

Stars & Stripes AS Roma

Alice Bonvicini (May 03, 2011)



[Screen shot 2011-05-03 at 2_1304448850.58](#) [2]

US Magnate Thomas DiBenedetto buys Capitoline football club AS Roma and for the fans in America it is the beginning of a new era, and the ultimate collision between their worlds

When you become an expatriate the meaning of things in your life change. Stuff that you once took for granted suddenly becomes distant turning up a notch the appreciation receptors. What is even more fascinating is how some other things, even the most mundane, become personal signifiers of an unbroken bond, "miracle growth" serum for the roots left home. The intoxicating passion for football (soccer, in America) seems to be one of the most common and most powerful of those elixirs. Sunday games take on layers of meanings, hardly understandable by the fans back home, often having more to do with social bonding and identity rather than stats and numbers.

Hence, on April 15, after the finalizing of the sale of [AS Roma](#) [3] (the number one team of Italy's capital, and yes I am a tifosa) to a United States consortium led by Thomas DiBenedetto, Roma fans in the US not only rejoiced for the new era about to begin, but they experienced something quite special: the collision between their new world and their old one.

Giovanni Peluso, an attorney from Rome who has been living in the US for two decades and who is the founder and President of the [Roma Club New York](#) [4], confirms that watching Roma keeps him close to home even if he is on the other side of the Atlantic. "The team is the one you followed when you were a boy and reminds you of your youth; in a way you miss it more than the city," he says. "But those memories, at the same time, keep the city alive," he explains us. Laura Caparrotti, a Roman actress who holds the position of Secretary of the Roma Club New York, elaborates the concept of soccer and social bonding, "if you are a real fan, wherever you are in the world you have to watch the games. It's nice to be able to do it with other people who are fans. And often you become friends, and then it's not just about Roma anymore."

Laura continues, "I moved to New York 16 years ago and I can't believe my team is becoming a bit American as well. I feel like Roma is even closer to me and my life." But her feelings are mixed, as she cautiously wants to see what DiBenedetto and his partners are planning before giving into the excitement. "The most important thing is that they keep [Bruno Conti](#) [5] (former player and coach of Roma, now club Director). I am the biggest Conti fan and I say, do not touch Bruno, otherwise DiBenedetto has to deal with me," she adds quite vehemently.

For Giovanni Peluso, the level of thrill is a bit higher. "I am excited if a foreigner is interested in becoming the owner of Roma because it means there is worldwide recognition for the team; it means the club is as famous as Real Madrid, Manchester United, Liverpool and so on." And adds, "I live here and I know that American business people have managerial qualities that should be exported to



Italy, especially in sports. Roma needs that.”

[Red Sox](#) [6] minority investor Thomas DiBenedetto is the first foreigner to own a Serie A club. DiBenedetto's group, which includes [Celtics](#) [7]' owner James Pallotta, will control 60 percent of the team while UniCredit bank, the de facto controller of Roma until April 15, will have the remaining 40 percent, and has the option to sell a part to other Italian investors.

Bill Schempp, [Italics](#) [8] producer and a hard-core Roma fan for the last twenty years is also very excited about this deal. The first date with his Irish girlfriend was a Lazio-Milan game at [Stadio Olimpico](#) [9] in Rome, but when he came back to the United States his friends informed him of Mussolini's adoration for SS Lazio and advised him to pick the other Capitoline club, AS Roma. He has been tirelessly following the giallorossi since then, often in solitary isolation in the basement of his house, because he hates to “watch sports with other people” since he gets, he diplomatically puts it, “highly emotionally involved.” From his office, which has a huge Roma flag on the door, he tells us that he is happy about DiBenedetto. He thinks football (his Irish girlfriend taught him two paramount things, never to root for Manchester United and never to call it soccer) will never be the number one sport in the US but with the changing demographics in the country and now an American involved with the team of a city where many Americans travel, more fans could be drawn in. Schempp grew up in an Italian-American household where his parents consciously did not teach him the language, quite a common practice among second generation children who were kept from learning Italian to better assimilate into America's culture. Hence he gets frustrated not to be able to read articles about Roma in Italian, but football has somehow helped him salvage his roots. “It was a way of embracing my Irish girlfriend at first,” he admits, “but I now realize I know a lot more about the country of my grandparents from watching the games.”

Roma fans have all dreamt about having a stronger and more powerful team, able to compete with esteemed European counterparts, and since the beginning of this stars and stripes chapter they have projected themselves into a future season of affluence, victories and glory. Waiting to see what will happen in the next Campionato, we can safely say that this acquisition has finally brought the worlds of many -mine included- very close.

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