



Forza Italia: The Fall and Rise of Italian Football

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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