'It is clearly the most beautiful football book that I have ever read.'

Giacomo Pellizzari, la Repubblica

'A thesis worthy of Scott Fitzgerald'".

Giuseppe Culicchia, La Stampa

'*The Match* by Piero Trellini is an exceptional undertaking. (...) Books like this are no longer made. It's a super-novel. It has a setting of absolute originality.'

Antonio D'Orrico, La Lettura – Corriere della Sera

'It is an ode to football, a poignant ode to the most beautiful game in the world. (...) a sum of wonderful stories, which keep you glued to the page…'

Walter Veltroni, La Gazzetta dello Sport

'I had never read, on a single game, anything so complete and engaging. In its genre: a masterpiece.'

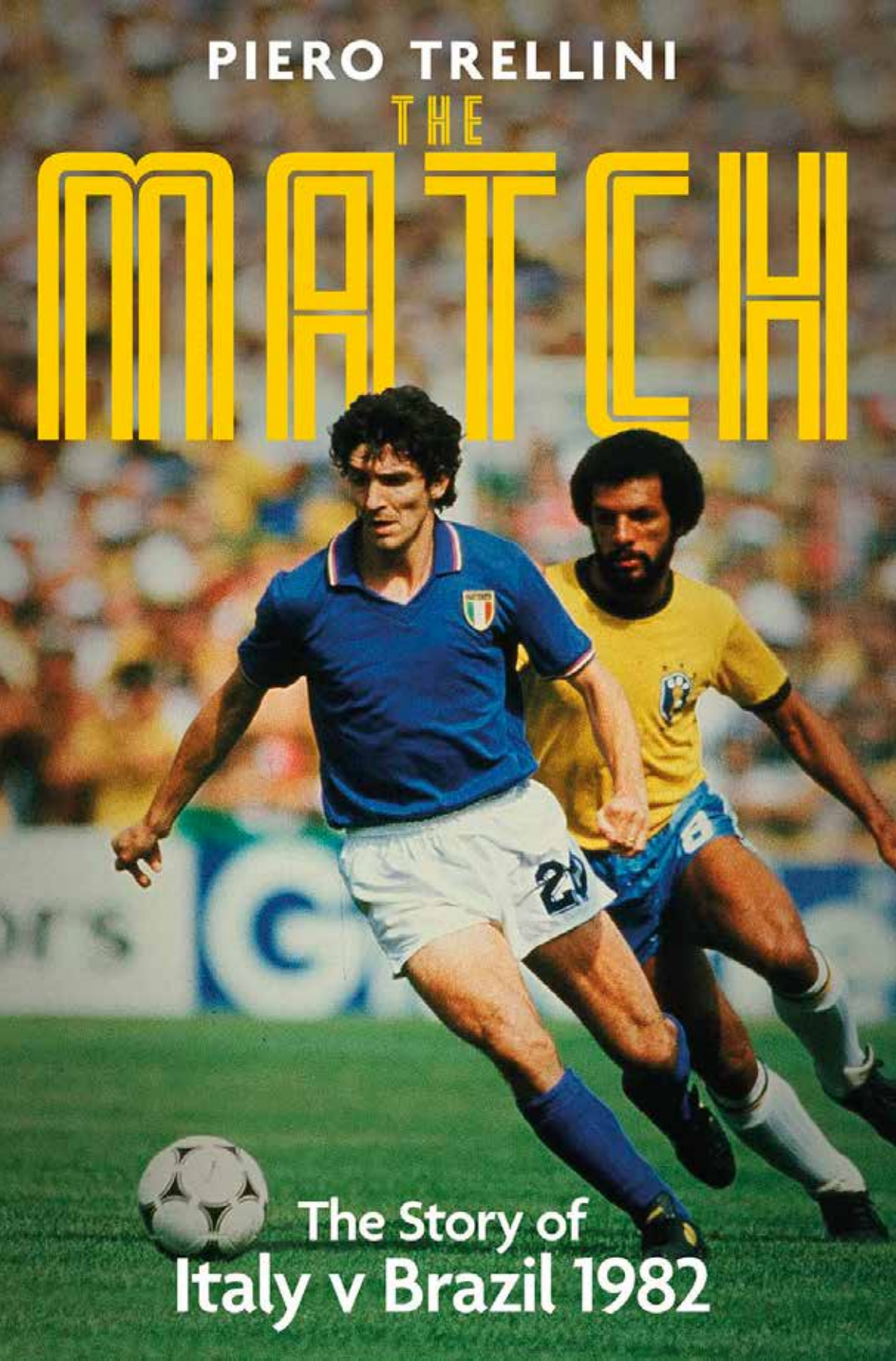
Darwin Pastorin – Huffington Post

'Have you read *The Match*? Beautiful. Trellini has turned the carpet we all know upside down and shown the intricacies that make it up. Spectacular coincidences, hidden roots, historical premises.'

Luigi Garlando, SportWeek

PIERO TRELLINI

THE MATCH



The Story of Italy v Brazil 1982

THE MATCH

The Story of Italy v Brazil 1982

PIERO TRELLINI

pitch

Contents

Prologue

My greatest passion is jazz, particularly Dixieland. That doesn't stop me getting goosebumps every time I listen to Stelutis Alpinis, but it's the voice of the blood: jazz...

Here, I would like a jazz team, great ensemble work, a lot of teamwork and suddenly the soloist comes out.

Enzo Bearzot

The Man Who Came from Haifa

Five o'clock in the evening, the time of the bullfights. A lone man stands in the middle of the field in Barcelona's Sarriá stadium. His name is Abraham Klein. He wears a watch on each wrist, one traditional and one digital. He cannot leave anything to chance, he certainly cannot afford to make a mistake. Not now, not today. This is his day. A few weeks ago he was devastated by the passing of one of his sons. Now he is about to referee his only match in the 12th edition of the World Cup being played in Spain: the last match of Group C: Italy vs Brazil. The semi-final is up for grabs. The winning squad will find themselves among the top four in the world.

It's a Monday. Klein has overcome all kinds of prejudices, difficulties and political manoeuvres to be here. But he is a survivor and is no longer afraid of anything. Maybe that is why he flaunts his forehead space by plastering his hair back, as was once the custom. Maybe it does not do justice to his 48 years, but it suits him just fine. Precision, rigour, clarity, honesty and courage are his values. And Klein belongs to a generation that entrusts looks with presenting them. He wears a long-sleeved cotton shirt, completely black except for the wide white collar and cuffs. At heart height is a pocket filled with all his pride. Printed on it is 'FIFA Referee' and wedged between those simple words, which make him an international referee for the game's highest body, are the two faces of the planet. On one is Italy, on the other Brazil. It is unbearably hot, 34 degrees in the shade; on the pitch it must be 40.

Klein came to Spain directly from Haifa, where he supervises the athletic activities of Israeli schools for the Health Institute. He trains every day. Ten kilometres of running, two hours of gymnastics, strict diet, heart rate checks. On the eve of the World

Cup in Mexico, he climbed the mountains of Galilee to get used to the altitude, and before the championships in Argentina he chose the climate of Cape Town. This time, fearing that his physical condition would not reach the levels of previous years, he hired a fitness trainer. Klein lost nine kilos in four weeks and trained his body to withstand a load of physical stress for 120 minutes so that he would also be ready for extra time, should it prove necessary. A nightmare for a man in his late forties. But he feels he has to do it; a referee is alone against 22 men. And he must always be in the right spot. Making a wrong decision would mean ruining a match. But he wants to dominate it, so he is constantly studying the videos. He tries to understand the tactics of the teams, get to know their players, see who among them has the tendency to intimidate their opponents. Or the referees. He avoids speaking on the pitch. His role is to manage the match without giving explanations. However, before each match he still tries to learn some basic expressions of the local language. He speaks perfect Hebrew, English, Hungarian and Romanian, but also German, Spanish, French and Italian, because he was taught Latin at school and European languages are all children of the same mother.

For more than a decade he has been taming the world's best players and now thinks he has learned everything about control. But the Spanish World Cup has just taught him a lesson he will never forget. A lesson punctuated by three crucial phone calls that will change the course of his life forever.

The first dated back to March. The list of referees who will take part in the Mundial is awaited but, with the qualification of Kuwait and Algeria, Arab TV stations have threatened to boycott the World Cup if an Israeli is allowed to direct a match. FIFA meets. The day of the verdict is set for Monday, 15 March, and on that morning Klein is shrouded in unusual anxiety. In 1970, Montezuma's revenge had prevented him from going ahead in the tournament; two years later the massacre of the Israeli Olympic team in Munich had not allowed him to take part in the 1974 World Cup in Germany; in the following

World Cup the Argentinian dictatorship denied him the final. Now what else could happen?

Spain's will be the World Cup of Zico, Platini, Rummenigge, Boniek, Maradona, and he does not want to miss it. He walks around the house impatiently, plays nervously with the phone, picks up the receiver to make sure there is a line. Until the phone finally rings. 'You are one of the 44,' says a voice on the other end. 'Abraham, you've made it, you're going to the World Cup!' His candidacy has been unanimously approved by the 59th meeting of the FIFA Referees' Committee. The solution adopted, suggested by Artemio Franchi, was the result of the usual diplomatic compromise: the television companies of the Persian Gulf States (Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait itself) will be able to choose between not broadcasting the match or broadcasting it without showing his name in the overlay.

So Klein packs his suitcase two months later and leaves for Spain. Before his arrival, in London, three men shoot the Israeli ambassador Shlomo Argov in the head. It is 3 June. Using the attack as justification, three nights later Israel invades Lebanon. Exactly one week before the Mundial. That day the phone rings in Klein's hotel room. It is his wife: 'We are at war, Abraham!' Their son Amit is serving in the military and Klein's thoughts race to him: 'They cannot send a recruit into a firing zone.' Instead, he learns from that same phone call that Amit has already been sent to the front. Suddenly Klein's body is invaded by unfamiliar emotions. Fear prevents him from breathing. The fate of his son is in distant hands. And for the first time in his life, Klein finds he is not in control of the situation. All he can do is collapse on the bed and cry.

Three days later, when he learns that Amit is fighting in Damour's hottest spot, a few kilometres from Beirut, he asks for a meeting with Franchi. 'I can't do it,' Klein hisses. The UEFA and Referees' Committee president stares him in the eye: 'Are you sure?' 'Yes, one hundred per cent. I can't referee a match in this World Cup. My son is fighting in Lebanon and I haven't heard from him for days.

I don't even know if he is alive.' There is a special understanding between the two.

Like Klein, Franchi knows all the rules of football and the major languages of the world. In his youth he was also a referee. Now, as he is listening to Klein's story, he is the president of UEFA, the vice-president of FIFA, a member of the World Cup Organising Committee and, of course, chairman of the Referee's Committee. He is a fierce defender of football's interests but here and now he is only concerned for the Israeli referee. When Klein stops talking, Franchi abandons for a moment that tight, authoritative smile that has always given him the empathy to be accepted by everyone. He does not want to make a definitive choice. He has never done so. He has always left himself every possible room for manoeuvre. 'Compromise is always the most honest choice for a manager': his credo in ten essential words, as indispensable as the players of a team. He had whispered them a few months earlier to the Roman journalist of *Il Messaggero*, Lino Cascioli, who accused him of knowing the outcome of the World Cup draw in Spain in advance. Franchi understood Klein's dilemma and accepted his request not to have him referee, but invited him to stay in Spain: 'For now I'm only going to put you on the pitch as linesman.'

Almost two weeks pass, during which Klein does not receive a single piece of news from the front. He begins to fear that his son has passed away. It is the day of Italy vs Peru. It is 18 June, Amit's birthday. His son turns 20 at the front as Klein runs back and forth on the sidelines of the Balaídos, the stadium in Vigo. Klein tries to do his job, his eyes see Bruno Conti's amazing goal, Paolo Rossi's dull performance and the famous fall on the pitch of his colleague, the German referee Walter Eschweiler, but his mind is elsewhere. After the match he returns to the hotel and finds a telegram waiting for him on the reception desk. He hesitates. Then he grabs and opens it.

> Shalom dear Dad,
> Today, as you know, is my birthday. I am celebrating it here in Lebanon; many of my friends have died and my heart is broken, but we talk a lot about the World Cup and I am looking forward to seeing you referee a game.
> With love,
> Amit

Klein cannot stop crying. He goes up to his room and hears the phone ring. On the other end he thinks he can hear his son's voice. He thinks it is a hallucination. How can Amit, who is in the middle of a war, reach him in his hotel room? But it is him and Abraham is seized by an uncontrollable emotion, the most powerful of his life. His son has left the front line and begs him to referee. 'In less than a week, I will be linesman again for Brazil–New Zealand.' But Amit wants to see him on the field. 'I'll be there, son,' he promises him through tears. So Klein, still stunned, rushes to Franchi: 'I'm ready, give me a game.'

A few days later, on Saturday, 26 June, the Israeli referee is assigned the third match of Group C between Brazil and the winner of Italy vs Argentina. 'You'll do Argentina–Brazil, happy?' Franchi tells him. It is a gift for him. Instead, he will find Italy and Brazil, the teams of his destiny; before this match he has refereed them both five times. In this World Cup he has already seen them both from the sidelines. But this time he will conduct the orchestra.

Klein summons Zoff and Sócrates, the two captains, to the midfield circle. He turns to the Brazilian and flips the coin. Heads or tails, ball or goal. Sócrates loses the toss, and Zoff takes the field. The sun is still high and the Azzurri goalkeeper chooses to field his team on the right. When the sun goes down it will be the opponents who will have it in their sights. Brazil kick off. The crowd is buzzing. To comply with protocol, Klein has to wait until 5.15pm. He places the ball on the ground, leaning over the midfield circle in perfect alignment with the line that divides the field into two halves. He

is small in stature and lacks what is known as physical authority, but he still manages to impose his own law. In his erect posture, in his amplified gestures, in his theatrical glances, there is a solemn, authoritative, almost warlike mimicry.

The Brazilians look towards the grandstand. The centre of the pitch gathers only three figures: Zico, Serginho and Klein, who has his left arm raised and his eye fixed on the stopwatch. Galinho has the number ten wedged between his shoulder blades and his hands resting on his hips, as if he is about to start a walk. The clock is ticking as 44,000 gazes, 88,000 eyes stare at that strutting gentleman dressed in black. Klein understands that this is the moment, takes a breath and pushes all his authority into the whistle. Perhaps he already knows: it will be the last match of his life. It is his final.

The Historical Memory of the Italians

Italy start breathing the Mundial breeze 33 days before the match against Brazil. In the worst way: with slaps, spits and tears. For the national team it is the day of departure. In front of the Hotel Villa Pamphili in Rome, where the Italian team has gathered, the technical commissioner Enzo Bearzot, by now subjected to exhausting solicitations during which the criticism has largely exceeded the approval, is apostrophised 'bastard ape' by a fan – Anna Ceci, 22 years old, member of the Roman Club Boys Nerazzurri – furious with him for not having called up Evaristo Beccalossi, the Inter midfielder who is setting the crowds on fire. 'Criticism yes, insults no' is the credo carved into the conscience of the Friulian commissioner – Friuli is a north-eastern region of Italy. The *Vecio*, a dialect term meaning 'Old Man', as he has always been nicknamed, responds to the offence with a slap. It is a paternal, educational slap ('a father is also a father of other people's sons; I gave her a slap like I would have done with my own daughter'), holding back his hand just enough so that the lesson would not hurt her, but the gesture is consigned to history and goes around the world. The previous day, in the same context, the same

scene, this time it was a Roma fan singing the praises of Roberto Pruzzo, who was also excluded from the squad, and spitting on the coach's arm. Bearzot, at that point, took off his official federal jacket and suddenly handed it to the invader: 'Here, this is the uniform, you be the technical commissioner!'

For the Italian press, the two episodes are yet another indication of an obvious state of nervousness. Shortly afterwards, at 4pm, on the Boeing 727 City of Sulmona AZ 8236 bound for Santiago de Compostela, Bearzot recalls his Argentinian past. 'We will suffer in the first phase with all three teams we meet, but we will rise in the second phase. In the long run, values always emerge and I am sure that my players will not betray me.' That's what the Old Man thinks, immensely confident, as he flies over Spain. The rest is Italian talk, while he doesn't talk at all. In this Enzo Bearzot is a different Italian.

In his country, the vicissitudes of football interest public opinion more than the enormous chasm that has opened up in the state budgets, the quarrels of the Pentapartite party, the painful aftermath of the armed struggle, the impressive sequence of Sicilian political murders or, again, the atrocious epilogues of the events of Banco Ambrosiano, one of Italy's best-known institutions at the time, which collapsed in 1982. It is a confused, immature and tumultuous Italy, but also tired, spartan and sleepy. The President of the Republic (Sandro Pertini), the secretary of the largest trade union confederation of workers (Luciano Lama), the figurehead of journalists (Gianni Brera), the coach of the national team and even the doctor of the Italian team (Leonardo Vecchiet) all smoke a pipe.

These are restless days. The previous Friday petrol broke through the 1,000 lire barrier, while the wind of crisis is blowing threateningly over the government, which, more than ever before, appears shaky. The desperate search for a solution to the problem of the escalator has created a worrying split between the parties and a chasm now seems to be dividing the Christian Democrat and Socialist ministers. It is the beginning of the most difficult week for Prime Minister Giovanni Spadolini, the first non-Democrat in the history of the Republic. He

has just returned from his official visit to Spain, where he also had the opportunity to meet the Azzurri. He compared their destiny to his own. Saving Italy. The national team by reaching the semi-finals.

Spadolini averts the fourth consecutive early dissolution of the chambers. Solemn and good-natured, he loves history and is proud to be part of it. But he knows that history sometimes takes place in unexpected twists and turns. Apparently minor episodes that affect social life more than politics. When, on the eve of the Italian squad's departure for Spain on 1 June he welcomed the Azzurri to Palazzo Chigi, he suggested a bold and visionary hypothesis: 'If you win the World Cup, the historical memory of the Italians of 1982 will be much more closely linked to your names than to those of the Spadolini government.' He then said he was certain to meet them again in early July, on the occasion of the official visit to his Spanish counterpart.

And before leaving for Spain, he set to work, sounding out in three long talks the mood of the Republic's highest monetary authority, the governor of the Bank of Italy, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, the most important private industrialist, Fiat chairman Gianni Agnelli, and one of the historic leaders of the Christian Democrats, Giulio Andreotti.

Work resumed in the morning, with a series of talks to be held by the president with Ciriaco De Mita, Bettino Craxi, Pietro Longo, Valerio Zanone and Oddo Biasini. This could be the last week of work for deputies and senators. If, at the end of the debate, the Spadolini government were to resign, the legislative activities would automatically be blocked and all the bills presented would lapse. The last word had not yet been spoken. While waiting for the fateful hour, the Chamber and Senate went ahead, ignoring the impending crisis. In the afternoon in Montecitorio, the case of the Christian Democrat councillor Ciro Cirillo, freed by the Red Brigade on payment of a ransom, would be discussed. It would certainly not be a fierce debate since the Chamber could even be deserted, due to the simultaneous Italy vs Brazil football game.

The Mundial

The same day, six years earlier. Joaquín Viola Sauret is sitting at his desk, reading his mail. The air is changing. Just 48 hours ago, Don Adolfo Suárez González became the first democratically appointed head of government since Franco. Viola was not chosen by the people. It was Rodolfo Martín Villa, the Gobernador Civil de la Provincia, who did it by appointing him mayor of Barcelona. He has been in that chair for ten months but it has been enough to qualify him as *el alcalde más impopular de Barcelona*, Barcelona's most unpopular mayor. He is 63 years old, his mouth perpetually half open and two bright eyes. He points them at an envelope that catches his eye. The sender is José Antonio Zalba, president of the commission in charge of preparing the World Cup in Spain. The letter contains a request for details of the works needed in order to be chosen as the venue for a World Cup match. Stadiums, car parks, roads, accommodation and services. At that precise moment, Viola takes his eyes off the paper and places them on the street map of the city he presides over: 'The World Cup will happen.' He knows that Barcelona, along with the capital, will be the main theatre. And he trembles at the thought of being part of the scene.

But his shining gaze has no foresight. The Presidente del Gobierno Suárez will remove him five months later and replace him with José María Socías Humbert, the last mayor to take office without the support of the ballot box, and Viola will never see the World Cup. Death suddenly appears to him as he is intent on reading another letter of directives. At stake is not the city of Barcelona but his own life. On the morning of 25 January 1978, four terrorists enter his house on the Paseo de Gracia, catch him in his pyjamas in his bedroom, wrap a bomb over his chest with adhesive tape and hand him a paper: 'Read carefully. If you do not pay within the terms, you will be blown up.' He would have followed those instructions; he has a rich wife and five children. But the device explodes before its time and his head flies through the air, taking all his dreams with it. The

following year, Spain officially accepts the invitation. Yes, the World Cup will take place. Even without him. And it will be Barcelona that will host 'the game'.

The story of that challenge, however, begins much earlier.