

The Real Football: Clashing Realities Characterize Serie A Week 4

Ghelli Federico (September 19, 2016)



Welcome to The Real Football, i-Italy's new column that aims to bring the Italian soccer spirit to the American population. Every Monday, we'll deliver facts, statistics and curiosities of a sport that we Italians consider a religion.

There are two parallel realities marking the start of this soccer season.

One is the exponential growth of Napoli, which enjoys the top-spot in both Serie A and Champions League, and Inter Milan, which resuscitated after the debacle in Thursday's Europa League match and provided a solid performance against defending league champion Juventus. On the other hand, Roma is still facing an identity crisis since the Champions League playoff fiasco, and Juventus, whose a confidence overload caused a display of too little desire to fight in the very first crucial game on the road to its sixth consecutive Scudetto.

Juventus' triumph this year might end up being more difficult than what many predicted. Napoli is proving to be a team with infinite resources which can only improve given the young age of the newcomers in this market session, confirming the ability of Napoli's scouting network. Critics thought that after Gonzalo Higuain's departure Napoli would've lacked that impressive firepower that characterized last season, but they were wrong.



With six goals in the first five games of the season, Arkadiusz Milik has a different opinion. The 22-year-old Polish striker is becoming the new Serie A sensation and many Napoli fans are already forgetting their old idol... **Higuain who?**

Another team that is finally showing signs of improvement is Inter Milan. After a stormy summer with way more downs than ups, Inter has finally played with intensity and courage from the first minute of the game, resulting in an unpredictable 2-1 win in the Derby D'Italia against Juventus.

Mauro Icardi proved to be the true leader of the team, being able to score goals and make decisive assists. Joao Mario demonstrated to be the missing piece in Inter's midfield. It wasn't just about his performance, but his wisdom to keep his position on the field and to always have clear ideas, even when his team was left with just 10 men on the field. Along with Banega's creativity and Gary Medel's intensity, Inter's midfield has the potential to become one of the finest in Europe. Now, we are all waiting on Gabigol... **Icardi's reserve or the new dynamic duo?**

The team that doesn't seem close to solving its issues is Roma, but the 1-0 loss against Fiorentina showed a few small signs of improvement. In the past weeks, Coach Luciano Spalletti accused his players of lacking that winning mentality every top team should have. Against Fiorentina, the Giallorossi certainly demonstrated that they have accepted the challenge. They showed that desire to win and to overcome their own flaws.

Of course, the struggle is not over yet but the desire to win is there and Spalletti's team has brought order and concentration, which is necessary in becoming a winning team. Before Badelj's winning goal, Roma remained in the game and that shouldn't be underestimated when talking about a team ready to fall apart at the first difficulty.

Thinking about the first half of Roma-Sampdoria or the first half hour of Europa League in Plzen, the mere fact of having found a vessel and now having to find something to put into it sounds more like relief than regret... **New beginnings?**

But the big news this past weekend was the Juventus defeat against Inter. On paper, la Vecchia Signora is the best team in Italy right now, and they're widely the favorites in the run for the title. However, they deservedly lost a game in which they showed a lack of competitive spirit and efficacy.

Juventus' defense granted too many opportunities against an opponent who in previous games had not seemed irresistible. The midfield for Juventus showed perpetual difficulties from both physical and quality points of view. It's not a surprise that Kwadwo Asamoah was one of the worst of the game, guilty of losing the ball that turned into Inter's second goal.

The only good points in the game were Dybala and Alex Sandro. The first remains one of the most inspired Juventus' player, even though is still missing his first league goal. The second, showed unlimited energy and provided an assists galore to his companions.

Juventus stands just one point below Napoli, so there is no drama here. Yet, the road will be long and hard, more than they might have thought... **Time to get her groove back?**

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