Bosio's lead and formed clubs in Turin and elsewhere. In September 1893 (a date which is still, for many, the real birth date of *calcio*) the Genoa Cricket and Football Club was set up by British consular officials. No Italians could be members. A year later, another club was formed in Turin, the Football Club Torinese. These were small clubs, who rarely travelled beyond their own city borders. For a short time, even cricket was more popular than football.

James Richardson Spensley

In 1897, an English maritime doctor, James Spensley, arrived in Genoa to look after the sailors on passing coal ships. A polyglot, philanthropist and scouting enthusiast, born in London's Stoke Newington, thirty years earlier, he was also a football devotee who organized the first real game in Italy. This pioneering match was between Genoa and Football Club Torinese in 1898, with a certain Reverend Richard Douglas officiating. In the meantime Genoa had changed their rules, on Spensley's insistence, to allow Italians to play and be members. A quota system was introduced to protect the English. Italians would not be allowed to make up more than half of the total membership of the club.

Numerous details survive from that historic first game: Genoa-Football Club Torinese, 6 January 1898. We know that 154 tickets were sold at the full price of one lira and 23 at half-price and that 84 people paid extra for numbered seats and that the whole event made a profit of over 100 lire. The police were present and drinks were available. The referee's whistle cost 2.5 lire while the doorkeeper was paid a mere one lira for a day's work. The Turin team took home a victory, and it appears that at the return match a decision was made to form an Italian football federation. This nascent body then set about preparing the first Italian championship, for May of the same year. Genoa retains its name to this day – despite being pressured to Italianize, along with all clubs with foreign titles – under fascism. Spensley is remembered with affection in the city and in the 1970s a plaque was unveiled in his honour, on the wall of his house.[2] There is still a Genoa club Spensley amongst the many supporters' clubs linked to the oldest team in Italy.

The first championship

In May 1898, Italy's first football championship took place in Turin, in one day. Official records date from here. Genoa's victory in 1898 thus *counts as a championship success*, with the same statistical weight as that of 2004. The three-month-old Italian football federation brought together four teams for the tournament, three of whom were from Turin, along with Genoa.

For many years, championships were not fought out in a modern, league-type system but through 'challenges' similar to short cup competitions. All three matches in 1898 were played in a field on the edge of Turin, which bore little resemblance to the industrial city that was to sprawl across the Piedmont plains in the twentieth century. Players from all four teams took trams to the pitch and the first championship game was a derby, between two Turin-based clubs. Played at nine in the morning on 8 May, it finished 1–0 to Internazionale di Torino with John (Jim) Savage, who was a marquis and the team captain, scoring the winner.[3] Genoa (in white shirts) won their semi-final against Ginnastica di Torino 2–1 and the final, against Internazionale (at three in the afternoon, after a sandwich lunch), by the same score, after extra-time. Spensley was in goal for Genoa. The team contained three other British players and at least five foreigners. Genoa took home a cup – donated by the Duke of the Abruzzi – and each player was given a gold medal.

Italy's first football champions were therefore a club with an English name, Genoa. There were only around 50 spectators for the semi-finals and little over 100 for the final. As well as a referee (whose name remains unknown) there were two seated 'line-judges' whose job it was to adjudicate if the ball had crossed the goal line, or not, as there were no goal nets. According to football historian Antonio Ghirelli, the crowd cheered their teams and even fought briefly amongst themselves. They also booed the referee, 'a habit which would continue', he dryly notes.[4] The total takings were 197 lire. Football was way down the list of popular sports in Italy at the turn of the century, coming something like seventh in the reporting hierarchies in the newborn sports press. Cycling, riding, motor sports and hunting were all far more popular pastimes.

The small crowd was understandable. Many people had other things on their minds. May 1898 was not a particularly happy time for Italian society as a whole. As Genoa celebrated its first championship in Turin, Milan was in chaos. Bread riots had led to barricades going up across the city. The government decided to repress the protests and the army was sent in. To this day, nobody knows how many protestors (and bystanders) were killed, but modest estimates put the number at 400. Martial law was declared, soldiers camped in Milan's central Piazza del Duomo and mass arrests were carried out, including priests and moderate reformists. King Umberto I rewarded General Bava Beccaris, at the head of the military operation, with a special medal.[5] All eyes were on Milan, as Italian society tore itself apart, and little attention was given to three ninety-minute games on the dusty periphery of Turin.

Paleo-calcio. Rules, Managers, Foreigners, Sundays

The early game in Italy – which we might call *paleo-calcio* – was poles apart from the sport you witness if you turn on your satellite TV station today, or even pop round to your local football pitch. There were no managers of any sort (although people similar to managers began to emerge quite quickly, in some accounts as early as 1901), no training beyond a few shots with the ball, and the players were all, to a man, amateurs. There were no stadiums, no real tactics, the ball was heavy and goalkeepers didn't even attempt to catch it. Punching or kicking out were much preferred. Kit was made up of long-sleeved shirts, often with buttons. Many essential items were imported from England – balls, shirts, boots. Shorts were long, and trousers were often worn, as were caps. There were no changing rooms, so players usually turned up, and went home, already changed.

Many rules in place at the birth of *calcio* were dissimilar to those that govern today's game. A player was offside if, when the ball was played, there were fewer than three players between him and the goal and until 1907, the offside rule applied to the whole pitch. After that date, you could not be offside in your own half. For many years, a draw usually led to a replay, not extra-time. Disciplinary rules were rudimentary. Pitch invasions led to replays, not sanctions (thereby encouraging more pitch invasions). There were no shirt numbers until the 1939–40 season and no substitutes at all until 1968. Early Italian football history was also dominated by foreign players, presidents, clubs, entrepreneurs, referees and words, and above all by the English, the Swiss, the Germans and the French.

From the start, matches were often played on Sundays, despite the fact that Italy was a Catholic country. The reason for this anomaly was simple. Most people worked on Saturdays, and the battle for an 'English Saturday' – one without work – was one of the historic demands of Italy's nascent trade union movement in the early twentieth century. Later, the Church was to complain about this tradition (which is also true of Catholic Spain). Until the 1990s, when Pay-TV destroyed the rites and rhythms of the great Italian football Sunday, the Sunday afternoon match formed a central part of Italian culture. Some fans went to games, partaking in the physical act of watching their team. Others hung around outside stadiums, trying to get in free or just lapping up the atmosphere. Many others simply waited for news, or visited bars. Once radio became widespread, the little transistor became a key element of the classic Sunday family outing, pressed as it often was to the ear of the father, or listened to through a primitive plastic earpiece. With the advent of TV, the afternoon outing had to be cut short in order to get back in time for *Ninetieth minute*, a programme with short reports on all games, transmitted at about 18.30.

Spensley and the Reign of Genoa, 1898–1904

James Richardson Spensley's Genoa team went on to dominate early Italian football history, winning the title in 1899, 1900, 1902, 1903 and 1904. The doctor played in goal in all of these finals apart from 1899, when he moved to left back to allow one of only two Italians in that particular team to take over between the posts. Spensley, the first name on the first team sheet of the first official game in Italy, retired as a player in 1906. He then became one of the earliest referees in the Italian game and a key member of the embryonic football associations. It is not clear what kind of managerial role Spensley played, if any. Did he select the team? Did the team train at all? Nobody really knows. But, being captain, we can assume that some kind of leadership was provided by the doctor and some Italian histories even list Spensley as a kind of modern coach of Genoa. This detail is an example of the temptation to read back football history, imposing the structure of the modern game onto that of the past. When war broke out in 1914 – although Italy did not join until May 1915 – Spensley signed up as a military doctor. He died in agony in a hospital in Germany, from injuries sustained, it is said, whilst tending to an enemy soldier.

In the photos that survive of James Spensley, the doctor-goalie is wearing a white shirt (not what we would think of as a football top – but a real *shirt*) and his sleeves are rolled up. His shorts reach down to below his knees. He is not particularly tall and his boots appear to be normal boots, without laces. He has no gloves and sports an impressive beard and moustache. The goal, behind him, has no net. In England, by this time, the game had taken on many aspects of modern football. Italy was still in the dark ages, in footballing terms, as the twentieth century began.

The big teams are born. Juventus, Milan, Internazionale, Torino

Slowly, but inexorably, *calcio* grew in influence and importance. The second championship lasted three days, the third in 1900 twenty days. Other cities became football centres – above all Milan, traditional rival to Turin as Italy's football capital. The infrastructures associated with the modern game began to take shape. Clubs formed all over the country, including in the south, and the business possibilities of the game also became evident.

In November 1897 a group of school students from the prestigious Massimo D'Azeglio school in the centre of Turin – a school attended over the years by such Turin luminaries as FIAT magnate Gianni Agnelli and Primo Levi – met to organize the foundation of a new Turin sports club. They settled on a Latin name – Juventus – 'youth'. What was to be the biggest club in the history of Italian football became a *calcio* team in 1899 – Juventus Football Club. The famous black-and-white shirts came to Turin – allegedly – via an English referee called Harry Goodley.[6] Given the task of buying some football kit in England, he sent back Notts County's, which thus became the black-and-white of the Turin team.[7] Juventus won their first championship in 1905, by one point from Genoa. It was about this time that shirts and other items of kit began to be produced in Italy, and not simply imported from England. In 1907 Juventus pulled out of the playoff final in protest against a change of venue. They were not to win the title again until 1926.

The early history of Turinese football was extremely complicated but began to take shape in 1906 with the formation of a second, unified, Turin club to rival Juventus. Torino Football Club was set up in a beer hall by 'twenty or so Swiss men with bowler hats and a lot of good will' (Marco Cassardo).[8] Torino's first ever official game was a derby victory in 1907, although the club's fans would have to wait until 1928 for their first championship success. Since then, Torino's history has been intimately linked to that of its hated, rich and envied cousins. Torino's colours were claret red – leading to one of the club's nicknames (along with *Toro*, the bull, their symbol) – the *granata.* Many of *calcio*'s greatest, most controversial and most tragic moments were to be associated with the extraordinary history of Torino.

In 1899 a group of Milanese industrialists and English and Swiss footballers in alliance with the local *Mediolanum* gymnastic society created the Milan Cricket and Football Club. Milan had rapid success, winning their first championship in May 1901. The team's most influential early player was Herbert Kilpin. Like Bosio in Turin and Spensley in Genoa, Kilpin played a pioneering role in the development of Milanese *calcio.* In his native Nottingham he had played in a team named after the Italian nationalist leader Giuseppe Garibaldi, complete with red shirts. A minor player in England, he became a legend in Italy – perhaps the first real football star – underlining the huge gap in the level of play in that early period.

As a utility player, Kilpin popped up in defence, midfield and in attack, and was captain of Milan for ten years. His nickname was 'Il Lord'. Legend also relates that he chose the team's red-and-black shirts. There is some controversy over the team's 'Devils' nickname, however. Relatives of Kilpin argue that it was his Protestantism, in a Catholic country, which led to the epithet.[9] Kilpin is supposed to have said that 'our shirts must be red because we are devils. Let's put in some black to give everyone a fright.' Kilpin's Milan team won three championships, and might well have claimed a fourth if it were not for a split in the football federation (over the question of foreign players) in 1908.[10] Another oft-repeated story (first spread by Kilpin himself, and then rewritten with poetic licence by Gianni Brera) is that he abandoned his own marriage party to play a game in Genoa, whereupon he broke his nose. The most famous of all early footballers, he played up to the age of 43, and then became a referee. According to legendary Italian national manager Vittorio Pozzo, Kilpin liked a drink, and used to keep a bottle of 'Black and White' whisky in a hole behind the goal. Kilpin,

again according to Pozzo, claimed that the only way to forget a conceded goal was to drink a sip of the hard stuff. When he died in 1916 the sports press was moved to hyperbole: '[Kilpin]…a magic name, which moved the first passionate crowds to sporting delirium…a name which encapsulates the history of our football'.[11]

Just how very different the early game was from today can also be seen by looking at Kilpin's official record for Milan. He played a mere seventeen championship games (with seven goals) between 1899 and 1906, for which he was awarded three titles. Early photographs show Kilpin running for the ball in a wide field with scattered fans looking on and some half-built houses in the background. In another famous photo Kilpin is decked out in full Milan kit, including long white trousers, long black socks, long-sleeved Milan shirt with buttons and Milan cap.

Kilpin left a very rare series of anecdotes about the early game, written just before his death in 1916. He relates that 500 fans turned up in 1900 in the pouring rain for Milan's first ever match, and tells the tale of a remarkable game in something called the Negrotto Cup. In Kilpin's version (the only one we have) Milan's goalkeeper had brought a chair onto the pitch with him as he had nothing to do all game. There he sat, cross-legged, smoking a series of cigarettes and sporting a straw hat, as the goals went in at the other end. 'In the closing stages', relates Kilpin, 'he was bored to death. He asked me, "Can't I play a bit as well?" I let him leave the goal, he went up front and scored…the twentieth goal.' Milan duly won the match, 20–0.

Too old for the regular army, Kilpin remained in Italy after the outbreak of World War One and died in mysterious circumstances in 1916. It was only in 1928 that he was given a proper burial, thanks to an anonymous donor. His tomb was unmarked, and its location unknown, until the 1990s when a dedicated Milan fan decided to find his club's founder. After scouring the Protestant and non-Catholic sectors of sixteen sites across Italy he finally discovered Kilpin in the city's vast, flat, municipal cemetery. AC Milan paid for a proper tombstone, and Kilpin was re-buried in the city's beautiful monumental graveyard.

In 1908, a split from Milan led to the formation of a new Milanese team, Internazionale Football Club. An artist, Giorgio Muggiani, along with 42 other rebels, organized the historic meeting in a city-centre restaurant called The Clock.[12] Fanatical Inter fan Giuseppe Prisco – who was the team's lawyer in the 1960s – later joked that 'everyone knows that we were born from a split with Milan: well, we really came from nowhere'. It appears that the motives behind the split were many, but were dominated by a discussion over the role of foreigners (after the end of the Kilpin era) and personal tensions. Inter's vaguely communist name hinted at the squad's non-nationalist intentions, confirmed by their first team, which contained eight Swiss players.

On the field, Internazionale enjoyed almost immediate success. In 1910, in their first title-winning year, Inter crushed their 'cousins' twice in the derby; 5–0 and 5–1. Inter had won their first championship just two years after their formation, amid great controversy over the preponderance of foreign players in their side. According to the history books, Internazionale introduced a new playing style, based upon short passing and stylish touches. Their play was certainly attacking, as their goals tally shows (they scored 55 goals against the 46 of second-placed Pro Vercelli). Inter took the field in the Arena, an impressive amphitheatre built by Napoleon in the early nineteenth century.

A photo of the Inter team of 1909 shows ten men in striped shirts, one with a large badge on his left chest (with a cross) – the captain. All the players sport moustaches and there appear to be two goalkeepers dressed in white. Another team member boasts an impressive potbelly. The championship portrait of 1910 is far more professional. Only the team are in the photo, Virgilio Fossati, the captain, is in the middle with a ball under his arm (and he has the physical shape of a modern player), whilst the others stand in formation around him. The eccentric goalkeeper – Piero Campelli, only sixteen at the time – the first player in his position to 'catch' the ball, instead of simply hoofing or punching it away – stands behind with his hands up holding a ball. The other star of that team is absent from this particular photo. Ermanno Aebi was a Swiss-Italian (born in

Milan, his mother was Italian, his father Swiss), who learnt the game at school in Switzerland. He became a skilful attacking midfielder, scoring 100 goals in ten seasons with Inter, and winning two championships. Aebi was perhaps the first of a long line of stylish midfielders in the Italian game, who were to be at the centre of criticism, time and again, for their lack of application and *grinta* – 'grit'. Aebi was known, in fact, by the nickname of *signorina* – 'miss' or 'little lady'. Inter's second championship was not to come until 1920, after a series of mediocre seasons. The birth of Inter began the tradition of one of the world's great derbies – Milan-Inter.

In 1928, Internazionale merged with another Milanese club to form Ambrosiana. Usually interpreted as acquiescence to fascist diktat (against *all* foreign names and words) this fusion was probably more of a financial move. After the war, Inter returned to their original name and colours and they continued to play at the Arena, right in the centre of Milan, until 1947. AC Milan, after 1926, had their home in the newly constructed San Siro stadium, on the northern edge of the metropolis. Since 1947–1948, the two clubs have shared the magnificent San Siro, which is sometimes compared to the city's most famous cultural arena of all – as La Scala of football.

L'Italia. The National Team and the Reading Tour

Italy's national team began playing internationals in 1910, and the enthusiasm that surrounded them from the start was symptomatic of, and contributed to, the rapid growth of *calcio* after World War One. Yet, the early Italian teams were extremely weak in comparison with the major footballing nations of the time. Despite thrashing France and edging past Belgium, Italy were much less strong than Austria and Hungary. In the 1912 Olympics Italy lost to Finland and were crushed by Austria 5–1, although they managed to beat Sweden. With England, whom they did not meet at an international level until 1933, there was simply no comparison. Reading FC, a relatively minor club, toured Italy in May 1913. At the time, Reading had just finished eighth in the Southern League Division One.[13]

Reading took nearly two days to reach Genoa, where they thrashed the local team, 4–2. The next day it was the turn of Milan, who were dispatched 5–0, after Reading were four up within half an hour. Casale, who were to win the championship the following year, actually beat Reading, 2–1, but their pitch was so small that its width was close to that of a modern penalty area. On 15 May – their fourth match in five days – Reading bounced back. They destroyed Pro Vercelli – champions of Italy, and unbeaten for eighteen months – 6–0. On the following Sunday, in Turin, a match was organized between Italy and Reading. The English team won, 2–0, in front of 15,000 spectators. This was no scratch Italian team, but one with eight Vercelli players. Italy would take time to become a force on the world stage, but some talented players were emerging. Attilio Fresia of Genoa so impressed Reading that they signed him the following season, making him the first Italian to take part in professional football in England. He was not a success and moved on – to Clapham Common, for ten pounds – without ever making a first-team appearance. Reading's Italian tour made an eighteen-pound profit.

Despite its low technical level the Italian team, almost from the start, attracted large crowds and provoked widespread interest in the game. *Calcio* as a mass game was created in part through the efforts and the popularity of the national team. Rapid progress was also made in coaching and training systems after World War One so that, by the 1920s, Italy was able to challenge for major honours on the world stage.

Calcio and World War One

Italy entered the war in 1915 following a series of violent pro-war demonstrations by a radical nationalist minority. The majority of Italians were opposed to the war and millions of peasants were forced to fight in terrible conditions under officers who spoke a language – Italian – that very few of them understood. Most Italians still conversed in local dialects. Thanks largely to the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Italy was able to force a victorious armistice in November 1918. In return for relatively tiny tracts of new land, 571,000 Italians had died and over 450,000 had been seriously wounded. War lacerated Italian society, creating divisions that were to lead to near-civil war and the destruction of her fragile democracy in the 1920s.

Instead of signalling the start of games on 23 May 1915, referees all over the country announced the suspension of the tournament. A day later, war was declared against Austria-Hungary.[14] The conflict took a terrible toll on young Italian players who were called up. Virgilio Fossati, captain of Inter and the Italian national team, was killed on Christmas Day, at the age of 25. In all 26 players and staff from Inter lost their lives in the war, making their 1920 championship victory appear something of a miracle.[15] Only two players played in both the 1910 and 1920 Internazionale championship teams.

During the war, Italian nationalists attempted to mobilize sport behind the war effort. Soldiers were anxious to read about sport and special sports papers were produced for them to browse through. Soldiers also played football at the front and appeals were made for footballs to be sent out to them. *Sports Illustrated* produced a war issue that compared the conflict to a vast game 'in which there are no laws and the spectators are also actors'. With time, this paper became less and less about sport and more and more about war propaganda. Fascism's use of sport as a potent propaganda weapon in the 1930s was prefigured in this period of international conflict.

Although the official championship had been called off at the start of the war, competitive football continued through a series of cup competitions. All the big teams were involved, although crowds were small, judging by the photos. Players were still being paid, much to the chagrin of the sports press, who complained that 'nasty professionalism has still not disappeared'. There were even outbreaks of crowd trouble, 'the usual fights'. In the reports of these games, *calcio* appears to be far more modern than during the 'heroic' phase of its growth. The players have the physical shape of modern footballers, the kit is smaller and less baggy and includes knee bandages, headbands and goalkeeping gloves. Football photographers were also improving. In the early photos, the ball was a rare sight – and papers would use crude photo montages to show 'goals'. Now they had begun to capture goals, saves, tackles and even fights between players. Another modern development was advertising around the stadium. Football had become a business.

In 1919 the football championship began again in earnest and the sport went through a period of considerable expansion. After the war the foreign dominance on the field began to wane, although foreign players continued to arrive, whilst the technical side of the game began to be controlled by non-Italian coaches and managers. Foreign managers were brought in by most of the big clubs after the war and many enjoyed immediate success. Symbols became important as *calcio* invented its own history made up of a mix of tradition and myth. From the 1923–24 season onwards, the championship-winning team had a *scudetto* (shield) symbol – with the colours of the national flag – sewn onto their shirts. The shield-patch remained there for the whole following season, and the word *scudetto* began to rival that of *titolo* or *campionato.*

Running the Game. The Italian Football Federations. Splits and Reunions

We have seen that the first Italian football federation had been formed in 1898 and had organized the first championships, which slowly expanded from the minor one-day tournament of that year. In 1909 the federation changed its name to the FIGC (*Federazione Italiana del Giuoco del Calcio*) making *calcio* the official Italian term for football. That year also saw the adoption of a rule book and federal statutes. Referees were also brought under the auspices of a special commission. For the first time, relegation and promotion were introduced.

Almost from the beginning of the history of *calcio*, the 'problem' of foreign players produced heated debate. The early championships saw teams with English, Belgian, Swiss and German players in key positions. Genoa and Inter were often criticized for their preponderance of foreign players. In part, this was simply jealousy, but politics was also important. Italian nationalists argued that the domestic game should be reserved for Italians.

In 1908, the football federation took a radical step – all teams with foreign players would be excluded from the main championship and a special competition would be reserved for them. In protest, a series of big teams pulled out altogether, including Milan, Torino and Genoa. The foreigner ban was seen by the Milanese clubs as a crude attempt to take their power away, on and off the field. Milan were particularly angry as their chance of winning the special Spensley Cup, awarded for three successive championship victories, had been removed by diktat.

Under pressure again, after the farcical failure of the Italian-only championship, the federation re-admitted foreigners the following year, but the issue continued to provoke bitter debate. A gesture was made towards Milan, who were awarded the Spensley Cup without having actually won it. In 1910, Inter's championship victory was marked by controversy over the role of Aebi, an elegant Swiss-Italian player whose citizenship was called into question. These battles were also over territory (the head offices of the football federation kept shifting from city to city, and in particular between Milan and Turin) and about control over what was becoming big business. The world of *calcio* was, right from the start, riven by splits, controversies, rivalries and acrimonious debate. It was rare for a championship to go by without insubordination by one club or another and the federation struggled to impose its authority.

Violence and Fans. The early years

Violence was part of *calcio* from the very beginning. Fights in the crowd were reported during the first ever championship tournament, the one-day affair in Turin in 1898, and violence began to afflict the game almost from the start. Football historian Ghirelli writes of pitch invasions during a match between Genoa and Juventus in 1905, which led to an immediate replay, and of stone-throwing during other early games.[16]

Between 1911 and 1914, a number of incidents marred games. Stones were hurled at a referee in 1912 in a match between Genovese team Andrea Doria and Inter. In December 1913 another referee was forced to run away from angry supporters in a match at Novara. A photo survives of this incident, depicting a number of men with straw hats milling around on the pitch, and a bemused goalkeeper-onlooker. Casale and Inter fans fought each other on the pitch in June 1914. Some of this violence was linked to actual games, some to local rivalries, and some to gambling, which was already widespread. Pitch invasions became commonplace, such as in a match between two Rome teams in June 1914 and in a Tuscan match in January of the same year, when shots were fired and stones thrown during a Livorno—Pisa derby.

In the brutal atmosphere of post-war Italy, football violence exploded on and off the field. For Ghirelli, there was a series of episodes that 'veered between farce and the time of the Wild West'.[17] Rinaldo Barlassina, one of the most prominent Italian referees at the time, was the victim of stone-throwing during a match at Casale. After refusing to give a penalty, Barlassina used an umbrella to protect himself and he emerged unhurt. Ghirelli comments that 'it is unclear if this was thanks to his stoicism or to the fact that the stones had run out'.[18] Another referee was attacked by angry fans on his way home after a game at Modena.

In February 1920, a pitch invasion interrupted Pro Vercelli-Genoa and Guido Ara, a Vercelli midfielder, was hit by an angry fan. A rare photo survives of this incident, with supporters running towards the referee whilst the players flee. In the background, a number of fans have clambered up trees in order to see the match. In 1921 Pro Vercelli were again involved, this time against Inter, in Milan. In the first half, an Inter player was seriously injured. The home crowd blamed Vercelli's players. In the second half the atmosphere was 'electric' but Vercelli continued their 'dirty play', according to press reports. Finally, Vercelli's captain was sent off. Another injury followed – this time a broken leg – and the players squared up to each other. After a pitch invasion the referee took refuge in the dressing room. The Vercelli player blamed for the incidents was banned for six months and the match was never replayed.

Footballers also became directly involved in the political violence which tormented Italy after the war. Aldo Milano, 24, was the third of four brothers who all played for Pro Vercelli before and after the war. Milano the Third, as he was known, was also a militant fascist. One night, in January 1921, a group of Vercelli fascists decided to visit another nearby town to carry out a mission – the removal of a plaque that was seen as insulting to the war dead. Symbols were important in post-war Italy, and could get you killed. Socialists cried 'down with the war-mongers' and attacked those seen as responsible for the conflict, whilst nationalists and fascists flew the Italian flag and exalted the 'heroes' from the trenches. That fateful night, Milano the Third was helping the others remove the plaque in question when a local government doorkeeper shot him. Here, as ever, versions differ. Some claim that he was taken to hospital, but nothing could be done; others that his body was left on the street all night.

Aldo Milano had played just over twenty games for Pro Vercelli, who threatened to abandon the championship altogether before deciding to continue. Local fascists were quick to exploit the death of Milano, making him into the latest of a series of 'fascist martyrs', and the local fascist

branch was immediately renamed in his honour. As on other occasions, the fascists 'organized commemorations…through which they tried to wipe out the memory of the socialist dead, whose numbers were far greater'.[19] This time, the setting for these commemorations was a football pitch.

The most violent *calcio*-related moment of the whole post-war period was *connected* to football, but was not really *about* football. Viareggio's 'red days' of 1920 reflected the spirit of the times. In this dramatic case, football was more of an excuse for, and not the cause of, the violence.

Revolution. Viareggio's 'red days' of 1920

'Revolution, well before it is a "thing", is an emotion' – *Avanti!* (Socialist Party newspaper) comment on the 'Viareggio days', May 1920

Viareggio is a sleepy, elegant seaside town in Tuscany, famed for its long beaches, its February carnival, its liberty architecture and its *bagni*; institutionalized strips of beach where the rich and the semi-famous can bathe in relative privacy. The town has twice in its history had an impact on the history of *calcio.* In 1926, the new 'fascist' football federation constitution – known as the Viareggio Charter – was drawn up there and in the post-war period a celebrated young players' tournament was organized (and still takes place) in the town. In 1920, however, at the height of the *biennio rosso* – Italy's 'two red years' – a football match in Viareggio was enough to spark a kind of local revolution.

The story begins in Lucca, the beautiful walled city just inland of Viareggio, where the local team took the field against Sporting Club Viareggio in April 1920. According to reports, the away fans were greeted with 'hostility and violence'. They vowed to get their revenge in the return match, planned for May. Worried about possible trouble, the authorities and the club advised all Lucca fans to stay at home. Only a tiny number made the trip to Viareggio. The referee was from Lucca, and he 'failed to appear impartial', according to press reports, during the game. As if to balance things up, a war hero called Augusto Morganti, from Viareggio, ran the line. Lucca came back from 2–0 down to draw level towards the end of the game, and this result was 'blamed' by the local fans on the referee. With the match drawing to a close, an argument erupted between the linesman and a Lucca player. The referee decided to end the game early, but Morganti was not of the same opinion. Both sets of players took the opportunity to settle some scores, laying into each other. This was the signal for a mass pitch invasion, and an 'enormous fight'. The few *carabinieri* (military police) who were present managed to rescue the Lucca players from the hostile crowd, and pushed the Viareggio fans back outside into the street.

News reached the nearby *carabinieri* barracks, and more men were dispatched to the scene. They arrived to find the crowd attempting to re-enter the stadium, and were greeted with whistles and threats. At this point, the facts are unclear. One policeman, it appears, lost his head (he claimed he was threatened) and shot Morganti – the locally-born linesman – at close range in the neck, killing him immediately. This tragedy enraged the crowd, and the *carabinieri* were chased away. Meanwhile, Lucca's players and their fans slipped out of a back door, and left town – they were forced to walk for twenty kilometres to the next station. In Viareggio the crowd turned its attention to more serious matters.

Arms were seized (including at least 100 rifles) and the railway lines blocked. The crowd surrounded the barracks and tried to get hold of the man who had shot the linesman. Barricades went up and telephone and electricity lines were cut. Viareggio was isolated, and in the hands of local subversives. Anarchists from local towns arrived on the scene: it felt and looked like a revolution. Three military columns were soon dispatched to quell the protests, some by sea. With some difficulty, and only after a couple of days, 200 soldiers took control. The taking of the town by local subversives entered into local mythology as Viareggio's 'red days'.

Football tried to draw a veil over the events of 1920. In 1921 a 'Peace Match' was organized in Viareggio and passed off without incident. However, in the 1921–22 season, violence was again on the agenda. Viareggio won the first derby, but the Lucca fans attributed their defeat to the intimidating atmosphere in the stadium which revived unhappy memories of 1920's riots. The return match, in the claustrophobic city of Lucca, was extremely tense. Viareggio's fans were escorted by the police, and after losing 2–0 they proceeded to smash up (according to the version provided by Lucca fans) anything they could find. Here politics, local rivalries (the Tuscan derbies, and in particular Pisa-

Livorno, are perhaps the most emotional of all Italian derbies) and the social upheavals of the time, allied to protests against match officials, combined to produce an explosive situation.

Early Games. Ropes, Nets and Fields

What were early games like? Much football writing extrapolates back from contemporary soccer, assuming that matches were similar to those we see today. Yet, apart from some of the rules, the pitch, the numbers of players and the goals, very little of what was called *calcio* or *foot-ball* resembled today's game. The players were not athletes, they rarely trained and they were, at least for the first 20–25 years, nearly all amateurs. It was only in the 1920s that the professional game, and the idea of football as a business – as a full-time occupation – really began to take root. Skill and tactics were rare, play was slow and often violent.

Games took place on impromptu fields, which were not designed specifically for football and were hardly conducive to skilful ball play. Neither was the mud that was far more common than grass in the rainy north of Italy. For some time crowds just gathered around the sidelines, or a simple rope held them back from the pitch itself. For the first ten or so years, football matches failed to attract significant crowd numbers. It was only with the birth of the national team in 1910 that the masses began to turn up to games. Four thousand people – a big crowd – attended the first ever Italian game in Milan in that year. In 1911 Italy's first football stadium was opened, in the Marassi zone on the edge of Genoa. The stadium had a capacity of 25,000 and was bordered on one side by a large stand with seats. Genoa's stadium was designed with dressing rooms and even a special room for the referee.

Genoa's ground was one of the first to give a team 'home advantage'. Just next door was the more intimate ground used by their city rivals, Andrea Doria (who would later become a part of Sampdoria). Here the crowd was so close to the pitch that a claustrophobic atmosphere was created. This ground was dubbed *La Caienna*, after a French prison camp. Other stadiums, usually consisting of one stand and some terracing, were constructed by Milan and other clubs before and during World War One while Venezia built a stadium on an island in 1916.

In the years before World War One, fan numbers multiplied. Away fans began to turn up to games, and groups of supporters awaited their team's return. By the 1920s, the strongest teams had groups of organized followers, and special trains were commissioned for away games. A 1923 photograph shows a group of Genoa away fans on a station platform. They have flags, banners (*viva Genoa Club*) and have scrawled graffiti on the train itself – including *Fan Carriage* and the rather poetic and self-deprecatory phrase: *Foot-ball, acute mania.* These were the first groups of obsessive, faithful fans, the grandfathers (and they are all men, in the photo) of the fanatical *ultrà* of the 1970s and 1980s.

Were there any tactics? According to some books, early teams tended to line up in a kind of inverted pyramid formation – a sort of 2–3-5 – with emphasis on attack and on kick and rush. It was only with the professional-style training methods of the first and second decades of the twentieth century and the modern coaching of foreign managers that the game began to resemble what we see today on our screens. The various alterations to the offside rules were also important in imposing change, and players did adopt specific positions on the field, right from the beginning (although tactical discipline was slow to take root). The birth and growth of the sports press, sports writers and football correspondents boosted understanding of *calcio.* Certain clubs began to be associated with specific styles of play, and with particular attitudes to the game, as with the aggressive reputation of Pro Vercelli, or Inter's association with elegance.

Amateurs and Professionals

Early Italian football, as with the game in England, was strictly an amateur sport, played for honour, fun and physical well-being, but never for money. Payment of any kind was frowned upon. Most players had other jobs – as doctors, artists, businessmen, dockers, students. Amateurism was written into the statutes and rules of clubs and players caught taking money were banned. By the 1920s, this system had become unworkable. Money was beginning to flow into the game – through gate receipts, advertising, newspapers and journalists, and prizes. Working outside of the rules the bigger clubs began to employ coaches and pay players, using a series of tricks, such as calling managers 'consultants'. Sometimes they were caught, sometimes they weren't. Italy was slowly catching up with England, where there were already more than 4,000 registered professional footballers by 1914.[20]

From 1913–1914, Genoa's star player Renzo De Vecchi, who was known as the 'Son of God' because of his precocious talent, was handsomely paid for his 'work' as a clerk for a Genoa bank. Other sectors of De Vecchi's pay (and transfer fee) were hidden as 'travel expenses'. Thanks to this new job, De Vecchi's transfer from Milan to Genoa was allowed to go ahead. In general, however, before World War One, the federation dealt harshly with those found guilty of professionalism.

When Genoa poached two players from local rivals Andrea Doria in 1913, they were caught breaking the rules.[21] Offered 1,000 lire each as a signing-on fee, the players accepted, but they had the bad luck to cash their joint cheque with a bank teller who was also a disgruntled Doria fan. Upset at the loss of two excellent players, the bank clerk copied the cheque and informed the football authorities. At first, the players were banned for life, a ban that was reduced to two years on appeal and then cut further by an amnesty. Both players proved to be excellent signings, going on to win three championships with Genoa and play for Italy.

The rationale behind the amateur ideal was ideological. Sport should not be played for money, which sullied the concepts of fair play and healthy physical activity. It was a leisure activity, not a job. These lofty ideals quickly collapsed in the face of the economic needs of clubs, presidents, players and the demands of fans for success. In the 1920s a number of very high-profile big-money transfers led to bitter public discussion and in the 1926 Viareggio Charter, professionalism was officially recognized for the first time. From that point on, players' wages (as players, not bank clerks or lawyers) were subject to negotiation and the big clubs began to buy up the best talent. And it was not just players who were on the market. The best-paid football employees never took to the pitch themselves, but selected and trained their teams: the managers.

The first manager. The odyssey of William Garbutt

Foreigners had been largely responsible for setting up the game in Italy, and had been amongst the best early players. In 1912, Genoa became the first Italian club to appoint a professional manager. He was an Englishman, from Stockport, and was only 29 years old. William Garbutt had been a fine player with Reading and Woolwich Arsenal, before suffering a terrible injury while playing for Blackburn Rovers during a match witnessed, according to his own memoirs, by future Italian national coach Vittorio Pozzo. Garbutt's salaried employment as Genoa manager was outside of the rules, so he was paid through a series of semi-legal means until the onset of professionalism in the second half of the 1920s.[22]

As with most Italian versions of early football history, the origins of Garbutt's employment by Genoa are unclear. What is certain is that he took up the reins of power at the club in 1912, and went on to have a quite remarkable career in Italy. Although not a manager by trade, Garbutt introduced some of the modern training techniques he had experienced as a player in England. He planted poles in the ground for dribbling practice, and supervised jumping exercises, abolishing the desultory kickabouts that had previously passed for training at most clubs. In 1913 Genoa finished second in the northern championship and they went one better in 1915 in the controversial war-suspended tournament.[23] It is said that the English manager also introduced a crucial aspect of post-match material culture to the Italian game – hot showers in the dressing room.

Genoa, which already had the best stadium in Italy, invested in the market, tempting players (illegally) from local rivals Doria and buying Renzo De Vecchi from Milan in 1913. Garbutt also used his contacts to bring over various English players. When war broke out, Garbutt returned to England before rejoining Genoa after the conflict, tempted by a wage increase to 8,000 lire a year. Genoa won the *scudetto* in both 1923 and 1924, and came close to a third successive championship in 1925.

Garbutt moved on to manage Roma in 1928, and then to Naples, where the team finished third twice in six seasons – their best-ever showing up to that point. Whilst in Naples he adopted a young orphan girl, Concettina Ciletti, an act of charity that endeared him to sentimental locals. The local press also accused him of hitting the bottle.[24] Garbutt then took control at Athletic Club Bilbao, where he won a title just as the Spanish civil war broke out. In 1938 he began his third spell with Genoa.[25] It is often said that the name given to managers in Italy – *Il Mister* – became popular thanks to the influence of Garbutt and other English managers in the 1930s. Even today players will refer to their managers as *il mister* in cliché-ridden post-match interviews: 'who will play next week?' – '*decide il mister*'; 'That's up to the *mister*'.[26]

When Italy entered World War Two in June 1940, Garbutt was advised to leave Italy but was tempted to stay on as his team had reached the Italian Cup final. He finally left the city on the eve of the final – which Genoa lost – and went into hiding in the Ligurian countryside with his wife, leaving his adopted Italian daughter behind. On 26 June, a warrant was issued for his arrest. Garbutt was too famous to be able to hide for long near Genoa, and in mid-July the couple were picked up. According to the arrest report, which was full of praise for the manager's reputation, Garbutt had remained in Italy 'thanks to his great sympathy for fascism'. After being held in a small and crowded cell for some time, Garbutt's health and that of his Irish wife Anna began to deteriorate.

Two weeks of negotiations between the authorities and the club followed. The Garbutts were spared the indignities of an internment camp, and instead sent into exile in the south of Italy, near Salerno. Garbutt was a familiar figure in the south, after his time with Napoli. The family ended up in a tiny village in the mountains, where they lived off their savings and, when those ran out, on a small state income. In February 1941 an order came through to move the Garbutt family to an internment camp in the poverty-stricken Abruzzo region. There they were held for more than a year,

until a palace coup removed Mussolini from power in July 1943. German troops poured into Italy and the Garbutts were terrified that they would be deported. In the chaos that ensued, the family used false documents and fled north. They were helped in their escape by a local politician, and ended up in a refugee camp in Imola in central Italy. In May 1944, Garbutt's 55-year-old wife Anna decided to go to the local church. The city was bombed by the Allies and the church was hit, killing Anna and many others. After Imola was liberated by Allied troops in April 1945, Garbutt returned south where he stayed with his adopted daughter's family.

This long and tragic odyssey was only completed with Garbutt's return to Genoa, nearly five years after his first arrest. A crowd formed when the news broke that *Il Mister* had come back to the city. After a brief spell in England, Garbutt was re-employed by Genoa in 1946, after being persuaded to return once again by Edoardo Pasteur, one of the club's original founders. He stayed in the job right up to 1948 – his sixteenth season with the club, thirty-five years on from his first spell in charge. He then worked as a scout for the port-city team until 1951, when he finally returned to the UK. Garbutt died in Leamington Spa in 1964, after moving to a small house there on retirement, still cared for by his faithful Neapolitan daughter.[27] This quiet death was met with indifference at home, but obituaries appeared in all the Italian papers. As Pierre Lanfranchi has written, 'the contrast between how he [Garbutt] is remembered in England and in Italy is astonishing. Forgotten in England, he is an historic figure in Italy, celebrated as the first real football manager and one of the major actors in the development of professional football in the peninsula.'[28] His biography is a perfect example of the ways that football history and Italian history simply cannot be separated.

Fans and History

Italian fans have a deep sense of history. In the 1990s, in a derby game, Genoa fans produced an enormous banner – which stretched across the whole end – *We are Genoa.* The message here was twofold, referring to the English origins of the club, and underlining the belief that Genoa represents both real football history (as the oldest club in Italy) and the core of Genoa itself (as the oldest club in the *city* – rivals Sampdoria were only formed after a fusion between two other Genoa teams in 1946). The same appeal to a stronger historical identification with the city is often made by Roma fans (against 'provincial' Lazio followers) and Torino fans (against Juventus).

Genoa fans have always been proud of their English origins. Elegant, older and supposedly well-informed fans at the Genoa stadium were always known as 'the English'. Genoa fans are also renowned for their aplomb and irony. Forced to drop their English name in the 1920s (although recent historical work has argued that club authorities did so more out of zeal than under pressure from fascism) and call themselves *Genova*, the fans demanded a return to the English *Genoa* after the war. There are still supporters' organizations in the city that are known as 'Garbutt's clubs'.

Most serious Italian fans are well aware of the date of foundation of their club, its record, its founders and its historic players, managers and even the various stadiums where the club has played. All these historic features are a strong part of a civic religion – adherence to which is a crucial aspect of fan-identity. Founding myths, legends and stories permeate this self-styled football history, as tales are handed down from generation to generation. These stories are a key part of every fan's collective identity, and are reinforced by the presence of a series of institutional and footballing enemies. Many stories are linked to scandals, 'thefts' and injustices which teams have suffered in the past, and whose legacy can last for decades.

From Lions to bankruptcy. The rise and fall of Pro Vercelli

Vercelli is (and was) a sleepy, rice-growing town on the Piedmont plains, between Turin and Milan. Yet, between 1908 and 1913, and then again from 1921–1923, the town's football team – Pro Vercelli – was more or less unbeatable. Pro Vercelli lost just one championship in the five years between 1908 and 1913 – and even that was in extremely controversial circumstances. The club's rapid rise has been attributed largely to their modern training methods and tactics, and to the extraordinary fitness of their players.

This small-town team, with players who were not only all Italians but almost entirely from Vercelli itself, demonstrated that early football success was not so much about talent, but also about determination, preparation and teamwork. One of Vercelli's most celebrated players – the midfielder Guido Ara – allegedly coined the Italian cliché 'football is not a game for little girls'. Vercelli was the first modern Italian club, on and off the pitch, and the lessons of its victories were to become part of the DNA of *calcio* from that moment on. Corners and free-kicks were practised in training and the team controlled possession instead of simply booting the ball upfield. They were also very young – the average age of the 1908 squad was just twenty. In Genoa's 1906 team, Spensley was nearly 40 and Pasteur, another key early player, was 30. Pro Vercelli often dominated the last fifteen minutes of games, relying on their exceptional strength. The club was perhaps the first to have a serious youth policy which paid off handsomely. A series of legendary players came through the ranks. Giuseppe Milano was their formidable captain before the war and his brother Felice won five championships at Vercelli, before dying in the trenches in 1915, at the age of 24.

Pro Vercelli played in white shirts with starched collars and cuffs and were one of the first teams to inspire loyalty and almost religious fervour among their fans. Pro Vercelli were also given a rhetorical nickname – *The Lions* – which tied in neatly with the nationalist rhetoric emerging in Italy at that time. As an all-Italian, provincial and local team, Pro Vercelli represented national pride against the foreigner-dominated clubs from the cosmopolitan cities of Milan and Turin. It was no accident that in the first national team game in 1910 Italy's shirts were white, in homage to Pro Vercelli.[29] So dominant was the Vercelli squad in this period that they provided nine of the eleven players who played for Italy against Belgium in May 1913.[30] A staggering eight of these nine players were from the little town of Vercelli itself.

In 1910, Inter and Pro Vercelli finished level on points at the end of the season. The title playoff was to be played in Vercelli because of their superior goal difference. However, on the date chosen by the federation a number of Pro Vercelli players were committed to a military tournament. The club asked for the date to be put back but the federation (and Inter) refused. In protest, Vercelli played their *fourth* team (made up of 10–15-year-olds). Not surprisingly, Inter won easily, 10–3. Pro Vercelli were furious, and were banned until the end of the year for their impudence. An amnesty relaxed the ban in October and Pro Vercelli swept to the title in 1911, 1912 and 1913. The team was famous enough to gain a prestigious invitation to tour South America in the period before the war. After winning two more championships in the 1920s Pro Vercelli began a long decline. As a poor, small-town club, they were unable to hold on to their star players in an increasingly professional game.[31]

In decline, however, Pro Vercelli's youth team managed to produce a striker who turned out to be perhaps the most extraordinary player of his generation. Born in a small town near Pavia in 1913, Silvio Piola moved to Vercelli as a little boy and went on to a career that no other player has come close to matching. After making his debut in 1930 Piola played five seasons for Pro Vercelli, scoring 51 goals and he remained close to his old squad even after Lazio signed him for a record fee in 1934. Pro Vercelli's president had once stated 'we will never sell Piola, not even for all the gold in the world. Once we sell him, the decline of Pro Vercelli will begin.' He was right. His side finished

bottom of Serie A with only fifteen points in that year and, once relegated, they were never to return to add to their seven championship titles. Piola went on to greatness and in 21 war-interrupted seasons stretching from 1930 to 1954 he scored 290 goals in 566 games in Serie A.

Pro Vercelli languished in the lower levels of the semi-professional game for a time, before rising slowly up to Serie C again by the end of the 1990s. However, by 2003, like so many other clubs, they were in financial crisis. In December of that year, bankruptcy proceedings began after the club failed to pay player wages. The company which owned the club – whose name was Spare Time – had debts of over £600,000. Pro Vercelli's players were forced to have a whip round to pay for their transport to an away match. A Committee to Save Pro was set up and began looking desperately for a buyer. Today, Pro Vercelli struggle on in one of Italy's third divisions, backed by a small group of loyal fans.

The First Scandal. The Rosetta Case

In a society racked with scandal, suspicion, accusation and counter-accusation, and where the rule of law has always been something of an option, Italian football was caught up in controversy almost from the very beginning. Many early championships were marked by intense debate, as the football federation struggled to impose any kind of authority over the game. In 1906 Juventus refused to play in the title playoff against Milan after a change of venue and 1910 saw the Pro Vercelli 'baby-players' protest. The post-World War One period was marked by splits, debates and arguments amongst the various clubs and federations.

Italian football's first real scandal became known as the 'Rosetta case'. Virginio Rosetta was one of the most admired and prized defenders of the heroic early phase of *calcio* history. Born in Vercelli in 1902, he is usually recognized as Italy's first professional footballer and was the subject of the first big transfer fee. Rosetta's move was also the spark, for the first, but certainly not for the last time, of protests by one set of fans against the transfer of a player. An accountant by trade, Rosetta was idolized in Vercelli. As he approached his second championship victory with the club in three years (in 1922–23) rumours began to spread of an offer from Juventus. Rosetta had, it appeared, been tapped up. At that time Luigi Bozino, criminal lawyer and Pro Vercelli's president, was also president of the FIGC, so the case took on football-wide proportions.

A lot of money was involved. A cheque for at least 50,000 lire went directly to Bozino and Rosetta's new highly-paid accountancy post in Turin was underwritten by Juventus (and therefore by their owners FIAT). The Rosetta scandal led to the resignation of a number of leading members of the various football federations, and threatened to split the world of *calcio* wide open. Moreover for the first time the *amount* of money paid for a footballer led to scandal *in itself*. It was seen as immoral to spend so much cash on what was essentially just a game. The scandal dragged on. Rosetta moved to Juventus, but after just three games of the 1923–24 season, the federation ruled that the transfer had been irregular. Juventus were docked points for the three games Rosetta had played for them. Without this penalization, Juventus would have won the northern league. The scandal had effectively cost them the championship. Furious at this decision, Juventus's management threatened to pull their team out altogether. This is a unique scandal in Italian football history – with Juventus as the *victims* of an injustice. The trend since then has been for the FIAT club to be the benefactors of scandal and favouritism.

The controversial transfer was finally completed the following season, and Rosetta proved to be well worth the money. Pro Vercelli's fans were still angry at Rosetta's 'betrayal' when he came back in 1929 for a game against their team. He went on to win six championships with Juve as well as the 1934 World Cup. Rosetta's move also highlighted the increasing power of the big clubs, and the beginning of the long decline of the strong provincial sides who had taken *calcio* by storm in the early part of the century. Some writers even trace the deep hatred of many Italian fans towards Juventus to the 'Rosetta case'.

Fascism and Football

Italian fascism had been created in 1919 from a ragbag group of nationalists, ex-socialists and futurist artists. By 1922 the violent anti-socialism of the fascists had destroyed the nation's powerful socialist and trade union movement through the use of systematic violence, with the support of many ordinary middle-class citizens and the backing of big business. Their next prize was the state itself. In October 1922 fascist leader Benito Mussolini led a 'March on Rome'. The idea was to frighten the fragile liberal elites, and the King, into submission. It worked. Meekly, in the face of the threat of an illegal armed insurrection, the King made the head of that insurrection prime minister. Mussolini was to remain in power for the next 21 years. By 1926, all vestiges of democracy had been wiped out through repressive laws and brutal violence. A dictatorship was in place. Opposition parties were dissolved, their leaders arrested or forced into exile, or murdered.

Football went on, regardless. Fascism was to see Italy become, officially, the greatest football team in the world, and the national league reach levels of popularity that challenged all other sports and pastimes. Under Mussolini, *calcio* became Italy's national sport, new stadiums were built in most Italian cities and the national league became a reality. During the Duce's reign, Italy won two world cups and an Olympic gold medal. Fascism was good for Italian football, and football was good for fascism. Individual fascists also made their mark on the game, as with the infamous events which closed the 1925 championship.

The first 'theft'. Bologna, Genoa and the 1925 playoff final

In 1925, as Italy teetered on the brink of absolute dictatorship, fascism made its first, direct intervention into the football world. Leandro Arpinati had been the local leader of the fascist squads who roamed the Bolognese countryside and city in the post-war period. Using batons, guns and castor oil, these gangs wrought havoc as they 'brought order' to a socialist region. With the ascent of the fascists to power and the progressive move towards dictatorship the violence was toned down. It was no longer needed. Most people were too scared to protest, or had fled.

The 1924–25 season witnessed a titanic struggle between Bologna – Arpinati's team – and Genoa. There were no penalty shoot-outs, so drawn games were simply replayed. Five playoffs were needed to decide the fate of the championship. The third game in this series – played in Milan on 7 June 1925 – proved to be the most dramatic and controversial match in the short history of *calcio.* A massive crowd of some 20,000 fans turned up, including Arpinati himself, and many threatened to spill onto the pitch. Giovanni Mauro, lawyer and ex-player for both Inter and Milan, was the referee. One of the most authoritative figures in the game, he had been an influential member of various committees for over ten years, whilst continuing to officiate in important matches.

William Garbutt's Genoa were 2–0 up by half-time and the title seemed theirs. Midway through the second half, Bologna were on the attack when a close-range shot came in towards the Genoa goal. The goalkeeper spread himself, and Mauro gave a corner to Bologna. At that point, there was a pitch invasion, led by a group of black-shirted fascists. Arpinati stayed in the stands. The referee was surrounded for at least fifteen minutes. In the end – scared, it is said – he changed his decision and gave a goal. Bologna then 'equalized' with eight minutes left, but Genoa refused to accept the draw and play extra-time. Under federation rules, after the pitch invasion the game (and therefore the championship) should have been awarded to Genoa. However, Mauro, under pressure from Arpinati, wrote a bland report which mentioned the pitch invasion, but assigned no blame for it. The federation ordered yet another playoff.

The fourth final was played in Turin on 5 July, and ended in another draw. Genoa and Bologna fans clashed at the city's Porta Nuova station after the game, and gunshots were fired from the Bologna train. Most reports mention either two or four shots, but some put the number as high as twenty, and the fascist daily paper at the time wrote of 'quite a few revolver rounds'. At least two Genoa fans were injured, and one was taken to hospital. Bologna received a small fine, but the incidents caused national outrage, a long inquiry by the federation and a debate in Parliament. The federation decided on yet another game in Turin – this time with no crowd. However, the city's authorities refused to give permission for the match to take place.[32] Football had become a public-order problem.

The drama came to an end in August with a game behind closed doors on the outskirts of Milan at 7.30 in the morning. More than a month had passed since the violent events of Turin, and more than two months since the bizarre 'no-goal' game in Milan. Most of the Genoa team were called back from their holidays to play. The press was ordered to keep the location of the game secret, or to pretend it was in Turin. In the 'crowd' there were a few journalists, some club officials and assorted locals. The whole pitch was surrounded by *carabinieri* on horseback. Bologna won, 2–0, despite having one man sent off just four minutes into the second half, and another towards the end for 'insulting his opponents after a goal'.

Bologna's all-Italian team duly won their first championship, the national playoff with the southern champions being the usual formality, but in Genoa and elsewhere this success would always be known as 'the great theft'. As film-maker Giuliano Montaldo wrote in the 1990s, 'It is hard to believe now but before the war this was the main talking point at the Marassi [Genoa's ground]. The wound has only been healed in the last twenty years. Before that, when we said "Bologna" we meant "the thieves".' The sense of injustice was exacerbated by the rest of the club's history as Genoa

were never to win another *scudetto*. The team was thus denied its tenth championship, an honour that gives clubs the right to sew a special star on their shirts. Inter and Milan currently have one star and Juventus have two.[33] Genoa have never got close to their star again and have been stuck on nine championships for eighty years. As is to be expected, Bologna's version of events is rather different. Fan websites hint at a 'hole in the goal net' which would explain the events of that day and leave us in doubt as to whether their team had actually scored, whilst Mauro's report is glossed over and the pitch invasion is blamed on both sets of fans. This version remains limited to one category of people – Bologna supporters.

In 1925, Bologna's powerful backers decided which version of events was made public. In 1926 Arpinati was appointed as the new *podestà* – unelected Mayor – of the city and in the same year he became president of the Italian football federation, a job he would hold until 1933. He reigned supreme over football, his club and his city until financial scandal brought him down in 1934.[34]

The referees' strike of 1925 and the first 'suspicions'

Referees in the Italian leagues were increasingly unhappy with the pressure they were under by the mid-1920s. Giovanni Mauro, president of the referees' association (the AIA), called time and again for more protection for his members and less control over their activities. His organization was vehemently opposed to a blacklist of referees that had been compiled – in secret – by certain powerful clubs. In 1925 Mauro wrote in his magazine, *The Referee*, that there was a need to re-establish 'minimal levels of deference and respect towards referees whose current position is no longer like that of a judge, but more like that of a clown'. In 1926 a match between Casale and Torino was declared null and void because the referee had not officiated with 'the correct serenity of spirit'. This was code (and remains so, even today) for clearly biased refereeing. This besmirching of their reputation pushed the referees into strike action. Almost everyone in Italy had gone on strike in the wake of World War One. There was even a priests' strike. However, referees had never withdrawn their labour. In the mid-1920s this taboo was broken.

The action was moderate. The men in black simply refused to go to matches. Someone as conservative as Mauro, who had often linked his job to a lofty patriotic ideal, was hardly likely to organize picket lines and burning braziers outside grounds. In any case, the very threat of such a strike gave fascism a perfect opportunity to impose its will on Italian football. A commission was set up to draw up plans for sweeping reforms that would bring an end to the chaos in the game. In 1926, this led to the Viareggio Charter, the most important set of rules since 1909 and the basis for *calcio*'s re-organization under the regime.[35]

The Viareggio Charter. *Calcio*'s constitution

In 1926, the tortuous history of the Italian football federation, with its splits, rivalries and scandals, led to the imposition of unity from above. The Viareggio Charter was drawn up by three self-styled experts in the elegant seaside town that had seen the 'football riot' of 1920. Viareggio's new rules revolutionized the game. First, professionalism was legalized.

This had been made inevitable by the increasing numbers of working-class footballers, who found it difficult to work *and* play professionally.[36] It was one thing being an accountant *and* a professional footballer – like Fulvio Bernardini of Roma. It was quite another trying to combine other, more humble professions with the demands of a full-time national championship.

Moreover, the charter clarified the role of foreign players: *they were banned.* The boom in players from the new frontiers of *calcio* – above all Hungary and Austria – was brought to a swift halt by these new rules. There were more than 80 such players in the Italian championship in the 1925–6 season. These foreigners were all forced to find work elsewhere, or as something else. Some became managers, like the Hungarian Arpad Veisz, who won the first Serie A national championship as coach of Inter in 1929–30 and two other titles in charge of Bologna in the 1930s.

Like many Italian laws and rules, however, the charter's procedures contained a big loophole. Who was Italian, and who was a foreigner? Banned from buying Hungarians and Austrians, the top Italian clubs began to look for 'Italians' amongst the millions of their fellow citizens who had left the country to find fortune elsewhere in the world. The hybrid category of the Italian *oriundo* (a person of Italian *extraction*) became part of footballing parlance. *Oriundi* were Italians who had been brought up or born in other countries, but were of Italian origin (an Italian grandparent was usually enough). For a long time after 1926, the history of foreigners in the Italian game – right up until the end of the 1940s, and in various phases after that – was synonymous with that of the *oriundi.*

Thanks to the charter, a unified national league was made inevitable by further rationalization of the championship, leading directly to a national Serie A and Serie B in 1929–30. As if to underline the central role of fascist leader Leandro Arpinati the offices of the football federation were moved to Bologna, away from the traditional centres of football power – Turin and Milan. These offices followed Arpinati to Rome in 1929, when he became undersecretary in the Interior Ministry. Finally, the Viareggio Charter abolished the referees' association, reducing their autonomy, but increasing their prestige. A special committee was given the power to select referees for specific games. Referees remained amateurs. Giovanni Mauro, Arpinati's ally in the 1925 Bologna 'theft', took control of this new body until well into the 1930s. His decisions in that 1925 final had done his career no harm at all.

The inauguration which changed Italy

For Italy, 1926 was a key year, as Benito Mussolini was anxious to move the country further towards a fascist dictatorship. The spark which led to the final destruction of the country's fragile democracy was linked to football. Arpinati had ordered the construction of a spanking new stadium in Bologna in 1924 and by the end of October 1926 the ground was ready for an official inauguration, to coincide with the fourth anniversary of the March on Rome. Mussolini came to Bologna for the occasion, and entered the stadium on a white horse to huge applause. After making a speech and opening a fascist foundation, Mussolini was driven to the station by Arpinati himself, in an open limo known as a 'torpedo'. As the dictator passed through the crowds, a gunshot was fired into the car, missing everyone and, allegedly, passing through Mussolini's scarf. In the chaos that ensued, a fifteen-year-old boy was beaten to death by the crowd and identified as the potential assassin. The boy, Anteo Zamboni, was the son of a well-known local exanarchist. The whole Zamboni family was sent into internal exile for having organized the supposed attempt on the Duce's life. Years later, a plaque was unveiled where Zamboni had been killed.[37]

There are strong doubts about the role of Zamboni, and many historians claim that the shot was the work of dissident fascists or even the Italian secret services.[38] Arpinati, to his credit, pressed for an amnesty for the family – he was a friend of the boy's father. Meanwhile, the consequences for Italy of Mussolini's trip to Bologna for the new stadium were dramatic. In November 1926 new laws were passed reintroducing the death penalty that had been abolished in 1888. All political parties apart from the Fascist Party were banned along with their newspapers and a special fascist secret police service was set up. The last vestiges of free speech and democracy had been removed.

Calcio and Italian capitalism

From the very beginning, Italy's business leaders were interested in *calcio.* One of the founders of AC Milan was Piero Pirelli, industrialist and part of the huge Pirelli rubber business set up in the city in 1872. Pirelli ran Milan from 1908 to 1929 and was responsible for the construction of the San Siro stadium in 1926. Senatore Borletti, another Milanese industrialist with various interests in the city (alarm clocks, bullets, watches, department stores, basketball), was president of Inter from 1926 to 1929. Most important of all, however, was the role of FIAT. Formed in 1899 in Turin, by the end of World War One FIAT had become one of Italy's biggest companies. By the 1920s, FIAT was producing 90 per cent of Italy's cars and the Agnelli family controlled 70 per cent of the company. In 1923, Edoardo Agnelli (who was just over 30 at the time) took control of Juventus and remained president until 1935, overseeing a series of astonishing victories in the 1930s. Edoardo was the son of Giovanni Agnelli, founder of the company. FIAT have been linked to Juventus ever since. Edoardo used to take his son Gianni with him to the stadium, and Gianni Agnelli was part of Juve's history until his death in 2003.[39]

In a way that is unique, Italy's biggest company has run Italy's biggest football club, and this alliance has created love, hate, loyalty and jealousy in equal measure. FIAT's wealth, and its business ethics, made Juve into the greatest producer of victories in Italian football, with a fan-base that spread across the whole country and dwarfed that of the other clubs. FIAT used Juventus to make money, but also to create consensus and popularity, with Turin workers but above all among ordinary Italians across the peninsula. Every victory was identified with the car company that paid the players' wages. By the 1930s Juventus could count on a fan-base bigger than that of all the other clubs put together.

From *calcio* to football. A mass sport is born

By the end of the 1920s, *calcio* had become football. Italy had a professional game, with a national league. The history of *calcio* since 1929 is synonymous with the history of Serie A and Serie B. Italy also had a national team that was on the verge of making its mark as a world footballing power. There were stadiums all over the country, and many people – men and women – now saw themselves as fans. A series of spectacular scandals had rocked the game, including a playoff behind closed doors and cases of bribery and corruption. Shots had been fired between rival fans, and referees had gone on strike. Politics had intermeshed itself deeply into the organization, running and structure of the game, and of individual clubs. Money was also being made from football, and footballers could now live by the game alone. In just three decades, Italian football had moved on from a few tubby Englishmen kicking a heavy ball around on the dockside to a mass sport, which attracted millions of followers. Italian football had come a long way, in a short time, and it was never to look back.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.