

Benito Garozzo: The Myth by Mabel Bocchi

Mabel Bocchi has taken the opportunity to interview the legendary Italian here in Estoril.

He was born in Alexandria, Egypt, 78 years ago. He has lived in the United States since 1987 and in 1994 obtained double nationality. For his genius, his imagination and the results he has obtained, he is considered one of the best players ever, if not the best. Born under the sign of Virgo, he is divorced, has a son, Fulvio (46) and a daughter, Silvia (45). His partner since 30 years, both in life and in bridge, is Lea Dupont. He loves all sports and when young, practiced a number of them: soccer, basketball, volleyball, tennis and ping pong. Nowadays he plays golf and loves to bet on horses, a hobby that he appreciates more for the preparation it needs than for the bet itself. But his great passion remains bridge. Still not appeased by the huge number of successes obtained in his bridge career, already playing with the Rome Angelini Parioli Team, he offers himself again on the international stage with that blue uniform with which he won almost everything that can be won, in fact, playing on the Italian Seniors Team.

His Major Victories

- ♠ 10 World Championships
- ♥ 3 Olympiads
- ♦ 5 European Championships
- ♣ 1 Open Pairs EU Championships
- ♠ 1 Mixed Teams EU Championships
- ♥ 13 Open Teams Italian Championships
- ♦ 1 Open Pairs Italian Championships
- ♣ 4 Italian Cups

Italy, following the example of the United States and many European countries - such as France, Poland, Israel and Denmark - have always considered Seniors activity as a basic instrument for the promotion of Bridge, and for this reason they have always been represented in the top events by the best available players, and in Portugal they are fielding a team that has no need of an introduction. They can rely on the names that have helped to make Italian Bridge history: Benito Garozzo, together with Dano De Falco, Pietro Forquet, Nino Masucci, Carlo Mosca and Silvio Sbarigia.



Your return to the Italian team seems quite a miracle and made the entire bridge world, and not only that one, talk. Aren't you satisfied with your ten gold medals in the Bermuda Bowl?

I know that ten gold medals are not few at all, but I must say I would not be sorry to add another trophy to my records. We will surely try. We all trained very seriously via the Internet, including Pietro Forquet who wasn't confident at all with this instrument. This to demonstrate that we can be elderly people, but serious and professional elderly people, besides being as passionate as when we were thirty."

Dano De Falco will be your partner in this new adventure. Do you get on well with him?

"I already played several times with Dano in high level competitions, by the way often winning, as in China. He is a very good bridge player with a unique fault: he doesn't study! Here we are playing my system that isn't simple at all, being filled with conventions. I hope that in this period he will be good, also because a conventional system is an advantage only if you know it by heart, otherwise it can be a disaster."

You are here in Estoril with a brand new team that comprises at least three or four bridge generations. Will this finally be the team able to reverse the forecasts that always see the United States as favourites?

"It will really be very hard. The two American teams are very strong and we cannot really say that we are super trained and perfectly tested. I personally continue to play, both with the Angelini Team and with the Lavazza Team, and also at a personal level; you cannot say the same for Forquet, for a long time far from the bridge tables. However, I saw him play quite well on the Internet: solid as ever and with an aggressiveness he didn't have when young. Mosca and Sbarigia are certainly more close and used to high-level competitions, while I think that Masucci hasn't this kind of experience. There are many uncertainties and, however, besides our performance, we will have to consider how luck will be. In such a level contest, it is often important. Apart from all this, I put myself on the podium!"

We know everything about the Garozzo of the old days, how is the new one?

"Getting older, unfortunately, means to lose speed, you don't succeed any more in those brilliant plays that disorient the competitors, especially in defence. And it would be fine if it would only be this; but you also become less patient and, faced by a mistake, be it yours or your partners', I easily explode. In bridge this isn't a good mood as it takes you to make more mistakes. Fortunately the brain resists and so does the memory; and I compensate for the diminished coldness with a better technical experience that in the course of the years cannot do anything than increase, if you go on applying and studying."

You were among the first players who felt the need for conventional bidding system.

"When I first began to play in the Blue Team, in 1961, I still played a rather rough kind of bridge. I remember that Chiaradia compelled me to an incredible full-immersion to learn, on the eve of my first World Championship, the "Neapolitan Club" that I had to play with my new partner, Pietro Forquet. The next step was the "Blue Team Club" and from that moment on, my research in the bidding context went on without any interruption."

Was it difficult for you to get along with such different partners?

"It has never been a problem for me. I've always been a quite flexible player and the list of my bridge partners in my long career is really infinite."

How and how much did bridge change your life?

"A lot, to the point that it can be identified with my own life. Even my thirty- year long relationship

with Lea and my definitive move to the States have to be related to bridge."

Is it sufficient to win to be a bridge champion?

"I should say yes, but to win it isn't sufficient to be ingenious and keen, if you don't have a good partner; or if you are a presumptuous person, this fault takes you to indulge on honours and interrupt any kind of growth, you don't win anything and in consequence, you cannot become a champion."

In what do yesterday's and today's Blue Team mainly differ?

"I think that the difference isn't all in the level of the single members, excellent today as they were then, but in the competition that is now much keener. Now the competing teams that can aspire to important international titles are many, definitely much more than the ones that could worry us then. To summarize, I think that the main difference is the possibility to obtain the same number of successes."

Bocchi-Duboin, Fantoni-Nunes and Lauria-Versace will try again to get that gold medal that Italy has been seeking for thirty years. Do you feel this could be the right time?

"I do think so, even if it will not be easy. Our technical superiority is evident and the malediction that affected Lorenzo Lauria should, after the third time, be exhausted."

You know very well both the Italian and the American bridge environments. What do you think about them?

"Americans live bridge in a more professional way. For example, they play with a sponsor, and do not say a word, when the partner makes a mistake, they don't turn a hair, they never show their mistakes, and they are always at time. We still have a lot to learn in this. On the other hand, under a strictly technical aspect, I think that, at least from a bidding point of view, we Italians are better."

Is there somebody you have to thank?

"First of all God the Father for having let me arrive at 75 with my head still working; then Chiaradia and Forquet who gave me my first big opportunity."

Editors Note:

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