

Giorgio Belladonna

Giorgio Belladonna (1923-1995) of Rome, Italy, was a public official and bridge professional with a long-running column in a leading Italian daily news-paper.



In his youth, Belladonna was a useful footballer but it was bridge which was to be his great love and at which he was to become one of the all-time greats.

A leading theoretician, Belladonna was the principle inventor of the Roman Club system of bidding and, with Benito Garozzo, created Super Precision, a complex strong club based method.

Belladonna was the number one ranked player in the world for many years according to the WBF's masterpoint scheme and for many years would also have won a sizable number of votes from his peers as being the best player in the world. Certainly, he was regarded as being the best technical player around. I can also speak from personal experience in saying that he was one of the nicest players in top class bridge.

The story of Giorgio Belladonna is really the story of a very great team, the Italian Blue Team. There have been other powerful teams in the history of bridge but the Blue Team were, without question, the finest team the world has yet seen and their achievements are without parallel.

The Blue Team consisted of eight very fine players : Eugenio Chiaradia, Guglielmo Siniscalco, Mimmo D'Alelio, Walter Avarelli, Camillo Pabis-Ticci, Giorgio Belladonna, and Pietro Forquet and Benito Garozzo, who are also to be found in this volume. As important as the players was the non-playing captain, Carlo Alberto Perroux.

An international team consists of six players, and from 1957 to 1969 six out of the above eight players won ten consecutive Bermuda Bowls, the Open Championship of the world. They also won three consecutive World Team Olympiads, in 1964, 1968 and 1972.

After the break-up of the Blue Team, some of its members continued to play internationally and three more Bermuda Bowls were won in the 1970s. Only

one man was a member of every one of those sixteen Italian World Championship victories and that was Giorgio Belladonna. He also won the European Open Teams Championship on ten occasions between 1956 and 1979 and the Italian Open Teams eleven times.

Belladonna's early successes were in partnership with Walter Avarelli. He played odd championships with other partners but his other major partnership was that with Benito Garozzo, which was generally regarded to be the strongest in the world. After retiring from international competition Belladonna frequently partnered Pietro Forquet in open tournaments around Europe.

Along with other members of the Blue Team, Belladonna played in the Lancia Team, a sponsored team that toured North America in 1975 playing a series of challenge matches against local teams. They managed to win only one of the four matches; good news for their opponents as part of the sponsorship deal was that Lancia cars were to go to teams which were successful against them.

Belladonna had also been a member of the Omar Sharif Bridge Circus, a group of top professionals who toured both Europe and North America in the late sixties playing challenge matches. In 1970, the Circus made its second North American tour, winning three out of seven challenges against major city teams and also playing a marathon 840 board match against the Dallas Aces who accompanied them on the tour and played a segment of the match at each of the seven venues. The Aces won the match by 1793 to 1692 IMPs.

But the results of the matches were not as important as was the publicity generated by the tour. Though it was not a financial success, the tour significantly raised the profile of the game in the public image for a while, though it has to be admitted that Sharif was the biggest attraction to the media and the exhausting schedule included many personal appearances by him.

It was no accident that Giorgio Belladonna was involved in both the Sharif Circus and the Lancia Team. A truly great player and a fine human being, he was a great ambassador for the game wherever he went.

The hand which follows was attributed to Belladonna and certainly nobody else has ever laid claim to it, yet, when asked by another author many years ago, Giorgio swore that he had never seen the hand before and knew nothing about it! Whatever the truth of that story, it looks like a Belladonna hand and is so beautiful in its simplicity that I could find no hand more deserving of my selection as the Belladonna hand for this book.