

FIFA® 1904

FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



LLOYD AND MESSI AT THE FIFA BALLON D'OR 2015

IT'S TROPHY TIME!

RWANDA
AFRICA IN
CHAMPIONSHIP FEVER

ANTONIO CONTE
"ITALY WANT TO GET
BACK TO THE TOP"

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL
THREE SYMBOLIC
TOURNAMENTS

HEALTH
HOW SLEEP AFFECTS
MATCH PREPARATIONS

THE INTERVIEW



Antonio Conte The 46-year-old wants to replicate his years of success at Juventus with the Italy national team.

„CATENACCIO HAS HAD ITS DAY“

After learning his trade under some of Italy's finest coaches and after leading Juventus to three league titles, Antonio Conte is about to experience his first major tournament as a national team coach. *FIFA 1904's* **Alan Schweingruber** sat down with him in Paris for a chat about EURO 2016, the crisis in *Serie A*, and the young footballers of today.

Antonio, what is your opinion of Italian club football at the moment?

Antonio Conte: I think the best football is currently being played in England, followed by the leagues in Spain and Germany. *Serie A* is only in fourth place, there are no two ways about it. It didn't used to be that way.

That sounds wistful.

It's not wistful, it's just the truth. Italian football used to be in a far better state. *Serie A* was one of the most attractive leagues in the world. Everybody wanted to play their football here. If you look at figures from the past, it is even clearer. When we became world champions in 2006, 66% of all players in *Serie A* were Italian, and that figure was even higher still when I was playing. Today, that figure is only 34%. Club owners are no longer prepared to invest huge sums of money in their teams. There is simply a lack of money in *Serie A*.

How much does that affect the Italian national team?

The national team obviously suffers as a result. There are fewer players available for selection. I am still optimistic about the future for *Serie A* though. We are on our way back to the top.

THE INTERVIEW

You'll have to explain that one to us...

The clubs have started to invest more in youth football again, and the association has also launched good, ambitious development projects. We are now in a very exciting period, which I would compare with where Germany were about 15 years ago, when the German FA began to set up training centres in every region. And we all know how well that project turned out, with Germany winning the 2014 World Cup with the players who were just kids back then.

But isn't it also true that Italy should be able to win any tournament, regardless of how well *Serie A* is doing?

(laughs) You could say that! You can never write off Italy.

Can you win EURO 2016 with your team?

Let's just say that we have ambitions. It doesn't matter to me if we are one of the favourites or not. Maybe we will just be dangerous outsiders in France. The main thing is that we prepare for this European Championship as well as we can. If all goes to plan we will play seven matches, so it would be a case of doing our best seven times. You have to get a lot right if you are to win a tournament.

„As a player, I was fortunate to be able to learn from good coaches. Marcello Lippi, Giovanni Trapattoni, Arrigo Sacchi, Carlo Ancelotti... so it is certainly worth making a few calls.“

You are about to go into your first major tournament as a national team coach. How much can you take from your experience of tournaments as a player?

Of course you learn something from every experience. I was part of the national team for six years, in which time we reached the final of a major tournament twice (Ed. 1994 World Cup and EURO 2000). So you do learn something from that. But I will certainly ask for some advice from one or two coaches before the European Championship.

Which coaches do you have in mind?

As a player, I was fortunate to be able to learn from good coaches. Marcello Lippi, Giovanni Trapattoni, Arrigo Sacchi, Carlo Ancelotti... so it is certainly worth making a few calls



NAME ANTONIO CONTE

BORN 31 JULY 1969, LECCE

CLUBS AS A PLAYER US LECCE, JUVENTUS

CLUBS AS A COACH AREZZO, BARI, ATALANTA, SIENA, JUVENTUS, ITALY (SINCE 2014)

HONOURS WINNER OF THE UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE, FIVE *SERIE A* TITLES AND ONE ITALIAN CUP TITLE (AS PLAYER), THREE *SERIE A* TITLES (AS MANAGER)

“A tailor makes a suit out of the material available to him. He can only do what the material allows him to do. The work of a football coach is rather similar.”

(laughs). I will then combine all the advice I receive with my own ideas. Working as a national team coach is always an opportunity for the coach himself too. I want to become a complete coach. So it is important that I also put my own ideas into practice.

What ideas do you have?

I always compare my work as a coach to that of a tailor, who makes a suit out of the material available to him. He can only do what the material allows him to do. The work of a football coach is rather similar. If a coach wants to impose a complicated system on a team that is too weak, he will probably fail. So my view is basically that you need to adapt to the circumstances. Of course, the manner in which you get your message across is the key to success.

What kind of mentality does your team have?

My players know that I value discipline and decency. Mutual respect is also important to me. If all of that is in place, then you have the foundations for good cooperation. In terms of the game itself, I am a fan of attacking football.

Italy's greatest successes have all been built on *catenaccio*, the most defensive of all defensive tactics.

That is true, but *catenaccio* and counter-attacking football have had their day. We have to have a rethink and move with the times. Football has changed dramatically. I have a feeling that the mentality is changing in Italy. Good attacking football is all about the art of switching quickly into attack after winning the ball, but still finding a balance between defence and attack.

That sounds a little like the Arrigo Sacchi of the 1990s.

Arrigo Sacchi was a great coach. He changed Italian football with his new style of attacking football. In fact he revolutionised it! We can still benefit from that, even today. But I do not want to simply copy somebody; I want to learn from the past and take all I possibly can from it.

Was Sacchi your mentor?

Sacchi taught me a lot, but the two men who have had the biggest effect on my career are probably Carletto Mazzone and Eugenio Fascetti (*Ed.* former coaches of US Lecce). As a young player, I was able to learn so much from them, both as a footballer and as a person. That was a long time ago, but I still think a lot about their words.

What would you say to a young player who is only interested in money?

That money is important in life, but it can never be the be-all and end-all. A player has to be motivated by his passion for and love of football. If he isn't, he will find it hard to have a successful career in football.

Collaboration: Giovanni Marti

„In this age of smart phones and computers, young players can have their heads turned by the merest taste of success.“

Do the old-fashioned values still reach the young footballers of today?

The internet and social media have changed many things, and not always for the better. We also used to be proud to see ourselves on TV, but we had a different connection to reality. In this age of smart phones and computers, young players can have their heads turned by the merest taste of success. They score a goal and half an hour later they are watching a replay of it on their mobile phone in the dressing room. They play well in a couple of games and think they have made it. That is far from reality. It is not easy to reach such players with words.

Are such conversations part of a national team coach's job?

Yes, but I obviously only see the players now and again. It was easier when I was the coach of Juventus. I think that club coaches and national team coaches both have a role to play.