

## The Real Football: Happy Birthday Capitano

Federico Ghelli (September 26, 2016)



The 40th birthday of a legend, who still manages to impress everyone despite the age. He's the King of Rome, Francesco Totti.

Sometimes it's hard to realize when time goes by, especially when we feel young and we still make a difference in the things we do. Sometimes it can be draining being a captain, a number 10, in a city like Rome.

It's something that only a man like you can do, who never gave up in the past 24 years. You went past injuries, gossip, and multimillionaires offers from clubs that would've allowed you to win way more than you did in your career. Despite everything you stayed in your city and played for the team you loved. And I grew up watching you, Francesco.

I was like all the other kids that wanted to be "Totti," copying your hairstyles or imitating your



celebrations after scoring a goal when I played with some friends in the park. You made me fall in love with the best sport in the world, and with the most beautiful and craziest team in the world. We went through some great moments of joy together, and a good deal of suffering as well. Do you remember that June 17, back in 2001? You were the symbol of a club that was just about to win a national title after 18 years.

I was there, with my hair dyed half red and half yellow, witnessing the feats of my hero. I had the luck to be born in your era, and one day I'll talk about it to my son when he'll ask "dad, who Francesco Totti was?" The answer will be easy: one of the best players who ever stepped on a soccer field, who at 40 years old still manages to change the sorts of a game.

I remember last April, during Roma-Torino. We were down 2-1 with four minutes left in the game. The coach finally decided it was your time. Twenty seconds later you scored doing a split in the air, just like a 20-something-year-old, more flexible guy would do. Because who cares about the age when your name is Francesco Totti. Not happy with that, three minutes later you scored again, this time with a penalty shot in the way you do in times that matter: powerful, on the left corner.

Just like in 2006. You were unlucky in that World Cup, playing with a bad leg. But you were still the greatest of them all. You managed to put your mark on that World Cup with that penalty against Australia. I will never forget those instants of terror when I thought "Gosh, what if he tries to do the 'cucchiaio' and misses?"

That same 'cucchiaio' you did six years earlier during the 2000 Euro Cup against van der Sar, the giant Dutch goalkeeper. That tournament didn't end well but you were still the best.

To fall in love with soccer while watching you play it's too easy. Some people hate you, but I don't quite understand why. Maybe they're blind. Francesco, you don't even realize what you gave to us all, or maybe you do but still think that it's impossible for one person to mean so much for his fans. We're the fans who grew with the legend of Totti: with the goals, the jokes, and the gladiator tatted on your arm.

I will never stop thanking you for everything you gave me. Living in the U.S., the only thing I have to describe Roma is you, because you're the only player they know. I don't want to think about the day the stadium will cease to roar your name. I know it's coming soon but being able to shout the name "Totti" it's an emotion I don't think I'm ready to give up yet.

There aren't many players like you anymore. Who knows how many more trophies you would have won if you went to Real Madrid or A.C. Milan? Instead, you decided to sacrifice your career for Roma. For that, I want to thank you. You gave me the chance to share with you this 24-year-long dream, and I had the luck to cheer, suffer, and celebrate for and with you. But most important, I was lucky enough to watch you play.

Happy birthday Capitano.

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