

# Italy wins Ionio Cup

Written by: Steven Birchall

27/9/03

Italy has recorded a two point victory over Greece, in what was an excellent game despite the terribly windy conditions at Oki Jubilee Stadium. The win to Italy was not a surprise with the team going into the match as favourites, however the close scoreline has already raised interest in next years clash between the two sides.

Italy opened the scoring in the match after an impressive attacking start. In the 15th minute prop Anthony Phillips went himself, finding a break in the sliding Greece defence to score near the posts. Michael Salafia added the extras and Italy were up 6 vs 0.

Greece responded ten minutes later, after swinging it wide to the left wing for their centre Manuel Manolis to cross. The try was just reward for Greece's vast improvement in defence. Mitchell Karabatos missed the difficult conversion, but he had another chance just four minutes later when former Magpie and Greece captain/coach, Steve Georgallis drew across the Italian defence before dropping off Nick Kouparitsas who scored under the posts. Karabatos added the extras to put Greece up 10 vs 6.

The high ball down the left hand side caused problem for Italy, and allowed winger Adam Fletcher to collect the third try for Greece in the 32nd minute and extend their lead to 14 vs 6.

Italy got one back before half time however through a try through Adam Kaleopa who took advantage on the Greece defence being in the wrong position to make the score 14 vs 10, before a penalty right on half time put Italy just two points behind after Michael Salafia put it through the uprights.

Greece were looking the more committed side in the first half, and this translated into points early in the second half when George Kouparitsas crossed in the far right corner. Again Greece were unsuccessful with their conversion, so far only converting one of their four tries, leading now 18 vs 12.

Italy hit back only two minutes later after Greece failed to re-gather the ball from a very high and short restart by the Italians. Italy capitalised, and eventually their fullback Daniel Alberitri pushed his way over the line to put Italy just two points behind again.

Italy hit the lead in the 67th minute when interchange player, Greg Flormino, pushed his way over the line. The strong winds again played havoc with the goal kicking, with the ball being blown away from the goal posts when Michael Salafia attempted the conversion.

Italy, now back in the lead, a position they had not held since the 25th minute of the game, stepped up in defence to hold out the determined Greece side. National pride boiled over a few times between the two sides before Greece finally got a breakthrough.

A high ball into the far corner, put pressure on the Italian fullback, who after receiving a hard tackle from the fast Greek defence, spilled the ball for Kouparitsas to collect and score his second.

Stuart Philpot added the extras and Greece lead 24 vs 20 with less than four minutes of play left. The game looked like it was all over for Italy, but the players weren't going to give up. The side rallied together, putting pressure on the Greeks.

This led to the team gaining a good field position in order to pounce through hooker and eventual man of the match, Paul Dezolt not far from the sideline. The try brought the score to 24 vs all, with Michael Salafia facing his most difficult kick of the match.

Just on cue, to make it even harder the wind picked up again, raising the prospect of a draw, but Salafia struck it just right for the ball just to go between the uprights and to claim the victory for the Italians.

The victory sees Italy hold the Ionia Cup till next year when the two nations do battle again.

**ITALY 26**

Tries: Anthony Phillips, Andrew Kaleopa, Daniel Albertiri, Greg Florimo, Paul Dezolt

Goals: Michalel Salafia 3 from 6 (50%)

defeated GREECE 24

Tries: George Kouparitsas 2, Manuel Manolis, Nick Kouparitsas, Adam Kaleopa

Goals: Mitchell Karabatos 1 from 2 (50%), Stuart Philpot 1 from 3 (33%)

**Venue:** Oki Jubilee Stadium (Kogarah) **Crowd:** Est 1,000

**Date:** Sat Sep 27 3:00pm

**Half time:** Greece 14 - 12

**First Try:** Anthony Phillips (Italy)

**Man of the Match:** Paul Dezolt (Italy)