



MR. INTER

JAVIER ZANETTI IS ONE OF INTER'S MOST LEGENDARY NAMES, HAVING MADE MORE THAN 800 APPEARANCES OVER ALMOST TWO DECADES. SOCCER360'S ROSSELLA MARRAI-RICO SPOKE EXCLUSIVELY TO THE NERAZURRI VICE-PRESIDENT.

LET'S START OFF WITH YOUR CHILDHOOD IN ARGENTINA. HOW DID YOU FALL IN LOVE WITH FOOTBALL AND WHAT IS YOUR EARLIEST MEMORY PLAYING FOOTBALL?

I started very young, when I was just three. My mum gave me a football and that was the first present I remember ever getting. That's when I first discovered my passion for the game and I've never looked back. From that moment, I spent my entire childhood running around after a ball with friends near the area where I lived.

TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOUR EARLY CAREER...

After being rejected by Independiente, I had the chance to go for a trial with Talleres de Remedios de Escalada. They took me on and that's where I turned professional. I made my senior debut for them when I was 17. After that I joined Banfield, where I played my first game in the First Division. I spent two years there before moving to Inter in 1995.

YOU WERE MASSIMO MORATTI'S FIRST-EVER SIGNING AT THE CLUB WHEN HE BOUGHT THE CLUB IN 1995. GIVEN WHAT HE ACHIEVED WITH THE NERAZZURRI, HOW MUCH OF AN HONOUR WAS IT TO HAVE THE PRESIDENT'S VOTE OF CONFIDENCE?

I was honoured to join a club with such a big history as Inter. I was very young, and especially in that early period at the club, it was important to know Massimo Moratti had faith in me. He was also someone I looked up to because he conveyed important values to me and introduced me to Inter's history.

HOW WAS THE EXPERIENCE OF SETTLING IN AT THE CLUB AT SUCH A YOUNG AGE WITH YOUR FAMILY ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD? HOW DOES THAT EXPERIENCE BUILD YOU AS A PLAYER AND A PERSON?

It was a really big challenge because not many people get the chance to test themselves in such a highly competitive League as Serie A and I did have that opportunity. It was a great learning experience both for my family and me.

YOU WON EVERYTHING THERE WAS TO WIN AT INTER - 16 TROPHIES IN TOTAL - AN INCREDIBLE FEAT. WHAT ARE THE KEY FACTORS IN MAKING A SUCCESSFUL SQUAD?

To achieve success you need to create a very strong sense of unity, first among people, and then as footballers. You also need the club behind you. That's what enabled us to win so much and that's why we'll forever be a part of this club's history.

FOUR YEARS INTO YOUR NERAZZURRI CAREER, YOU TOOK OVER THE CAPTAIN'S ARMBAND FROM GIUSEPPE BERGOMI, A SPECIAL HONOUR. HOW DID YOU FEEL WHEN YOU FOUND OUT THE BATON HAD BEEN PASSED ON TO YOU?

It was a massive honour to be named captain but it also comes with huge responsibility, because it's an armband that's been worn by people like Bergomi, Giacinto Facchetti and Armando Picchi who made Inter history.

YOUR TIME AS CLUB CAPTAIN AT INTER COINCIDED WITH PAOLO MALDINI'S AT MILAN - MAKING EACH DERBY EXTRA SPECIAL. YOU TWO ARE AMONG THE MOST RESPECTED PLAYERS IN HISTORY. WHAT WAS IT LIKE HAVING TO MEET HIM ON THE FIELD AT LEAST TWICE A YEAR?

The derby is always a special game and I've always had the utmost respect and admiration for Paolo Maldini. He's a fair opponent with whom I became friends over the years. He made history at Milan, as I did at Inter. It was always a great battle within the battle.

YOU PLAYED IN 47 DERBY DELLA MADONNINAS WITH INTER. WHICH WAS YOUR FAVOURITE?

The derby is the game everyone wants to play in because it means so much - the whole city is focused on it. If I had to choose just one, I'd say the time we won 4-0 in 2009-10.

"I WAS HONOURLED TO JOIN A CLUB WITH SUCH A BIG HISTORY AS INTER"



YOU HAVE HAD THE PLEASURE OF WORKING ALONGSIDE SOME OF THE BEST COACHES IN THE WORLD - MARCELLO LIPI, HECTOR CUPER, MARCO TARDELLI, ROBERTO MANCINI, AND JOSE MOURINHO TO NAME A FEW. WHO HAD THE BIGGEST IMPACT ON YOU AS A PLAYER AND WHY?

I'd start with Cuper because, although we didn't win anything with him, he gave the team an identity. Then there was Mancini...he gave me the chance to play in a different position where I was able to help the team and improve as a player. Then Mourinho, because of everything he instilled in us - that's what enabled us to achieve our greatest success.

LET'S TALK A BIT ABOUT INTER UNDER JOSE MOURINHO AND THAT TREBLE-WINNING TEAM. IT REALLY WAS A MAGICAL SIDE. WHAT WAS IT LIKE WORKING UNDER THE SPECIAL ONE? AND WHY WAS IT SO SUCCESSFUL?

Besides his coaching expertise, he was also an incredibly charismatic individual and that's important at a big club. All his methods worked very well and once the team learnt what he wanted, we played on autopilot.

FROM SAMUEL ETO'O TO LUIS FIGO AND DIEGO MILITO, THERE WERE WORLD-CLASS PLAYERS THROUGHOUT THE TEAM. WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TEAM NOW AND THEN?

The team we had was full of star players, who were all important, but no one felt they were more important than the team. I think that's what you need to be successful.

THERE ARE SOME INCREDIBLY TALENTED PLAYERS IN THE CURRENT SQUAD, WITH THE LIKES OF JOAO MARIO, ROBERTO GAGLIARDINI, IVAN PERISIC AND MAURO ICARDI. WHAT DOES THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE?

I think going through difficult times such as the current moment will help the players to grow as individuals and as a team. I believe we have solid foundations, and I'm confident about the future.

"I TRY TO SHARE MY VALUES AND KNOWLEDGE WITH OTHERS. I'VE CERTAINLY CARRIED FORWARD MASSIMO MORATTI'S HUMAN VALUES"



Zanetti led Inter to win the treble in 2010.

INTER'S ARGENTINE CONNECTION

Javier Zanetti wasn't the first Argentine to don Inter colours and he wasn't the only one to lift silverware either. Esteban Cambiasso is one of the more successful Argentines to have played at Inter, 'Cuchu' becoming as important as his compatriot in the 10 years he wore the black and blue. Cambiasso won the Champions League, five Scudetti, four Coppa Italias, four Italian Super Cups, the Club World Cup and the UEFA Super Cup.

Only Walter Samuel managed to win nearly as much at Inter, as the tough-tackling defender raked in five Scudetti, three Coppa Italias, four Italian Super Cups, a FIFA Club World Cup and the UEFA Champions League trophy. The Argentine duo, along with Zanetti, formed a crucial backbone to Jose Mourinho's treble winning season in 2009-10.

Unfortunately for Julio Cruz, he narrowly missed out on that year of dominance with the Portuguese tactician, but during his 16 years at the club, he tallied up nine trophies in total. On the bench, though, two names stand head and shoulders above the rest: Helenio Herrera for the six trophies he won between 1962 and 1966, and Hector Cuper, for how he managed to get the best out of a squad and created Inter into a competitive side.

In every area on the field, there is a bit of Argentinian heritage that can be found in the Beneamata history books.



"I'M HONORED TO HAVE SUCH AN IMPORTANT ROLE"

YOU ARE NOW THE VICE-PRESIDENT OF INTER, A ROLE THAT MANY FANS LOVE TO SEE YOU IN. WHAT DOES YOUR POSITION ENTAIL AND WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM MORATTI DURING HIS REIGN?

I'm honoured to have such an important role, and I try to share my values and knowledge with others. I've certainly carried forward Massimo Moratti's human values. I'm also working and studying so that I can perform my management role as best I can. I am learning about subjects and fields I didn't have to deal with on a daily basis as a player.

WHAT ARE YOUR AMBITIONS, AND THOSE OF THE OWNERS, FOR THE CLUB IN THE FUTURE? SURELY A RETURN TO EUROPE IS THE PRIMARY OBJECTIVE, WHAT IS THE CLUB HOPING TO ACHIEVE? We're tremendously ambitious and we're basically working with two ideas in mind: both to challenge for trophies on the pitch, and to make Inter one of the world's top 10 clubs off it. It takes time, planning and strategizing. We're working on all that and it will help us to achieve our targets. It's very important to the owners, as it is to all of us.

LASTLY, DO YOU HAVE A MESSAGE FOR THE INTER FANS?

I want to thank the fans for their constant support, even in difficult times. We're working hard so that you can be proud of us, and so that we can all experience the joy of winning again.