

INTERVIEW WITH LORENZO LAURIA AND ALFREDO VERSACE By Christina Lund Madsen

The New Monaco Maestros

The hottest gossip in the bridge world is the news that Lorenzo Lauria and Alfredo Versace are switching to Monaco.

The Yeh Bros Cup is their debut with Team Monaco. We tricked them into participating in an interview by saying we found a nice Italian restaurant in Tokyo.

What was the main reason for your decision?

Lorenzo shrugs his shoulders in the Italian way as if it is the dumbest question he ever had. **Lorenzo:** "We don't have a team for international competitions. Bridge is my life." The agreement to play for team Monaco doesn't include the American Nationals, where Lauria-Versace will continue to play with Jimmy Cayne. They do not know, who will play for Monaco in the States.

Alfredo: "After Angelini stopped, we were looking for a new good team for the biggest events in Europe like the European Winter Games, the Cavendish, the Champions Cup and tournaments like the Yeh Bros Cup. We had this opportunity to join such a strong team and took it. We decided very quickly. It was the last day in Montecatini. We met with Pierre. It was the first time we spoke and it was a complete surprise. We decided within 24 hours and were happy to accept and play 4-5 years with a very good team.

Did you ever imagine to play for another country than Italy? Lorenzo shrugs his shoulders again as if to let me know it was yet another dumb question. **Alfredo:** We played 35 years for Italy. Lorenzo played almost 40 years for Italy, first time in '79. We played the last three European Championships and the Olympics without the Lavazza-players, so we had bad results. It is not easy to carry the team. We could not make the best team for Lyon and if Monaco qualify for the Bermuda Bowl, we can play in 2019 with a very strong team.

What was the hardest part about your decision? **Alfredo:** "We felt bad for the Italian Bridge Federation to tell them two months before Lyon we cannot play, and also to announce we will no longer play for Italy. Now we feel okay. After some time. It doesn't change a lot in our lives, the only thing is that we cannot play the Bermuda Bowl for Italy

Which was the best moment you experienced playing for Italy?

Alfredo: "When we won the first Bermuda Bowl. Before Estoril, Lorenzo lost two finals in the BB on the last hand, so he was very happy." Lorenzo looks as happy as he can.

What is the best part about joining team Monaco? **Alfredo:** “We will have a good team. We will play the most important events in Europe. This year we will play here at the Yeh Bros, the transnationals in Lyon and the Champions Cup. We always play against HelgemoHelness for the last 20 years. Now finally we can compare with them.” Alfredo laughs.

What do you think about the team for Lyon? **Alfredo:** “The Italian Bridge Federation send Garozzo to Lyon as a gesture to his unbelievable career. He taught us all how to play bridge. He is Nostro Maestro. (our master, ed.) Both the young pairs are good. I don’t think they are strong enough at the moment to win the BB. Maybe in the future. But I hope I am wrong.” He smiles.

How do you see the future for the Italian national team? **Alfredo:** We have some very good young players, so it is not so dark even if we leave. We gave them a good approach to the game. They are educated well. They can have success in the future.”

What is the main strength of your partnership? **Alfredo:** “We have a good friendship. We play the same philosophy of the game. We are very professional, we study a lot, and we work a lot on the system. Every month we make some correction to the system.” Lorenzo: “We have the same mentality in the bidding.” Alfredo smiles: “I will tell you a secret: On the levels 1-4 you can ask me about bridge, on the levels 5-7 you should ask Lorenzo.”

Which time was the toughest during your bridge career? **Lorenzo:** “Never. I don’t remember.” He waves his hand at me to wipe away the question. Alfredo twirls his curly hair while he thinks about the question: “Before the European Championships in Ostend in 2010, we fought with Angelini and remained a couple of months without a sponsor and then Zaleski decided to take us for two years. It was really hard because we were fighting for good things, and he fired us because we wanted to represent Italy. He cannot forbid us to play for the national team. We always make clear before we make a contract to be free to play for the national team, not like Lavazza. Sometimes in Italy we have the problem that the Italian Federation fights with the sponsors

Which is the best part about playing with Alfredo? Alfredo answers before his partner: “Tutti. (All, ed.)” and laughs. **Lorenzo:** “Good partner. Always nice at the table. A good character, we are equal. If we make a mistake, nothing happens.” Which is the worst part? Lorenzo: “Pinocchio.” He points at his nose. Alfredo tells me with a laugh that sometimes Lorenzo thinks that Alfredo’s bridge stories are not entirely true...

What is the best part about playing with Lorenzo? **Alfredo:** “Every time we arrive at the 5-level I am so comfortable because I know that he will make the right decision. Lorenzo is very strong in crucial moments.”

Which is the worst part? “When he wants to call the director... ” Alfredo is laughing and glances at his partner. “I always disagree with him.” Lorenzo turns 70 this month but will not tell me whether it is during the Yeh Bros Cup.

When do you plan to retire? “I don’t know. I play at least five more years.” Do you feel as sharp as when you were younger? “It is different. I have more experience but the reflexes are not as sharp.” What will you do when Lorenzo retires? Alfredo: “I hope I can find a new partner after leaving Italy, because right now everybody is very upset with me,” he laughs. The Yeh Bros is the first event with your new team.

What are your expectations? **Alfredo:** “I won this event a very long time ago playing with Sementa, Garozzo and De Falco. I always come with great pleasure to this tournament, always a very nice place, everything is perfect. Obviously with our team I hope to have a good result.”

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