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## **When a Soccer Club Becomes a Mirror**

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“Soccer is a metaphor of life: from Milan’s success people realized that mine is a winning philosophy.”

—Silvio Berlusconi (1994)<sup>1</sup>

This quote from Silvio Berlusconi is part of the speech he held on April 18, 1994 during the celebrations for AC Milan’s third consecutive *scudetto* under his management. Suppose we take this claim seriously: what is the logic at play when soccer is linked to other spheres of life? In particular, in what ways is a team a metaphor for its patrons?

### *Warming Up*

Metaphors stand to language as pitons, karabiners, and ropes stand to a rock-climber: they nail down and guide most of our exchange of information. Clearly they come in handy when we talk about things such as love, power, and food; yet we have come to identify them where you would not expect that much rhetoric. Most (if not all) scientific models rely on metaphors, such as those representing chemical compounds, gases and light.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Translation for this and all the following quotes from sources in Italian are ours.

<sup>2</sup> To read more about metaphors in science, we recommend *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* by Max Black (Cornell Press, 1962), *Models and Analogies in Science* by Mary Hesse (Notre Dame Press, 1966), and Part IV of *Metaphor and*

Soccer can be thought of as a metaphor too. Indeed, its usage as a metaphor is so widespread that—despite its importance—it has come to be an unanalyzed commonplace. Soccer metaphors typically rely on particular features of the game that in some way resemble aspects of *normal life*. The list of features is for practical purposes undeterminable. It includes items such as a player's sacrifice of personal gain in favor of the interests of the team; the due respect for a coach's deliberations; an individual player's creativity; the importance of virtuous conduct, and so on. Three features enable this type of link between soccer and other aspects of life.

(A) *Like life, soccer is unpredictable*. This can be seen at three different levels.

i) *Game unpredictability*. The peculiar rule that forbids touching the ball with hands and arms—for everyone but the goalkeeper—shapes the interaction between the player and the ball, so that the movements of the former have to be constantly responsive to the position and movement of the latter. For this reason, while scoring a point is a prosaic occurrence in most sports, in soccer it becomes a magic moment. Additional unpredictability comes, moreover, from the tactical complexity of the game: no matter how thoughtful the formation, a team's overall performance is vulnerable to a player's failure to keep her role even for just a few seconds. Thus, it is impossible to fully control our actions in the field—as in life.

ii) *Player unpredictability*. Soccer is surely a peculiar sport where, unlike American football or ice hockey, it is quite common to

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*Thought* edited by Andrew Ortony (Cambridge Press, 1993). For more on the theories of metaphor in general try *Metaphors We Live By* by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (University of Chicago Press, 1980); and *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* by Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca (Notre Dame Press, 1969).

find a great player who does not possess an extraordinary physical structure. A list of the greatest players of all times includes several possessing average or even deficient bodies. The great Garrincha had several birth deficiencies: his spine was deformed, while his right leg was bent inward, and his tremendous dribbling was due—partially—to his left leg being six centimeters shorter and curved outwards. Rather than prevent him from being a fine player, these features arguably contributed to make him one of the greatest of all times. Lionel Messi, *blaugrana* forward, at the age of 11 was diagnosed with a growth hormone deficiency, and he stands now at only 1.69 meters. Nevertheless he scored a headed goal in the Champions League Final on May 27, 2009. On a soccer field—as in life—everyone has possibilities that are not fully determinable by looking at the initial conditions. As Solon brilliantly taught Croesus, initial conditions do not determine what we do and who we become (the story is narrated by Herodotus in *The Histories*, Book I, sections 29–33).

iii) *The unpredictability of fortune*. Luck is an ingredient that everyone into soccer quickly—and often bitterly—comes to learn. Even a first-rate team, playing a great game, could lose because of a series of unlucky events. Netherlanders may have no difficulty grasping this point, remembering the match against Italy in the semi-final of Euro 2000. It is superfluous to highlight that in life the same happens: often an unlucky event can produce disastrous consequences.

(B) *Soccer means winning and loosing*. As a corollary of what we said about the unpredictability of soccer, every player knows the bitter taste of a loss—even an undeserved, unfair, or maybe unjust one. Even the greatest players of all times such as Pelé, Maradona, Garrincha, Cristiano Ronaldo, Van Basten, Best, Messi have on their careers astonishing victories, but also heart-breaking defeats. Along the same lines, an undeniable dialectic between winning and loosing characterizes everyone's life.

(C) *The referee*. The theme of the unfair or unjust loss introduces a feature that contributes to render sports (soccer as well as many others) a good metaphor for life: the referee. The authority of the referee (and of the other officials as well) is almost undisputable. The need of accepting and respecting authority—beyond personal interest and opinion—is considered one of the most valuable pedagogical features of soccer. However, peculiar to soccer is the fact that referees always have to be in the middle of the action, so much so that not only can they touch the ball, but even unintentionally score a goal. (On September 22, 2001, referee Brian Savill even scored a goal intentionally during the match between Wimpol 2000 and Earls Coine Reserves; however, he was suspended for seven weeks and, refusing to accept the decision, retired from refereeing.)

But what renders *A* a metaphor for *B*? Roughly, it is an appropriate transfer of meaning from the first to the latter. To be more careful, let's call any subset of a language that is employed to represent a certain portion of reality a *sphere of discourse*. We shall deliberately keep this notion informal and vague, so to embrace the multifarious usages of language. Typically, such a subset is individuated through a certain functional role that it plays in our lives. For example, music, fashion, or the wine-making business are all portions of reality with a particular corresponding sphere of discourse.

Sometimes, two different spheres are juxtaposed. Among the modes of juxtaposition, in a metaphor, one or more expressions belonging to the first sphere are employed to transfer part of their meaning to expressions belonging to the other sphere. Typically, this operation is performed by an identity claim, such as “Buffon *is* a wall” or “Maradona *is* a god.” Clearly, no metaphor expresses a literal identity. The above claims do not purport to claim, respectively, that Buffon is *literally* a wall or that Maradona is *literally* a god—both of these statements are obviously false—they

simply draw parallels between the two. A competent speaker wouldn't find such claims non-sensical. Yet it is extremely difficult (if not impossible) to spell out exactly in what respects Buffon is like a wall and Maradona is like a god. A sentence may be used to convey different meanings as uttered in different contexts and, moreover, the respects of similarity are potentially infinite. It is this opacity that renders the metaphor a ductile tool, one of the most apt to recurrently transferring meaning from one sphere of discourse to another. The other remarkable feature of a metaphor is its intersubjective character. The above metaphors are straightforward for a soccer fanatic, yet they become utterly obscure for an outsider.

For our purposes, the two juxtaposed spheres of discourse are *the sphere of soccer* and *the mundane sphere*. Three major players within the sphere of soccer can be identified—the *team*, the *supporters*, and the *patronage* (which includes the owner, and the president with all its collaborators)—all of which are part of a *club*. The mundane sphere includes all sorts of things, especially those that may influence or be influenced by soccer. Nevertheless there is one entity within this domain, which calls for some introduction—the '*bare individual*'. With this expression (which we borrow from contemporary metaphysics), we intend nothing more than the bare existence of a person stripped of any quality (think of it just as a proper name, for example 'John Franklin'), which functions as a placeholder for any quality whatsoever.

The bare individual corresponding to the owner plays a key role in the mirroring process. Spelling out this role is pivotal to uncovering the logic of the metaphor embedded in contemporary soccer. Here is the illustration of a typical case of metaphorical transfer between a soccer patron and his public *persona*: (i) the name 'Donald Duck,' which picks out a bare individual in the mundane sphere, is correlated to The Owner of the club in the soccer sphere; (ii) within the soccer sphere, The Owner is then linked to the other parts of the club, which enrich its image; (iii) such image is then projected onto the *persona* of Donald Duck, an individual of the

mundane sphere with all the qualities that are transferred to him, in multiple ways, via the different parts of the club. Thus, what initially was a mere name within the mundane sphere becomes at the end of a mirroring process a full-fledged persona, which crucially passes through the soccer sphere.

Naturally, most everyday cases of patronage involve individuals that are *a little more* than bare individuals (when Roman Abramovic acquired Chelsea FC he was already somewhat re-known, although not in the soccer quarters or in the major mass media); moreover, mirroring processes from other spheres often play a relevant role. Even so, today clubs typically offer a peculiarly powerful mirror because of two emerging processes. The first proceeds from the increased media coverage of soccer events and the advent of pay-per-view. These transformed the relation between supporters and their clubs, whose popularity—in its social, economical, and political dimensions—reached an unprecedented level. Secondly, there is the progressive decline of traditional forms of structured aggregation for young people—such as politically oriented groups or religious communities. This transfigured the role and the nature of organized groups of supporters, both in their self-understanding and in the way in which societies at large deal with them.

Thus in today's culture, in a very real sense, the persona of the patron is created by a reflection of properties of the soccer club. This metaphorical mirroring can produce very different personas. These differences occur not only because clubs vary in character, but also in the way in which patrons hold themselves to their clubs. It is not just the character of the club but the mirroring relation itself that shapes and determines the persona of the patron. To see this, we decided to compare the Agnelli family – owner of Juventus FC –, Silvio Berlusconi of AC Milan, and the owner of U.S. Città di Palermo, Maurizio Zamparini.

*The Orpheus of Soccer*

“There is an elegance which is not deliberated, but it is owned or interpreted once that wonderful shirt is put on.”

—Giampiero Boniperti

They call it *La (vecchia) signora*, the (old) lady. The nickname is a pun on its Latin name, which means “youth.” With its fifty-one trophies, Juventus FC is not only the most successful Italian club, but it also boasts the largest basin of supporters: around twelve million in Italy, and one hundred and seventy three million all over Europe (*La Repubblica*, August 30, 2008). The “Lady” sets the standards of Italian soccer in many other regards as well; *style* is what interests us here. It is because of this primacy that we shall start our analysis from Juventus.

The so-called *stile Juve* functions exactly like a brand, instantly transforming the understanding of whatever falls under its scope. Being *juventino* is to endorse a certain ideal: a mix of natural elegance (described by Boniperti in the quote opening the section) and serene poise. As Darwin Pastorin once said, “To be *juventino* is just this: to live with serenity [in] any transitional phase.” (*Juventus: 110 anni di storia*, Morandotti Editore, 2007, p. 305) This attitude developed under the guidance of the Agnelli family, who took control of the club in 1923, and whose distinctive public behavior became a model for the club members and its supporters.

The elder Giovanni Agnelli—whose *persona* was associated with the image of Juventus for decades—probably molded that style more than anyone else. Over the decades, he set peculiar standards for a soccer patron, never losing his detached and calm look in spite of the team’s performance.

Among other behaviors, he was re-known for leaving the stadium at the end of the first half, no matter the result or the

importance of the game. He used to give nicknames to the team's stars borrowed from *highbrow* spheres, such as art history or literature. Thus, Alessandro del Piero was "Pinturicchio" at the peak of his career, and "Waiting for Godot" when his performances became less brilliant. This *haute burgoise* attitude was expressed by a member of one of the most wealthy and prestigious Italian families (who controlled, among others, the car-making company FIAT).

Unlike contemporary protagonists of the soccer patronage sphere, for the Agnelli family the process of construction of a well-rounded and re-known soccer brand had to grow slowly over decades. This was the time, indeed, when the soccer sphere was not dramatically overexposed to the public attention by mass-media.

It would be erroneously reductive, however, to associate the *stile Juve* to the Agnelli family alone: nearly all the foremost figures that contributed to the image of the club embodied it. Here, you may list players that distinguished themselves for their elegance and serenity inside and outside of the field, such as Giampiero Boniperti, Omar Sivori, Dino Zoff, Michelle Platini, Gaetano Scirea, Roberto Baggio, and Alessandro del Piero—just to name a few. And you may list team presidents and managers, such as (once more) Giampiero Boniperti, Vittorio Caissotti di Chiusano, Giovanni Cobolli Gigli, and coaches such as Giovanni Trapattoni and Carlo Ancelotti.

Through the models provided by its patrons and its most distinguished representatives, the *stile Juve* secured for itself a powerful, well-rounded, and long-lasting metaphor, which instantly transforms the image of the person or group associated with the club. Within the mundane sphere, the domain of applicability of the Juventus's metaphor has basically no boundaries: for this reason, we can think of the *Signora* as one of the most wide-ranging and classic club metaphors in contemporary soccer. As Orpheus enchanted his audience with his lyre, Juventus charms any fan (and often opponents too) with its style. The benefits of this transformation have been felt—or simply sought, with different results—by key figures in the world of politics and business; but ordinary supporters



can often appeal to (and at times even draw benefits from) such a distinctive style. However, the *stile* originally reflects upon the Agnelli family, who contributed so much to create it.

Hence, from the mere name of the '*Agnelli family*,' the image of a stylish team and patron was created. This image was powerfully reflected over the members of the family, giving a decisive contribution to create its myth outside of soccer, well into the business world (especially the car-making industry) and public life; but, the image also ethically shaped the *personae* of the players off the field, of the supporters when not talking about soccer, and, perhaps, of Italian soccer as well.

In recent year, however, the club has gone through some difficult times. It all started in July 2006, when Luciano Moggi—at the time the club's general manager—was sent off from FIGC (the Italian soccer federation) for bribing the referees and orchestrating a system aimed at favoring Juventus's team and some of its players. The accusation was backed up by an impressive amount of phone conversations, involving Moggi and a number of other high profile managers and administrators of Serie A clubs and the refereeing ranks. As we are writing, *La Signora* is struggling to promptly reaffirm the old metaphor, which contributed much to the development of Italian soccer. Meanwhile, Italian soccer acquired some new protagonists; one in particular was able to turn the soccer metaphor, with the aid of the new media, to create a different mythology within a very short time-span.

#### *The Gods of War: Berlusconi and Mars*

Sylvio Berlusconi is the paradigmatic case of patronage for our study, if not the origin itself of the contemporary way of understanding the property of a soccer club and the image that can derive from it. To recall just some of his many titles, he is the main shareholder of Fininvest, one of the country's ten largest privately owned companies that operates in media and finance; the founder, with Ennio Doris, of Mediolanum bank; the main shareholder of

Mediaset; and, last but not least, he is the leader of the political party PdL (*Freedom people*). Berlusconi's group has controlled three of the six Italian national television channels for almost three decades, several magazines and newspapers, and, as we are writing, he is the acting Italian Prime Minister.

Berlusconi acquired AC Milan on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 1986. Just a few weeks later, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March, he became president of the team and set about to change the world of soccer. Since the earliest years of his management, Berlusconi grasped the potential alchemy between mass-media and soccer. Especially through television, he reconstructed the sport's visibility, its relation with supporter, and the image that patrons were gaining through these things. The culmination of this revolutionary process was the broadcasting of live matches of the regular season, starting with Lazio–Foggia on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 1993. The channel was *Tele+*, the first European pay-for-view tv, then controlled by Berlusconi, Vittorio Cecchi Gori (the president of AC Fiorentina from 1993 to 2002), Leo Kirch, and other smaller businesses-partners.

Even though Berlusconi achieved wide notoriety since his acquiring of the club and his taking it “to the pinnacle of the world game” (see, “History” on AC Milan official website), it was with his debut into Italian political life that the significance of his patronage and his *public persona* were transfigured. On January 26, 1994, the Cavaliere officially *entered the political field*, proclaiming:

Italy is the country I love. Here I have my roots, my hopes, my horizons. Here I have learned, from my father and from life, how to be an entrepreneur. Here I have also acquired the passion for liberty. I have chosen *to enter the field* and become a public servant because I do not want to live in an illiberal country, ruled by immature forces and by people who are well and truly bound to a past that proved both a political and economic failure.

During this famous speech—the first of his political career—Berlusconi chose to employ the soccer jargon in order to secure a metaphorical link between his extraordinary success as patron of AC Milan and his political activity, being sure that most Italians would have been able to understand it immediately (albeit unintentionally). That soccer played a very special role for Berlusconi is confirmed also by other interviews released shortly after that first speech. For example, the day after the foundation of Forza Italia (his first political party), the PdL's leader declared, “If I enter into the political life, I will resign from every other role but the presidency of AC Milan.” (January 19, 1994) More noteworthy words came just a few months later, on June 6, after his party's victory in the elections: while greeting the Italian National team about to leave to compete for the 1994 World Cup, Berlusconi declared, “My political mission is like building a soccer team.” Finally, during the celebration for the third consecutive *scudetto*—again, just a few weeks after his party's electoral victory—Berlusconi addressed a selected audience of AC Milan players and supporters with the following questions:

“Are we tired of winning?”

“Nooo!” they answered.

“Will we win again?”

“Yees!”

“Everywhere and anyway? Under our guidance, will Italy become like [AC] Milan?”

“Yees!”

“Then, we shall cut the cake, being assured that there are going to be lots of cakes for everyone!” (Taken from Alberto Costa, “*Noi del Milan, mai stanchi di vincere*,” *Corriere della Sera*, April 19, 1994, p. 41)

When compared to the construction of the *stile Juve*, Berlusconi's case is striking in its brevity. Within a few years, he

succeeded in creating a new image for himself and for Italian soccer. The new media were a crucial component of this process, and Berlusconi had a long-standing frequentation with them. He was indeed the first to explore and understand the commercial potentials of private television in Italy: in 1978 he bought a small local television—Telemilano—and just few years later his business was controlling several channels, spread all over the country, thus able to broadcast nationwide. This was a formidable achievement, especially when considering that national television was at that time a State monopoly.

It is not an accident that the first major event Berlusconi decided to broadcast on his network was the 1980–81 Mundialito, a soccer tournament played in Uruguay during Christmas time. The teams involved were former world champions, Italy being among those. He had thus foreseen the novel alchemy—in terms of profit—between television and soccer: within less than ten years, Fininvest (nowadays Mediaset) became the only competitor of RAI in the Italian television market.

Berlusconi's connection with soccer, however, is not limited to the commercial aspects. On April 18 1994, the Cavaliere himself marvelously expressed how that sphere is related—and in the specific a patron—to his public *persona*:

Soccer is a metaphor of life: from Milan's success people realized that mine is a winning philosophy, that by working hard ambitious goals may be reached.

At first sight, the metaphorical link between AC Milan and Berlusconi's *persona* may come through as commonplace. But, once you begin unpacking the logic behind it, you become aware yet again of a lengthy and continuous process of meaning transfer from one sphere to the other. The story, however, gets more interesting. Not only was Berlusconi a forerunner in the use of soccer as a metaphor through mass-media, but the connection he puts to work relies on the

surgical removal of certain elements of the soccer sphere, so that—as it was for the Roman god Mars—any turn of bad fortune for Berlusconi disappears.

No mirror provides an *exact* copy of reality. Some mirrors, however, distort more than others. In the fairytale Snow White, the Queen in asking, “Who is the fairest one of all?” cannot content herself with any answer but the one she desired. Analogously, Berlusconi cunningly arranges to receive the answer he desires from his team: no defeat. This wish clashes with a very basic fact: as any team is bound to come across victories and defeats, its metaphorical correlate will be accordingly mirrored. It is hence remarkable how Berlusconi systematically tries to escape this logic by avoiding having his name linked with AC Milan’s bad fortune. This is why we are saying that, in relating himself just with the wins of AC Milan, Berlusconi is doing something of peculiar: he is creating a “winning team” by *fiat*, which would suggest that he is a winner because—indeed—*his team* is a winning team. (AC Milan is indeed among the most successful clubs in the world; nonetheless it has suffered incredible defeats, like the memorable 2005 Champions League Final played against Liverpool.)

The question, then, quickly arises: “How can Berlusconi remove the defeat as constitutive element of the story of his team—and of soccer *sans phrase*?” Answer: “By removing unpredictability”—that is: “By denying that *like life, soccer is unpredictable*.” This is achieved through a surgical and deliberate selection of the episodes in which the metaphor should be put at work. The effect is to create the image of a president who is able to overcome the power of any adversary and any fortune (as the prince portrayed in Niccolò Machiavelli’s masterpiece). Here are some excerpts from Berlusconi testifying this point:

The problem of Milan is that I do not take care of the team in first person anymore. Because of politics I have

had to abandon the team. I have to think about the Country and not about Milan, you are ruining me. (*Sette*, March 2, 2001)

Milan is not winning anymore because, since he entered politics, his president is not taking care of it anymore. (*Ansa*, February 6, 1998)

Milan at Berlusconi's fashion: Roma defeated. A goal by Leonardo and two goals by Shevchenko: but it is of the Cavaliere too, that he asked forever a four men defense to Zaccheroni. (*Il Giornale*, January 22, 2002)

No one talks about Berlusconi's Milan, but Sacchi's, Zac's, Ancelotti's one. However, I am the one who decided line-ups for the last eighteen years. (*Corriere della Sera*, March 17, 2004)

Berlusconi obviously cannot deny the fact that his team sometimes loses. What he does is subtler. He simply understands and explains Milan's defeats as caused by his absence or by some kind of lack in the fulfillment of his directions. In Berlusconi's terms, the failed observance of his “winning ideas”, or the impossibility to produce and communicate them, is the reason AC Milan is defeated. He endorsed this philosophy even as Prime Minister of Italy and, thus, as a representative of the Italian national team. The day after the clamorous defeat of the *Azzurri* in the final of Euro 2000 by France, Berlusconi officially declared during a press conference:

For the love of my country, I wanted to stay silent. Instead, I have to say that we could and we had to win. Zoff made shameful decisions: Zidane was always free to move and play, it was impossible not to notice that. Even an amateur would have noticed that and we

would have won. Someone like Gattuso could have been the right choice. [...] It would have been enough to win. (*Corriere della Sera* August 17, 2005, p. 48)

It is not just by attributing the responsibilities to coaches or lamenting his lack of involvement (because of more pressing duties) that Berlusconi can avoid being identified with the defeats of his team. AC Milan possesses a very weird set of managers. Paradoxically, Silvio Berlusconi is not the President of AC Milan, but no one else holds—or can hold—this position. Adriano Galliani is vice executive president and managing director, while Paolo Berlusconi (Silvio's brother) and Gianni Nardi are vice presidents. Thanks to this administrative arrangement, the Cavaliere can deny being the president who (sometimes) loses, while celebrating being the winningest president in the history of AC Milan (and maybe of soccer). Like Mars, the Roman god of war, every time he enters the battlefield, he cannot lose.

Finally, there is the intricate relationship between Berlusconi and AC Milan supporters. These have been unusually critical of the management (regretfully, in violent ways too), a striking fact when posed next to the impressive number of competitions recently won by the team. The reasons of the conflict may be at least partially found in that very same mirroring process that helps in the constitution of Berlusconi's public *persona*. A handy example is the recent transfer of Kakà to Real Madrid. Faced with the vehement fans' protests, Berlusconi readily denied any involvement in the trade: "If it would depend on me, I would keep him." (Furio Fedele, "Berlusconi: 'Ronaldo sarà il faro del Milan'," *Corriere dello Sport*, June 9, 2009) This suggested that the player and the executive management (Adriano Galliani) were responsible and that, once more, there was no defeat for Berlusconi. However, Galliani in turn blamed the global economic crises: "Transfers of this kind are going to be popular in the next few years," ("*La vita continua anche senza Kakà*," *Televideo*, June 5, 2009: 00:01) suggesting also that the

ultimate reason for the transfer is to be found in some special fiscal laws that would favor Spanish teams over Italian ones. Unfortunately, the supporters' distress was not relieved by these comments and, ultimately, the *public persona* of Berlusconi was negatively affected.

We are now in a position to summarize the logic of metaphor underlying Berlusconi's link to AC Milan. The *bare individual* 'Silvio Berlusconi' is connected with the 'President' of AC Milan. The peculiarity of this process of mirroring is that the 'President' is *connected directly* to the subset of the team—the *winning team*—and just indirectly to the *losing team*, through the mediation of 'Collaborators' (Galliani and Leonardo). Since the relationships are loaded with value, we can identify the first one (President-winning team) as a *positive relationship* (in the sense that favors the construction of the 'winning' public image of Berlusconi), the indirect relationship between him and the *losing team* (losing team-Galliani&Co.-President) as a *negative-relationship*. The supporters are directly related to the team, directly related to Galliani&Co. and indirectly related in a *negative-relationship* to the 'President.' Thus, the *public persona* of Silvio Berlusconi (who is the Prime Minister of Italy, the founder of Mediolanum bank, the major shareholder of Fininvest and Mediaset, *et cetera*) is—at least in part—shaped through the mirroring process originating in 'being-the -President-of-AC Milan.'

#### *Ad Maiora: Leonidas Goes to Sicily*

In the last two decades, the sphere of Italian soccer has seen the rise of another patron who, like Berlusconi, in a short time-span secured a strong metaphorical link between his club and his public persona; but, this time the emphasis was on virtuous up-keeping, rather than on a winning character. When, in 1980s, Maurizio Zamparini attempted to acquire Udinese Calcio, his name didn't ring a bell for most Italians. Nowadays, the owner of US Città di Palermo is one of the most visible and controversial figures on the scene. Like



Berlusconi, Zamparini is a self-made man and a successful entrepreneur who gained a prominent role in Italian soccer in a short time. And also like Berlusconi, Zamparini primarily relied on the new media to develop his public persona. However, while the former is the correlate of Mars, the latter embodies Leonidas for his non-negotiable appeal to virtue and morality.

In a sense, Zamparini is the nemesis of Berlusconi. He has been seeking to build a new course for Italian soccer, calling for a dramatic change in a number of its contemporary aspects. First, while Berlusconi wishes to link his image to the one of a winning team, Zamparini has stressed multiple times that, in order to save Italian soccer, what matters is to set “democratic rules”: “I idealize sport as an activity where we are all really on a par and the best of us is the winner.” (Saverio Lodato, *L’Unità*, November 2, 2004, p. 11) In this regard, his greatest achievement was the introduction of an agreement that more equitably distributes profits coming from TV broadcasting rights of soccer games. His democratic zeal was supposedly also at the heart also of Zamparini’s quarrel with Galliani (AC Milan’s vice-president) for a more democratic management of the Lega Calcio Serie A, a public discussion which reached very harsh tones at times.

Zamparini’s appeal to virtue and morality was made visible in other contexts as well. He has repeatedly and energetically demanded more secure stadiums. On the tragic night of the Catania–Palermo match, when a local policeman was killed in a riot, he declared, “Nobody won tonight, but everybody lost” (*Il Messaggero*, February 3, 2007, p. 2), and remarked on the necessity of improving the security measures within and surroundings the stadiums (see also the article by Guglielmo Buccheri in *La Stampa*, June 17, 2006, p. 12). The most recent changes in stadium management—for example, the stricter controls over ticket sales and the exclusion of police forces from the stadium—are in keeping with Zamparini’s proposals and owe much to his zeal. Also of note were the open letters that the president of the *Rosaneri* wrote to the Cavaliere. In these unusual

documents, Zamparini publicly discusses both what connects and what separates the two powerful businessmen (all appeared in *Liberio* on February 20, 2009, p. 13, November 3, 2004, p. 14, and August 26, 2003, p. 1). The missives, clearly linking Zamparini's *persona* to Berlusconi's, argued quite clearly that what is at stake is not just soccer, but also politics—revealing how close in the present-time the link between the two spheres is. But, in the most recent one of the series, our Leonidas reprimands his nemesis: “Next time you go to S. Siro do not sit in the tribune but in the curve. There you'll hear the true voice of the people,” By means of this, Zamparini chides the overtly detached behavior of Berlusconi and while reinforcing the need for patrons and teams to close the cultural and behavioral gap severing them from the supporters.

On the other hand, over the past two decades, Zamparini's business has grown along with his visibility. After owning Pordenone Calcio for a few years, in July 1987 he purchased Società Sportiva Calcio Venezia, which was on the verge of bankruptcy (and which he immediately merged with its longstanding rival Calcio Mestre). But when, in July 2002, the occasion to acquire Palermo arose, he took it, even if that meant “abandoning” his native region and taking away from it a precious financial support. In the meanwhile, he has made investments in Sicily of about one hundred million euro, creating approximately one thousand jobs (*Corriere della sera*, January 18, 2007, p. 24). His name has also been associated with the Moggi *affaire* in 2006 and to a corruption scandal for tax evasion in 2007 (see, BDC, *Il foglio*, May 19, 2006, p. 1 and Luigi Ferrarella, *Corriere della sera*, January 18, 2007, p. 24). Are we thus really in front of a Leonidas of soccer? We shall not peruse this issue further. But, the elements at hand suggest that he partially succeeded in securing a moralized image for his *persona*.

Summing up, what to most Italians was a bare particular, ‘Maurizio Zamparini’, came to be linked in due time (and within the soccer sphere) with the patron of two Serie A clubs (Società Sportiva Calcio Venezia and US Città di Palermo). Acting in this role, in a

short time and with the aid of the new media, Zamparini created a public *persona* in the mundane sphere, which acquired notoriety and success.

#### *A Season Ahead?*

We conclude our analysis here. Before leaving you, however, we shall make a few remarks. First of all, our analysis was limited to a few notable examples of patronage. There are other kinds of cases deserving close study. (i) *Shareholding clubs*, such as FC Barcelona and Real Madrid AD. The mirroring mechanism is here quite complex, because the legal and administrative structure of the club prevents the affirmation of a figure who could emerge as the ultimate keystone of the team. (ii) *Supporter's owned clubs*, such as Spezia Calcio. In these cases, the image of the club directly reflects the spirit of a town, whose members decide to represent the team financially as well. (iii) *International patrons*, such as Roman Abramovic (patron of Chelsea FC) and the Abu Dhabi United Group Investment and Development Limited (recent patron of Manchester City FC). The global market has recently seen the rise of wealthy individuals acquiring the property of high profile foreign teams. For quite obvious reasons, in these cases the link between the patron and the public *persona* is established through the construction of a team of superstars, more than through the recourse to the cultural and historical heritage of the club; and, as for AC Milan, more attention is devoted to cultivate (through the media) a relationship with the far-away supporters rather than with the most *historical* devotee. (iv) *Multi-club patrons*, such as Luciano Gaucci, Franco Sensi, and Massimo Moratti. The soccer scene hosts patrons who own and manage more than one club at a time. Usually, the teams do not compete in the same league; they may, however, exchange players and staff. Such cases are relevant to our issue in that they usually muddy the image that their patrons are trying to establish through one of the clubs they own. For example, Franco Sensi's image as patron of AS Roma was negatively affected by the secondary

relations he entrenched with other satellite clubs (Olympique Lyonnaise, US Città di Palermo).

Secondly, this is just a first step into the study of the logic within which the soccer sphere affects the way we perceive elements in the mundane sphere. Fortune, virtue, creativity, authority, loyalty, and honor are just some of the additional themes that might deserve a similar treatment. Our wish is that other analyses may follow to this exordium.