

Carl'Alberto Perroux

Translated by Maurizio Di Sacco

Edited by Mark Horton

THE BLUE TEAM

IN THE HISTORY OF BRIDGE



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Foreword

I am very pleased to congratulate Maurizio for the excellent research he has done to flesh out this history of Blue Team written by its great founder and leader, reporting little-known details that will help the reader to learn more about the characters. I am honoured to write an introductory note recounting my memories of the time.

Thanks to my father and my mother I knew the world of bridge from childhood and I met all the great champions of the Blue Team. A relationship which started in the middle of the 50s and over the years became friendship. I'm still very close to the two last surviving drakes: Piero Forquet and Benito Garozzo.^{1 2}

In the 80s I was NPC of the Italian National Team and for a couple of years I went around Europe as captain of a team composed by Giorgio Belladonna, Piero Forquet, Benito Garozzo and Camillo Pabis-Ticci. Giorgio would often remark: *Can you believe it? I sat him on my lap when he was a child and now he is my captain!*

About Carl'Albero Perroux, I still have a live and clear image of the first time I met him.³ It happened in Rome, when I was just a teenager, at the stadium for a football match of a team which Perroux was very enthusiastic about. It was winter, I was with my father and I heard an incredibly powerful voice calling him (they were very good friends) from behind us. I turned and saw a man who seemed as big as a tree to me, draped in a black cloak and wearing a giant black hat.

In later years I have come to appreciate the Man and his great passion, wisdom and charisma, inside and outside of bridge. A great lawyer, a great leader, a great teacher of life, whose words and writings are a testament of culture for posterity.

Unforgettable feelings, experiences and memories that have enriched my life, and stayed with me. It is those emotions I relived on reading Maurizio's translation.

GIANARRIGO RONA

¹ "Drake" Enzo Ferrari's nickname, founder of Ferrari. It is now used for someone who's the founder of something great (*Translator's Note* hereafter)

² Everybody calls him Piero these days, including myself

³ Italian names may be joined, eg Gianarrigo is registered as Giovanni Arrigo

Contents

Foreword	i
Contents	ii
1951-1969 World Championship Teams	iv
1951-1969 European Championship Teams	vii
Introduction	ix
Acknowledgements	xi
Preface	1
Chapter I	
THE...PREHISTORY	5
Chapter II	
1951: THE JUBILATION OF VENICE AND THE DISILLUSION...	11
Chapter III	
1952-1955: THE YEARS OF THE WITCHES	24
Chapter IV	
1956: STOCKHOLM; THE BLUE TEAM IS BORN	40
Chapter V	
1957: NEW YORK: FIRST WORLD TITLE!	54
THREE FORT APACHE HANDS	64
Chapter VI	
1957: OH SWEET WIEN!	68
Chapter VII	
1958: COMO, THE "BIG ONES" OF NAPLES RETURN; BUT ...	74
The Hand Bilucaglia Liked	90
The Campione Coup	91
Chapter VIII	
1958: OSLO: EVEN IF JUST EVEN...	92
Chapter IX	
1959: NEW YORK: THREE TIMES WORLD CHAMPIONS	99
Ash Wednesday - Belladonna's slam	113
Three Hearts are Too Many	114
Forquet's Four Hearts	115

Photographs	
Blue Team players	117
Blue Team 1950s	118
Blue Team 1960s	119
Chapter X	
1959: PALERMO: THE SICILIAN VESPERS	120
Chapter XI	
1960: THE DEBACLE OF TURIN	127
Chapter XII	
1961: BUENOS AIRES: GAROZZO JOINS!	140
Chapter XIII	
1962: NEW YORK; NOT EVEN THE ASIAN FLU IS ENOUGH TO STOP ...	154
Chapter XIV	
1963: SAINT VINCENT: THE MOST ARDUOUS WIN	171
INTERVIEW WITH THE HC	174
SOME DEALS FROM SAINT VINCENT 1963	207
Three Slams	207
TRIALS FOR THE 1964 OLYMPIADS	213
Chapter XV	
1964: NEW YORK: FINALLY WE WIN THE OLYMPIAD	215
THE OLYMPIAD FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF TADDEO	240
My Bridge Dream	304
Chapter XVI	
1965: BUENOS AIRES: "THE AFFAIR"	308
Chapter XVII	
1966: SAINT VINCENT: EIGHTH CHAMPIONSHIP WON!	334
Chapter XVIII	
1967: I RETIRE FROM SCENES	341
Chapter XIX	
1967-1968-1969: BUT THEY KEEP WINNING	348
Chapter XX	
DAGUERREOTYPES	362
DAGUERREOTYPES	374

1951-1969 World Championship Teams

1951 Naples, Italy

Baroni, Chiaradia, Forquet, Siniscalco,
Ricci, Perroux (npc)

1957 New York, USA

Avarelli, Belladonna, Chiaradia,
D'Alelio, Forquet, Siniscalco,
Perroux (npc)

1958 Como, Italy

Avarelli, Belladonna, Chiaradia,
D'Alelio, Forquet, Siniscalco,
Perroux (npc)

1959 New York

Avarelli, Belladonna, Chiaradia,
D'Alelio, Forquet, Siniscalco,
Perroux (npc)

1960 Olympiad Turin, Italy

Chiaradia, Manca, Belladonna,
Forquet, Bianchi, Avarelli, Perroux
(npc)

1961 Buenos Aires, Argentina

Avarelli, Belladonna, Chiaradia,
D'Alelio, Forquet, Garozzo,
Perroux (npc)

1962 New York, USA

Avarelli, Belladonna, Chiaradia,
D'Alelio, Forquet, Garozzo,
Perroux (npc)

1963 St Vincent, Italy

Belladonna, Chiaradia, D'Alelio,
Forquet, Garozzo, Pabis-Ticci,
Perroux (npc)

1964 Olympiad New York, USA

Avarelli, Belladonna, D'Alelio,
Forquet, Garozzo, Pabis-Ticci,
Osella (npc)

1965 Buenos Aires

Avarelli, Belladonna, D'Alelio,
Forquet, Garozzo, Pabis-Ticci,
Osella (npc)

1966 St Vincent, Italy

Avarelli, Belladonna, D'Alelio,
Forquet, Garozzo, Pabis-Ticci,
Perroux (npc)

1967 Miami Beach, USA

Avarelli, Belladonna, D'Alelio,
Forquet, Benito Garozzo, Pabis-Ticci,
Barbone (npc)

1968 Olympiad Deauville, France

Avarelli, Belladonna, D'Alelio,
Forquet, Garozzo, Pabis-Ticci,
Barbone (npc)

1969 Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Avarelli, Belladonna, D'Alelio,
Forquet, Garozzo, Pabis-Ticci,
Tracanella (npc)

1951-1969 European Championship Teams

- 1951** Venice, Italy
Baroni, Chiaradia, Forquet ,
Franco, Ricci, Siniscalco,
Perroux(npc)

- 1952** Dublin, Ireland
Baroni, Franco, Giovine,
Chiaradia, Siniscalco, Zeuli,
Perroux (npc)

- 1953** Helsinki, Finland
Chiaradia, Ricci, Luciani, Zeuli,
Siniscalco, Forquet,
Perroux (npc)

- 1954** Montreux, France
Belladonna, Bianchi, Franco,
Giovine, Chiaradia Forquet,
Perroux (npc)

- 1955** Amsterdam, Netherlands
Franco, Giovine, Ricci, D'Alelio,
Chiaradia Sabetti,
Valenti (npc)

- 1956** Stockholm, Sweden
D' Alelio, Avarelli, Belladonna,
Chiaradia, Forquet, Siniscalco,
Perroux (npc)

- 1957** Vienna(Wien), Austria
D'Alelio, Avarelli, Belladonna,
Chiaradia, Forquet, Siniscalco,
Perroux (npc)

- 1958** Oslo, Norway
D' Alelio, Avarelli, Belladonna,
Chiaradia, Forquet, Siniscalco,
Perroux(npc)

- 1959** Palermo, Italy
Chiaradia, Manca, Belladonna,
Forquet, Bianchi, Avarelli,
Perroux(npc)

- 1961** Torquay, England
Bianchi B, Brogi, Astolfi, Gandolfi,
Cremoni, Mascheroni, Carini(npc)

- 1962** Beirut, Lebanon
Belladonna, D'Alelio, Bianchi B.,
Brogi, Messina, Pabis Ticci,
Pelucchi (npc)

- 1963** Baden-Baden, Germany
Chiaradia, D'Alelio, Pabis-Ticci,
Messina, Bianchi B, Brogi,
Osella (npc)

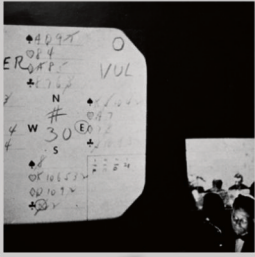
- 1965** Ostend, Belgium
Astolfi, Gandolfi, Belladonna,
Mondolfo, Bianchi B., Messina,
Tracanella (npc)

- 1966** Warsaw, Poland
Franco M, Montorsi, D'Alelio,
Pabis-Ticci, Bellentani, Bresciani,
Osella (npc)

- 1967** Dublin, Ireland
Bianchi, Cesare Besciani,
Belladonna, Messina, Bellentani,
Mondolfo, Tracanella(npc)

- 1969** Oslo, Norway
Bianchi, Garozzo, Belladonna,
Messina, Frendel, Mondolfo,
Barsotti(npc)

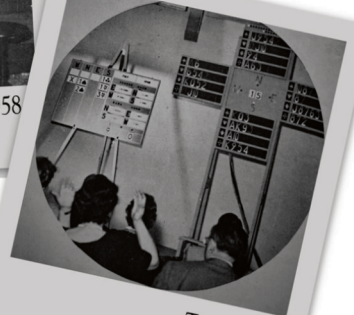
The Early Days of Vu Graph



New York 1957



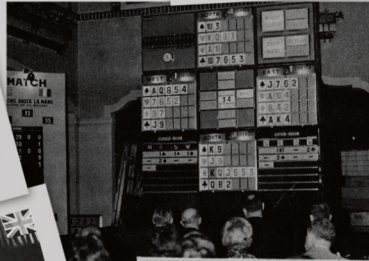
Como 1958



Turin 1960



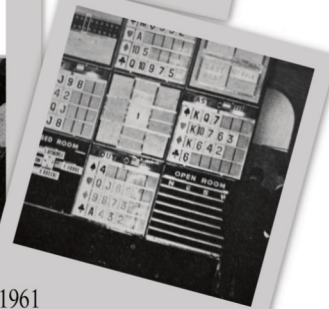
New York 1959



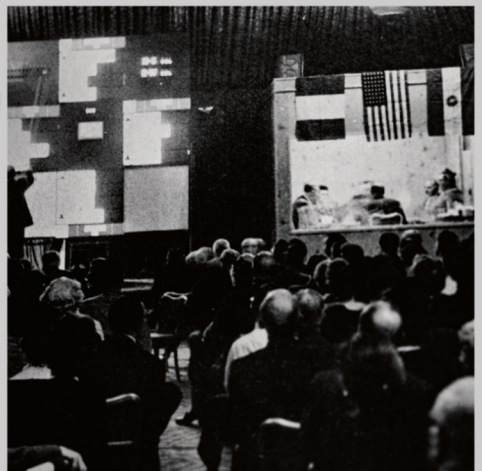
New York 1962



Buenos Aires 1961



St Vincent 1963



New York City 1964

Introduction

Perroux's recounting of the exploits of his Azzurri is probably the most dog-eared book on my bridge shelves. I happened upon *Il Blue Team nella storia del Bridge* a few days after I started learning to play and it remains one of my favourites - the one I recommend to scholars and bridge enthusiasts alike.

Today, you can only find it in Salsomaggiore, a pretty Italian city where all the Italian championships are played (and some international ones too), but back then it was common to see bridge books in bookstores all over Italy thanks to our nation's great bridge team. The wonderful rhetoric of their Captain makes this book stand out for me.

History has always fascinated me. Perroux was highly educated - in his time it was mandatory to study the Classics (Latin and ancient Greek) at high school to become a lawyer, or medical Doctor, actually it was the mainstream path to any high profile career. It was similar in my time too, and I had the same education, which allowed me to follow Perroux in his excursions around literature, poetry, opera, Latin and history. The author - again typical to a man of his time - was an avid reader on many different subjects. And since some of his quotations pertain to happenings of his time, not rarely did I have to look to the internet for information about facts that were clearly popular in the sixties, but forgotten nowadays. Remarkable were the lengths it took to uncover one criminal trial he quotes: I spent a couple of days looking for articles from newspapers of the time, flipping through a few hundred pages before I hit on the right one. From there, I was finally able to locate all the details in the digital version.

Reading Perroux is a fascinating experience: his language is generally sophisticated, but from time to time he uses his own dialect, or the dialects of elsewhere in Italy, or sometimes a more colloquial tone, and he does this to create a confidential atmosphere, a kind of intimacy with the reader. A true master. I can only hope that in my translation I have been able to hint at his style when read in English. In order to achieve this, not only have I tried to match the author's style by using the same (oh would that I could!) kind of language, but I've also left a few parts of the book in its original, adding footnotes to explain the true meaning. You'll find almost five hundred footnotes: they represented the toughest task. Much time has been dedicated to perfecting the book - three pairs of native English-speaking eyes have been cast over the various stages of my translation, for more than a year my helpers have been meticulously dissecting, refining and proofing the text. After every revision, I've checked it again, doing what the author, with his love for Latin sentences, would have certainly called a "labor limae" (literally "file work", meant as "refining").

Together with my editor Mark Horton and with thanks to bridge friends, we have also stepped into the time machine of bridge archives to uncover the stories behind the scenes to update and expand for today's readers.

We have preserved the integrity of the original in all parts of the book, with one carefully considered exception: we decided to change Perroux's reports of the bridge hands because some were inaccurately recalled or lacking details. Instead, to offer a more enjoyable read, we located the original books of those Championships and produced new commentaries. However, for those interested in Perroux's original version, they are posted on the dedicated website.

The great bridge organisers and writers of this period are remembered forever by Perroux's work. In the course of research for this translation, we found many of the original articles in magazines and books in Bridge Clubs across Europe and as far away as Australia, bringing what we were translating to life once again. It is a treat too to revisit the early days of bridge communication, eg Vugraph – the fishbowl – Bridge-o-rama – which suddenly allowed bridge enthusiasts to witness the trials and tribulations of competition and follow the increasing success of the Blue Team. These early efforts were so successful I strive to emulate their hard work in my current role as Chief Director of Operations and Chief Tournament Director for the World Bridge Federation. I am always thinking to improvements – how technology can increase our options for dealing with new challenges and create opportunities. In the 43rd World Championships Lyon 2017, USA II were watched live via video by thousands around the world as card-by-card they defeated worthy opponents France by an agonising 2 IMPs in a 128 board final.

Perroux and his various commentators refer to the team by an assortment of names throughout the book. The phrases they coin are in turn affectionate and for effect. I have kept the references as they were made by the various authors, as I felt they help convey the state of mind at the time of writing, so you will find peppered through this book the following names for the now world famous Blue Team. The Blue Team – azzurro, azzurri, the Azzurri, azures, the Azures, the 'big ones', ours and quartet all feature.

I never met Carlo Alberto. He died when I was very young (in 1977, I was 16), and I was even younger when Chiaradia passed away. Nor did I meet Siniscalco and D'Alelio, though I could well have done from the age point of view, but they retired from all competitions long before I started playing regularly. But I played in a team with Forquet in Israel, won an Italian Championship with Pabis-Ticci, and Belladonna was my coach as a Junior. I know Garozzo well but we have never met across the table, although in my first international outing I had the daunting honour of knowing that Garozzo and Forquet were sitting in our seats at the other table. This was their last outing together. The opponents I remember too – Stayman and his wife were our adversaries in Venice once, Hamman and Kaplan at other times. As for French players, I have met Pierre Ghestem and played against Tintner and Szvarc.

The men and women of the BLUE TEAM IN THE HISTORY OF BRIDGE have been part of my life from a young age and it is my pleasure to now bring their early story to the English speaking bridge world.

Pisa, March 2018
MAURIZIO DI SACCO

Acknowledgements

A truly global team has helped me bring this translation to life. It's a project which could not have been conceived without the permission to translate her father's work given by Perroux's daughter Donatella. Thank you. And it would not have been as comprehensive and complete without the attention to detail of everybody involved with the project. Their labour of love for this wonderful game has enabled me to step into the past to bring the history of bridge alive again for the English speaking world.

At home in Pisa, Italy (a mere two hour drive from Perroux's hometown Modena) Marcella my long suffering wife, though experiencing the most difficult challenge of her life, was kind enough to let me spend a lot of time lost in the past. My children ground me and keep bringing me back to the joys of life away from bridge.

Most of the World Championship books featuring the Blue Team were carefully transported from down under to Lyon, France by WBF TD and secretary of the WBF Laws Committee Laurie Kelso, in his carry-on for safety I fear! Fellow writer and English international Brian Senior loaned us others from his personal collection. And archivist Wolf Klewe has made available thousands of periodicals and magazines from the time to help us bring out the bridge colour and flavor of the time.

Swedish bridge player and winner of six North American championships Per Olof Sundelin, delved into the Swedish newspaper archives to research the foreign championship reports Perroux writes about.

Denise Barclay, sub-editor and bridge player, has Skyped and typed to re-proof each version, weathering storms and moving goal posts calmly with kiwi good humour. Her memory lane recall of her mother playing the Blue Club system in the local club in Paeroa, New Zealand, proves Perroux's wonderful writing touches everyone in a different way.

To my editor Mark, an Englishman with whom I have shared many a fine wine, I owe credit for the birth of this project. Always at the end of the email to answer a grammar or layout question, he has guided our technical writing inexperience, and spent many hours researching, in order to supply the updated hands readers can now enjoy.

Ray Lee and his company Master Point Press believed in the project.

Finally, I say thank you to my 'little kiwi' friend and biggest critic Nicole Barclay (English bridge players will know her as EBU Director Nicole Cook), who has

chased me too often, frustrates me constantly by asking impossible questions; but who has kept the project on track, keeping us to deadlines with her fresh approach to all things. She has taken the Blue Team on holiday with her, scoured bridge clubs for articles and photographs and challenged every word I translated – I'd say with politesse, but that's not her style! She not only worked with me to maintain the integrity of Perroux's work as a "good read" in English: she took on all the secretarial work the job needed with great competence, and with all the care for neatness and order that I, living difficult times at home, could not guarantee.

Above all, I must thank the men and women who contributed to the legend of the Blue Team...

Pisa, March 2018

MAURIZIO DI SACCO

Preface

Written in 1971

Are we back?

It looks like "yes". After many years of silence, fasting and abstinence, the desire has returned.

Desire for writing, or more so for collating all the articles from that wonderful period where I lived the life of the "Blue Team".

In the years between 1951 and 1966 the Blue Team played too big a role in my days for the following five to have nullified, or at least clouded the joy of memory. Fifteen complete years, every hour and every day dense with that feeling: that outside work and family, the sole beings to whom we attribute decisive value to as time goes by, there was another worthy of expending one's time and energy for, getting angry with and quarreling with half of the world (because I had already fought with the remaining half): the Italian National Bridge Team.

Let's make this clear: I never felt like a bridge champion, not even in my rosiest dreams, those where you delude yourself that you are more powerful than Aladdin and his lamp and the annex giant wizard: I've always been an egregious dud, and fully conscious of it.

In that period there were very few things that I ignored about the bidding systems of all the pairs that the Blue Team would have met. I even ventured to critique them and pretend, unrealistically, to find their weaknesses.

I knew enough to understand the mechanics, in theory: end-plays, triple squeezes with a kick to the moon and a backward jump etc etc.

But if I sat at a table to play, I did not understand anything.

My partner had opened 1 Spade. With a twelve count and four spades to the queen, what should I say? 3 Spades? 2 Spades? 4 Spades? 2NT? Or, would it be smarter to pass to set up a trap?

I knew everything: what Chiaradia would have said, what Goren would have responded, what Schenken or Crawford would have called, how Trézel would have behaved, how Reese would have bid.

One thing only I did not know: what I should have done.

Thus: a dud, irreparable, incurable, inconsolable.

I was not, then, glorifying my own bridge, but that of the players of the Blue Team.

With me, they were European champions five times.

They were World Champions eight times.

We toured the world together, and to the eye of a non- expert, I could even have appeared to be one of them.

But - after all (away the modesty!) - who selected them?

Who organised them?

Who merged them, to the point of creating, with only the help of some patriotic rhetoric, that "team spirit" which sometimes I still happen to hear quoted as an example outside the borders of our nation?

Well, let's forget about that.

It is neither the time any more nor the circumstance to push one's chest out, full of pride.

So much water has gone by under the bridges...

So many things have happened...

But why do I wake up only now?

At some point (it is not useful pretending to ignore it) a situation of incompatibility arose between five-sixths of the Blue Team and me.

Later, I'll go through the reasons. For now suffice it to say that I went off the scene.

The Blue Team kept winning for three more years.

It was not possible on the spur of the moment, to either join the peanas as, in reality, I wished to do (and after all, my successors often received both my best wishes and my congratulations), or to point out (ad quid?) the semi-rotten past memories while in the dish there were, fresh, more recent glories.⁴

Then, one disgraceful day, they all decided to step back. Other commitments, other goals, other Gods! The Circus, the tours, left too little time for the rest. (Which was only the World Championship!)

They stepped back. And immediately there was darkness.

Stockholm 1970, it's not a shiny page for us. And not for the ones who were sent, but, rather, for the ones who stayed home.

Could I have written then, in 1970? At that time could I have, in sight of an inevitable defeat, or the day after a defeat that had already occurred, showed back "my jewels" as to make a comparison which would have been, to say the least, inelegant?

And then 1971 came.

Italy lost the 1970's European Championship thus did not have the right to compete in the World Championship any more: so there disappeared one of the reasons which had held me back. It was possible, finally, without the risk of making hateful confrontations, to talk about past championships. And, in fact, I have already made peace with half of the Blue Team. And in my soul there is not the smallest shadow of acrimony left, not even toward the other half.

Thus I don't even dread the possibility of not being objective any more due to some left over rust.

And then...then some little bird whispered to me that they will be back!

⁴ Latin: "for what purpose?", "what for?"

I had already wished for, invoked, pretended, this come back, in a preface-letter written to Forquet just a year ago, the day after Stockholm. But, even if they took one year to make the decision, if they come back, there must be someone who helps them, as once before, to re-invoke their victories, to try to give them back that spirit which is indispensable as propellant to a win which should not be missed.

Let me, just once, be the optimistic prophet: the "Aces" (as they self-proclaimed themselves with quintessential modesty) certainly are a great team, it even looks like in America they have finally managed to impose some discipline and that there is a commander in chief who enforces it. But I believe that, "Aces" or no "Aces", if those six will come back, the Americans will find bread for their teeth.

And I am certain that, if those six will be enlivened by the firm will to win as they did before...well, I have a small coin, a small coin of Pius IX, which was left to me by my grand-father.

I'm ready to put it on the line.

I bet my Pope's coin on the Blue Team.

Written in 1972

I was writing those lines in the summer of 1971 when the "Match of the Century" (as the American press called it), a challenge between the Aces and the Blue Team, had not yet been announced to be held in Las Vegas, the notorious capital of all games, in December 1971.

It was a non-official match, with the Aces not putting their fresh World title on the line, but to confer the due seriousness to the clash, for the winners there was a good heap of not so poetic, though quite welcome money.

I eventually came to know that the "Match of the Century" was held between the 3rd and 11th of December.

On one side the Aces, holders of the World title, on the other side the Blue Team. In the middle, 15,000 dollars.⁵

Over 140 deals, the Aces lost by 84 IMP.

Then, since between 12th and 19th of December, still in Las Vegas, a further small Knock-Out event with a small prize for the winners of roughly 15,000 more dollars was scheduled, the Blue Team stood by to compete in it. They won that one too. The Aces did not even get to the final.

Good night!

Then the official counter-proof. Summer 1972: in America, in Miami, the fourth Olympiad. And the Blue Team comes back: wins the qualification round robin easily, then gets rid of France in the semifinal and beats the same old Aces without any shadow of "if" or "but". There are no more doubts left: it is unbeaten and invincible.

⁵ Nowadays roughly the equivalent of €80,000

And then? And then if there is no upheaval, if the team's spirit can hold, if no extraneous factor intervenes to damage the bomb-proof friendship of those six, the team will still keep winning for a long time yet.

Just to make it clear: nothing is eternal, and nothing is perfect: it might well be that, tomorrow, time's inevitable strain or the seeds of some other interest will create situations where we will be called upon to judge that a team is stronger, or that the Blue Team itself breaks up and never recomposes.

I don't give any credit to these hypotheses. But I have to foresee them as possible ones.

It costs nothing.

What the Blue Team has done from 1956 up to today nobody else will ever do again.

C.A.P.⁶

⁶ I wish to thank the friends Guido Barbone, Luigi Firpo, Sergio Osella, Federico Rosa, Angelo Tracanella for letting me have transcripts of some of their articles. (Perroux's footnote)

Chapter I

THE...PREHISTORY

It was January 1938.

Paolo Baroni publishes the "Bollettino Mensile", the monthly bulletin of the "Italian Bridge Association", in collaboration with Piero Acchappati, Adolfo Giannuzzi, Raoul Morpurgo, Enzo Pontremoli, Federico Rosa and Giano Vedovelli, giving notice of its birth to take care of the "sportive organisation of the game...of bridge".^{7 8}

Actually, even though the locution "bridge" did not originate from a bridge - as the bulletin advises, it was still Italianised "così colà dove si puote ciò che si vuole e più non dimandare".⁹

The Association headquarters itself at 1 Manzoni Street in Milan, and attempts to make contact with other European bridge centres (Norway, Austria, Yugoslavia, Egypt and USA) where "leagues" of players have existed since 1932.¹⁰ But the problem of "ponte" was not going to make matters straightforward, as to publish the bulletin you would need the concession, followed by a hosanna of praise from the Minister of the People's Culture.¹¹

⁷ Associazione Italiana Bridge

⁸ As explained later, there's a joke in Italian which cannot be properly translated. The original text is "gioco...del ponte", where "ponte" means bridge in Italian, but only as an architectural structure

⁹ Two lines from Dante Alighieri's "The Divine Comedy" (Inferno, III 95-95 and Inferno, V 22-24). The author, one of the most famous lawyers of his time, uses a very elegant linguistic style, full of highly cultured quotations. The translation more or less sounds like: "this is the way it was wanted to be, where you can do what you want, and do not ask any further". Here is the classic translation by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: It is so willed there where is power to do. That which is willed; and farther question not". The reference is to the fascist regime in power in Italy at that time, which had forbidden the use of any foreign words. Thus the necessity to translate the word "bridge" into "ponte" (bridge as architectural structure)

¹⁰ Egypt and USA were not in Europe at that time or now, but this is how the original is written

¹¹ They could not use "bridge" because it was a foreign word

The enthusiasm from the pioneers is great and bypasses obstacles. Become a member now! (For the chronicle the ordinary members pay 40 Liras per year in 1938!).¹² The first matches are organised: Milan - Turin - Genoa.

On April 4 the first President is elected, Commendator Augusto Besana, from Milan.¹³

It is decided that a representation will be sent to the European Championships to be held in Oslo.

In 1937, in Budapest, an Italian team formed of Baroni, Moroni, Morpurgo and Pontremoli makes an honorable debut, finishing third in their qualification group which, while denying them access to the final, was a good result, given the standard of the opponents.

For the sake of clarity, here is the Editorial outlining the history of European Bridge up to 1937, published in the May issue the same year as the "Bulletin":

In 1932 in Sheveningen, for the first time in Europe, an International Bridge Tournament was held which hosted all the best players from various countries.

It was during this event, thanks to the proposal of the already existing Dutch Association, that it was agreed to create an International League to represent the associations of every single country, which would have as its purpose to supervise and regulate all international bridge activities.

It was with the presence and enthusiastic approval of the managers representing Austria, England, Netherlands, Norway and Hungary, that on June 1 1932 the International Bridge League was founded.

During the same year, associations in Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark and Germany also formed, so that, by the end of its first year of existence, the IBL officially controlled the bridge movement of as many as nine countries.

In the following year, 1933, the first International championship took place. At the same time, the first IBL Congress was held in London. During this Congress, basic criteria were established, including statutes, rules and regulations to govern all affiliated associations.

Year on year other countries joined the IBL until 1937 when even Italy, driven by the desire to excel in the international arena, joined the other eighteen countries. America's addition (then governed by two leagues) in 1935, had brought about a change in the denomination of the society, resulting in a split. The International Bridge League - European Division - (IBLED) and International Bridge League - American Division - (IBLAD) were formed.

Nowadays, following the dissolution of the Austrian Association and the forced withdrawal of Estonia, the IBLED records as affiliated: England, Netherlands, Norway, Hungary, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, Italy, Romania, Denmark and Germany.

¹² Nowadays the equivalent of €36.40

¹³ A Commendator is more or less the equivalent of a British knighthood

In Oslo in 1938 the Italian team is composed of Morpurgo, Baroni, Bogoncelli and Grandi.

Unfortunately, luck was not on our side: the Italian team is eliminated before the final.

The championship is won by Hungary.

In 1939 the Italian Teams Championship is held for the first time: Eight teams from Milan attended, five from Genoa, six from Florence, three from Busto Arsizio, one from Rome and one from Turin.

We make it to the semifinal. In the North the win goes to the Milanese team of Pontremoli, Acchiappati, Morpurgo, Baroni and Vedovelli; in the Centre-South to the Roman team of Tortima, Daroda, Giove and Giove.

The final is held in Milan 12-13 May 1938 and at the end Rome wins by 1 point.

Extra hands should be played, but the Romans, due to work commitments, ask for a postponement until 16-17 September.

However in September it is decided not to do anything and the title is not awarded.

In 1939 a team comprising Acchiappati, Morpurgo, Pontremoli, Radice, Fossati, Tadini and Vedovelli goes to the European championships at The Hague.

Italy does not reach the final.

Then war explodes and the International League dissolves. The Italian Bridge Association drifts along for another year and during 1940 keeps publishing its Bulletin conforming only in name to fascist regulations, as AIP (Associazione Italiana Ponte).¹⁴

It takes care of "ponte courses", of the "Italian Ponte Championship". The qualifications see Genoa (Bargero, Bevilacqua, Jonoch, Marchini, Taragoni, Trivero) win in the North and Rome (Bontempelli, Giove, Giove, Mazzitelli) in the South. The final is due to be held in Milan 1-2 June, but the storm which is about to hit even our country advises to postpone *sine die*.¹⁵ It was written that we would have to wait until 1947 to have...an Italian Champion!

With the October issue the editors of the Bulletin, the founders of the Italian Bridge Federation put down the cards to put on the gray-green!¹⁶

At the end of the war a passionate group of players resurrect the Italian Bridge Association, headquartered in Milan.

Some of the pioneers were Paolo Baroni, Cesare Guglielmetti, Federico Rosa, Vito Gandolfi, Enzo Pontremoli, Ferruccio Remotti, Giano Vedovelli, Ciro Verratti. The headquarters is the Biffi Galleria, Milan, where the first tournaments are held.

A single issue of the magazine Bridge which, in subsequent years, will be produced on an almost monthly basis is published.

¹⁴ See note 5

¹⁵ Latin. Literally: "without a day" but meant as "without fixing a date"

¹⁶ At that time the colour of the Italian Army's uniform

It contains sixteen pages, but already looks like a big deal, because it is able to announce that other associations have risen or are rising in Rome, Turin, Genoa, Busto Arsizio, Florence and Modena.

Parva favilla...¹⁷

In 1947 the Italian Teams Championship took place. Thirty teams entered. At the same time the organisation re-formed thanks to Baroni and Rosa's impulse and cooperation from trustworthy others coming on board from the sidelines. The magazine explains that, at the end of the year, the number of clubs has reached 33.

The final of the Championship sees victory for the team from Florence - Calamarà, Boni, Gallo, Supino, and Socci.

In April, in Milan, the General Assembly of the AIB members elects as its President Engineer Giuseppe Baslini, from Milan, who will stay in office until 31 October 1948.

Meanwhile, in Denmark, on the initiative of Herman Dedichen, the European Bridge League is reconstituted. Countries defeated in the war are not given admittance. French delegate Baron Robert De Nexon is elected President.

Meanwhile, in Copenhagen, the first post-war European championships take place. Great Britain wins and Sweden are runners-up.

In 1948, in Italy, the bridge organisation grows up: the Italian Championship now fields ninety teams and is won by the Neapolitans. It is the first success for Chiaradia, Ricci, Siniscalco and Zeuli from Naples and the Chiaradia Club method.

Commendator Mario Salani from Florence is elected as National IBA President.

In 1949 Italy knocks at the door of the European league again. Finally it gets the yearned for "Enter!" and can take part in the European Championships in Paris.

A team's trial is held to select a team. There are a few troubles, and last minute changes. In the end, off to Paris go Calamarà (NPC), Dussoni and Mazzitelli, Chiaradia, Ricci, Siniscalco and Zeuli.

Meanwhile these same Neapolitans have once again won the Italian Teams Championship.

Great Britain is first. Sweden second once again. Italy finishes fifth.

In the September issue of the magazine *Bridge*, Azzurro Team Captain Calamarà recalls his impressions:

Let me start with a brief digression about the protagonists, which I'd like to title: "From Tennis Vomero to Palais d'Orsay". You need to go back to the distant 1940, to the small Vomero Tennis Club, in Naples where Eugenio Chiaradia introduced his young friends to the mysteries of bridge. The wartime stopped the

¹⁷ Latin: small spark. It means that starting from a small spark a big fire may rise

*fertile preparation job of the “professor” Eugenio, but the foundations laid in the Vomero’s workshop were very solid.*¹⁸

First edition of the post-war Championship -1947-: the Neapolitan team appears for the first time on the national stage at the semifinals in Rome, where it pays tribute to inexperience. 1948: at the finals in Florence the first unexpected triumph, that perhaps does not fully convince the enthusiastic multitudes. 1949: the process is longer, the examination closer, the results unequivocal: the best team won.

Not long after that second success nationally, the four Neapolitans are called upon to defend the Italian colours at the Palais d’Orsay in the 1949 European Championships.

In such a synesthetic chronology, my admiration for those four is condensed. Four guys to whom I am tied by a relationship of great friendship, which makes me appreciate even more, leaving aside the strictly technical, their accuracy of preparation, their spirit of sacrifice, their moral solidity and their sense of responsibility.

“Bravi folks! In Paris I followed you more closely than you could guess, and I can affirm that you really gave a very good account of your ability, even if the technical result was not the one you would have wished for. Next year in London things will go better. I’m sure about it, with you and for you.”

In 1950, the AIB's General Assembly elects Dr Giulio Balestrini, from Milan, as President.

A system that will remain in place for the European Championships is adopted, the appointment of a selector with full powers - Dr Enzo Boscaro from Genoa.

The Italian Championship, with an entry of 113 teams (the wheels are in motion!) is won by a Roman team with Carlo Giove, Antonio Dussoni, Giovanni Olivieri, Gaetano Jozia and Gianfranco Ferrari.

The national team captained by Boscaro and formed of Baroni, Franco, Gallo, Soggi, Siniscalco and Zeuli goes to Brighton and finishes fifth once more.

In reality, the Azzurri lose the opportunity for a surprise win on the last round, or, more accurately, in the final deals, when they lose to Belgium. The positions were so tight at the top of the ranking on the eve of that round that our representatives, having brushed against the final win, dropped to fifth spot. When a draw would have been enough!

Here is what Calamarà wrote in the July issue of Bridge:

To immediately give you my impression on the results of this year, I will report to you the exact words that I pronounced on Radio London’s microphones, a few minutes after I had been informed by phone from Brighton about the final results: Italy maintained and improved its honorable placement in the final ranking, but how bittersweet for those of us who, hour by hour, lived the dramatic final moments. We beat England and Sweden, ranked first and second, and up to the

¹⁸ Eugenio Chiaradia was called "professor" for a number of reasons: he was, for many years, the leading authority in bridge, and also, in his real life, a teacher of Philosophy

final boards we were fighting for first place. The score of the final ranking speaks out so clearly: England and Sweden 14 points, Iceland, France and us 13.

Pity, what a pity!

Actually in our clan, especially after the win against England, we were already feeling the breeze of the European title and that feeling was widespread among the congregation. In Brighton our players already had a foretaste of a sojourn in the enchanted islands of Bermuda. Fate did not want it so, but what is certain, is that the title scarcely was, or ever will be as close at our fingertips as it was this year.

As for the players, undoubtedly at the top are the two Neapolitans. Made strong by their perfect synergy and their experience acquired in Paris, they held on until the end, the linchpin of the team. There is too much emotion in the Florentine duo. Perhaps as direct consequence of that mood, on some hands, particularly the early ones, they demonstrated a lack of complete understandings. A lack of performance continuity from the two Milanese, who alternated wonderful deals with ruinous ones. I cannot tell whether it was imperfection of system, or the slightly exhibitionist gusto of exceedingly intellectual bids, leads and plays which had dishearteningly low probabilities of success. Furthermore, the laughable food supply we were subjected to had a very detrimental effect on Franco's clearly neurotic temperament, which proved to be extremely deleterious, especially in the last days.

Once more, Great Britain finishes first, Sweden second. In November these two teams go to Bermuda to compete for the first post-war world championship, against a team representing the United States of America.

Starting from this match, the "Bermuda Bowl" (meaning the World Cup which is retained every year by the country which wins the world title) donated by the Bermuda's Governor, starts its pilgrimage.

The three-way match offers too many emotions, because the Americans, the big Schenken, Stayman, Rapee, Goren, Crawford and Silodor control both opponents, and the Cup begins its journey ... remaining in America.

Chapter II

1951: THE JUBILATION OF VENICE AND THE DISILLUSION OF NAPLES

In 1951 the Federation appoints me as Head Coach (HC) of the national team.

An explanation of the selection might be interesting. There were four “clans” vying for supremacy, for the right to form the national team: Milanese, Florentines, Romans and Neapolitans. The Head Coach could not have resided in any of those geographical groups without one of the others threatening insurrection.

It was opted therefore, to approach an “anybody” guy, a person devoid of ambition and any technical skill, residing in area producing excellent Lambrusco¹⁹ but completely lacking in good bridge players, a *homo novus*²⁰ who would scrape along for a year and then - very likely - would have asked no more than to return to cultivate his own small piece of land,²¹ so leaving the gallery free for the battle among the four clans.

Hence I was chosen as a “provisional filler-in”. Instead, I started to rampage with trials, meetings, and circular letters.

Here is one of my first articles which may still retain its bounce of modernity.

Titled “Advice to a young member of the national team”.

I dreamed of having a younger brother. Naturally the brother of my dreams was a strong bridge player. So strong that that very fine technician who is the HC had put him in the national team.²² And I, taking advantage of the pitiful circumstance of being elder than him, was giving advice, foisting on him my wisdom and experience in small granules.

Not technical advice. I was not advising him to adopt this or that convention, to follow one tactic or another. It was a proven fact, borne out by his call-up to the national team, that my brother knew a lot more than I did about all that. The

¹⁹ A red wine typical of Perroux city' Modena. It is sparkling, almost sweet and goes very well with food of the area: many kinds of salami and fresh pasta

²⁰ Latin: literally means “a new man”, but in fact is idiomatic and refers to somebody who is the first in the family to take on a public career such as a politician or high military rank

²¹ The sentence may sound odd, but the reference relates to *homo novus*. To pursue a career, a member of the aristocracy (common people did not have that chance at all) had to give up care of the family's properties

²² Head Coach

counsel I was giving him, was of a completely different nature: his behaviour as a bridge player.

I was telling him:

"My brother, you have a duty, to yourself, your partner, your teammates and the opponents. You also have rights, but those - as a good Italian - you already know and certainly won't forget, but it is not bad to first remember your duties.

Remember that bridge is an intellectual game, that a bridge competition is an endeavour which will sap one's energies. You know very well that at the end of a match - especially if it's been demanding and difficult - you sometimes feel as tired as after an athletic competition. Thus conduct yourself as you would after a tennis match!

Rest and moderation, my brother!

There are bridge players who, on the eve of a match, stay awake all night to play concincina and...canasta.²³

It is true that to go to sleep when the rooster sings is by now an old habit. But you brother, if you want to feel on top of things, if you want your brain well reposed during the competition, start by resting it, welcome waking from a deep slumber.

And as for the habit of going to sleep at dawn, let someone more experienced than you say it: night is made for sleeping and not for putting yourself under strain in a Club. So you too, you a bridge athlete, think about it: a 'national' athlete! must embrace the due care of athletes. No alcohol and little love.

Alcohol is a poison which mostly hits the cerebral connections. Is it not agreed that you play with your head and not with your feet? Thus defend your mental lucidity.

As for the rest I'd like to advise you what a great orator once advised the youngsters. Until 30 years of age, on the evening before a speech, abstinence. Between 30 and 40 years old, abstinence from two evenings before. At 40 to 50 years old, abstinence from three evenings before. On turning 50, there are no longer rules to be observed.

Thus, the night before: chastity; think that tomorrow you will have to face four women at the same time: the Queen of spades, the Queen of hearts, the Queen of clubs and the Queen of diamonds.²⁴

You would agree with me that four women at a time are a lot, even for a Casanova like you.

And smoke less! Nicotine is a stimulant, but you tarnish yourself. And I'm not talking about your finances. I'm talking about your heart and your lungs.

Each and every hand a cigarette: by the end of a match of 32 boards you will be intoxicated.

²³ A card game played for high stake money which is not as popular any more

²⁴ There is a joke in the Italian text that is not possible to translate: in Italian you can use (and it is much more common) "woman" instead of "queen" and so does the author to underline the concept

Do you know that for the nicotine from a cigarette to wear off, it takes one hour in the bloodstream and that you play (by regulation) eight boards an hour?

You are the young hope of Italian bridge and you must preserve yourself for many years: if you drink, smoke, love like a seaman, you will discover at some point that you will not find a HC who will put you in the team. Live the life of a Trappist monk, then?

Not a Trappist monk, but do not be a pleasure-seeking monk either.

Study!

Study mainly the opponents' conventions.

Keep your own convention card: modify it as little as possible, do not adopt a new one every week: systems are like shoes: you always feel more comfortable in your old ones. New ones are always more beautiful, but always hurt a little.

Study the systems of the opponents: because every system has a weak point (so much so that every single day someone finds a new system) which can be pinpointed only by someone who knows it.

There are systems that are built on the prerequisite that the opponents always pass, and should you know this, you can unsettle them by bidding. Other systems make any overcall dangerous. You should know how to regulate yourself: you have to know all the opponents' systems. It is tedious. I know it well, but you will see that it will be much more annoying for your opponents to realise that you understand their secret code!

But are the opponents' systems abstruse?

Do you think that your opponents do not find yours equally so?

Ask the English their opinion about the Swedish Efos (Sweden was the bogeyman in 1949) or the Italian Marmic (Italy beats England in Brighton) and you will receive the answer that they are 'prohibited' systems because they are too obscure.

And since you are not English, but just a poor Italian, you cannot ban other people's systems so you must study and understand them.

And while we are there, try to have a rough idea of English. Do I exaggerate? You need to be able to think quickly in English, because as homage to perfect international parity, the English language is the only one you will be allowed to use for bidding, even if you play against the French.²⁵ And it may happen that you think 'now I'll bid 'fiori', then I'll reverse into 'cuori' - and if the opponent bids 'picche' I'll contro'.²⁶ You have to talk about clubs, then hearts and ready yourself to say 'double'.²⁷

If you make a mistake you are lost! If you don't grasp what your right hand opponent is saying, you are dead, because all bidding is in English. Get accustomed then to thinking in English.

Duties toward your partner.

²⁵ Up until 30 years ago, in Italy it was much more common to study French than English. In the author's time English was almost unknown whereas French was spoken by most members of the upper class

²⁶ Fiori = clubs; cuori = hearts; picche = spades; contro = double

²⁷ Obviously bidding boxes were long to come

The fact that you have to play with a partner is a painful, inescapable fatality. Thus cede readily to it; try to get along as well as possible.

There are players whose amusement seems to come, not from the honest intellectual pleasure of prevailing over their opponents, but from the harrowing desire to humiliate, depress and flatten their partner.

There are players who, instead of inspiring sympathy and friendship in their partner, seem to desire to make themselves odious.

Whilst their good breeding keeps them from insulting openly, it does not tongue-tie them from scorn and sarcasm.

And so on and so forth. For when partner is sweet tempered, he can affect a jaundice attack, without countering. But should he exhibit just a bit of temperament, sing a similar tune, then the duet plays out more wonderfully for the opponents than Gioconda.²⁸

And so, do not do that.

If your partner makes a mistake smile at him, cheer him on as one would Popoff, the inventor of radio.²⁹ If your partner gets upset because he realises he has compromised a hand, reassure him that he has certainly rescued others. And that his skill is such that he will rescue many more.

You certainly play better than your partner does (every bridge player believes it, and you are no exception), but it brings no pleasure to your partner, having to listen to you express your differing opinion on every hand.

Respect his opinion and do not hope to make him change it, by continuously giving lessons; unfortunately school has finished for you both! Try instead to rationalise for him because he certainly played at his best. A calamity wanted him, and not you, the insurmountable ace of open card play, to be at the helm on that hand. Hope that next time will be your turn to paint like the Raffaello³⁰ you are, but do not tell him that he made a daub.

Cheer him up, cheer him up.

You will see that the whole harmony of your partnership will benefit from it.

With your teammates, govern yourself in the same way.

At the end of every session do not rush to them frowning like a creditor to ask how come they didn't make the six spades that was made effortlessly by the opponents at your table; do not scream that there were no mistakes from your side and that, for the match not to end with the annihilation of the enemy, the other pairs must be to blame. The analysis of the results will likely prove you wrong and, in any case, since there are still rounds to be played, it is better for the team to play them with the high morale of an innocent acquitted, rather than the guilty standing in front of the jury.

²⁸ An Italian Opera, written by Amilcare Ponchielli

²⁹ Although in eastern countries Aleksandr Stepanovič Popov was celebrated as the inventor of the radio (and still is in the Russian federation, where the "radio day" still exists), that affirmation is historically inaccurate

³⁰ Raffaello Sanzio was an Italian painter of the Renaissance period, considered by many to be the very best