

INTERVIEW

BY ANDY ROXBURGH,
UEFA TECHNICAL DIRECTOR



MARCELLO LIPPI IS THE ONLY COACH WHO HAS WON BOTH THE FIFA WORLD CUP (2006) AND THE UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE (1996). IN A REMARKABLE COACHING CAREER, SPANNING MORE THAN THREE DECADES, HE ALSO WON THE SERIE A TITLE FIVE TIMES, THE ITALIAN CUP IN 1995, FOUR ITALIAN SUPER CUPS, THE UEFA SUPER CUP AND THE 1996 EUROPE/SOUTH AMERICAN CUP – ALL WITH JUVENTUS. IN ADDITION, HE JOINTLY HOLDS THE RECORD WITH REAL MADRID’S MIGUEL MUÑOZ FOR FOUR EUROPEAN FINAL APPEARANCES AS A TECHNICIAN. THE FORMER UC SAMPDORIA PLAYER, WHO PLAYED 239 TIMES IN ITALY’S TOP DIVISION, STARTED OUT AS A YOUTH COACH WITH THE GENOA CLUB, AND EIGHT CLUBS LATER, HE ARRIVED AT THE ‘OLD LADY OF TURIN’ IN 1994. MARCELLO, A GRADUATE OF THE ITALIAN FA COACHING SCHOOL IN FLORENCE, TOOK ALL THE NECESSARY STEPS ON HIS WAY TO THE TOP, AND APART FROM ONE SEASON AT FC INTERNAZIONALE MILANO, HE WAS THE ‘MISTER’ OF JUVENTUS BETWEEN 1994 AND 2004. MARCELLO CAN ALSO BE CONSIDERED AS THE COACHES’ COACH BECAUSE HE IS GREATLY ADMIRER BY HIS ELITE COACHING COLLEAGUES. THE MAN WITH THE FILM STAR LOOKS IS UNDOUBTEDLY A FOOTBALL WINNER. HE IS A STAR, AND THE NAME IS:

MARCELLO LIPPI

1 • How do you feel about being the first coach to win the World Cup and the UEFA Champions League?

I didn’t realise that until after we won the final in Germany. It’s an absolute privilege for me because we are talking about the two most important football competitions in the world. And if you also consider the Intercontinental Cup, then I am even more satisfied. But for me it is not a point of arrival, only a point of departure.

2 • What was the moment when you knew you were destined to become a top-level coach?

Well, a coach only becomes a top-level coach when he achieves some significant results. When we won the UEFA Champions League and the Europe/South American Cup with Juventus in

1996, I felt I had completed a cycle. Not that I felt that I was a top-notch coach, but I was very satisfied and it gave me greater strength to talk to my players because I had won something.

3 • How did you train to become a coach?

My career as a player was honourable but not brilliant. When I was 25 years old I took a coaching course because I wanted to understand more about what was happening in the game. I was interested in tactics and what coaches did, and I was already interested in becoming a coach before I retired from playing. I thought I would start out at youth level, which I did. But I didn’t stay there too long.

4 • What is the difference between coaching at club level and working with a national team?

The difference is huge. As a club coach, you start in the summer and then you work on a daily basis, trying to convey your feelings and your ideas to your players – things which come from your heart and things which come from your brain. You build your team, technically and tactically, every day. You can check your players’ progress in matches week after week. With the national team, we only meet once in a while, and although you are a coach, your main task is the selection of the players – you have to recruit the best, but you have very little time to communicate your thoughts to your players, so the work becomes extremely difficult.



**MARCELLO LIPPI
WITH THE WORLD CUP.**



**THE COACH AND
HIS MIDFIELD LEADER –
ANDREA PIRLO.**

You have to vary the tactics depending on the players that are available to you – you have to do that because you have to take advantage of the characteristics of the players you have chosen. So a shortage of time and trying to make the best use of the players available is the challenge.

5 • What are the priorities for a coach in professional football?

The main priorities for a top-level coach, especially for someone at a club, are the following: firstly, the players need to have the feeling that their coach is a guide, someone who is competent and with the necessary experience and personality that it takes to be at the helm of a group of men. This means dealing with top players who have their own views, and at club level, who come from different countries and cultures. So the players must feel that they have a sure and strong guide. It doesn't matter if they view the coach as a nice

man; as long as he has a strong personality and the competence for the job, he will have their respect.

6 • Who were the biggest influences on your coaching career?

This is a question which I am happy to answer because there was one person in particular who had a great influence on me. He was my first A-league coach and he was very well-known in Italy – but sadly he is no longer with us. His name was Fulvio Bernardini. He was a great player and subsequently a great coach. He also became Italy's national coach in the 70s, and I was very impressed with his intelligence, his wisdom, and his educational background. He had a degree in business and economics, and he had one major quality in my view: his personality. All too often, however, coaches who have a strong personality end up by neglecting the personality of their players, or are overbearing. He didn't do that, and

he was my first point of reference. I didn't expect to become like him, but he was definitely the first example that I followed.

7 • During the World Cup you were quite adaptable in terms of tactics and selection. What were the reasons for this?

My first reflection about the World Cup and the tactics goes back to what I said about taking advantage of the talents and best qualities that you have in your team. You must not choose players who are a photocopy of each other – you must pick the best in the country. If you have variety in the selection, you may have to vary the system of play. Secondly, as you know, matches start in one way, they then evolve in a different way, and often they finish in a totally different way. So the important thing therefore is to try to capture the moments when you see the possibility of scor-



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**MARCELLO LIPPI
WITH THE PRESIDENTS AND
CEOs OF FIFA AND UEFA
AT THE COACHES' SYMPOSIUM
IN BERLIN.**

ing, of winning the game. You try to deploy a player (or players) that can exploit a weakness in your opponent, something you have identified. You may have to change the approach or the system rather quickly. But in Italy we have a very good tactical culture and our players are well trained in various systems and they are prepared to adapt.

8 • Specifically, what was your reason for the change you made in the second half of the World Cup final when you moved Andrea Pirlo forward and brought Daniele De Rossi into the midfield?

We were suffering in the second half against France. We had been very successful in the first half, but in the second period we started to pay the price for our 120 minutes against Germany in the semi-final – there was a huge energy expenditure in that game both physically and psychologically. So, I thought I would try to maintain our creative quality by moving Pirlo forward,

(he can play other roles), and add a fresh player like De Rossi to the midfield. I therefore was able to preserve the technical quality of Pirlo, and with our other attacking players, to maintain an offensive approach.

9 • From a coach's perspective, what does it take to win either the UEFA Champions League or the World Cup?

The most important thing is to have the ability to involve top-level players. There is very little a coach can do if he can't count on top players – you need quality players to produce results. So it is about recruitment, selection and the ability to gel those players into an effective team. The more stars you have in the team, the more you need to work hard to bring the group together, to make the team compact and in total harmony. You have to make each player feel equally useful, but not indispensable. Every time I start working with a team, the first thing I emphasise is that a team is made up

of people who respect each other and who place themselves at each other's service. If nobody acts like a prima donna, then the group is destined to achieve great results. By contrast, if all the players cater to their own self interest, it is going to be rather difficult; you will have some spectacular moments of football, but in the end the teams which have a 'we' mentality will prevail.

10 • How did you deal with the motivation of the players at the World Cup, particularly with the difficulties in Italy at the time?

Well, first of all I have to say something. I always use this metaphor to define what happened in Italian football: if you have a nice piece of cheese in the cellar and a small piece goes bad, you don't throw out the whole cheese – you get rid of the bad bit and keep the rest. So although there were problems in Italian football, it didn't mean that everything was bad. This group of players was very much affected by what happened, and they felt they had a mission to show to the whole world that Italian football was not what people read in the papers. The technical and moral values of Italian football had to be upheld and that was the attitude when we set about our task. Our squad began with a great deal of tension and therefore difficulty, but we knew that in time all this would turn to our advantage, and that is what happened. We turned a negative situation into positive energy.

11 • What is your view of the UEFA Champions League?

The UEFA Champions League is something which is part of me. I had the good fortune of winning the UEFA Champions League, but a lot of people forget that I was lucky to reach the final four times. Only Miguel Muñoz of Real



EMPIRIS

Lippi also won the Champion Clubs' Cup with Juventus in 1996.

**THE WORLD CHAMPION
WITH EUROPEAN COLLEAGUES
AT THE UEFA ELITE
CLUB COACHES' FORUM
IN GENEVA.**



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Madrid also did that. Getting to four finals was fantastic but winning only one was very difficult for me to accept. The magic, the music, the organisation of the UEFA Champions League, it is the most wonderful thing that can happen to a coach in his career, and it is equally special for the teams that participate. So please don't change anything – leave it the way it is.

12 • Is there something in the modern game that annoys you?

Not the referees because they are like people in all walks of life – you get the good and the bad. But, as I said earlier, a coach should try to tap into the quali-

ties of his players. I don't think the coach should adapt the player to his system, but instead he should adapt and work over the months to use the qualities of the players. When I see a coach who is stubborn and insists on playing in a certain way, and everyone realises that these players are not meant to play that way, then that annoys me. A coach has to be flexible, be very receptive. We have to understand that we are constantly experiencing tactical evolution. This even happens in youth football and young players are emerging technically and tactically prepared for the modern game. I therefore can't stand it when coaches

behave in an obstinate way and want to impose their style of football on the players.

13 • What happens to Marcello Lippi now?

I have no intention whatsoever of retiring. Let me just say that even before the World Cup I had informed my federation that whatever the outcome of the World Cup I would leave. I want to stress this because people might think that I suddenly left triumphantly, just because we had won. My mission was to be concluded, irrespective of the outcome. Now my plan is to rest for a few months and then I will definitely go back to my job, which is to be a coach. I was asked to be the supervisor of our national teams but that is not what I want to do. I would like to have a direct relationship with a new team. I would like to try to convey to them, as I said before, what comes from the heart and what comes from the brain.

14 • Finally, is football, from a technical and coaching view point, in good health?

Technically speaking yes. I think football is in good condition because there are some excellent players around. There are many players who have evolved greatly from a tactical point of view, and consequently the coaches have the opportunity to work in any way they want. Unfortunately, however, the activity today is so intense, the calendar so crowded, that when top-notch players get to the final stages of competitions, especially with their national teams, they are tired and lack the necessary energy. If there is too much competition, star players can't be expected to perform to their capacity because they are exhausted. But technically and tactically, the game is certainly in good condition.