



Forza Italia: The Fall and Rise of Italian Football

By Paddy Agnew

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When journalist Paddy Agnew and his girlfriend touched down in Rome in 1985 in search of adventure, sunshine, and the soul of Italian soccer, they were traveling into the uncharted terrain of a country they did not know and a language they did not speak. It soon became clear that neither Italy nor Italian soccer would be boring. In that first week in Italy, Michel Platini and Juventus won the Intercontinental Cup, while just days later the PLO killed 13 people in a random shooting at Rome's Fiumicino airport. Paddy covered both stories. The coming years saw the rise of TV tycoon Silvio Berlusconi, as he became owner of AC Milan and then Prime Minister of Italy, naming his political party Forza Italia after a football chant. In that same period, Argentine Diego Maradona became the uncrowned King of Naples, leading Napoli to a first ever Scudetto title in 1987, notwithstanding a hectic, Hollywood-esque lifestyle that mixed soccer genius with off-the-field excess. *Forza Italia* is a fascinating tale of inspired players, skilled coaches, rich tycoons, glitzy media coverage, Mafia corruption, allegations of drug taking, and fan power—culminating in the 2006 World Cup victory that delighted a nation and a match-fixing scandal that shocked the world. It is also a personalized reflection on the consistent and continuing excellence of Italian soccer throughout a period of huge social, political, and economic upheaval, offering a unique insight into a society where soccer has always been much more than just a game.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In 1985, Agnew and his girlfriend left their home and jobs in Ireland in search of adventure in a warmer clime. They settled in Italy, where she got a steady job teaching and he followed his dream of covering Italian football. Part memoir, part sports commentary, part political and cultural observations, these pedestrian fan's notes record the exciting and the sordid world of Italian football, including its relatively recent glory days of the 1990s. As he observes, football in Italy is currently undergoing a crisis, ranging from financial meltdown to match fixing and drug scandals, that reflects the wider political and social crisis afflicting the country. For example, Agnew chronicles the life of Diego Armando Maradona in the 1980s, one of Italy's greatest footballers of all time, whose penchant for drugs, sex and the fast life ruined his career. In spite of Maradona's shortcomings and eventual arrest on drug possession charges, Italians stood by their footballer, demonstrating just how strongly football is embedded in Italian culture. Agnew waxes poetic in his admiration for the game, concluding that it brings together the creative genius of Da Vinci, the fun of the *carnavale* and the elements of *commedia dell'arte*. (July)

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Review

"Excellent ... A superb background guide" Independent "Superb" Sunday Telegraph "Splendid ... Occasionally makes for pretty disturbing reading ... An enlightened and compelling study " FourFourTwo "entertaining and immensely readable" The Guardian "a fascinating journey to the heart of Italian soccer" Choice

About the Author

Paddy Agnew is a match commentator on Italian football for state broadcaster RAI and has covered Italian soccer for ESPN TV, BBC World Service radio, Reuters, *World Soccer* magazine, and many other news organizations.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Edward Phillips:

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