

THE STORY OF
RIVER PLATE
ARGENTINA'S BIGGEST CLUB

**EL
MÁS
GRANDE**



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Chapter One

Carnival

FOOTBALL FIRST took root in Argentina after being introduced in the 1860s by British workers, engineers and managers engaged in the construction of Argentina's nascent infrastructure network, especially the railways. They brought with them cultural activities, including sports like cricket, football and rugby. After the first game held under Football Association rules was played on 20 June 1867 by members of the Buenos Aires Cricket Club, football was disseminated more widely by the British amongst the Argentine population through three main avenues: private schools, community clubs and works teams. Language was not implicitly a barrier, as this could be overcome with mutually understood gestures and body language. Unlike Argentine state schools, whose physical education was based on European-style individual gymnastics, the country's private schools emulated their British-run counterparts, such as the

Buenos Aires English High School, run by Alexander Watson Hutton, which produced the famous Alumni club that dominated Argentine football in the opening decade of the 20th century, in opting for team sports. The establishment of like-minded Argentine clubs such as Estudiantes de Buenos Aires, founded by students at the Colegio Nacional Central in 1898, saw the Argentine League that was established in 1893 quickly grow in membership.

Origins

It was from the first of these groups that in 1898 two teams of adolescent boys played each other in the dockside *barrio*, or neighbourhood, of La Boca, where thousands of Genoese immigrants settled at the turn of the 20th century, to play each other on a *potrero*, or patch of waste ground, in the Dársena Sur area of the docklands. One of the teams composed of local boys from the *barrio* was called Juventud Boquense, captained by Bernardo Messina; the other was a team of pupils from the Escuela de Comercio. A year later the two sides joined forces to take on other clubs from the area and a new club La Rosales was formed by Messina, Alfredo and Enrique Zanni, Carlos and Enrique Antelo, Eduardo Rolán, Pedro Martínez, Luis Tarrico, Pedro Pellerano and Luis Arata.

Meanwhile, separated by small mounds of earth just across from the *potrero* where La Rosales played, another club was taking its first steps. Composed of pupils from the Escuela Industrial and Colegio Nacional Oeste who were no more than 15 years of age, Santa Rosa were formed by Leopoldo Bard, Enrique Salvarezza, Enrique Balza, A. Capeletti, J. Botinelli, J. Kitzler, L. Prumier, the Pita brothers, J. Souza, E. Reynoso and J. Cirigliano, with Bard taking on the dual roles of president and captain. They met each Sunday at the ground next to the Wilson & Sons Carboneras coal yard and had to clear the pitch of stones, cans and weeds before they could play. Initially, the goals were just piles of stones, until later Sr. Duque of the Wilson coal yard gave them some pieces of wood with which to make goalposts, across which a piece of rope was stretched to make the crossbar. British-owned companies were important in the spread of football in Argentina amongst workers from diverse backgrounds, and this company in particular, Wilson & Sons, which provided most of the coal that kept the dockyards of La Boca working, was to play a significant role in the early development of the club and the future River Plate.

Later, at the turn of the 20th century, shaded under the branches of a willow tree and sat on bales of hay at a site close to where they played, members of the two sides met to discuss joining forces to form a new football

club. Representing La Rosales were Bernardo Messina, Enrique Zanni, Carlos Antelo, Pedro Martínez, Alberto Flores, Pedro Pellerano and Enrique Somaruga, whilst Enrique Salvarezza, Enrique Balza, Leopoldo Bard, José Pita, Livio Ratto, Juan Bonino, Abelardo Ceballos and Luis Tarrico attended on behalf of Santa Rosa.

The proliferation of Italian and other surnames among the Hispanic ones reflected the changing face of Argentina at the turn of the 20th century. Mass European immigration had begun from the mid-19th century as Argentina sought the workforce to capitalise on the transatlantic export of its agricultural products. The country's population quadrupled to nearly 8 million people between 1869 and 1914, with almost half of those newcomers originating from Italy. In the *barrios* of Buenos Aires such as La Boca, immigrants mixed with working-class and middle-class locally born Argentines to create an organic hybrid civic society rather than disperse into ethnic ghettos, as happened in other countries of high immigration such as the United States.

After it was agreed by those present that it would be economically sensible to merge the two teams to achieve their shared goal of achieving league status, there was some discussion as to what to call the new club. Carlos Antelo wanted to keep the existing La Rosales moniker, Livio Ratto suggested Club Atlético Forward, Bernardo

Messina proposed a reversion to Juventud Boquense in celebration of their local neighbourhood, whilst Pedro Martínez – a student at the Escuela Industrial – put forward the name Club Atlético River Plate – inspired by the crates labelled ‘River Plate’ that he had seen unloaded at the docks near to where they played. The suggestions were voted on by the attendees, who in a majority favoured Forward as the name. The minority led by Martínez who preferred River Plate protested and suggested a football match be held between the eight supporters of Forward and seven of River Plate. The supporters of Martínez won 5–2 and after a second vote the majority voted for his team name and River Plate were born.

A managing committee for the club was then formed with executive positions shared between members of the constituent teams. Bard was elected as president, Flores as vice-president, Messina became secretary with Balza acting as his deputy, Salvarezza was chosen as treasurer deputised by Bonino, whilst the remaining delegates made up the remainder of the committee. The members decided that the new club would play on the field next to the Wilson coal yard previously used by La Rosales. Over time, Bard, who was a medical student and the son of Jewish immigrants from Austria-Hungary, used the civic skills and personal support base developed as president as a proving ground for a political career in the Unión

Cívica Radical (UCR), later being elected as a deputy standing for the party.

The exact date of the meeting is shrouded in doubt. The date officially registered by the club with the Ministry of Justice and Public Instruction on its Act of Foundation was 25 May 1901 – the national holiday celebrating the proclamation of Argentine self-government in 1810. It is likely that the adoption of 25 May was a patriotic affectation on the part of the founders, in common with other clubs created at the time, who wanted to use football as a way of proving their Argentine credentials despite coming from various immigrant backgrounds. However, some historians put the formation as late as 15 May 1904, a week before a notice appeared in the newspaper *La Nación* of the club's formation, and two weeks before the club's first recorded match as River Plate. This was a friendly played on the Dársena Sur ground on 29 May against General Bartolomé Mitre de Palermo that ended in a 1–0 win for the home side. Lining up for River on this auspicious occasion were Pedro Moltedo, Livio Ratto, Damián Ceballos, Leopoldo Bard, E. Peralta, Artemio Carrega, Pedro Martínez, Luis Tarrico, Fernando Flores, Enrique Zanni and Bernardo Messina.

The Red Sash

Over the next century and beyond, River became famous for *La Banda Roja*, the distinctive red sash on their

white jerseys, the origins of which are owed to a chance encounter at a local carnival. In common with most clubs of the era, River's players used white shirts due to their cheapness. Then one day a group of River players were taking part in a costumed parade dressed as 'Inhabitants of Hell' as part of the local carnival, riding aboard a Wilson coal wagon, upon which the earlier occupants had abandoned red strips of material. One of the players had the bright idea of fastening them as bands across their shirts with pins – later sewn on by Catalina Salvarezza, mother of Enrique – to differentiate them from other teams and, apart from a 23-year interruption between 1909 and 1932 when River wore their *tricolor* kit of red and white stripes separated by black pinstripes, it is a colour scheme that has endured to this day.

River's competitive debut came on 30 April 1905 in the league competition of the Argentine Football Association – forerunner of the current Asociación del Fútbol Argentino (AFA) – after officially affiliating with the body a week earlier. To be allowed to play, River had to prove it had suitable facilities. All the players pitched in to get the ground in Dársena Sur up to scratch. The goalposts were donated by player and vice-president Alberto Flores, stored at a local bar when not in use and carried to and from the ground by the players each Sunday. A small dressing-room

measuring three metres by three metres and painted up with the club name and crest was constructed thanks to Ratto, whilst the wire fencing and posts that demarcated the playing area were provided by Bard and Scrocchi. The dockside ground with all its new installations was officially inaugurated in a friendly against First Division side Maldonado.

Competing in Section A of the Third Division, River lined up for their league debut on 30 April 1905 against the medical students of the Asociación de Medicina with: S. Zanni, Ceballos, Tarrico, Bard, Pedro Moltedo, E. Juanich, J. Kitzler, Martínez, Rolán, L. Flores and Enrique Zanni. The 3–2 defeat in that opening match was indicative of a disappointing first season results-wise, but more importantly the objective of playing competitive football was completed: River were now part of the Argentine footballing establishment. Their maiden win came a week later with a 4–3 victory against General Belgrano A and they went on to finish seventh out of eight teams.

Undaunted by a poor first campaign in the Third Division, the youngsters from the dockside entered the Second Division for the 1906 season. In this era the different leagues were autonomous of each other, and each team was able to choose in which division to play, with the obvious exception of the First Division. Placed in

Section B, River's performances were again uninspiring, with a 7–0 thrashing by Estudiantil Porteño a particular low point, as they did not pick up a single point from their opening seven games. Victory over Barracas Central broke this wretched run, the only win River achieved on the field of play, the others coming by virtue of their opponents not turning up for fixtures. It was at least another season of consolidation in the league.

Evicted from their ground in Dársena Sur by the Ministry of Agriculture, who owned and wanted to build on the land on which the club had effectively been squatting, River found a new site in neighbouring Sarandí through José Bernasconi, Director General of the Dresco naval store company, who became River's president in 1909. The club moved all their installations to the new ground, including stands and dressing rooms, and prepared a new pitch, although their time across the Río Riachuelo would be fleeting. The ground did not meet league requirements for running water, having instead just a water tank that was filled prior to each home game to supply just sufficient water for the players to bathe. The club not having sufficient money to install proper plumbing, the players all played their part in pretending to the visiting delegation from the Association that they had running water. When given his cue by Salvarezza, who was showing the visitors around, kicking the pipes,

Alfredo Zanni, who was stationed on the roof, poured buckets of water from the tank down the pipes so that when Mr Williams from the Association turned on the taps, out came running water. The subterfuge worked and the ground was signed off by Mr Williams who expressed how impressed he was that the club had ‘installed 800 metres of underground piping’ to the nearest water source, in Sarandí!

At their new home, River became stronger on the pitch, finishing first in Section A of the Second Division in the 1907 season to earn themselves a place in a promotion play-off against Nacional. Although River lost 1–0 to the team of workers of the Gath y Chaves department store from Floresta, the club were moving forward.

Promotion

After the disappointment of the previous season, River entered the 1908 season with renewed optimism after signing several players from their play-off nemesis, Nacional, who were denied promotion because of their substandard facilities. After just a year in Sarandí, River returned to Dársena Sur where they remained until 1913. Although nobody knew it at the time, 2 August 1908 saw the birth of one of the great rivalries in world football as River played Boca Juniors in a friendly that was won

by their neighbours 2–1. River easily topped Section B of the Second Division, before thrashing Ferro Carril Oeste 5–1 in the play-off semi-final at Racing's ground on 8 November.

Promotion appeared to be confirmed when River beat Racing Club de Avellaneda 2–1 in the final on 13 December at the ground of Gimnasia y Esgrima de Buenos Aires (GEBA). After going a goal down after 11 minutes, *Los Darseneros* fought back to take the lead. However, the overexuberance of River's supporters in invading the pitch in celebration of the winner brought protests from Racing, and the AFA ordered the game to be replayed at the same venue. River channelled their unhappiness with the perceived injustice of the decision and reaffirmed their promotion in emphatic fashion two weeks later. Overcoming the sodden pitch after heavy rain the previous night, and a strong wind that disrupted the game, River won the restaged game 7–0 through a hat-trick from Elías Fernández, two from Griffero and one each from Julio Abaca Gómez and Silvio Politano. Their task was made somewhat easier by Racing's goalkeeper refusing to reappear after the half-time break, having taken umbrage at some first-half refereeing decisions, to be replaced in goal by forward Alberto Ohaco. After the game, *La Nación* speculated that 'River Plate will have a good

performance next season in the First Division.' The star of River's promotion campaign was the skilful right-winger Fernández who became one of the club's first playing idols, as well as being the first player from the club to win a cap for the Argentine national team.

There was concern amongst the River committee that despite winning the play-off, their ground would be judged inadequate and would be barred from staging First Division matches, as had happened with Nacional a year previously. With the club having just 300 pesos in the bank, committee members Zanni and Lofgren launched a fundraising drive, with 63 members contributing towards the 10,000 pesos to construct the stands at the Dársena Sur ground needed to bring it up to standard, to be repaid from future gate receipts. A short while later, River played their first match against international opposition, taking on their namesakes from Montevideo at the Banco de la Nación ground in the Colegiales *barrio* of Buenos Aires. The Argentine River Plate won the game 2–1 with goals from Anempodisto García and Hernán Rodríguez.

River took to the field in the First Division with a changed colour scheme for the team strip. Originally it was to have been red-and-white striped shirts at the suggestion of Abaca Gómez, but this was rejected by the AFA on the grounds that the more established Alumni

already played in those colours, so thin black stripes were added to differentiate between the two.

The start of River's debut season in the top flight in 1909 could hardly have been more auspicious, the team winning four and drawing two of their opening half-dozen games including a 5–0 opening-day thrashing of Argentino de Quilmes. Their unbeaten run was ended by a 3–1 home defeat to the illustrious Alumni, the dominant force in Argentine football in the opening decade of the 20th century. Two heavy defeats to Belgrano, 6–0 and 4–1, followed as the team struggled to recover its form, but victory over Quilmes steadied the ship and on 12 September River went on to record a historic 1–0 win away to Alumni in a game dubbed the 'Match of the Year', with Rodríguez scoring the all-important goal in the 33rd minute, becoming the only team to beat the champions that season. Four consecutive victories at the end of the campaign meant that River finished creditably as runners-up.

After a euphoric debut in the First Division, the 1910 season brought River back down to earth. In a competition featuring only nine teams, River finished third from bottom. After drawing two of their first three games, and losing the remaining one against Alumni, the team went on its best run of the year, winning three games in a row including a seven-goal demolition of

Quilmes away from home. A 4–0 defeat to Estudiantes de Buenos on 21 August signalled the start of a slide down the table, as River lost by the same scoreline to Belgrano and suffered further defeats to GEBA and San Isidro. Victory over Belgrano was but a brief respite, as the docksiders closed the season with further crushing defeats against Porteño, Argentino de Quilmes and Alumni. Despite his team's mediocre performance, Alejandro Chiappe's strong displays in the centre of defence saw him become the second River Plate player to be selected by the national team during the 1910 season.

River started the 1911 campaign in positive style, following up a draw against Porteño with consecutive home victories over Quilmes, Racing and GEBA. However, successive defeats against San Isidro, Alumni and Quilmes reacquainted them with reality as each scored three against *Los Darseneros*. River's inconsistent season continued with consecutive wins over San Isidro, Belgrano and GEBA, before further thrashings by Alumni and by Porteño. A mid-table finish represented progress on the season before, whilst off the field the move back from Sarandí brought a measure of stability from which to grow its membership base, which rose 40-fold between 1908 and 1911.

The 1912 season was profoundly affected by a rupture in Argentine football, in which a group of

clubs led by Porteño, unhappy with the direction of the Asociación Argentina, decided to leave and form their own federation: the Federación Argentina de Football. The Asociación championship was already a team down after the withdrawal of the illustrious Alumni which had dissolved that year, so had to reprogramme the championship with just six clubs: Quilmes, San Isidro, Racing Club, Estudiantes de Buenos Aires, Belgrano Athletic and River Plate taking part in the tournament.

In this chaotic footballing landscape, River had another dreadful campaign, winning just three of their ten games, one of which was achieved against Belgrano Athletic without even playing, when their opponents did not fulfil the fixture. Four of the losses came against Quilmes and San Isidro, champions and runners-up respectively, reflecting the gulf in class between River and the teams at the top. The low point of the season came with a 10–1 reverse at the hands of Belgrano Athletic – a scoreline that remains the club’s heaviest-ever defeat – as River finished bottom in the truncated tournament.

The 1913 season saw a different format to previous years. After a round of all playing all, the top 11 were split into two zones with the winners of each playing off for the title, whilst the remaining four teams played each other to decide who would be relegated. The club’s cause

was not helped when a strong storm on 13 March 1913 destroyed most of the ground's infrastructure just weeks before the start of the season. Members and supporters worked tirelessly to rebuild the stands and buildings so that play could resume there. After reaching their nadir the previous year, River convincingly redeemed themselves this season. An early high point was an away 2–1 victory over Boca Juniors on 24 August with goals from midfield strongman Cándido García and Antonio Ameal Pereyra in the first official *superclásico* against their neighbours as River finished the first round unbeaten. According to press reports the game ended in a 'boxing contest' as players from both sides participated in a mass brawl, sowing the seeds of an enmity that would grow exponentially over the following century and more. River were subsequently drawn in Zone A together with Platense, Belgrano, Banfield and Racing, finishing on 31 points together with Racing Club. A play-off to decide the champions was held at the stadium of Estudiantes de Buenos Aires and was won by Racing 3–0, a result which signalled the start of the Avellaneda club's domination of Argentine football for the rest of the decade.

It was not just on the pitch that the club were making progress, River's director and two-time president Antonio Zolezzi used his influence as president of the Buenos

Aires city council to obtain subsidies for the club and its local rivals Boca Juniors. The 3,000 pesos obtained by Zolezzi went towards building stands for spectators at their ground in Dársena Sur. Born in Italy, Zolezzi was emblematic of a new breed of Italo-Argentine entrepreneur who had come to *Fare l'America*, 'make it an America', that were transforming Argentine commerce and industry in the early decades of the 20th century. These businessmen were also beginning to dominate the boardrooms of Argentine clubs, as Anglo-Argentine influence in Argentine football began to give way to that of the Italo-Argentine community, using their influence inside clubs to further their own political and commercial careers, with politics having been an avenue opened to foreign-born Argentine residents following the Sáenz Peña electoral reforms of 1912.

By the following year it was a different story as River were definitively ejected from their Dársena Sur site by the port authority, forcing the club to temporarily move far from their dockside support base and share the ground of Ferro Carril Oeste at the geographic centre of Buenos Aires in Caballito for the 1914 season, and causing the club to experience financial difficulties. Their saviour was long-standing member Esteban Fortunati who made several loans to the club and paid River's affiliation fees for the upcoming season.

That campaign saw a reversion to a more ordered league format with the 14 teams playing each other in a single round of matches as River's performances reverted to their earlier inconsistency. Despite starting with successive wins against Banfield, Belgrano, Platense and Comercio, they lost against San Isidro, Huracán, Estudiantes de Buenos Aires and Racing to drop out of title contention. River then went unbeaten in their last four matches with two wins and two draws to finish with a flourish, but it only served to reach fifth place in the final table.

There was, however, a first success in cup competitions as River won the Copa Jockey Club, a trophy instituted in 1901 by Francis Chevallier Boutell, a British railway engineer who was president of the AFA at the time and member of the prestigious Jockey Club in Argentina. They opened with a 5–1 thrashing of Belgrano before eliminating San Isidro 2–1 in a replay after a 1–1 draw to reach the quarter-final. River earned passage to the semi-final with a hard-fought victory over Ferro Carril Oeste, where they beat their 1913 nemesis Racing 2–1. In the final they beat the Rosario outfit, Newell's Old Boys, 4–0 on 15 November with goals from Alberto Penney, Roberto Fraga Patrao, García and Juan Sevesi to earn their first piece of knockout silverware. Victory in the Copa Jockey Club earned River the right to

meet Uruguayan Cup runners-up Bristol de Montevideo (cup-winners Nacional were unable to take part) in the Tie Cup Competition a month later at Ferro's ground on 20 December in what was essentially a South American club championship at the time. River won the match 1–0 through a 35th-minute Juan Bautista Gianetto goal to add to their rapidly filling trophy cabinet.

1914 Winning Squad: *Goalkeeper:* Carlos Isola; *Defenders:* Arturo Chiappe, Agustín Lanata, Pedro Calneggia; *Midfielders:* Cándido García, Atilio Peruzzi, Heriberto Simmons, Alfredo Elli; *Forwards:* Roberto Fraga Patrao, Alberto Penney, Alfredo Martín, Juan Bautista Gianetto, Antonio Pereyra, Juan Sevesi, Enrique Gainzarain, Pablo Cipresini.

River returned once more to the *barrio* of La Boca for the 1915 campaign thanks to founding member Enrique Zanni, who put up his house as guarantee for the rent of land owned by shipping magnate Nicolás Mihanovich on Caboto and Aristóbulo del Valle streets, surrounded by warehouses and meat-packing factories. The new ground was officially inaugurated with a game on 16 May, in which River treated the capacity crowd to a 5–0 demolition of GEBA thanks to two goals each

from Nicolás Rofrano and Fraga Patrao, and one from Penney. The fusion of the Asociación Argentina and the Federación – in reality a takeover on the part of the former – resulted in an extended championship comprising 25 participants playing a single round of matches. Building on the cup wins of the previous season, River ended the season with a respectable third place in the league, behind Racing and San Isidro.

The 1916 River Plate campaign, whilst not dazzling, was a positive one. With only two defeats in 21 matches, against Atlanta and Platense, the docksiders finished third behind the unbeatable Racing Club and Platense. The cup competitions were less successful, with Rosario Central eliminating River at the semi-final stage of the Copa Jockey Club, and Platense knocking them out of the Copa Municipalidad de Buenos Aires in the first round.

The following season Racing Club again barred River's way to league glory, as the team from Avellaneda won 16 times on the way to winning their fifth consecutive title, with River five points behind in second place. Racing also denied River cup success in the Copa Municipalidad. After eliminating Estudiantil Porteño, Porteño, Tigre, Huracán and Tiro Federal de Rosario on the way to the final, River fell at the last hurdle to *La Academia*.

It was a case of déjà vu in the 1918 season, as once more River finished second to Racing, although this time by a wider margin – 11 points – than the year before as they fought off the challenge of local rivals Boca Juniors for the runner-up spot. There was heartbreak in the final of the Copa Jockey Club as River lost 2–1 in the final to Porteño. Their success in getting so close to honours lay in just conceding 22 goals all season thanks to goalkeeper Carlos Isola. Blessed with great agility, Isola was known as *El Hombre de Goma*, ‘the rubber man’, and also played for Argentina, as well as later becoming a director of River.

In 1919 Argentine football was once again rent asunder, dividing itself into associations as it had done in between 1912 and 1915. On 9 September 1919, after eight rounds of the championship had taken place, River Plate joined Racing Club, Independiente, Estudiantil Porteño, Platense and Quilmes in protesting the arbitrary decisions taken by the ruling council of the Asociación Argentina de Football (AAF) and were summarily expelled by the Association. Six days later the dissidents were joined by six more clubs: San Lorenzo de Almagro, Gimnasia y Esgrima de La Plata, Sportivo Barracas, San Isidro, Defensores de Belgrano, Atlanta and Estudiantes de La Plata after their request that the rebels be immediately reinstated by the AAF was ignored.

In the face of such intransigence, the 12 clubs met on 19 September in the offices of *La Prensa* newspaper to form a new governing body: the Asociación Amateur de Football (AAmF), which formally came into being three days later. The AAmF then held its own 1919 championship, which was dominated by Racing who won all their games in the truncated tournament. After starting promisingly with three consecutive victories, River went on a five-match winless run that ended their title chances, ending the season in fourth place. However, Racing's period of domination was ending; the question was who would take their crown?

Champions

As the name suggests, the AAmF was fiercely against footballers playing the game for economic gain, yet 'covered' professionalism became the norm with the offer of work for the local council or in private companies linked to signing for certain clubs. Racing Club's close links to the Mayor of Avellaneda, Alberto Barceló, enabled them to entice players such as Juan Perinetti, Alberto Marcovecchio, Juan Ohaco and Zoilo Canaveri to the club with the lure of jobs with the city's municipality. By contrast *Los Darseneros* had problems attracting players for the 1920 season as Alejandro Elordi and Gaddi turned them down in the face of more financially

attractive offers. To give an idea of the jobs undertaken by River players in addition to playing football, García and defender Rofrano worked in the mint where Argentina's money was manufactured.

After 11 years fighting for the championship since winning promotion in 1908, and finishing runners-up three times, River ended the 1920 season as champions of the AAmF league competition, in a tournament comprising 19 teams, thanks to the late addition of Lanús and Sportivo Almagro, who played just the second half of the season after deserting from the AAF mid-season. River won seven and drew three of their first ten games before tasting defeat for the first time at the hands of San Lorenzo on 3 June. The setback was only transitory as *Los Darseneros* promptly won their next four games to stay top of the table. River fought off a strong challenge from seven-time reigning champions Racing Club, who sold their title dearly, beating River 2–0 in La Boca on 19 September. Again, the disappointment of defeat to Racing was brief; after drawing 2–2 at Barracas Central, River closed out the season with 11 successive victories – seven of them away from home.

On 2 January 1921 River Plate hosted Ferro Carril Oeste with the possibility of being crowned champions for the first time. The home fans, excited at the prospect, filled the stands as never before. They awaited news

from the other side of the Río Riachuelo that separated Buenos Aires from Avellaneda. If Racing lost against Barracas Central, the title would come to La Boca. As time passed without the scoreboard changing, the River *hinchas* got increasingly anxious, abusing the Ferro players for their perceived rough play as the atmosphere within the stadium became volatile. Considering the flimsy wall separating the fans from the pitch, referee Lorenzo Martínez weighed up the situation and fearing for his personal safety sent off the visiting captain, Juan Bautista Pini. River capitalised on the man advantage, scoring three goals to make the game, and the championship, safe. The Ferro players, enraged by the expulsion of their leader, kicked any River player in their path, resulting in a second sending-off for Ferro minutes from the end. The offending player, Santos Barbera, responded by kicking Martínez in the chest, and barely had the referee recovered from that assault he was punched by Ferro centre-half Leopoldo Briola. Chaos ensued as River fans invaded the pitch to battle with the opposition players, at which point Martínez wisely blew early for full time.

Results elsewhere meant that River could not confirm the league championship that day, but the consecration duly came a week later following a 2–0 victory away to Quilmes with a goal scored in each half by García and Tomás Galanzino. Alongside García, the

team's lynchpin was Heriberto Simmons, a centre-half of British stock who was nicknamed *El Inglés* despite being born in Buenos Aires. According to a contemporary press report, Simmons was the base of the team's spine: 'If it were not for the Englishman, the colours of River Plate would have succumbed [to the opposition] more than once.'

1920 Winning Squad: *Goalkeepers:* Juan Crotti, Carlos Isola, Agustín Moretto, Luis Libera; *Defenders:* Jacinto Giúdice, Arturo Chiappe, Pedro Choparena, Arturo Ferrari; *Midfielders:* Cándido García, Pedro Etchenique, Heriberto Simmons, Roberto Taramasso, Pablo Simone, Atilio Peruzzi; *Forwards:* José Laiolo, Nicolás Rofrano, Jaime Chavín, Aníbal Arroyuelo, Tomás Galanzino, Ángelo Santambroggio, Emilio Medone, José Ventura, Victorio Bonadeo, Héctor Rivas, Santiago Mantero, Santiago Ortelli, Antonio Pereyra, Marcos Roldán, P. Sabattini, M. Aspesi, S. Tomaselli, Armando Risso.

River had now outgrown their humble origins and were firmly established as a big club. Now that they were champions, it was time to find a home that matched their ambitions.