

ONE-ON-ONE

Was he really an "excellent" goalkeeper?
Does the Euro 2000 Final still haunt him?
Did he turn down Liverpool because of
Heyssel? And what's with Noel's lucky shirt?

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY...

Alessandro Del Piero

Stylized: Nick Ansell/Retna Ltd. (left); AP Photo

"I came down from the Italian mountains to come to watch Spiney, who I've been a huge fan of since I was a boy," quipped Italy's Olympic gold-winning midfielder Davide Nascetti. He was in the stands of the little Armando Picchi Stadium in the seaside resort of Jesolo, along with other fans who'd travelled from various corners of the land, some as far as five hours away, to see Alessandro Del Piero as Sydney FC scored Italy in the summer.

"I, Australian", as the Italian press now calls him, remains a serious draw in his footballing dogma. Last season the A-League recorded its highest total attendance in the glow of the Del Piero effect. Lurking outside Sydney FC's training ground is a woman who says she has come from Mexico, and could she have her photo taken with Italy's 2006 World Cup winner? If she got her man, she may well show him wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with a blagging bear carrying a surfboard.

Were he from the surf beaches, though, at the Sky Blue Macquarie University training ground in the north-west suburbs, the set-up is a sight more homely than the Old Lady's bloody training complex. A lookabout looks on, but the interview is disrupted only by Del Piero's hacking cough. "Spiney," he spatters. "This is it and the noise like a demented monster grandfather clock made by the corrugated roof expiring in the mounting heat."

The 28-year-old's stern at the sound suggests Australians have yet to experience a good Aussie tin shock.

FACT FILE

Italy of World 1982/1994
Major 10 for
Place of birth Conegliano, Italy
Position Striker
Clubs played for
1991-93 Padova 34 games (1 goal)
1993-2002 Juventus 195 (280)
2003-Present Sydney FC 11 (17)
International career
1995-2006 Italy 61 (31)
Playing honours
Serie A 1995, 1997, 1998, 2002, 2003,
2005, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011
Coppa Italia 1995,
Supercoppa Italiana 1995, 1997, 2002,
2003, 2005, 2008, 2009
UEFA Super Cup 1996, Intercontinental Cup 1996

You would have been seven years old when Italy won the World Cup in 1982. How did that resonate with you? Were they your sporting heroes, or was there somebody else you idolised?

Bryan Linley via Facebook

It was a wonderful time for me – really, really great. Experiencing it as a child, you're a really odd fan. I remember the action after the game. I'd had a flag made for me, using some wood from the house – a piece of birch, just the thing. My mum had seen the Italian flag and said for me. After the game we went out

Below Too small to succeed, apparently – Del Piero was proved them wrong



into the street where the cars were going by flooding their horns – it was amazing. I didn't really understand at that point what it meant to be world champions but I understood the victory. The players became stars for all Italians, plus I was a Juventus fan so all the winners who played for Juve for that World Cup final team, including Marco Tardelli, Paolo Bettini and captain Dino Zoff, certainly influenced me in my youth.

It says on Wikipedia (and therefore it must be true) that you started your footballing life as a goalkeeper because your team didn't want you to get injured. Is that right? Were you any good in goal, or did your talents always lie at the other end of the pitch, even at an early age?

Michael Alexander, London
Yes, she wanted me to play in goal so that I didn't get injured. I played every day in the yard to try to be, "OK, you can go out, but play in goal so you don't break and you don't get injured that's for me." (Laughs, slightly muffled) (Smiling long-suffering expression) I would say. So sometimes we compromised, yes. And I was an excellent goalkeeper (tongue-in-cheek laugh) I enjoyed playing in goal but the best things almost always happened when I got the ball at my feet and travelled with it and passed it around, not when I was between the sticks, because attacking was in my nature, you see.

"I honestly had the chance to go to all the countries in the world, but I chose Australia"

