

# Why Invest in Italian Football

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## Foreword

Can a thesis title start with the word 'why' and not be a question? Of course, it can. *Why Invest in Italian Football* is meant to delve into the true purpose of football and the deeper reasons 'why' shareholders should invest. The repetition of the question 'why' reveals truths which satisfy the needs of the key stakeholders. The same 'why' leads, interestingly enough, to the good of the game. And, yes, despite the difficulties Italian football has suffered over the past ten years, there are many reasons why people can invest in Italian football.

The idea of 'why' was supposed to raise an eyebrow or two. In the same way, the thesis title aims at shaking the assumptions of the stakeholders in football.

The statements in this thesis have to do with logic and are not based on my personal point of view. The thesis does not state 'Why should I myself invest in Italian football?'; nor does the thesis revolve around a potential club owner. This paper attempts to put forward the reasons why a coach (and his/her staff), a sports director (and his/her scouts), the head of a youth academy (and the youth coaches), an athlete (amateur or professional), and most importantly, a fan can "buy into Italian football."

There are reasons for which the thesis investigates the question of 'why' from the point of view of a coach, a player, a sports director or an owner. All of these people are key stakeholders.

First, logic and history teach us that the success of all products (whether we are talking about a cell phone or a football club) depends on the totality of many elements. The reason behind the success of the iPhone can be compared with the sustainable success, for instance, German football has experienced over the past ten years.

Secondly, football, particularly in Italy, is perceived as being 'out of touch'. This despite the fact, that football in Italy has had a profound historical relevance on both a sociological and economic level. Before jumping to conclusions, let's not fall into a trap and forget that there is a reason and a process behind it all, issuing from the investments made every day by the stakeholders mentioned above. Let's not fall into a trap either, failing to acknowledge that a packed stadium, prestigious titles and championships are merely a final result. Let's not forget the consequences of a 'lack' of a 'reason' or a 'process'.

Last but not least come a few of my own discoveries. Having had the opportunity to read a fascinating book called *Start with Why* by Simon Sinek, I feel in touch with a purpose again. I know 'why' I invest in football. My own motivations are irrelevant to the reader. The thesis will attempt to give credence, however, to the declarations above though, encouraging the reader to consider the personal opinions and convictions of highly-experienced professionals. I consider them leaders in their line of work; they inspire others to invest in football.

The unfiltered responses these experts have given at times in answer to critical and provocative questions are testament to their commitment to improve the game. I am very thankful for the support they have shown me in the writing of the thesis. Most of all, I must thank these distinguished colleagues for shaping my convictions over the past ten years.

**Mr. Walter Sabatini**, former Sports Director of AS Roma

**Mr. Stefano Pioli**, Head Coach of FC Internazionale Milan

**Mr. Paco D'Onofrio**, legal expert on Sports Law and Reforms in Italian football, Assistant Professor Department for Life Quality Studies, Director of Second Cycle Degree in Wellness and Sport Management, Università di Bologna

**Mr. Oliver Bierhoff**, World Cup winner as Team Manager and Head of Sports of the Deutscher Fussball Bund, as a player- European Champion with the German National Team, Serie A Champion with AC Milan

**Mr. Stefan Reuter**, Sports Director of FC Augsburg, former national team player of the German National Team, Champions League winner with BVB Dortmund, FC Juventus.

**Mr. Max Eberl**, Sports Director of Borussia Mönchengladbach

## 1. Why start with 'why'?

The question of 'why' is meant to provoke the reader into an active investigation of the reasons why we do what we do in Italian football, the next question being: "Can I identify with the direction Italian football is going?"

Asking 'why' can sometimes be an uncomfortable task. It might force you, a potential owner, into a deeper assessment of a certain proposal or reform, using new criteria, 'value' and 'purpose.' "Why do I need a head of methodology?" or "Why should we have an analysis team for the youth sector?"

The question 'why' can encourage you, the coach, to understand the value of "why I should transfer knowledge" or "why I should prolong my contract despite a better offer."

Sinek humbly says that the asking of 'why' should be considered "just a tool." This tool, however, is relevant for no less than "90% of people at the work place that go home at the end of the day unfulfilled with the work that they do."<sup>1</sup> These numbers may differ amongst the key stakeholders in Italian football, but it is still legitimate to continue to ask and know the answers to your 'why' (and for that matter, to dig a little deeper). After all, Sinek's work has attracted hundreds of advice-seeking entrepreneurs and companies in the U.S. and abroad, representing both the private and public sectors.

Here comes the uncomfortable question.

Q: "Why should I care about the 'why'?"

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<sup>1</sup> Sdins66. "Simon Sinek Start With Why Interview: Arguably the Single Most Powerful Principle in Business." *YouTube*. YouTube, 15 Feb. 2012. Web. 15 July 2016.

Sinek: "Nobody has to do it. Those who do it, tend to go home more fulfilled. Those who do it, tend to be more inspired when they wake up in the morning. Those who do it, have a capacity to inspire those around them." <sup>2</sup>

The coach or the owner might really want to consider starting with 'why'! There is a need for reform in Italian football. The stakeholders must, of course, remember that new initiatives require not only experience, knowledge and intuition, but also the courage to repeatedly ask 'why' or 'break the ice,' for example, or sacrifice something in order to affect change over the long term.

Knowing why you are doing what you are doing as a stakeholder in Italian football or 'finding your purpose in football' may clarify 'purpose' and kindle inspiration in other stakeholders. Sometimes this may even involve challenging the 'status quo.'

Sinek's interview offers insight into the reasons why only "few people or organizations know why they do what they do."

Q: "So, why does it seem so difficult for people or companies to start with 'why'? What's the challenge there?"

Sinek: "There are two challenges. Primarily, it's difficult to measure. How do you measure culture in your company?!? It's easier to measure numbers. So, we default to that. It's often dismissed as fluff at worst, or: 'I get it but I just don't know how to implement it.' "

"The second obstacle is, it requires courage. Those that start with 'why' have a gumption to take short-term financial hits for the long-term greater good."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Sdins66. "Simon Sinek Start With Why Interview: Arguably the Single Most Powerful Principle in Business." *YouTube*. YouTube, 15 Feb. 2012. Web. 15 July 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Sdins66. "Simon Sinek Start With Why Interview: Arguably the Single Most Powerful Principle in Business." *YouTube*. YouTube, 15 Feb. 2012. Web. 15 July 2016.

## 2. Why should Italian football care to start with 'why'?

Just like the Egyptians, Pythagoras and Leonardo da Vinci, Sinek too was fascinated with the mathematical formula of the Golden Ratio. "It had so many applications in so many fields. And even more significantly, it offered a formula that could produce repeatable and predictable results in places where such results might have been assumed to be a random occurrence or luck." <sup>4</sup>

Driven by what he defines as the "Golden Circle," Sinek argues that "there is compelling evidence of how much more we can achieve if we remind ourselves to start everything we do by first asking 'why.'" <sup>5</sup>

The thesis investigates the cyclical nature of success and failure for Italian and German football over the past thirty years and encourages the key stakeholders in Italian football to consider the Golden Circle, or better, to start asking 'why.' Starting with 'why' is aimed at inspiring action on specific issues, one stakeholder at a time.

Oliver Bierhoff can relate to the rise and fall of Italian football. He was, after all, witness to the "dolce vita" era of Italian football. In the 90s, he was a player for AC Milan, winner of the Scudetto title in 1999. Now Bierhoff represents a football movement which has raised the bar on multiple levels. He speaks of Italy's "unique" values and its future opportunities.

Yes, when Bierhoff was national team manager, he led Germany to win the World Cup in 2012. But this doesn't mean that he has forgotten the difficult state the Bundesliga was in before the World Cup was announced in 2006. Bierhoff's beliefs are in line with the

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<sup>4</sup> Sinek, Simon. *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. London: Portfolio Penguin, 2011. 38. Print.

<sup>5</sup> Sinek, Simon. *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. London: Portfolio Penguin, 2011. 38. Print.

premise of this thesis: Italy's fate lies in its own hands. He comments, "The Italian Serie A of the 90s attracted the best players for several reasons. They had the best stadiums (because of the World Cup Italia '90), the best salaries and then they had the Italian lifestyle. Plus, each player appreciated and revered Italy's profound football culture. Italy taught players a different technical and tactical approach, with all their different facets. We didn't have individual performance training in Germany! The Italians did; and at the time they were leading the pack. The coaches too were well-prepared on both technical and tactical fronts. The people who think that the Germans had iron discipline should have seen how the Italians managed their game. They paid attention to the smallest technical detail. Moreover, Italy is so passionate about its football. 'Calcio' seemed to 'belong' to the Italian people."<sup>6</sup>

Was Italy's success random occurrence or luck? Is it repeatable? Not long ago, the Serie A represented the epicenter of world football. It attracted the highest number of viewers and also the attention of the best players from around the world. 'Calcio' was driven by football "mecenati," entrepreneurs and patriarchal families such as the Agnelli 'dynasty', T.V. tycoon Silvio Berlusconi, Angelo Moratti, and thereafter, his son Massimo. No one could resist the passion for the game. Before there was PayTV, 'Calcio' was considered the main artery for sociological, political and commercial expression.

For the purpose of simplification, the thesis draws its parallels based on Italian football of the 80s and 90s; actually the game goes much further back. Italy's understanding of the defensive game can be traced back to the "true catenaccio," adopted by Nereo Rocco in the late 40s. Not to be forgotten is the father of the "Grande Torino," Ferruccio Novo. He changed Italian football with great determination, insisting that "metodo"-based tactics be replaced with "sistema"-based tactics. Novo's managerial drive catapulted him into leading Torino, from being player to president, collecting five championships in a row from 1943 to 1949.

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<sup>6</sup> "Oliver Bierhoff." Telephone interview. 17 Nov. 2016.

Italian contributions to the sport are numerous. Just think of the number of Italian coaches who have won championships on foreign turf or of Arrigo Sacchi, who introduced a new game philosophy to Italy with his 4-4-2 formation. Think of the introduction of zonal marking or the radical change to a more offensive game style in the 90s. Italy has proven time and again that it has sufficient resources to draw from. These are the rich resources outlined by Simon Sinek: the knowledge, intuition and courage that inspire leaders to action. "Great leaders are those who trust their gut. They are those who understand the art before the science. They win hearts before minds. They are the ones that start with 'why'."<sup>7</sup> As seen in the *Gazzetta dello Sport* article below, Italy's coaching influence in foreign championships is second to none.

Table 1: Championship Titles of Italian Coaches Abroad

<b>Giovanni Trapattoni</b> : 3 - Bayern M. (Germania) '96-97, Benfica (Portogallo) '04-05, Salisburgo (Austria) '06-07.
<b>Marcello Lippi</b> : 3 - Guangzhou Evergrande (Cina) 2012-13-14
<b>Mario Astorri</b> : 2 - AB (Danimarca) 1967, KB (Danimarca) 1974
<b>Fabio Capello</b> : 2 - Real Madrid (Spagna) '96-97 e '06-07
<b>Walter Zenga</b> : 2 - Steaua Bucarest (Romania) '04-05, Stella Rossa (Serbia-Montenegro) '05-06.
<b>Luciano Spalletti</b> : 2 - Zenit (Russia) '09-10 e '11-12
<b>Carlo Ancelotti</b> : 2 - Chelsea (Inghilterra) '09-10, PSG (Francia) '12-13
<b>Alberto Bigon</b> : Sion (Svizzera) '96-97
<b>Nevio Scala</b> : Shakhtar Donetsk (Ucraina) '01-02
<b>Beppe Dossena</b> : Al-Ittihad (Libia) '02-03
<b>Mauro Bencivenga</b> : KF Tirana (Albania) '08-09
<b>Andrea Mandorlini</b> : Cluj (Romania) '09-10
<b>Roberto Mancini</b> : Manchester City (Inghilterra) '11-12
<b>Salvatore Nobile</b> : Africa Sports (Costa d'Avorio) 2008
<b>Stefano Cusin</b> : Al-Ittihad (Libia) '08-09
<b>Danilo Pileggi</b> : Saint-George (Etiopia) '11-12
<b>Marco Materazzi</b> : Chennaiyin (India) 2015
<b>Claudio Ranieri</b> : Leicester (Inghilterra) '15-16
<b>Gasport</b> © RIPRODUZIONE RISERVATA

Resource : "Ranieri E L'impresa Leicester: Ora Sono 18 Gli Italiani Con Scudetto Estero." *La Gazzetta Dello Sport* - Tutto Il Rosa Della Vita. Gasport, 03 May 2016. Web. 19 Oct. 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Sinek, Simon. *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. London: Portfolio Penguin, 2011. 60. Print.

No other country has produced as many titled coaches outside of its own borders. The Serie A holds the record for most Pallone d'Oro players to play in Italian first division clubs. These players include Gianni Rivera, Michel Platini, Marco Van Basten, Roberto Baggio; and, in the last twenty years, Zinedine Zidane, Fabio Cannavaro, Ronaldo, Andriy Shevchenko, Pavel Nedved and Kaka'. The Pallone d'Oro may have been discontinued in 2009, but the Serie A was the record holder, boasting eighteen of Europe's most valuable player titles, right up until the very last day. AC Milan and FC Juventus (8 MVP's respectively) led European club rankings on the club front as well.

So, is this success repeatable?

"The secret of football lies in its simplicity,"<sup>8</sup> argues Walter Sabatini, the former Sports Director of AS Roma. He adds, "Football is cyclical. The Germans had the same problems we did. They knew where to look for answers though, namely at the roots."<sup>9</sup>

"For decades after WWII, all of us in Italy, clubs, fans, coaches and players, lived from the simplicity of the game. For instance, the main reason why kids were developed into talents was because we played on the streets all day long. Football back then was pure. That's also why we need more courage now in developing our talents of tomorrow."<sup>10</sup>

"Did you see the kid in the stands of the San Paolo stadium after Roma scored the goal against Napoli? That's where we have to start. That's who we should resort to for answers."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "Walter Sabatini." Personal interview. 08 Nov. 2016.

<sup>9</sup> "Walter Sabatini." Personal interview. 08 Nov. 2016.

<sup>10</sup> "Walter Sabatini." Personal interview. 08 Nov. 2016.

<sup>11</sup> "Walter Sabatini." Personal interview. 08 Nov. 2016.

Table 2: Kid after Roma scored the third goal against his Napoli XX



Resource : De Martino, Dario. "FOTOGALLERY - La Roma Viola Il San Paolo, Le Lacrime Di Un Bambino Tifoso Azzurro." Tutto Napoli. N.p., 15 Oct. 2016. Web. 11 Nov. 2016.

What did Sabatini mean? Well, he meant that football in Italy has a sociological importance so great that the stakeholders in Italian football, from the coach to the club owner, have a responsibility (and an opportunity at the same time, namely) to listen and to inspire their followers.

Who follows a coach? The players, his staff and the team around the team.

Who follows the Sports Director? The coaches: pro and youth. The scouts. The coaching instructors or 'heads of methodology'. This figure is still missing in most Italian football clubs.

Who follows the CEO or the president? Everyone who identifies with his long-term vision for the club.

Who follows the club? The fans, the kids, their parents and their grandparents.

These statements align themselves beautifully with the Sinek point: **"Leadership is not about power or authority. Leadership is decidedly more human.** Being a leader requires one thing and one thing only: followers. A follower is someone who volunteers to go where you are going. They choose to go, not because they have to, not

because they were incentivized to, but because they want to. The question is, why would anyone follow you?"<sup>12</sup>

This basic, yet powerful, question tells us exactly why people have or have not followed, will or will not follow Italian football. It comes down to human volition and motivation. The words 'human volition and motivation' should be added to the vocabulary of the leadership and key stakeholders.

Team presidents can address the need for newer stadiums. There is an evident need for this. Perhaps though, we might first want to listen to and inspire our followers (again).

Coaches can address the lack of a good offense on Italian youth teams. Perhaps though, we might want to inspire talents to read the game rather than to memorize it.

Sports Directors can address the lack of Italian players in the Serie A. Perhaps though, we might want to stop "incentivizing" Lega Pro clubs for developing our talents, and rather insist on solid 2<sup>nd</sup> club teams.

So if we dig a little deeper, we realize that each stakeholder's vision is dependent on his/her following. **Each coach, each sports director, each president and each club has the responsibility and the opportunity to ask 'why.'** For this reason, *Why Invest in Italian Football* will examine a few of the critical issues facing Italian football today- from each stakeholder's perspective.

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<sup>12</sup> Sinek, Simon. *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. London: Portfolio Penguin, 2011. 226. Print.

### 3. Why we invest in Italian football

It is fair to say that football is a diverse ecosystem rich in backgrounds and ideas. Each team has its own roots and its own identity. Germany's game is characterized by its high intensity. Yet, the days of the "long ball to the long-legged striker" are history, according to Max Eberl, Sports Director of Borussia Mönchengladbach.

Today, Germany's game has progressed two chapters beyond. "Not only have we focused on improving today's generation of talents technically, but we are opening up new chapters and exploring game principles we can build on. Our emphasis in the next years will be to transfer knowledge to our players to encourage them to want to improve on reading the game from an individual standpoint, one player at a time."<sup>13</sup>

What has changed in twenty years? "In the 80s and 90s, we used to look to Italian football for tactically-advanced teams," acknowledges Stefan Reuter, who had a one-year stint at Juventus and won the World Cup at Italia '90. "When I arrived at Juventus, Giovanni Trapattoni made me understand how to look at specific tactical aspects I was not at all accustomed to in Germany. He inspired me from a tactical perspective. He held each player by his hand, the way a grandfather figure would, and allowed us to understand why to stand here rather than there and why to do this rather than that. Today, however, we don't need to go to the Serie A to improve tactically. The program led by the federation fifteen years ago has helped us develop coaches and players who then in turn contribute to the development of our own tactical understanding and our own game identity".<sup>14</sup>

Speaking of the German Federation, it was the nationwide development program prior to the 2006 World Cup which gave birth to Germany's football revolution.

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<sup>13</sup> "Max Eberl." Personal interview. 10 Nov. 2016.

<sup>14</sup> "Stefan Reuter." Personal interview. 21 Oct. 2016.

“Der weite Weg zum Erfolg,”<sup>15</sup> an overview of Germany’s development program, was published in 2007. Here, Matthias Sammer, the newly-appointed Sports Director of the German Federation, lays out “the long way to success” towards a distant World Cup in 2026 and proposes an all-encompassing vision of how Germany plans to redefine its game.

As seen below, the 7-step development pyramid embraces all stakeholders and their participation starting at the grass roots level: from kindergartens and grade schools to the Elite-Talent Centers and the National “A” team.

Table 3: “Der weite Weg zum Erfolg” or “The Long Way to Success”

### Ausbildungsstrukturen

<b>A-Nationalmannschaft</b>	<b>7</b>
Internationale Vereinswettbewerbe	<b>6</b>
Bundesliga, 2./3. Liga	
Lizenzvereine	<b>5</b>
Nationalmannschaften U19 U20 U21	Höchster Amateurbereich
Leistungszentren/Elfteschulen des Fußballs	<b>4</b>
Juniernationalmannschaften U15 U16 U17 U18	Talentförderung der LV und Vereine
Leistungszentren	<b>3</b>
	DFB-Talentförderprogramm Vereins-Jugendfußball
<b>2</b>	
Vielseitige Sportaktivitäten und Fußballspielen in Verein und Schule	
<b>1</b>	
Bewegungen und vielseitiges Spielen in Verein, Kindergarten und Schule	

Hinweis: Übersicht der zentralen Talentförderbereiche auf der jeweiligen Stufe.

**Merkmale und Ziele der Ausbildungsstrukturen**

- 1** Jede Ausbildungsebene hat eine spezielle Funktion im Ausbildungsprozess!
- 2** Ausbildungsstufen und -strukturen müssen aufeinander abgestimmt werden!
- 3** Durchlässigkeit und Offenheit für individuelle Ausbildungswege sind zentrale Qualitätsmerkmale!
- 4** Die Optimierung der Ausbildungsstrukturen ist eine permanente Aufgabe!

DEUTSCHER FUSSBALL-BUND

DFB-AUSBILDUNGSKONZEPTION

Wir fördern unsere Talente zukunftsorientiert und individuell!

**AUSBILDUNGSTUFEN DES DFB**

- 7** Hochleistungstraining - Stabilisierung
- 6** Hochleistungstraining - Perfektionierung
- 5** Belastungsgerechtes Übergangstraining
- 4** Beginnendes Spezialisierungstraining
- 3** Fußballspezifisches Grundagentraining
- 2** Technisch-spielerische Vielseitigkeitsschulung
- 1** Umfassende Bewegungsschulung

Was am Ende Fußballer und Teams der internationalen Spitzenklasse auszeichnet, können Experten und Fans besonders auf der Welt- und Europameisterschaften (aber in der Champions League) studieren. 1. Technische Perfektion auf allen Spielpositionen, 2. zeitlich emotionale Spielereinstellung mit unerschütterlicher Intelligenz in der Spielszene, 3. hochkonzentrierte Aktionen bis zur letzten Sekunde und darüber hinaus, 4. Fähigkeit, die als Persönlichkeit mit Leader-Qualitäten den Teamgeist immer wieder zu erneuern.

Wir aber erreichen unsere vielen jungen Fußballer: geborenen Spielern und Spieler durch Zufall, wir erwerben sie die spielerischen Qualitäten eines Top-Fußballers und die sie allein macht Sicher ist, dass sich das anfängliche Fußballspielen der Kinder und auch jede weitere Etappe der Talentförderung nur von solidem rechtlich-konformem Fußball abheben müssen.

Jeder Abschnitt des Kinder- und Jugendfußballs weist an dem Ziel, Schwerpunkte und Methoden auf wie der Erwachsenenfußball. Der Kinder-, vor allem aber der leistungsorientierten Jugendfußball ist häufig auf zu kurzfristige Erfolge ausgerichtet. Persönlichkeitsanpassung, Ziele, erzieherische, soziale, aber vor allem geistlicher, systemischer Ausbildungsprozess gar konzentriert auf die Substrukturspezialisierung.

Die neue Ausbildungsstruktur bezieht Konsequenzen für alle, je zuvor, unverrückbar Prinzipien eines zukunftsorientierten Kinder- und Jugendfußballs einschließlich eines langfristigen Leistungsaufbaus:

- 1. Individuelle Stärken und fördern**  
Die Förderung jedes einzelnen Kindes und Jugendlichen muss absolute Priorität haben. Das schließt vor allem langfristige, menschliche, schrittweise, aber immer als Resultat, altersgemäß ausgebildeter, positiver und kreativer Erziehung!
- 2. Ausbildungsziele und -inhalte konkretisieren**  
an Fähigkeiten und psychischen Entwicklungsstand der Kinder und Jugendlichen anordnen!

**Unsere Nationalspieler für 2026 leben bereits unter uns und warten auf Förderung!**

WM 2026	HEUTE 3- BIS 6-JÄHRIGE
WM 2022	HEUTE 7- BIS 10-JÄHRIGE
WM 2018	HEUTE 11- BIS 14-JÄHRIGE
WM 2014	HEUTE 15 BIS 18
WM 2010	HEUTE 19 BIS 21

Resource : Deutscher Fussball Verband

However, it was the excitement prior to the World Cup which kindled Germany’s incentive to embark on a paradigm change. With 4-5 years to go to the world’s largest sports event, high-spirited president, Mr. Gerhard Meyer Vorfelder, was confronted with

<sup>15</sup> Sammer, Matthias / DFB. "Der Weite Weg Zum Erfolg – Ausbildungskonzeption des DFB." *DFB-Trainermedien*. Deutscher Fußball-Bund, n.d. Web. 17 Aug. 2016.

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the gargantuan task of reviving the image of German football. His federation wanted to send a strong message: that Germany had not only learned from the past but that the country was now investing in a new inclusive football reality. "Die Welt zu Gast bei Freunden",<sup>16</sup> which in English stands for: "A Time to Make Friends."

For more than twenty years, Germany's Bundesliga had been playing an outsider role. An article from *Der Spiegel* in June of 2000 presents a grim picture. "The German National Under-21 Team has not qualified for the final phase of the European Championship. It also failed to qualify for the Olympic Games."

The missed qualification brings to mind Italy's on-going discussion on youth development. But so does the following comment made by Ralf Minge, Head of the Youth Academy of Bayer Leverkusen: **"I wish there was more courage to invest towards talents. But the pressure to win is so high that no coach in the world wants to jeopardize his position."**<sup>17</sup>

This comment touches a sensitive nerve, the same nerve Sinek and Sabatini had called our attention to. Sinek's reasoning draws a valid comparison between the coach and the trapeze artist who is training for a death-defying trick. **"Remove the net and he will only do safe tricks, the ones he knows he can land. The more he trusts the quality of the net, the more he will take personal risks to make his act better. The trust the circus management gives him by providing him a net is probably afforded to other performers too. Soon all performers will feel confident to try new things and push themselves further."**<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> "Klub 2006: Erster WM-Tag "Die Welt Zu Gast Bei Freunden" " FIFA.com. FIFA, 22 Apr. 2004. Web. 17 Nov. 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Reichelt, Ines. Germany, SPIEGEL ONLINE Hamburg. "Nachwuchs misere: "Zu Tode Gefördert" - SPIEGEL ONLINE." SPIEGEL ONLINE. N.p., 29 June 2000. Web. 14 Nov. 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Reichelt, Ines. Germany, SPIEGEL ONLINE Hamburg. "Nachwuchs misere: "Zu Tode Gefördert" - SPIEGEL ONLINE." SPIEGEL ONLINE. N.p., 29 June 2000. Web. 14 Nov. 2016.

This is where leaders come into play, a manager like Oliver Bierhoff or a coach like Stefano Pioli. They don't only provide safety nets for their coaches or for the players; they encourage them to accept risks and errors as part of their individual development.

The same principle applies to club owners and CEOs. They are not only responsible for laying out a vision for 'the product football', the brand. Their communication and leadership represent the guiding voice that accompanies all other stakeholders in good or bad times.

The following chapters will further illustrate why federations, such as the Bundesliga and the Premier League, have dribbled past Italian football in the past fifteen years - on and off the field.

#### 4. Why do we play football?

This too seems obvious. However, are we really aware of our reasons for playing football? Football is a competition. Whether the format is a match or a championship, in football there are constants. There is always a winner and there is always a loser; yes, even if there's a tie. If Juventus were to win the Scudetto again next season, the Serie A would be missing what it was actually meant to provide: namely, a good competition. One would assume that if there's little competition, the championship will suffer and the fans will stay home.

Is that so? Well, how about the Bundesliga? Bayern has won four titles in a row. Why are their stadiums so well-attended while the stadiums of Italy remain empty? Is it only an infrastructure problem? Of course, new stadiums would help.

Is there perhaps another reason why teams compete? The difference is this. In Germany and in England, there is a much stronger sense of responsibility and accountability in governing and promoting their product, football. It starts with the balance of power and avoidance of conflict of interest between the league and the clubs.

Let's dig a little deeper. VfB Stuttgart, currently attempting to bounce back after its relegation in 2016, is attempting to become the first club in history to break the 50,000 spectator average in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bundesliga. Borussia Mönchengladbach is one of four teams competing this season in the group phase of the Champions League. In 2013, all four German teams qualified for the Best of 16 Round of Europe's most prestigious cup- for the first time.

In Germany the Deutsche Fussball Liga is responsible for the operations and the marketing of the Bundesliga competitions (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Bundesliga) as well as for the licensing of the associated clubs. The DFL was founded in 2000 with a mandate to

govern and promote the game in Germany. In Germany, the DFL is considered the 'promoting engine' of the game. There hasn't been a single club that has filed for bankruptcy in the Bundesliga in over fifty years. Germans have every reason to trust the DFL, because of its history of safeguarding the interests of the competitions. Enforcing one of the most stringent licensing systems in Europe and continuously developing new revenue channels, the organization is a guarantor for the stability and quality of the German football product.

In Italy, in contrast, there is a Lega Serie A, a Lega Serie B and a Lega Pro. Not only do the three independently-governed leagues operate their respective championships and license their respective clubs, they also compete with one another when it comes to exercising their voting rights at the league assembly on football reforms and in the distribution of T.V. and marketing revenues. The question arises: why does Italian football even bother to have a league if its very function is compromised by the evident self-interest of the clubs (or the leagues themselves)?

In an interview with *Die Zeit*, Agnelli, the president of FC Juventus, points in the same direction: "I believe that the Serie A in Italy, in similar fashion to the Premier League in England, should be represented by people who understand that the entire championship is a single product. It needs a business plan for the development and promotion of our game."<sup>19</sup> "In Italy nothing happens without the president's assembly. The League is weak, lacks decision-making powers (as was seen in the sale of T.V. rights). The sale of T.V. rights was assigned to a marketing company called Infront, which was also in charge of marketing for a number of clubs in the Serie A and the national team. This inevitably leads to a conflict of interest."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Oliva, Alessandro. "L'intervista Integrale Di Andrea Agnelli a Die Zeit | Calcio E Finanza." *Calcio E Finanza*. N.p., 17 Mar. 2015. Web. 14 Nov. 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Schönau, Birgit. "Juventus Turin: "Unser Produkt Sind Tore" " ZEIT ONLINE. *ZEIT ONLINE* Nachrichten Auf ZEIT ONLINE, 26 Mar. 2015. Web. 14 Nov. 2016.

The need for new stadiums is not the main reason why the fans don't flock to the games anymore either. While there is an evident need to improve the facilities, the stadium complaint is an alibi. The real question should be: why do fans go to the stadium in the first place? They go to the stadium because they connect with the club and the players. There is a greater purpose. Even if the train ride takes seven hours and the team loses, the fan will continue to defend his colors. His sacrifice forms about as strong a bond as you can get. A bond of loyalty, for whatever reason, should not be underestimated. This is "why people tattoo Harley-Davidson logos on their bodies."<sup>21</sup> "That symbol is no longer about Harley. The logo embodies an entire value set – their own. The symbol is no longer about Harley, it's more about them."<sup>22</sup>

**There is more than one opportunity for Italian football to shine again. Italian football knows better. We do know why we play football, but our 'why' has become what Sinek refers to as "fuzzy". "Knowing your WHY is not the only way to be successful, but it is the only way to maintain a lasting success and have a greater blend of innovation and flexibility. When a WHY goes fuzzy, it becomes much more difficult to maintain the growth, loyalty and inspiration that helped drive the original success.**

It is not destiny or some mystical business cycle that transforms successful companies into impersonal goliaths. It's people."<sup>23</sup> The stakeholders do remember a time when Italian football embodied values which inspired a great following. After all, it was only twenty years ago.

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<sup>21</sup> Sinek, Simon. Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action. London: Portfolio Penguin, 2011. 38. Print.

<sup>22</sup> Sinek, Simon. Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action. London: Portfolio Penguin, 2011. 162. Print.

<sup>23</sup> Sinek, Simon. Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action. London: Portfolio Penguin, 2011. 50. Print.

In order to reanimate the patient, our efforts, the stakeholders' efforts, must remain uncompromised and void of self-interest. The league must be empowered and entrusted as a sovereign body with the capability to fulfill its mandate without compromise; to operate as the main artery of governance; and to promote the image and rights of the game. We must ask the question of 'why' from the top-down in the interests of reforming the game and creating a following and we have to start from the grass roots level. The message the league and the owners send has to be directed toward a purpose its followers can identify with (again). The message must be delivered in a clear, inclusive and credible way towards fans, employees, players, coaches and Sports Directors.

That's the first investment football needs. It's the very first 'why' for which I, president of the league or club owner, should want to invest in Italian football.

## 5. Why do we develop players? Why do we need 2<sup>nd</sup> teams?

The DFL has proven that repeatable and sustainable success is based on simple principles. As mentioned before, a healthy and sustainable system in football is dependent on a strong youth development program. Before asking why Italian football needs 2<sup>nd</sup> teams, the obvious question arises, why do we develop youth players?

It is true that there are many roads that lead to Rome. However, it seems as if the compass for Italian football has taken its stakeholders on a detour despite all recovery efforts. The German approach doesn't necessarily have to be copied, nor rivaled, but it might be worth it to find out why Germany's stakeholders are so insistent on their 2<sup>nd</sup> teams. The 2<sup>nd</sup> teams have proven to be the ideal platform for young players seeking the big jump into professional football. On the international scene, it appears that other nations have the same focus. France, Spain, England (U-23 Premier League 2), the Netherlands and even smaller leagues, such as Switzerland and Austria, have instated 2<sup>nd</sup> teams in an effort to allow aspiring talents to test the waters among adults in lower divisions before they make their debut in their respective 1<sup>st</sup> teams.

Italy's youth development program would probably not sit well with Simon Sinek. He would probably argue that it's not sustainable, and for several reasons. Unlike other top leagues, the Italian federation seems to foster little communication with its stakeholders or the heads of youth development of the various clubs. The federation has an insufficient number of coaching instructors, or what in other countries are referred to as 'heads of methodology'. It's as if coaches and youth players were relying on the "safety guarantee" of a trapeze net filled with holes.

Regardless of which metric or theory you choose to measure talent development in the Serie A and Serie B, it is a fact, that youth players, no matter how talented they are, have an uphill climb before they can make it to the big leagues, Serie A or Serie B.

The following two illustrations, presented by Federico Cherubini, current Sports Director of the FC Juventus Primavera (its senior age class), at this year's Sports Director course, raise the fundamental question: what happens to the academy players who discontinue their youth development training? Where do they end up?

Every season there is a new delivery of youth players of another age class who officially conclude their development training and seek a club and the chance to step into the adult football arena.

This season's "harvest" produced 479 youth players, only 2.29% of which were able to sign up with a 1<sup>st</sup> Division Serie A club. What is peculiar, however, is that Serie A and Serie B teams, instead of being compensated for the talent that they loan, actually end up paying incentives for the receiving club's contribution to the player's development.

While it sounds good in theory, one asks what benefit the youth player will have when the development club's motivation to develop and play him is not based on the player's talent but on a quota system promising monetary gains.

Table 4: This Season's "Harvest", Class of 1997



	Players	Percentage
Serie A	11	2.29%
Serie B	34	7.09%
Lega Pro	89	18.58%
Serie D	188	39.24%
No Contract	40	8.35%
Foreign Clubs	23	4.80%
U19 Extra Quota	94	19.62%

Resource : Cherubini, Federico. "Il Passaggio Dal Settore Giovanile Alla Prima Squadra." Sports Director Course. Italy, Florence. 25 Oct. 2016. Lecture.

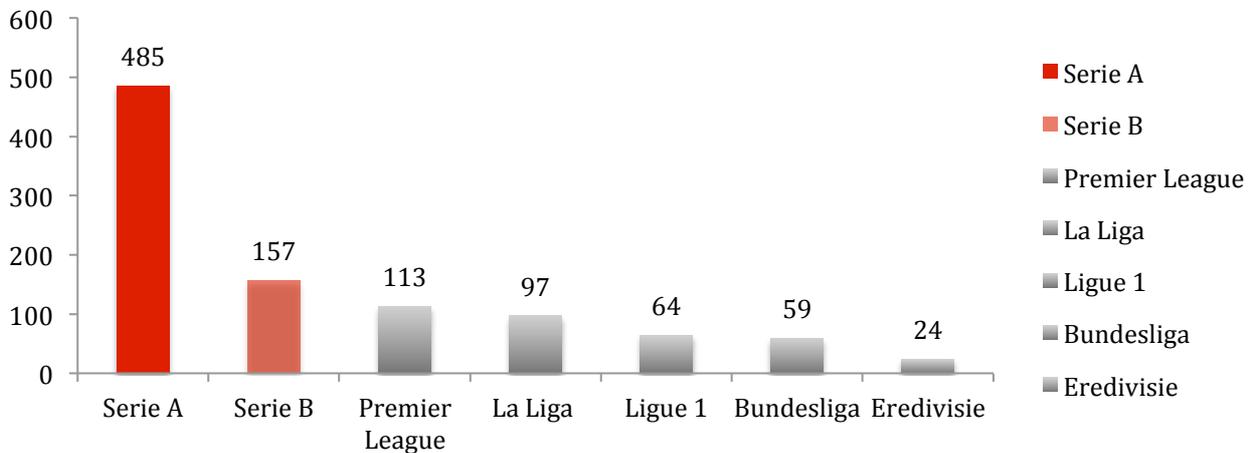
Moreover, this season, 2016/17, there are 485 professional players who were loaned out by Serie A clubs. The total number of players loaned in the Premier League, La Liga, Ligue 1, the Bundesliga and the Eredivisie combined (357 professional players) is roughly 25% lower than the number of players loaned by Italy's top league.

To draw a quick comparison, the Bundesliga averages 3.2 players loaned per club; the Premier League averages 5.6 players; whereas the Serie A loans out a staggering number of its players, an average of 24.3 players per club.

Table 5: League-by-league players on loan comparison

## Player Loans

### Elite Championships Europe (Season 2016/17)



Resource : Cherubini, Federico. "Il Passaggio Dal Settore Giovanile Alla Prima Squadra." Sports Director Course. Italy, Florence. 25 Oct. 2016. Lecture.

There are two main problems that arise. Because the player on loan is not owned (but borrowed on a short-term basis), the receiving club will most likely have less incentive to invest in that player's development. The incentive to take the player is monetary. The incentive to develop the player is minimal. A structural problem arises.

Clubs in obvious need of placing talent "for development" are obliged to find clubs willing to absorb the "surplus" of players on loan- in every transfer market window.

Not having a 2<sup>nd</sup> team system to bridge the gap contributes to an evident shortage of talented young players in Italy's Serie A. Most importantly though, Italy's loan-friendly ecosystem fails to address the actual purpose of developing players. The need to capitalize monetarily on the short-term means that young players hatch early and drop out of the nest in the long-term. To return to the circus analogy, Italy's league is failing to provide the safety net for the next generation of trapeze artists.

## 5b. What do the Germans, English and Japanese have in common?

It is needless to say that the offer outweighs the demand season after season. While on the subject of the structural difficulties facing Italian football, why not take another useful tip from Sinek's book?

"There is a wonderful story of a group of American car executives who went to Japan to see a Japanese assembly line. At the end of the line, the doors were put on the hinges, the same as in America. But something was missing. In the United States, a line worker would take a rubber mallet and tap the edges of the door to ensure that it fit perfectly. In Japan, that job didn't seem to exist. Confused, the American auto executives asked at what point they made sure the door fit perfectly. Their Japanese guide looked at them and smiled sheepishly. 'We make sure it fits when we design it'."<sup>24</sup>

This is why looking beyond Italy's borders could offer some clues.

Germany passed a reform in 2008 making it possible for reserve teams to participate in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> highest adult divisions. Max Eberl and Stefan Reuter weigh in on the benefits of the decision. According to Eberl, "Players like Marc-André ter Stegen, Tony Jantschke, Patrick Herrmann or Mahmoud Dahoud have benefited greatly from being able to play in our 2<sup>nd</sup> team. They must have totaled over 100 matches together gaining valuable experience in the 4<sup>th</sup> German division. Not only do they have the ability to prove their talent in a competition that is more forgiving than the Bundesliga; they also play among adults in front of a crowd of 5 - 6,000 spectators, for instance, when our 2<sup>nd</sup> team faces Allemania Aachen or Rot-Weiss Essen."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Sinek, Simon. *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. London: Portfolio Penguin, 2011. 14. Print.

<sup>25</sup> "Max Eberl." Personal interview. 10 Nov. 2016.

This year, during the Italian League assemblies there have been repeated calls for 2<sup>nd</sup> teams in an effort to bring reform to the Primavera U-19 championship. Juventus, Roma, Napoli and Fiorentina have presented a reform proposal which (unfortunately) has not fully convinced federation president Carlo Tavecchio. Instead, the league assembly has opted to pass a transitory measure which will allow all Primavera teams to play against one another on a more competitive national level. In the past they had played in regional divisions where the big teams, such as Roma, Napoli, Juventus, Inter and Milan prevail, leaving little room for the competition necessary for each player's individual development.

According to the November 4<sup>th</sup> article of *La Repubblica*, Tavecchio's stance on the proposal for 2<sup>nd</sup> teams still retains a glimmer of hope. "Tavecchio said that he was open to discussion and invited Agnelli, in a new friendly gesture, to present the proposal. Juventus has always insisted on the introduction of 2<sup>nd</sup> teams; it seems, however, that there is only a handful of teams in support of this campaign."<sup>26</sup>

The doubt remains as to whether the highly-politicized decision-making "among the 60 and 70-year old club presidents,"<sup>27</sup> as Agnelli notes, will come to the rescue or come at the expense of youth talent development in Italy.

It has become increasingly difficult for owners to adapt to the constantly changing organizational and regulatory landscape. The situation brings uncertainty and instability to an ecosystem in need of the opposite, according to Prof. Paco D'Onofrio, a renowned legal expert specializing in Italian sports law. (Prof. Paco D'Onofrio, Interview, 18 Nov. 2016)

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<sup>26</sup> "Agnelli: "Lega Senza Potere: Comandano I Presidenti. E Hanno 60-70 Anni"" La Gazzetta Dello Sport - Tutto Il Rosa Della Vita. Gasport, 12 Mar. 2015. Web. 14 Nov. 2016.

<sup>27</sup> "Agnelli: "Lega Senza Potere: Comandano I Presidenti. E Hanno 60-70 Anni"" La Gazzetta Dello Sport - Tutto Il Rosa Della Vita. Gasport, 12 Mar. 2015. Web. 14 Nov. 2016.

In closing this chapter, the thesis purposely avoids paraphrasing the thoughts of Sinek . They are relevant; they fit in the same way the Japanese assembly line workers made the car door fit the hinges: “What the American automakers did with their rubber mallets is a metaphor for how so many people and organizations lead. When faced with a result that doesn’t go according to plan, a series of perfectly effective short-term tactics are used until the desired outcome is achieved. But how structurally sound are those solutions? So many organizations function in a world of tangible goals and the mallets to achieve them. The ones that achieve more, the ones that get more out of fewer people and fewer resources, the ones with an outsized amount of influence, however, build products and companies and even recruit people that all fit based on the original intention. **Even though the outcome may look the same, great leaders understand the value in the things we cannot see.”<sup>28</sup>**

In terms of youth development, this is what the Germans, the English and the Japanese have in common.

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<sup>28</sup> Sinek, Simon. Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action. London: Portfolio Penguin, 2011. 15. Print.

## 6. Why do we buy players?

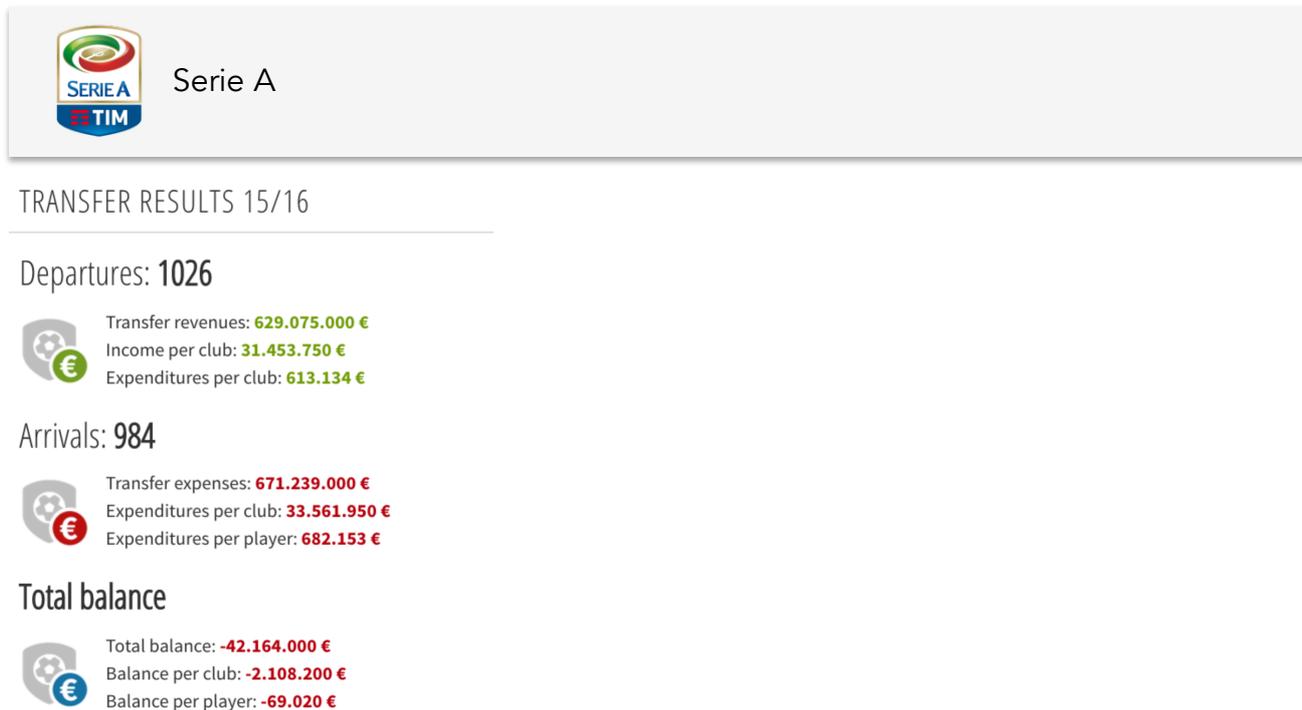
Italy is the only country that licenses Sports Directors. This year's course offered 144 hours of classes over a 2 ½-month time span. The classes were rich in content and in insights which are key to the education and training of Sports Directors. Among the guest speakers were some of the most influential stakeholders in Italian football, from the General Director of the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) to prominent legal and marketing experts to key stakeholders, such as Sports Directors, Heads of Youth Development and Scouting specialists.

In view of the number of player signings which take place every season, it comes as no surprise that new Sports Directors must be armed with the best tools and the best advice if they are to successfully manage "the situation room" of their club.

While the course instructors and guest speakers have given us a thorough introduction to the principles of scouting and recruitment, the thesis intends to expand on the topic of recruiting talent by asking 'why': "Why do we buy players in the first place?" Could a little less mobility result in a little more quality? If so, why?

The "Calciomercato" (or the yearly transfer market which takes place in Milan) is unique to Europe. There's a long-standing tradition in Italy where clubs and player agents meet during the transfer window to negotiate transfers, loans and player contracts. The thesis discusses individual stakeholders' reasons for investing in Italian football, one at a time. This line of argument should raise an eyebrow or two, especially among future Sports Directors. Does the long-standing tradition of wheeling and dealing players come with a cost? If one compares practices in the other leagues, one notes a striking difference in recruitment behavior. Last season 2015/16, the Serie A totaled a massive number of transactions: 1,026 player departures and 984 arrivals, according to [transfermarkt.de](http://transfermarkt.de).

Table 6: Transfer comparison between Serie A vs Bundesliga and LaLiga



The number of player signings in the Bundesliga and La Liga range between 25-40% compared to the Serie A.



Resource : "Serie A - Transfers 16/17 | Transfermarkt." European Leagues and Cup Competitions. Transfermarkt, n.d. Web. 15 Nov. 2016.

While these numbers and percentages certainly highlight two different recruitment approaches, there's a recurring question that looms: Why do we invest in a player?

Logic would tell us that the purpose of a player investment is to improve a team's performance, sportively and financially. When we look and see that Italy's transfer market has incurred a deficit year after year for the last decade, we would make the assumption that a lot had been spent on sportive development at least. After all, you buy a player to improve your team.

With all the player signings, one would also assume that Italy's teams would be dominating the European competitions. Unfortunately, this is far from the truth. As per UEFA's 5-year club ranking, 18 of the top 20 teams come from the other competing championships.

Table 7: Current 5 year UEFA club ranking, only 2 Serie A teams

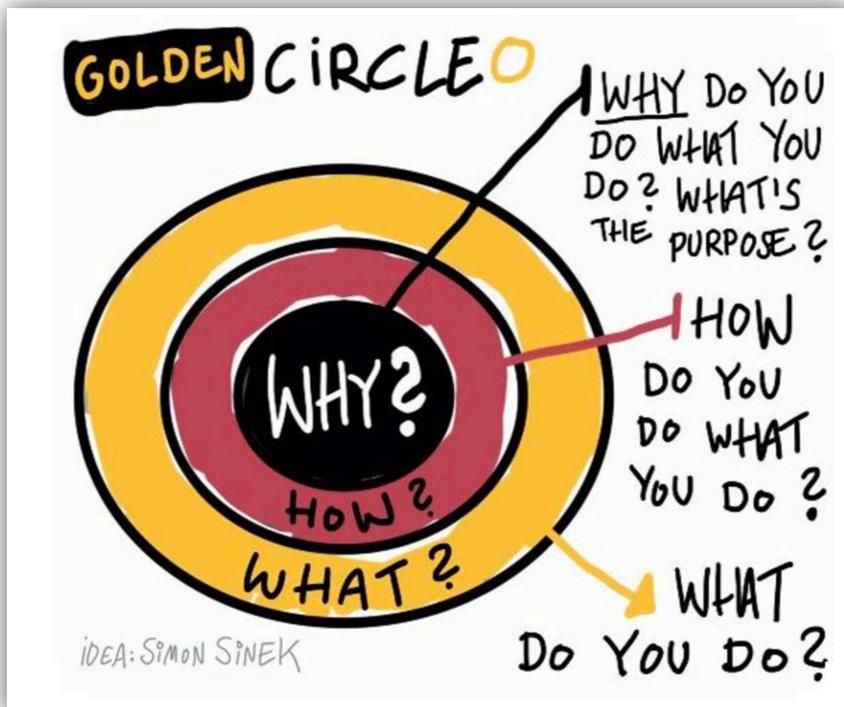
Clubs	Filter by club name	Country	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	Pts
1	Real Madrid CF	ESP	29.542	39.600	33.042	37.785	11.514	151.485
2	FC Bayern München	GER	36.585	29.942	31.171	32.285	11.428	141.413
3	FC Barcelona	ESP	27.542	28.600	38.042	30.785	11.514	136.485
4	Club Atlético de Madrid	ESP	13.542	37.600	26.042	32.785	13.514	123.485
5	Juventus	ITA	25.883	25.833	32.800	20.300	11.216	116.033
6	Paris Saint-Germain	FRA	27.350	26.700	23.183	26.216	12.350	115.799
7	Borussia Dortmund	GER	33.585	24.942	21.171	20.285	12.428	112.413
8	Chelsea FC	ENG	30.285	28.357	23.714	20.850	1.385	104.592
9	SL Benfica	POR	28.350	30.983	9.816	24.100	9.983	103.233
10	Sevilla FC	ESP	3.542	26.600	32.042	27.785	12.514	102.485
11	Arsenal FC	ENG	21.285	21.357	22.714	17.850	12.385	95.592
12	FC Porto	POR	22.350	17.983	26.816	13.100	9.983	90.233
13	Manchester City FC	ENG	10.285	22.357	17.714	28.850	10.385	89.592
14	FC Schalke 04	GER	22.585	18.942	20.171	14.285	7.428	83.413
15	Bayer 04 Leverkusen	GER	12.585	18.942	21.171	17.285	10.428	80.413
16	FC Zenit	RUS	14.950	18.083	18.933	21.300	7.120	80.386
17	FC Shakhtar Donetsk	UKR	18.900	12.566	19.000	21.960	6.620	79.046
18	SSC Napoli	ITA	8.883	18.833	25.800	15.300	10.216	79.033
19	Valencia CF	ESP	22.542	26.600	4.042	18.785	1.514	73.485
20	FC Basel 1893	SUI	17.675	20.440	16.380	13.060	5.620	73.175

Resource : "Member Associations - UEFA Rankings - Club Coefficients – UEFA.com." UEFA.com. UEFA, n.d. Web. 15 Nov. 2016.

This is where the 'why' comes into play again. Serie A teams (although there are exceptions to the rule) must have confused the 'why' with the 'how' and the 'what.'

Players aren't numbers. Higher numbers of players do not equate to higher profits; nor do they equate to greater success. **On the contrary, if other championships were the indicators of sustainable success, a little less mobility would result in a little more stability.** These numbers tell a story; however, they don't explain the reasons. They confirm the fact that Serie A clubs have concentrated more on 'what' you invest in rather than 'why' you invest. When we think of the number of players who are being loaned to third-party clubs, an alarm bell goes off, urging us to investigate even the question of 'how' Serie A is making its investments.

Table 8: The Golden Circle by Simon Sinek



Resource : "People Don't Buy What You Do, They Buy Why You Do It." Pinterest. Countr's Culture, n.d. Web. 15 Nov. 2016.

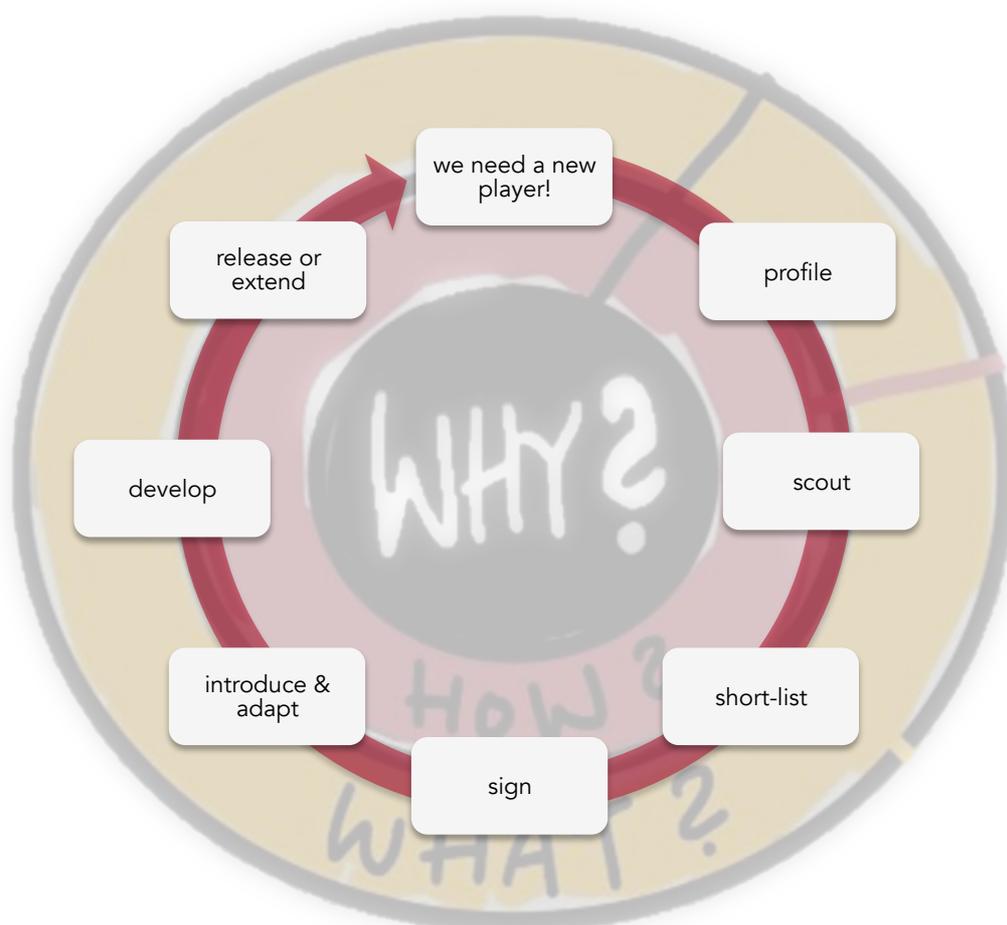
It is at this juncture that the thesis can dig a little deeper into the 'why.' This 'why' will reappear when we address present-day issues on transferring know-how, on game

identity and methodology and on the issue of big data vs. relevant data (in the last chapter). These topics naturally lead back to the core of the 'why': player development.

Player development affects the football investments of all of the key stakeholders - from the president/ club owner, the Sports Director, the coach to the player himself/herself. A Golden Circle is being formed, a tool Serie A clubs might consider while pursuing a future (re)born on renewed conviction and promise!

Before touching upon the Golden Circle though, the thesis should follow up on player recruitment, introducing a different circle which will outline a club's recruitment process from start to finish. It defines 'what' clubs do in order to recruit players.

Table 9: Recruitment and Development Process



The illustration emphasizes the correlation between the 'what,' the 'how' and the 'why.' It puts "why we invest in a player" at the core. In accordance with Sinek's premise, that everyone in an organization be able to identify with the purpose, people and processes must first align themselves with the purpose of the organization if they are to become a **great** organization. **Decisions must be subordinated to the 'why' of the club,** whether the club is hiring the right coach or applying an identifiable method (the 'how') to motivate players, scouts and staff or not. When it comes to acquiring talent (no matter how obvious it seems) the player's development should be placed above all other variables and at the core of the club's recruitment purpose. Without a purpose and a trapeze net, there is no purpose in signing players.

Let's say that a Serie A club has averaged roughly fifty signings last season. Add a new fact, that roughly every 2<sup>nd</sup> player was signed on a loan basis, usually on a short-term loan, it becomes clear that the 'purpose' behind player signing in Italy has gotten a little fuzzy. Imagine how difficult it is to engage each and every player in his development, let alone capitalize on player development.

It's not only a structural dilemma; it also raises the question of whether Italian football has its priorities straight. Where am I, the player, inside this equation? Max Eberl raises an interesting point: "Back in 2011, when Gladbach needed to hire a coach, we carefully examined several profiles. The thing that was most important to us was identifying the coach that would marry our vision. We wanted a coach who understood the importance of our player development. There were some big names out there; however, there was only one candidate who stood out: Lucien Favre. The characteristic which set him apart from the rest was his passion for developing talent."<sup>29</sup>

The same applies to Mönchengladbach when the team heads towards the mid-season break: "During the winter transfer period we tend not to look for the quick fix. It's an

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<sup>29</sup> "Max Eberl." Personal interview. 10 Nov. 2016.

exception rather than the rule for us to sign new players."<sup>30</sup> In fact, the "Fohlen" signed only three players in the winter session in the last four seasons. Instead, Eberl lays more emphasis on player development during the season.

"Even if we know that we will, sooner or later, be selling our top talent to the elite teams, we are committed to not giving into temptation before the player's development is completed. Our coaches play a key role in leveraging our investment. When we buy an interesting talent who is eighteen years old, he is made aware that he will benefit from his experience in the 2<sup>nd</sup> team. A player requires individual attention on various levels and we are now about to make further investments to ensure that players are engaged in their development process."

Borussia's key stakeholders - the player, his family and agent, the coaches and the sports director - identify with "a roadmap to the exit" the moment the player signs; the same stakeholders commit to a young player's future development.<sup>31</sup>

"The qualifications for the European cups are only the result of the outstanding work Favre did during the five years I worked with him."<sup>32</sup> Though Gladbach's rise is surprising to most, the reasons for the success of the team are actually quite clear: the team, acts with the 'why' firmly in mind.

**What seems mystical in the outcome is not obscured in the numbers, nor is it hidden in the process, it's rather evident in the collective pursuit of a bigger purpose.** In other words, to most clubs signing a player means purchasing some "added value" while to others, the signing of a player is a promise of purpose and player development, those things which define the entire organization and its processes.

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<sup>30</sup> "Max Eberl." Personal interview. 10 Nov. 2016.

<sup>31</sup> "Max Eberl." Personal interview. 10 Nov. 2016.

<sup>32</sup> "Max Eberl." Personal interview. 10 Nov. 2016.

By current definition, the main function of an Italian Sports Director is to manage relationships, including contractual relationships, with players and coaches and to conduct negotiations with other clubs which will result in a player's transfer. The next generation of Sports Directors, might want to discuss, formulate and express the team's purpose, a purpose identifiable to stakeholders across the board, before adding another player.

Sinek's conclusive account of the Japanese car plant validates the need to instate 2<sup>nd</sup> teams. "There are those who decide to manipulate the door to fit to achieve the desired result and there are those who start from somewhere very different. **Though both courses of action may yield similar short-term results, it is what we can't see that makes long-term success more predictable for only one. The one that understood why the doors need to fit by design and not by default.**"<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Sinek, Simon. Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action. London: Portfolio Penguin, 2011. 15. Print.

## 7. Why do we need a method?

Stefano Pioli, Inter's new Head Coach, has just taken over one of Italy's most prestigious teams and he's committed to turning the tides. "The first thing I want to do is to create an inclusive team environment, one that every member identifies with on and off the pitch. When the players are on the pitch, I want them to know why we do this rather than that on offense, on defense, on set pieces. The ability to read the game has become critical; and to achieve that state of awareness, it takes continuous knowledge transfer."<sup>34</sup>

"Since we want the players to identify with our game objectives, the staff and I decided to explain the "obiettivi di gioco" (our game objectives) on Thursday. We are identifying ways of how to create a game identity, defensively and offensively. We want to create a common denominator; in the process, we chose to include video clips of the German National Team. It's like watching Barca or Chelsea; you can see a reason behind the game of the German National Team. Letting the team members know we are open to other benchmarks and ideas for improvement is important to me. We are going to reach out to the players so that they can get to know me and my staff: Giacomo, Davide, Matteo, Francesco and my son Giammi and find out what's important, what we believe in."<sup>35</sup>

"I just wish that we would open up more in Italy. We have to look beyond our borders and start to communicate more, be open to their way. I would love to see the direction the federation wants to go with youth development in the clubs. We have so much more to offer."<sup>36</sup>

In fact, this is why certain teams dominate year after year. This is also why certain companies outperform others regardless of which product they are introducing to the

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<sup>34</sup> "Stefano Pioli." Personal interview. 15 Nov. 2016.

<sup>35</sup> "Stefano Pioli." Personal interview. 15 Nov. 2016.

<sup>36</sup> "Stefano Pioli." Personal interview. 15 Nov. 2016.

market. Sinek argues that “it’s no accident that the culture at Apple is often described as a cult. It’s more than just products, it’s a cause to support. It’s a matter of faith.”<sup>37</sup>

Miroslav Klose, the present all-time leading goal scorer in World Cup history, has recently joined the coaching staff of the German National team. When he refers to the way the German Federation does the things they do with an identifiable method applied across all the national teams, he simply says: “It’s tops! It’s great to have a ‘method’ which works in the National “A” team, but what has impressed me most has been the way youth national team talents identify with their individual and collective goals. Es ist klasse! (It’s great!).”<sup>38</sup>

Christofer Clemens, Head of Scouting and Match Analysis of the German National Team, hints at the common thread running through German teams, as to why and how they impose themselves on their opponent. This thread is a part of game identity, and the way it is transferred from federation to coaching staff to player is based on ‘methodology’, a framework of processes. These processes are not dictated from the top down; they are rather enriched over time as knowledge is gained or reinforced. Research and Development, in fact, plays an important role in the enrichment of game methodology.

There are clubs around the world as well which stand for methodological excellence: FC Barcelona and Ajax Amsterdam come to mind. There is another club in Spain, however, which might raise an eyebrow or two: Athletic Bilbao. The thesis does not examine their methodology in depth. It is interesting though. When Max Eberl was talking about benchmarks in European youth talent development and pointing out Athletic Bilbao, Roma too, had thought seriously about taking a good look at Athletic

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<sup>37</sup> Sinek, Simon. *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. London: Portfolio Penguin, 2011. 63. Print.

<sup>38</sup> "Miroslav Klose." Personal interview. 15 Nov. 2016.

Bilbao to learn more about their way of developing talent. "Gladbach has started to have a dialogue with them because talent development is key to our team culture too."

"The way this Basque club develops players is unique, starting with their training philosophy and extending to the way they communicate among staff and players."<sup>39</sup>

At Athletic, most kids at the age of 13,14 are already rating themselves and their team performance. Not just after matches but also at their training sessions. "The kids are encouraged to engage in open dialogue and accept criticism and errors; it's a way to improve collectively, rather than focus on the single player,"<sup>40</sup> says Jose Manuel Sevillano, their Head of Methodology at the 2016 Aspire Conference in Amsterdam.

Yet, stakeholder be advised, measuring trust or measuring a company's culture is very difficult. It might not be measurable analytically but it can represent a change of paradigm. To any organization it presents an opportunity, namely to join the few great organizations that do insist on knowing their WHY.

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<sup>39</sup> "Max Eberl." Personal interview. 10 Nov. 2016.

<sup>40</sup> Sevillano, Jose Manuel. "Communication and Feedback Athletic Bilbao." Aspire Conference. Netherlands, Amsterdam. 03 Oct. 2016. Lecture.

## 8. Why is finding the 'right fit' so important in defining a method?

A player of Klose's stature has many career options to choose from. There must be a reason why he chose the national team over a club team when he concluded his playing career. Vice versa, there must be a reason why the German National Team chose to work with Klose.

Sinek would agree: "Just as the goal is not to do business with anyone who simply wants what you have, but to do business with people who believe what you believe, so too is it beneficial to live and work in a place where you will naturally thrive because your values and beliefs align with the values and beliefs of that culture."<sup>41</sup>

If there's a new product made by Apple, people don't look at the specs the way they do when they purchase a competing product; and paying a premium is not an issue either. To die-hard Apple fans (followers), it's even worth the sacrifice of a cold camp-out in front of the Apple store. The same applies to the fan at the stadium willing to take upon himself the long train trip to a pre-season friendly game. The better the club has listened to and connected with that fan, the more probable it is that a long line of followers will want to join him.

Finding a stakeholder who buys into your cause is critical. When it comes to the methodology of a club, there's no time for compromise. Hiring and investing in a new member can transform that person into the megaphone of your game doctrines. It was not long ago, in 2014, when Miro won the World Cup with Germany and the memories are still fresh. The memories are fresh because so far little has changed. The German federation has chosen to stick with a winning team. It's part of their way, their method.

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<sup>41</sup> Sinek, Simon. *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. London: Portfolio Penguin, 2011. 90. Print.

"I believe that the 2014 team outperformed the rest because of one specific quality. There might have been a few teams with better technical and individual qualities. One or two teams might have even had a slight edge on us tactically. The component which no one could beat us at, however, was our character and confidence in our team"<sup>42</sup> says Clemens. "It was for players like Miro, Lahm, Höwedes, Schweinsteiger, Toni (Kroos), Manuel Neuer, Thomas Müller, Boateng; and many more stood out for a winning mind set. We consider this mind set a prerequisite. You should have seen how these guys prepared for the matches, how they trained and actively contributed to the analysis of the match. Those guys are a very unique group of people."<sup>43</sup>

"Today, having Miro as part of the coaching staff is great; the strikers can benefit greatly from his experience. Having him on board underlines our commitment to transferring our method. On the one hand, we continue to use our method of attacking the opponent and, more importantly, we invest in leaders who enrich our program."<sup>44</sup>

Italy has certainly not lost its ability to pioneer methodology again. As indicated in the opening chapters, there isn't a country whose coaches are more sought after; and none whose coaches have won more titles on foreign turf.

Here again, however, there is a catch. It's a fact that most Italian coaches with a string of good seasons to their credit opt for the choice to leave the Serie A. Is this a warning sign? It is also true that Italian coaches venture out to other championships for reasons other than financial. That's the 'why' which should raise concern for decision-making stakeholders.

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<sup>42</sup> "Christofer Clemens." Personal interview. 15 Nov. 2016.

<sup>43</sup> "Christofer Clemens." Personal interview. 15 Nov. 2016.

<sup>44</sup> "Christofer Clemens." Personal interview. 15 Nov. 2016.

"I love asking companies whom they like to hire, and one of the most common answers I am given is, 'We hire only passionate people.' But how do you know if someone is passionate for interviewing, but not so passionate for working? The truth is, almost every person on the planet is passionate, we are just not all passionate for the same things. Starting with 'why' when hiring dramatically increases your ability to attract those who are passionate for what you believe. Simply hiring people with a solid resumé or great work ethic does not guarantee success. The best engineer at Apple, for example, would likely be miserable if he worked at Microsoft. Likewise, the best engineer at Microsoft would probably not thrive at Apple. Both are highly experienced and work hard. Both may come highly recommended. However, each engineer does not fit the culture of the other's company. The goal is to hire those who are passionate for your 'why,' your purpose, cause or belief, and who have the attitude that fits your culture. Once that is established, only then should their skill set and experience be evaluated." <sup>45</sup>

**Considering how erratic and how numerous signings take place across all Italian football divisions, next time a player or a coach is being signed, Italians clubs might see an opportunity in asking WHY first.** The same applies before he's fired. It is at the initial stage where purpose and the commitment to purpose in hiring decisions should face the stress test.

Assumptions, as Sinek too points out, can be dangerous: **"The reality is, most businesses today are making decisions based on a set of incomplete or, worse, completely flawed assumptions about what's driving their business."** <sup>46</sup> In other words, it is wrong to assume that "finding the right fit" means by default committing to the right fit if we don't know the 'why' in the first place.

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<sup>45</sup> Sinek, Simon. Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action. London: Portfolio Penguin, 2011. 93. Print.

<sup>46</sup> Sinek, Simon. Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action. London: Portfolio Penguin, 2011. 17. Print.

## 9. Why we want to transfer knowledge

Key stakeholders in football are discovering that knowledge transfer is an invaluable asset and are beginning, slowly but surely, to invest in it. In fact, as indicated previously, there are new chapters being written every season in the 'knowledge transfer' sector. While the phenomenon of "big data" will be covered in the final chapter, there is a new stock trending which Italian football, in particular, can capitalize on.

"The problem is that Italy lost ground; it considered itself the center of the football world for too long. That is, in fact, the flip side of the Italian mentality. Italians love their food, their cars, their fashion and they tend to lose sight of what happens around them. Their priorities back in the 1980s and early '90s, their superior game and attention to detail brought great investments which faded over time. While Italian football was sleeping, others stepped into main place. The English, followed by the Spanish, can tell the story of the rise and fall of Italian football. In the past years, it's been Germany which has created a momentum of her own."<sup>47</sup>

This is where method lost its purpose, according to Sinek. When a method has a purpose with which "I" the player can identify, then it can translate into trust, this, depending on how well the 'purpose' is formulated, processed and executed, of course.

Working with a player to help him improve his game technically or tactically is not a science, but it does require a clear understanding of the objective. Football players are driven by objectives and players today, more than ever before, understand the value in investing in themselves. **If the goal of training is to continuously develop a player's skill set, then it is all the more important for coaches and players to forge realistic expectations. There have been books published on this topic.**

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<sup>47</sup> "Oliver Bierhoff." Telephone interview. 17 Nov. 2016.

In the 60s there was a theory put out by Dr. Maltz which claimed that a person can form a new habit in twenty-one days. His book went on to become a bestseller. A wave of motivational speakers and self-help gurus jumped to the same conclusion, feeding off of a claim which had never actually been scientifically proven. There are even apps in the iTunes store that promise a better life in twenty-one days.

In an effort to debunk the myth, Philippa Lay, a Medical Research Council Ph.D., and her team of researchers conducted an in-depth study of 96 volunteers over a 84-day period. The article was published in the *European Journal of Social Psychology* in 2009.

“In our study, we looked at how long it took people to reach a limit of self-reported automaticity for performing an initially new behavior (that is, performing an action automatically).”<sup>48</sup>

According to her findings, it can take anywhere from 18 to 254 days to reach 95% of their asymptote of automaticity, or in layman’s terms, to form a new habit. Their research concluded that it takes 66 days on average for a person to form a new habit (depending on the person and the strength of the habit). There was no significant difference between women and men.

It sounds very theoretical; however, this phenomenon goes back to evolution. “The reason the human race has been so successful is not because we’re the strongest animals—far from it. Size and might alone do not guarantee success. We’ve succeeded as a species because of our ability to form cultures. Cultures are groups of people who come together around a common set of values and beliefs. **When we share values and beliefs with others, we form trust.**”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Lay, Philippa. "How Long Does It Take to Form a Habit?" *How Long Does It Take to Form a Habit?* UCL, 04 Aug. 2009. Web. 15 Nov. 2016.

<sup>49</sup> Sinek, Simon. *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. London: Portfolio Penguin, 2011. 88. Print.

Imagine two stakeholders inside the team: the newly-arrived coach nobody in the team knows or “understands” and the player who is curious about how to best improve his game. Let’s assume that each player has a habit he’d like to work on, a habit which is deeply engrained in his playing style. Assuming that it takes fifty days for the 1<sup>st</sup> player to understand when and where to attack a space, forty days for the 2<sup>nd</sup> player to develop the right timing and technique to head a ball, and 100 days for the goalkeeper to build up cleanly from the back with his feet while under pressure, etc. If it were twenty-two players we are trying to assist, how long would the learning process take? How many coaches / analysts would the club have at its disposition to dedicate towards habit or “automaticity development”?

The unfortunate truth is that there is not a single club that will wait the average sixty-six days for twenty-two players to kick a habit or to form a new one. Knowledge transfer and the acquisition of knowledge, in football, is put to the test every time a coach starts a new job. **The unfortunate truth is that there is little patience in football. This is why coaches define a method and delegate assistants coaches and analysts to accompany players, one objective at a time.**

‘Automatisms’ are in fact, what coaches often refer to as situations in which players are able to recognize and perform an action intuitively. On the field, this means (having enough confidence and) knowing what to do in a split second when a specific opportunity unfolds.

Why are you supposed to position yourself in a manner that is favorable to the outcome of the desired play? This can be applied to all situations in football. As a matter of fact, they are called circumstantial. Based on the specific circumstance that presents itself, I, the player, have to quickly anticipate, grasp and execute an action.

As Pioli indicated, his intention was to involve and engage his players in understanding the 'why'. Why do we want to recover the ball in the opposing half? Why do we want to create numerical superiority when attacking? When these 'whys' are clear and well-explained, then there is a good chance the player will buy into Pioli's proposed game objective- one player at a time.

## **9b. Player-centric development**

Have we asked ourselves how come the goalkeeper coaches train their goalies individually? How about performance coaches? Why do they lay so much emphasis on accompanying players in their athletic development? Football has even identified the need for why players should have their own nutritional program. Clubs even hire sports psychologists for their youth academies!

It is surprising, however, that only a few clubs today examine and accompany a player's technical and tactical development on an individual level, let alone support the player's visual understanding of his game, with video analysis.

If we consider the fact that a 90-minute match produces at least 60-80 relevant plays (as per analyses I have performed while working in the Serie A for several years), it is only a matter of time before clubs (coaches and Sport Directors) will insist on individual player development. Imagine a different scenario: a buy-in on the part of stakeholders in a collective effort; the existence of a method; the participation of each member of the coaching staff (including performance coaches); everyone contributing to the player's development in one way or another.

The more coherent and consistent the message, the better the player will develop. The method will obviously vary from club to club; however, for the sake of relevance and clarity, there are important questions the stakeholders will want to consider: how to

transfer information, whether this is visually or verbally, whether it happens on or off the field. How many objectives are too many objectives? How do you speak to the player? Who accompanies me during the session? How do you want to encourage the player to find answers on his own? How often is too often? How long is too long? What's the right balance between criticism and encouragement?

The list of questions the head coach will want to tackle with his staff will eventually refine and optimize the process in a way that focuses on a player-centric and personalized approach.

These questions are relevant because they increase the probability that the message hits its mark. Whatever helps increase the player's understanding and self-initiative in his own development must to be taken into consideration. The moment the player identifies why this is helpful, he/she will see a purpose to "invest."

Max Eberl explains how far Gladbach is in terms of their player-centric development program compared to those of other clubs, and acknowledges that few clubs in Germany have recognized the relevance and potential of this approach. Driven by Gladbach's mission, Eberl is one of the few Sport Directors to have identified an investment opportunity.

This is where Italy, too, has an enormous opportunity. The current vacuum stands in stark contrast to the great store of technical and tactical knowledge engrained in the coaching culture in Italy. If one were to capitalize on a player-centric development program, one could revitalize and perhaps even redefine Italy's player development movement.

## 10. Why do we need big data?

In football there has been a lot of hype around big data which has led to misunderstandings. It is fair to say it has fueled unnecessary expectations in terms of its scope and application.

Football is writing new chapters in analysis and many stakeholders in football are raising a valid point: the attention big data has received is disproportionate to its influence in training and on game day. There is no doubt going to be a day when data will influence the decision-making process of a player on the field. But as long as the data does not reflect what coaches see with their eyes, no one is doing themselves a favor by referring to Money Ball (the film) as a representation of football. Predictive analysis is not yet intelligent enough to influence or determine, let alone replace the coach's eye.

So what does the coach's eye see that data cannot? In order to help data align itself with specific game situations and register tactical circumstances and specific technical aspects from a qualitative standpoint, **a machine will have to learn to read time and space in a very precise and reliable manner.** What does that mean and how far away are we? Very close. But there's a lot of human knowledge which has to be transmitted before the machines know what to look for.

There is another reason as well. With the introduction of video and scouting databases in the last ten years, coaches have not only witnessed a revolution; they have also had to find a way to work with it and transfer the knowledge to players.

The expectations put on coaches have risen. A coach today has to be able to delegate many more tasks to specialists inside (and outside) of the sportive area. He has become a sort of captain for the team around the team. A coach in the competitive leagues of today could not imagine working without a video database and a match analyst, but

he/she too has a background which merits great respect. His/her background, with few exceptions, starts and ends with what happens on the field - in training and on match day. The laptop and the tablet have become the coach's companions but the ball simply gets things rolling more naturally. The analyst can have the most comprehensive twenty-page pre-game report ready at the beginning of each match week. However, it would be physically and mentally unrealistic to expect a coach (or his assistants) to put those stats into a context that is a) intelligible and b) actionable from a player's perspective.

This is why coaches today are increasingly aware of the importance of transferring visual knowledge to the players. This is because, players too, are more apt to comprehend video footage than numbers. Will this change? **Perhaps, but as long as there is a gap in terms of knowledge transfer via video analysis, it is critical that the coach's perspective on the game be represented.**

This is where the great proposal and great opportunity come in. Let's move from big data to relevant data. Let's put data and contents into the context they deserve, namely aligned with the expectations of the coach and players. Let's start by showing a field I can identify with when pulling out a number. If it's not a field, let's have the numbers tell a story. After all, football is not a science. Let's take notice of how players communicate and learn today - a different way than they did ten years ago. What gets them going is the competitive aspect, so it might be interesting to illustrate leaderboards that speak to players based on relevant game situations reviewed in the post-game meeting.

Returning to the point regarding the outcome with the help of big data, there is a big void that can be filled while the machines become more aligned (on individual player analysis).

This type of analysis too requires a considerable amount of time and attention to detail. A player who sees himself / herself on film is able to identify game situations better. If the

player is guided properly by a coach he/ she will understand what the coach expects. It is an integral part of a player-centric development program. Another advantage: coaches have no problem mastering the art, because they understand the way it works; it's easier than algorithms and data charts. Will coaches want to integrate more data into their game plan? Absolutely. On a coach's desk, stats have become a neighbor of the morning Gazette (but we should not forget that the television screen still offers a little more entertainment- to coaches AND players alike).

There are new instruments available today and experience to be gained from other sports, the U.S sports and rugby, for instance. The Serie A may wish to take a look at these opportunities as well. Football coaches are delegating a larger number of tasks to their assistants, who focus on specific aspects of the game; and they are making requests for video analysis to support input. Should this trend keep up its pace, we will very soon be talking about individual player analysis as part of the 'status quo' - across Europe and in emerging markets (such as China), in 1<sup>st</sup> teams and, most importantly, in the youth teams.

Should the numerous benefits of individualized player development- led by performance and goalkeeper coaches, nutritionists and sports psychologists – not fade in coming years, **then we will soon see more assistant coaches and assistant analysts help redefine player development the way it was meant to be: player-centric.**

The Serie A has an opportunity. It can spearhead this movement just the way it did back in the 90s when players were "masters of analysis," i.e. when they paid great attention to detail in the technical and tactical aspects of the game.

## 11. Why Italy can capitalize on methodology too

It would be interesting to find out how well clubs in Italy, Germany, Spain and England are doing in terms of aligning their methodology with their club (game) identity. The parentheses again should raise an eyebrow. There is a connection between a 'club's perceived identity' and the 'game' it stands for. There can also be a contradiction. It is easy to argue that everyone's goal is to win. But it's slightly more difficult to explain why teams actually win.

A further inquiry into 'club identity' is in order. There's an obvious difference between Sampdoria's club identity, in terms of heritage and values, and Genoa's; similarly, Bayern's is very different from Dortmund's. Each team has a different heritage and set of values. In fact, a brand's perceived value is the reason why we feel connected to the club, on the field or off. So, can the game we play represent these values in some way and why could this be beneficial?

**Bierhoff was really impressed with the Italy's game back in the 90s and talked about Italy's attention to detail, both technically and tactically. He was hinting at something. It was also noticeable in his tone of voice. There was something bigger than nostalgia which had left a mark on him, something only he, as an ex-player, can identify with. Italy has something unique to offer in terms of football culture.**

**And it's still there.**

While Bierhoff did voice caution about having too much pride at the work place, he also stated that he had no doubts about Italy's ability to bounce back.

The thesis cites these examples, because methodology in football, when tied to identifiable goals, when aligned with the club's identity, can be the 'weapon of choice' for

successful teams and successful stakeholders. It is the tool, the product of trust and culture, that Sinek is talking about in his book.

*The Long Road to Success*, or in German, *Der Weite Weg zum Erfolg*<sup>50</sup>, published back in 2007, paid dividends. It proposes a vision, then a path and then the values and resources to draw from. It outlines the 'whys,' then the 'hows,' then the 'whats.'

If the expression, "'Why' we play this way," is clearly defined and communicated, it inspires the stakeholder to go the extra mile to contribute and defend the 'how.' It will influence how we train, how we defend after we lose the ball, how we analyze, how we engage players to learn about their fitness and their nutrition. It can impact how we scout and eventually how we recruit talent. It will help us to accept and deal with errors as a collective undertaking. **This golden reality can eventually preserve a sense of belonging in which the 'investors' defend the 'why.'** The same sentiment of unity, purpose and belonging that Bierhoff expresses towards the Serie A of the 90s.

There's a great opportunity in the making. Again. Italian clubs, in a reexamination of the truths of the trade, have the opportunity to rethink the 'whys' mentioned in this thesis. Bring back a winning methodology. Redefine purpose. Redefine success. After all, we have been there before.

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<sup>50</sup> Sammer, Matthias / DFB. "Der Weite Weg Zum Erfolg – Ausbildungskonzeption des DFB." DFB-Trainermedien . Deutscher Fußball-Bund, n.d. Web. 17 Aug. 2016.

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