



They love their Argentines in Napoli and Ezequiel Lavezzi is the latest to capture the San Paolo imagination.

Tango & Flash



Having spent most of the European winter based in Buenos Aires, **Serafino Ingardia** explores the close footballing relationship between Italy and Argentina.

Omar Sivori, Diego Maradona and Gabriel Batistuta. They are just three Argentines who have helped shape the history of Italian football. They belong to the past, but over the last decade a new wave of the finest Argentine talents have docked in Serie A.

Things have clearly changed since the arrival of Julio Libonatti at Torino in 1925, the first Argentine to play in Serie A. It was a completely different social scenario back then. There was mass migration between the two countries, on a totally different scale to what we see today, with around three million Italians leaving Europe for the South American nation. It's little wonder that a select few, in footballing terms at least, would later return to their origins.

The working class that emigrated to South America, mostly southern Italians, went on to establish itself in the new continent. They crossed the Atlantic Ocean

with a variety of skills that helped forge the new Argentina. That's hardly surprising when you consider that out of the 13m inhabitants in the city, 6m are of Italian origin, with the right to citizenship and a passport. Practically one out of two in the capital comes from il Belpaese, and Buenos Aires is actually considered the biggest Italian city in the world, with more residents than Rome or Milan.

Football-wise, aside from creating Boca Juniors, which is currently the most successful club in the world, those descendants have provided Italian football and La Nazionale with some of the best players in the game. What would the Azzurri, the eventual winners, have achieved at the 1934 World Cup without star man Raimondo Orsi? The Juventus right-winger, who was born in Argentina but held an Italian passport, was one of the first Oriundi. Would Sivori have been able to win the

Golden Ball without Italy? There have been great tacticians as well, such as Helenio Herrera, the Inter prophet.

Then, of course, came the era of Diego Armando Maradona, God on Earth for the Neapolitans. El Pibe de Oro, probably the greatest footballer ever, wrote one of the most magical chapters of calcio at the Stadio San Paolo. He was then followed in the 1990s by two tremendous strikers, Gabriel Batistuta and Hernan Crespo. The endless stream of Argentine talent has continued to flow ever since.

Today the Argentine colony in Italy counts more than 30 players. Catania, with seven, are practically made in the Land of Silver. The same goes for Inter with their six, captained by Javier Zanetti, who is coincidentally the oldest in Italy. The youngest is Siena starlet Fernando Forestieri, who was signed by Genoa at the age of 16 and will play for La Nazionale

one day. Meanwhile, there are three Argentines each at Lazio, Napoli and Siena.

But why do they choose Italy? "We Argentines are the sons of Italian and Spanish immigrants but I believe the difference is that in Italy, we have always felt more at home than in Spain," revealed Maradona, who is currently in charge of the Selección Albiceleste. "Even my personal story has been like that. In Barcelona I

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struggled to settle; instead, in Napoli, I had no troubles whatsoever."

So while Serie A is like Heaven for the players, for our clubs they are bargains and secure investments. With Genoa's Diego Milito, Mauro Zarate of Lazio and Napoli's Ezequiel Lavezzi making the headlines in Serie A this season, we have the proof that they can easily fit in and adapt to our style of football. Those players are the new generation of Italy's Argentines, and they're already replacing the likes of Julio Cruz, Juan Sebastian Veron and Mauro Camoranesi.

Of course, for every great player there's also a Roberto Nanni or Ariel Ortega, someone who doesn't live up to expectations. Still, the number of Argentines who make it into Serie A is considerable. Behind them is a huge line of agents looking for business. Jorge Cysterpillar, the guy who brought Maradona to Napoli, and Gustavo Ghezzi are among the elite. "We dealt with the transfers of German Denis and Lavezzi to the San Paolo," explained Ghezzi. "We also negotiate with the Catania players and Cruz. Argentines fit well into Italy."

But competition for Argentines around the world is increasing. "Argentinian football is a great export business because they are forced to create new talents and sell them," revealed Forestieri's agent Dario Canovi. "But I wouldn't say they are cheap – actually, in my opinion, it is the most expensive market in South America."

Argentine football has been suffering from this transfer situation, though. Having

best players. Fortunately, this hasn't affected viewing figures, at games and on the box.

The good news is that the national team is as strong as ever. Lionel Messi, Sergio 'Kun' Aguero and Carlitos Tevez may grab the headlines, but the side's solid base is built with Italian militants. Men like Esteban Cambiasso, Walter Samuel and Zanetti give Maradona a wide range of players to pick from. Italian clubs should also keep an eye on new talents like Eduardo Salvio, who I had the opportunity to follow at Lanus.

While their teams suffer from the financial crisis on a club level, the Selección will still be one of the favourites for World Cup 2010. Their players have studied tactics from the Italians, technique from the Spanish and pace from the English. Led by Maradona, they could become an unbeatable force. There's no point worrying about it now, though. Until the day arrives when Italy and Argentina come face to face, we can continue to enjoy their blooming talents at the services of our clubs.

recently spent time in Buenos Aires, I had the chance to watch the Superclasico, the biggest game of the season, between Boca and River Plate, as well as several other games in the Torneo Apertura. Despite a great quantity of youngsters, I was watching a Championship that had been raided of its

GOAL KINGS

Hernan Crespo was the last Argentine to win the Serie A Capocannoniere crown. Now at Inter, the striker scored 26 goals for Lazio in 2000-01 to join legends Diego Maradona and Gabriel Batistuta, who top-scored in 1988 and 1995 respectively. Genoa's Diego Milito looks Argentina's best bet to follow in their footsteps this season – he presently has 16 to his name. That's already three more than Julio Cruz's 13 last season, which made him the most potent Argentine in the League.

Season	Top Scorer	Goals	Top Argentine	Goals
1980-81	Pruzzo (Roma)	18	Bertoni (Fiorentina)	4
1981-82	Pruzzo (Roma)	15	Bertoni (Fiorentina)	9
1982-83	Platini (Juventus)	16	Bertoni (Fiorentina)	4
			Hernandez (Torino)	4
1983-84	Platini (Juventus)	20	Hernandez (Torino)	11
1984-85	Platini (Juventus)	18	Maradona (Napoli)	14
1985-86	Pruzzo (Roma)	19	Maradona (Napoli)	11
1986-87	Viridis (Milan)	17	Maradona (Napoli)	10
			Diaz (Fiorentina)	10
1987-88	Maradona (Napoli)	15	Maradona (Napoli)	15
1988-89	Serena (Inter)	22	Diaz (Inter)	12
1989-90	Van Basten (Milan)	19	Maradona (Napoli)	16
1990-91	Vialli (Sampdoria)	19	Caniggia (Atalanta)	10
1991-92	Van Basten (Milan)	25	Batistuta (Fiorentina)	13
1992-93	Signori (Lazio)	26	Balbo (Udinese)	21
1993-94	Signori (Lazio)	23	Balbo (Roma)	12
1994-95	Batistuta (Fiorentina)	26	Batistuta (Fiorentina)	26
1995-96	Protti (Bari)	24	Batistuta (Fiorentina)	19
	Signori (Lazio)	24		
1996-97	Inzaghi (Atalanta)	24	Balbo (Roma)	17
1997-98	Bierhoff (Udinese)	27	Batistuta (Fiorentina)	21
1998-99	Amoroso (Udinese)	22	Batistuta (Fiorentina)	21
1999-00	Shevchenko (Milan)	24	Batistuta (Fiorentina)	23
2000-01	Crespo (Lazio)	26	Crespo (Lazio)	26
2001-02	Trezeguet (Juventus)	24	Crespo (Lazio)	13
	Hubner (Piacenza)	24		
2002-03	Vieri (Inter)	24	Lopez (Lazio)	16
2003-04	Shevchenko (Milan)	24	Cruz (Inter)	7
2004-05	Lucarelli (Livorno)	24	Crespo (Milan)	10
2005-06	Toni (Fiorentina)	31	Cruz (Inter)	15
2006-07	Totti (Roma)	26	Crespo (Inter)	14
2007-08	Del Piero (Juventus)	21	Cruz (Inter)	13

The oldest Argentine in Italy, Javier Zanetti has become an Inter legend during his glittering calcio career.

