

Venice to Verona - Maryland '92 Boys ODP trip to Italy, 2009

Introduction

This was my third international trip with a Maryland State team. Since we were going to real soccer-playing country, I had a degree of uncertainty and anxiety about our kids performing against “their” kids, for whom football (soccer) is an integral part of their sports culture. On each trip, I actually hope that our kids just go out and play with only concern for their personal performance, while learning from the opponent.

In our first two matches, the Italian players appeared to be bigger than ours. They were quicker – not faster - very skilled, and often just as impatient on the attack as any US youth team. The third team we played we were able to match up in every department, including size. However, none of us expected to encounter such inept refereeing from the center. Soccer, much like the computer, tolerates natural stoppages. Bad things happen when there are haphazard stoppages. This match was swamped with such stoppages. At first we were confident we could win, but once this noticeably young man built an irrevocable relationship with his whistle, our momentum was arrested. Those first three games went south for us.

After the first match, the coaching focused on defensive awareness. These Italian teams moved the ball diagonally in a well-timed manner, using beautiful, Michelangelo-esque geometry. Our challenge became that of quickly reading where there was danger off the ball. We had much less trouble identifying at an early stage who the target players were, and took good care of that part of the contest.

Our tour guide promised us that the fourth and final opponent (of the trip) was highly skilled. We were scheduled to play them in a historic stadium, where Del Piero cut his teeth. When we got to that stadium, it had the look and feel of “... well, Italian soccer must have begun here” (see page 10). People used to stand in the bleachers to watch the matches! Well, I know that when I stand to watch any competition, I am very engaged. I felt intimidated ... my hope was that, for our boys, it was just the final challenge on a wonderful overseas trip.

The officials showed up – tall and athletic looking and very professionally attired. Maybe they were “moonlighting” from Serie A. For the fourth time, I wondered if these Italian players did their real warm-up somewhere else, because what I saw for a few minutes prior to the game, didn’t look like preparation of the body for dynamic activity. Yet, lo and behold, we played our most beautiful game! We scored first off of a nicely developed attack with an extremely clever finish from one of our central midfielders. They scored eventually off of a very avoidable defensive error, and we ended in a 1-1 tie.

The following is a Photographic journey through what the trip offered beyond soccer matches:



A trip to Italy that starts in Venice is going to be something.



The young man at the bottom right corner was one of our goalkeepers. Looks like he's in awe of his surroundings.



One of the more than one hundred bridges which keep Venice connected to itself. Each bridge is decorated with strong, historical detailing.



Silhouettes in the shade – walking, watching, and waiting. Venice is for the romantic in you.



These are some of our boys. They couldn't see how one could come to Venice from the USA and not ride in a real gondola, cost it what it did.



Well, they do say that they'll go anywhere, and anyhow, don't they?



Some of the adult party approaching the sports complex where we stayed.



Our boys did manage some casual moments prior to doing battle in the land of the Gladiators.



This historic stadium was designed for standing. Those rusty grab rails must have come in very handy when the spectators behind you got a little more than animated.



Verona – lots of walking ... vehicular traffic seems out of place.



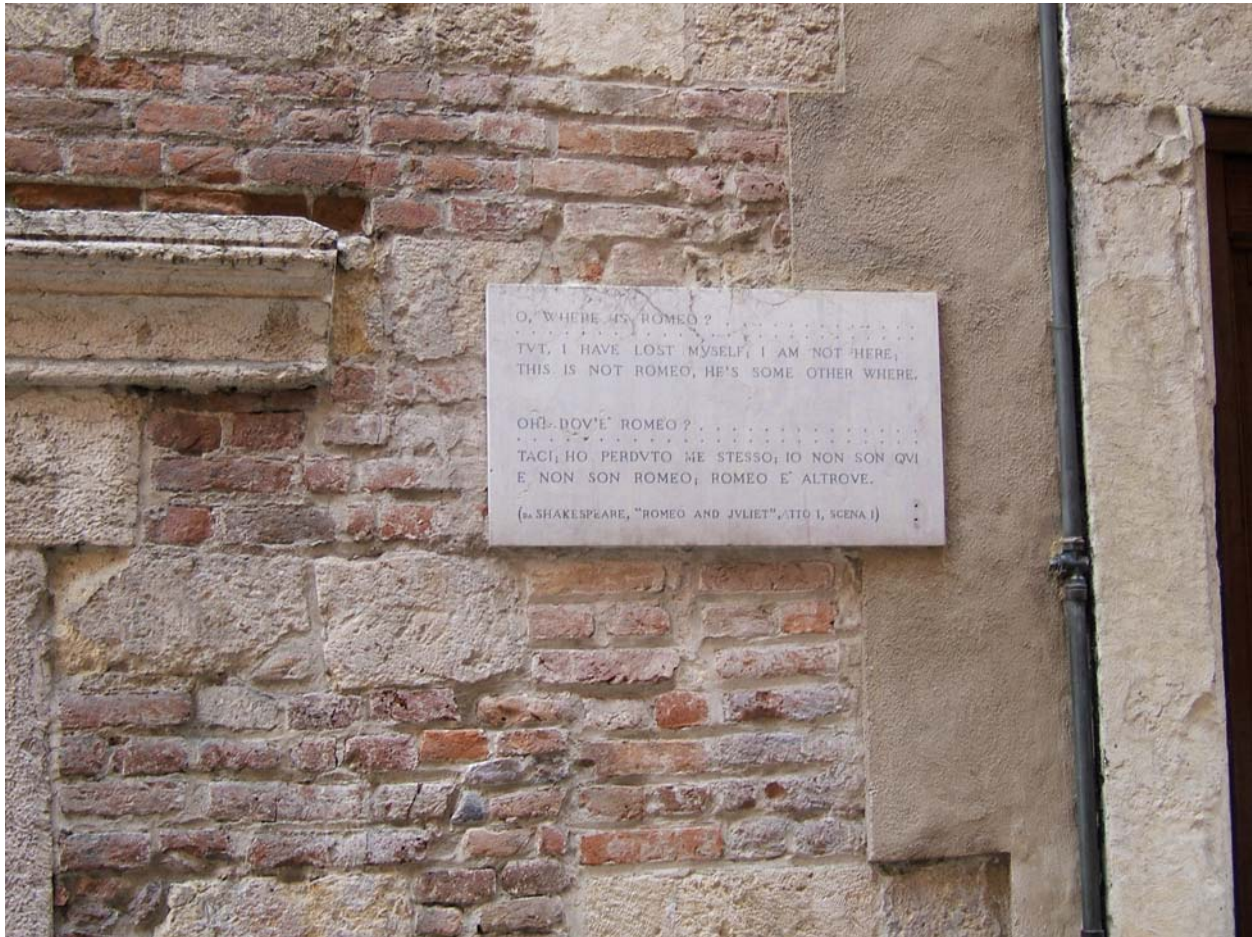
Word is that these days this arena is infested with cats, the kind you have in your house. Kind of a weird contradiction ... maybe ironic ... after all, in its live days, humans were tossed in front of the big cats for human entertainment.



These people have obviously just finished gorging on “pizze”. Pizza just makes us happy and fresh ... with each other, right Eric?



In this part of town, vendors are allowed to vandalize the view of a piazza in beautiful Verona.



This plaque bears a lyric from “Juliet Laments a Love Lost” ... yet ...



... love finds her ... again and again ... visitor after visitor. Romeo who?