

After The World Cup, Women Players Are Still Fighting

Roberta Cutillo (July 02, 2019)



The Italian Women's National Football Team is out of the World Cup after losing the quarter-final match against the Netherlands but their unexpected success spurs discussion in Italy concerning the professionalization of the sport.

Though the Italian team may be out of the [Women's World Cup](#) [2] after losing Saturday's game to the Netherlands, female soccer players aren't done fighting just yet. Actually, we could say that the biggest battle for Italian women's soccer begins now.

The unexpected qualification of the team to the World Cup, and its remarkable performance during the tournament became a central topic throughout the country, where football - or soccer if you prefer - has long been considered the ultimate expression of masculinity, more so than any other sport, and where the men's national team hasn't been performing well of late.



Although the team's journey was cut short after its elimination at the quarter-finals, many see this as the perfect opportunity to discuss the issue of professionalization. In fact, in Italy, the players of the women's national soccer team are not considered professional athletes, contrarily to their male counterparts.

"From now on, women's football in Italy will be different," stated [Milena Bertolini](#) [3], the team's coach, one of the only two Italian women to hold the title to train a men's Serie A team. "Now, those in charge of taking certain decision have to do it, because the girls deserve professionalization and more opportunities. Today they played against professional colleagues and from that point of view it was not an equal match." she commented after Saturday's game.

The first Italian football team was created in Milan during the 1930s and the sport became popular amongst women during the war and for a short while after. However, the Italian Female Football Federation ([Federazione Italiana Calcio Femminile](#) [4]) wasn't founded until 1968. An association was then formed in 1980 but the sport still wasn't widely diffused.

Today, major soccer teams are required to have a women's team as well and in 2018-19, the first edition of the female [Serie A](#) [5] (the highest division for Italian teams) was organized by the [Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio](#) [6] (FIGC.)

However, women's soccer remains marginal in Italy. Suffice to look at the numbers: the annual budget for the women's team is of about 4,2 million euro while the men's is of 28 million euro.

But the fact that women's soccer isn't considered professional has other consequences. For example, it means that female players are not provided with insurance, if they are injured they must cover the cost of treatment and rehabilitation themselves. They also do not receive a pension nor any form of support in case of pregnancy or invalidity.

Even more troubling is the common practice of including "anti-pregnancy" clauses in the athletes' contracts, which cause them to be automatically rescinded in case of pregnancy.

In Italy, whether an athlete is professional is determined by article 2 of law 91, which dates back to 1981 and simply delegates this responsibility to [CONI](#) [7] (the Italian National Olympic Committee) along with the national sports federations.

However, CONI has yet to clarify what constitutes the distinction between professional and amateurial. This has caused countless instances of discrimination over the years and penalized many athletes. Currently, the only sports that CONI recognizes as being professional are men's soccer up to Lega Pro, golf, basketball, and cycling. This means that some of Italy's greatest athletes such as Olympic swimmer [Federica Pellegrini](#) [8] are technically not professionals.



Women's soccer stands out amidst all the sports that are being denied their professional status because of how much importance is given to men's soccer in contrast.

This sort of disparity cannot continue to be ignored and, in fact, high representatives of the sport's associations and federations are beginning to express the intention to professionalize women's soccer, though with perhaps a little too much "caution".

The head of FIGC Gabriele Gravina commented after the quarter-final "We have to build the foundations that will allow these girls to make the jump in quality they deserve. The FIGC is taking concrete steps: from July 1st 2020, the status of female soccer players will change."

He then went on to say that "the girls" will eventually obtain professionalization but that it is unthinkable to introduce it today. "We must, first of all, consider the impact that a change in status would bring upon the system. We can't expose it to the risk of losing participants," he continued, insisting on the importance of behaving "sustainably."

A little more encouraging were the words of the President of [AIC](#) [9] (Associazione Italiana Calciatori,) Damiano Tommasi, who stated that "Women's soccer is destined to grow and I'm sad to see the resistance to discussing professionalization."

"I'm not saying we should do it tomorrow morning," he continued, "but we should start the path, with a clear framework in mind. It's time to reason, we certainly want to be sustainable, but women's soccer is one of the most convenient investments, with a great prospect of profitability."

With women's soccer growing in popularity across the globe, these issues are starting to be addressed everywhere and things are beginning to change. The Norwegian federation recently made history by mandating equal pay for its male and female players.

This is still an isolated case, but hopefully other countries will follow along. All over the world, from the United States to Argentina, female players are demanding and often obtaining more recognition and adequate compensation.

In some cases, brands and sponsors are stepping in to fill the economic and representational gender gaps. For example, in 2017, Adidas carried out the #InYourName campaign with the Swedish national women's team, for which they made a limited series of jerseys where the player's names were replaced by inspirational quotes meant to empower women and encourage them to support each other.

While it's still unclear how exactly the Italian situation will evolve from here, at least people are talking about it and it's not unreasonable to think that Italy will follow the wind of change blowing



across the world of women's soccer.

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