



**ITALIAN RUGBY LEAGUE WORLD CUP
QUALIFYING DINNER
6 SEPTEMBER 2019 - CLUB MARCONI COLOSSEO ROOM
'The road to the 2021 rugby league world cup'**



INNOVARE BUILDERS – Federazione Italiana Rugby League - MAJOR SPONSOR 2019
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ITALIAN RUGBY LEAGUE HISTORY

INTERNATIONALS

Rugby League in Italy dates back to the 1950s when the Italians had their own Rugby League competition and also played several tournaments against other European nations. In 1960 the Australian Kangaroos actually played two games against an Italian thirteen on Italian soil.

January 1960 Kangaroos toured Italy: played 2; won 2; for 104; against 37; total attendance 6,605.

Italy W 37-15 3,500 Padova in snow and rain

Italy W 67-22 3,105 Treviso – Ken Irvine 6 tries!

At the end of a mammoth tour in which the Kangaroos had played 24 games in England and 11 in France, the Australian team was coached by Keith Barnes. Angelo Gerardi played scrum-half. 'Gelly' died in 1993.

In the early sixties there were over 40 rugby league clubs in Italy, playing in three divisions, thanks to Rugby Football League (England) investment and coaching and was supposedly proving more popular than union. But it all ended when the Italian sports council was pressured by Rugby Union to not endorse League.

Lack of government approval and subsidies led to the downfall of rugby league in Italy. Without government approval, clubs could not obtain insurance for players. The rugby league code went into hibernation. In 1995 Italia Rugby League was revived by a couple of passionate enthusiasts by the names of Mick Pezzano and John Benigni. Pezzano and Benigni were determined to have a Rugby League team representing their origins compete again on the world stage.



1995 - The Italian Rugby League was revived and played in their first rugby league event - Coca Cola World Sevens tournament at the Sydney Football Stadium.

Having lost their first game against the South Africans earlier that day, the Italians were out to make amends against the Moroccan team.

With the scores locked at 10 all, the Italians attacked from their twenty through five eight Nicola Perna, who sent big man Franco Spalettra through a gap. Big Spalettra then passed to Giovanni Palestini who, although being gathered in by a Moroccan defender, gave a magic pass to flying three quarter Stefano Sarghini, who ran 50 metres to score under the posts and give Italy a historic victory. The first win for Italy in a Rugby League tournament.

Italian team: Nicola Perna, Franco Spalettra, Simone Franchini, Tiziano Franchini, Orazio D'arro (C), Stefano Sarghini, Guiseppe Perri, Giovanni Palestini, Stefano Ciaschini, Arturo Pignotti, Coach: Mick Pezzano, Trainer: John Benigni, Physio: Paul Fioretto – Major sponsor: LEGGO'S

1996 – The Super League World Nines were held for the first time. The Italian team was invited to participate in the tournament played in Suva - Fiji, along with fifteen other countries. They were New Zealand, Australia, England, New Guinea, France, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Fiji, Western Samoa, Tonga, Morocco, Japan, USA and the Cook Islands.

The tournament was played over three days with the New Zealand team defeating New Guinea in the final. Italy finished in twelfth position and two memorable results were an 18 - 0 victory over Morocco and a narrow 0-4 loss to the powerful England line up. Coach: Mick Pezzano, Trainer: Rick Baitieri

1997 – The Italian team participate in its second world sevens tournament at SFS. The Italians were pooled against Japan and USA. Italy 38 def Japan 4, Italy 22 def USA 0. Italy progressed to the Quarter-finals and was defeated by Wests Magpies 38 – 12.

Coach: Craig Salvatori – Captain: David Penna - Major sponsor: CLUB MARCONI



The World Cup Story

The Italian team flew to the south of France to play in the 1999 Mediterranean Cup tournament which also doubled as qualifiers to the 2000 World Cup.

The Italians' opponents were Lebanon, Morocco and the host nation France, who were already qualified. The three teams, Italy, Lebanon and Morocco, were playing off for the 16th and final spot in the 2000 World Cup. The Italians however, would find out that they would have more to contend with than just the footballing prowess of their opponents.

The first game of the tournament for Italy was against Lebanon in Perpignan. This was the game that everyone had trained hard for. This was the game that had been on everyone's minds since the qualifying tournament was organised. Italy had been weakened with the absence of their great second rower Neil Piccinelli, who suffered a broken arm in a trial game in Griffith NSW, only two weeks prior to the tournament. Although Neil's injury robbed him of the opportunity to represent his country of origin, he still toured with the squad, as he was appointed assistant coach to Craig Salvatori.

Lebanon won the game 36 - 16 and virtually qualified themselves for the World Cup with this win. The Italians started off slowly and were down 16 nil after only twenty minutes. A late rally inspired by former Illawarra great David Riolo, took Italy to within six points of the lead. The run, however, was too late and the Lebanese team won a very hard fought game.

The Italians were shattered. Their dreams of playing in a World Cup had evaporated. Hard working forward Damien Sonogo made the comment that "it couldn't get any worse".

Italy's next game was to be played in Lezignan. A two hour coach ride from Perpignan. The team was very depressed from the previous days loss and as the coach neared Lezignan, the weather became just as depressing, with a virtual cyclonic down pour of rain confronting us by the time the coach reached the hotel.

That night, to lighten the mood a little, coach Craig Salvatori, made it compulsory that the whole team go on a night out. While the team was out drowning its sorrows, their hotel in Lezignan was being drowned by the torrential rain. When the team returned from its compulsory night out, the town of Lezignan was under water. Players and officials had to walk a kilometre to the hotel, through waist high water.

When everyone finally reached the hotel they found the ground floor under water. Seven players were checked into rooms on the ground floor, which meant that their belongings were going to be a little the worse for wear.

The team found out later that 30 people had perished in the floods. The French authorities declared the area a disaster zone. Nobody could believe what had happened. The loss to Lebanon lost it's significance.

Damien Sonogo's words after the Lebanon game, came ringing back to us... "it can't get any worse". Without sleep and weary from their night out and kilometre trek through the muddy waters, the Italian team grouped together to assist one another. The spirit shown on that night bonded the team for the rest of the tournament.

The very next day, the Italians went on to defeat Morocco 38 nil in Toulouse and three days later was the time for Italy's greatest moment in Rugby League, when inspired by super efforts from David Riolo, Shannon Donato and Michael Salafia, they defeated France 14 - 10 in Avignon.

Italy defeating France in Avignon, had special significance, as forty per cent of the population in Avignon is of Italian origin. That night, the Italian origin crowd, along with the Lebanese team, who needed Italy to win so that they themselves could win the Mediterranean Cup, chanted, ITALIA, ITALIA, ITALIA, for what seemed the entirety of the game.

Officials from the Italian city of Padova came to Avignon that night specifically to watch Italia v Francia. In any sport in Europe, it is known as the European local derby.

Italy qualified for the Emerging Nations World cup tournament. The Italian team also reminded everyone that there is still a Rugby League tradition in Italy and they are now ready to re-establish the game. The Italian Squad for the Mediterranean Cup was:

David Riolo, Gavin Dolso, Anthony Minichiello, Simon Margheritini, Frank Napoli, Dainan Mancuso, Carmine Barbaro, Michael Salafia, John Frare, Daniel Paolini, Adam Capovilla, Damien Sonogo, Chris St Clair, Nathan Furia, Carlo Napolitano, Paul Pensini, Brendan DePaoli, Orazio D'Arro', Tom Rando, Shannon Donato (capt), Craig Salvatori (Coach), Neil Piccinelli (Asst Coach), Paul Fioretto (Physio), Sam Sorrenti (Team Doctor), John Lewis (Trainer), Rick Baitieri (Asst Trainer), Steve Carbonaro (Asst Trainer) Mick Pezzano & John Benigni (Managers).

2000 - EMERGING NATIONS WORLD CUP

Italy took part in its first Emerging Nations Rugby League World Cup in 2000 that was played in England. Results were Italy 66 def Canada 6, Italy 40 def USA 16 and Emerging Nations World Cup Final, England (BARLA) 20 def Italy 14 at Dewsbury. Head Coach: David Riolo – Major sponsor: ADDUSSO CONCRETE & PUMPING

The Italian Rugby League were finalists in the Emerging Nations World Championship Tournament held in England - November 2000, winners of the Ionio Cup 2003 & 2004 (against Greece) and winners of the Columbus Cup 2006 (against USA) Team captain: Adam Capovilla

2011 - WORLD CUP QUALIFICATIONS

Italy hosted Russia in Padova in the first game of the 2011 world cup qualifiers, Italy 92 def Russia 6. Italy then travelled to Serbia (Belgrade) for two more qualifying matches. Italy 52 def Serbia 6 and then played Lebanon for a 19 all draw. Italy progressed to it's first rugby league world cup on better points for and against. Head Coach: Carlo Napolitano - Team Captain: Anthony Minichiello - Major sponsor: WARMBURN ESTATE



2013 - WORLD CUP – ENGLAND

Italy were pooled against Wales, Scotland and Tonga. The opening match of the world cup was staged as a double header, Italy 32 def Wales 16 at Millennium Stadium – Cardiff. Italy then took on Scotland in its second pool match at Workington, result Italy 30 v Scotland 30. The final pool match saw a toughly contested match with Italy having 3 tries disallowed and Tonga winning 16 – 0. This match was the last game played by veterans and Italian Captain – Anthony Minichiello and Cameron Ciraldo who retired from rugby league.

Italy World Cup Coach: Carlo Napolitano – Team Captain: Anthony Minichiello - Major sponsor: JD BAR & GRILL

2016 - WORLD CUP QUALIFICATIONS

Italy took on Serbia in Belgrade in its first pool match, defeating Serbia by 62 – 14. Italy then played Wales in Monza, just narrowly losing 20 - 14. Italy then travelled to England (Leigh) and played Russia and defeating them 76 – 0 to gain entry into its second rugby league world cup. Head Coach: Cameron Ciraldo - Team Captain: Joel Riethmuller - Major sponsor: ARQUIS

2017 - WORLD CUP – AUSTRALIA

Italy were pooled against Ireland, USA and Fiji. Playing Ireland in Cairns, Ireland 36 def Italy 12. Second pool match Italy 46 def USA 0 at Townsville Stadium. Third pool match was played at Canberra Stadium, Fiji 38 – Italy 10. Italy World Cup Coach: Cameron Ciraldo – Team Captain: Mark Minichiello - Major sponsor: AZZURRI CONCRETE

2018 - TEST MATCHES

These test matches turned out to be fiercely contested with Italy taking the spoils in both games.
Italy 18 def South Africa 8 and Italy 36 def Niue 32.

Head coach: Leo Epifania, Team Captain: Brendan Santi, Major sponsor: AZZURRI CONCRETE

2019 - TEST MATCHES

12 October – Italy v Malta - Kirkham Oval – Camden

19 October - Italy v Philippines – venue tba



2019 - WORLD CUP QUALIFICATIONS (Italy and Ireland)

Italy will take on Spain in Italy (Lignano) on 2 November and then travel to Dublin and play Ireland on 9 November. Italy World Cup Qualifiers Coach: Leo Epifania, S & C Trainer: Ciriaco Mescia. Major sponsor: INNOVARE BUILDERS

Previous NRL and SL players who have represented the Italian Rugby League have been: *Mark Corvo, Luke Davico, Dean Schifilitti, Frank Napoli, Chris St Clair, Craig Salvatori, Neil Piccinelli, Paul Pensini, David Riolo, David Penna, Frank Napoli, Darren Capovilla, Carlo Napolitano, Greg Florimo, Shannon Donato, Neil Piccinelli, Anthony Minichiello, Daniel Sorbello, Michael Salafia, Jason Bulgarelli, Paul Franze, Paul Dezolt, Daniel Sorbello, Grant Rovelli, Andrew Dallalana, Cameron Ciraldo, Michael Russo, Ray Nasso, Rocky Trimarchi, Aidan Guerra, Josh Mantellato, Kade Snowden, Anthony Laffranchi, Simon Bonetti, Brendan Santi, Nathan Milone, James Tedesco, Mark Minichiello, Nathan Brown, Daniel Alvaro.*

Previous Italian national team coaches: *Craig Salvatori, David Riolo, David Penna, Michael Mantelli, Carlo Napolitano, Cameron Ciraldo.* Current Italian coach: **Leo Epifania**





James Tedesco



Anthony Minichiello



Italian team celebrating the victory against Niue – Marconi Stadium - 2018

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