

NEWS

Serie A soccer clubs hitting lean times

By Denis Greenan
ANSA

ROME: More Serie A clubs could go the way of once-glorious Fiorentina unless reforms are made to stop them living beyond their means, the FIGC soccer federation's president, Franco Carraro, warned on Tuesday.

In an interview with Italy's biggest sports daily, Gazzetta dello Sport, Carraro said the next two or three years would be make-or-break for Italian soccer's financial viability.

He also hailed Rupert Murdoch's takeover of Italy's pay-TV operations, saying it would mean clubs could no longer form cliques to hold soccer ransom and the sophistication of his proven anti-piracy technology would finally guarantee the levels of revenue seen in other countries.

But Carraro painted a grim picture of the immediate future, after a cash crunch that saw three-time Serie A winner Fiorentina go to the wall and top clubs scramble for money to make their downpayments for the season.

"Years of blood and tears await us, and I can't rule out other sensational cases," Carraro said.

"Soccer is still spending more than it earns. There's been some awareness of the problem but the old high-paying contracts are still running and some clubs are going against the belt-tightening trend.

"We're going to have to suffer for another two or three

years."

But the federation plans to help clubs change their ways, Carraro said.

The next meeting of FIGC's executive board will introduce measures for controlling clubs' finances and will approve penalties for clubs that break a code of financial practice.

On Murdoch's addition of Telepiu to his Stream pay-TV company, pending regulatory approval, Carraro said: "if he wins the battle against piracy, as he seems able to do, his monopoly should have positive repercussions."

The revenue of both companies has been severely dented by Italy's pirates, among the most skillful in Europe. But the card-cloners have been stumped by Stream's new hyper-smart technology developed by Murdoch's extremely successful Sky network.

With the pirates baffled, more subscribers would mean higher revenues, helping the clubs out of their tight spot - while a single pay-TV buyer would stop the clubs splitting into two squabbling groups, Carraro said.

This year the start of the season was delayed for two weeks as smaller clubs refused to agree a deal on pay-TV rights. In the end the big clubs chipped in cash to persuade them to sign up.

This year's rebellion was only possible because the rights were not bought in a single block by one buyer, Carraro said. But with Murdoch as the sole talking partner, "the clubs won't be able to present a divided front any more."

People

The Ferrari team was out in full force for Tuesday's reception at Rome's Quirinale Palace where President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi met with world champion Michael Schumacher, Ferrari President Luca di Montezemolo, team principal Jean Todt and members of the championship-winning racing team come down from Maranello. A model of the F2002, the winning car, was parked in the main courtyard of the 17th century palazzo, built when horses and not horsepower were the main mode of transportation. Driving a Ferrari may no longer be a dream for some. On Monday, news agencies reported that a Ferrari sports car had been modified by the Austrian Arboe automobile club to be driven by people who have lost the use of their legs. The manually operated 360 F1 Modena Spider will be available for a free test drive to people with paralyzed legs starting Wednesday at Arboe's track near Vienna.

Rimini's outspoken, fraud-fighting priest, Father **Oreste Benzi**, has set up a hotline to assist victims of Satanic cults, which are said to be growing fast in Italy. Benzi estimates that there are at least 8,000 groups practicing black magic with more than 600,000 members. The association will support families of the followers of Satan, and the members themselves, "so they can discover the lies and errors that keep them imprisoned by the sect." But it will also support the "promoters and leaders of these sects who keep the truth chained up so that they too will see the way," Benzi said. The number is 800-228866.

The sculptor **Giuliano Vangi** told reporters at a press conference Tuesday in Tokyo he was "pleased and honored" to have received the 2002 Imperial Praemium prize. The sculptor from Pietrasanta, a town near Carrara where Michelangelo once dug for marble, said it was "almost too much for an artist who has been working every day in his studio for more than 50 years." The Japan Art Association, headed by **Prince Masahito Hitachi**, brother of the Emperor Akihito, has been handing out the prestigious award for 14 years. The winners will pick up their €125,000 prize and medals in Tokyo today.



Restored beauty

A statue of Charity in a chapel designed by the 17th century sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini returns to its original guise after a recent restoration. The bust of the figure, which was sculpted by Bernini's son and followers for the da Silva chapel in the church of Sant'Isidoro in Rome, had been covered with a bronze cloth in the 19th century. The restoration of the chapel also unveiled the presence of frescoed angels by Giacinto Gimignani.

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One of the first dummy issues, made available online last week, featured an editorial outlining the paper's position on the highly fractured center-left opposition, the Olive Tree.

The article tackled the infighting within the largest party in the coalition, the Democratic Left, whose divisions are hampering the reconstruction of a coherent alliance capable of putting up an effective opposition to the governing center-right.

To rebuild the coalition, Il Riformista proposed keeping hard-line leftists out of the group. The new group, including only moderate reformists, would be "smaller than the large [Olive Tree] coalition, but more consistent."

To do so, the editorial suggested that the Democratic Left's liberal-labor majority give up trying to get along with the leftist faction of the party and simply work on its own. That idea, famously championed by D'Alema and his entourage, seemed to lend credence to the rumor that Il Riformista was created as a mouthpiece for the Democratic Left's chairman.

"We'll show the public that that is not the case," Polito said. Instead, he hoped his readership will be as diverse as possible.

Polito explained he imagined his average reader more or less as a clone of himself. "Someone my age, who developed a taste for politics in the 1970s and then lost it, partly out of disappointment in the left and partly out of navel-gazing, because he

concentrated on his personal and professional life."

According to a survey by the Trieste-based polling institute SWG, which divides Italy's newspaper readers into eight types, that profile could potentially fit a fourth of all readers.

In its effort to grab those readers, Il Riformista faces a powerhouse rival, the highbrow daily Il Foglio, which in six years of publication has reached a circulation of roughly 13,000 copies. Though known to side with the conservatives, the paper has developed into a must-read for all curious minds as well as for journalists and politicians.

More relevantly, it is proof that an opinionated paper can appeal to readers across the political spectrum. Il Foglio editor Giuliano Ferrara's start-up motto, "an exclusive article and a convincing opinion each day," has won over hosts of readers.

To many, Il Riformista will be "the Il Foglio of the left."

Naturally, Polito bristled at the comparison. "We are indebted to Il Foglio," he conceded, "because it has shown that a newspaper made of ideas can be a successful enterprise. But, he insisted, Il Riformista would be a completely different matter - "more factual, according to the Anglo-Saxon style."

Like Il Foglio, the paper will keep a close eye on the English-speaking world. Citing Great Britain in particular, Polito stressed that a strong focus on the public debate there - "where it is at a much more advanced stage than in Italy" - would be particularly significant for Il Riformista.

High-profile columnists will include Peter Mandelson, Frederic Michel, James Rubin, Dominique Strauss-Kahn and Italian journalist Lucia Annunziata, the editor of the AP-Biscom newswire. On staff will be five full-time reporters and a dozen contributors.

Comment

Even flowers can't sweeten GM's smell

By Amanda Castleman
Special to Italy Daily

The world's first fluorescent blossom debuted at the Pesca flower show this summer. The large white bluebell glowed under ultraviolet light - thanks to jellyfish genes inserted by the Experimental Institute of Floriculture in San Remo.

"Hopefully the flower can show that genetic engineering is indeed useful to mankind and not the sinister thing some have been led to believe," scientist Tito Schiva told ANSA news agency. "It's really a matter of psychology, and using flowers makes it so much easier to get one's point across."

But it takes more than a luminous green bouquet to win over Italians. Sixty-five percent oppose GM technology. And the nation is defying American trade representatives and biotech corporations, who want to bully into the lucrative European market.

Italy fought hard to stop new GM product approval four years ago. But time is running out: The European Commission is rolling out the red carpet for agribusiness. A new directive went into force on Oct. 17. It's coy like a young girl toying with an insistent lover. On the one hand, there are very, very strict restrictions on GM crops and food (Oh no, I couldn't possibly!). Yet she's willing to be coaxed, happy to flirt with applications for new products. (Well, maybe just this once...)

The EC promises a "case-by-case assessment of the risks to human health and the environment before any GM product such as maize, tomatoes, insects or microorganisms can be released into the environment or placed on the market."

Where does this leave Italy - and other countries who don't fancy modified meals? Kicking and screaming, like angry chaperones out to save the

maiden's integrity.

So far, so good. Product approval can't move forward until Europe agrees on GM labeling and "traceability." Italy, France, Greece, Luxembourg, Denmark, Belgium and Austria demand more protection. Ministers squabbled in Luxembourg during mid-October meetings. And the whole messy, unpleasant process ground to a halt.

Warning labels were a major sticking point. Grey areas exist, certainly. Most politicians will tolerate an accidental dash of GM ingredients. But how much is too much? The European Parliament voted in July to lower this threshold from 1 percent to 0.5 percent. Italy's insistence helped keep amounts minute.

Seeds also came under scrutiny. Three hundred organizations - some 25 million people - petitioned for clean crops in the SOS (Save Our Seeds) campaign. The Commission proposed a 0.7 percent margin of error, which was slapped down. That seemingly-innocuous amount would have opened the floodgates to seven billion modified seeds each year in Europe.

Contamination remains a huge fear. Italy has already experienced problems. La Repubblica daily bought 31 soy-based items in Turin: ten contained genetic material, four were mislabeled. In March 2001, police raided a Monsanto warehouse and seized 112 tons of banned GM maize.

"It is not accidental. It is normal that we have very low levels (of genetic material)," said Jean Michel Duhamel, President of Monsanto's Italian subsidiary. This is corporate-speak for "whoops, we can't really keep our seeds straight."

To make matter worse, modified pollen is traveling farther than anyone expected, interbreeding with regular crops and weeds. And these blunders

can have a high price. North American farmers are being sued for "stealing" patented genes - even if a few stray seeds blew off the back of a truck.

Italy is right to be apprehensive - it has the most to lose. "Organic farming growth in Italy is rapid and the domestic organic market is taking off," says a recent report from the Rome-based United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The country is home to the largest organically-farmed area in Europe, with more than one million hectares planted in 2000. Plus, Italians pride themselves on fantastic produce - and knowing how to prepare and savor fine foods.

Italy - and other cautious countries - must stand firm as European Union talks progress. They mustn't let big business dictate their diet, stock supermarket shelves with unwanted and frightening food.

Farm Minister Giovanni Alemanno made a bold start last year: "The position that we have on seeds is 'zero tolerance' within the technical limits." He then called for a €50 million investment to keep the gene pool pure. The minister also promotes "full and honest

labeling."

Let's just hope Uncle Sam doesn't administer a force feeding. Washington is angry at the loss of exports to Europe worth around \$4.5 billion every year - and may run squealing to the World Trade Organization.

Italians could find an unlikely ally, though: The American people. As biotech firms bluster abroad, the average citizen is losing appetite for GM foods. A majority of them, 93%, support labeling, according to an ABC News poll last year. Two thirds would avoid altered ingredients, given the chance.

Modified foods are getting such a bad name, they can't even give the stuff away. Zambia and other African states recently refused famine relief shipments of U.S. corn.

GM supporters can threaten. They can cajole and flatter with green-glowing flowers, fancy speeches. But at the end of the day, Bell'Italia should follow her instincts and slam the door on modified foods.

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Catania	12/54	23/73
Florence	8/46	18/64
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CLOUDY
RAIN
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Bolzano	5/41	12/54
Brindisi	11/52	20/68
Cagliari	12/54	21/70
Catania	11/52	23/73
Florence	8/46	16/61
Genoa	13/55	17/63
Milan	5/41	15/59
Naples	9/48	18/64
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