

Cover Boy: Balotelli on Soccer and Racism in TIME Magazine

Natasha Lardera (November 07, 2012)



He is only 22, yet he is on the cover of one of the most prestigious magazines in the world. Mario Balotelli, also known as Super Mario, the Manchester City striker, is an irresistible character who had a lot of Italian friends growing up, when he wasn't famous, but once his soccer career took off racism started.

"The Meaning of Mario, What the Phenomenon of Mario Balotelli Says about Football, Race and European Identity." Accompanying the above mentioned title of the article by Catherine Mayer and Stephan Faris on the cover of the International edition of TIME Magazine (to be released on November 12th) there is a picture of the profile of C. His eyes are staring at something or someone



not too far away, they are fierce yet some may mistake that for arrogance. His mohawk is perfectly styled and his left ear is graced by a pretty big diamond stud. If the word football were not mentioned in the title it would be hard to say who this guy is... he could be anybody...an actor, a fashion designer, or even a revolutionary.

He is only 22, yet he is on the cover of one of the most prestigious magazines in the world. Before him another SuperMario (Mario Monti) graced the cover of TIME ("Can This Man Save Europe?") and before him, above the title "The Man Behind the World's Most Dangerous Economy" there was a picture of a smiling Silvio Berlusconi. Not everybody ends on the cover, if you do, it means you are someone who matters.

Mario Balotelli was born Born Mario Barwuah (12 August 1990) in Palermo to Christian Ghanaian parents (Thomas and Rose Barwuah). "The family moved to Bagnolo Mella in the province of Brescia shortly after he was born. As an infant, he had life-threatening complications with his intestines which led to a series of operations, although his condition had improved by 1992. Mario's health problems and the family's cramped living conditions meant the Barwuahs decided to ask for the help of social services who recommended that he be fostered. In 1993, the Barwuah family agreed to entrust the three-year-old boy to an Italian foster family, the Balotellis. At first, he stayed at the Balotellis during the weekdays, and returned to his biological parents on weekends, but after a while it was arranged for him to be permanently fostered by the Balotellis. His foster parents Francesco and Silvia Balotelli, who have Italian Jewish heritage, lived in a large house in the affluent village of Concesio, Brescia. When Mario Balotelli became famous, his biological parents asked for his return. He later accused them of "glory hunting," stating that they only wanted him back because of the prominence he had gained. According to Law 91 of 5 February 1992, Balotelli had to wait until his 18th birthday to request Italian citizenship, as the Balotellis had not adopted him. Balotelli officially gained citizenship in Concesio on 13 August 2008. After the ceremony he released the following statement: "I am Italian, I feel Italian, I will forever play with the Italian National Team." (Wikipedia)

The issue of citizenship for children of foreign parents born and raised in Italy (second generation immigrants) is at heart of many Italians and law makers (on November 15, 2011 Giorgio Napolitano, President of the Republic of Italy, addressing a delegation of the new citizens at Quirinale, the Presidential Palace, called for reforms of the citizenship law to grant citizenship to children born in Italy of immigrant parents) and Mario Balotelli's case is exemplary. "He represents a new generation of young Italians who can and must become champions in their field by always trying to be the best they can be," Italian-Ghanian film director Fred Kudjo Kuwornu, said in an interview regarding his documentary [18 Ius Soli](#). [2]

In the interview for TIME, Super Mario (in recognition of his talent, he has often been admiringly nicknamed Super Mario by the media - inspired by the Nintendo Super Mario video game character) remembers when he was on the receiving end of racist chants while playing for Inter Milan in Italy and he admits that he believes the problem is far worse in his homeland than in England. He is quoted saying "Racist people are few and you can do nothing against [to change] them," "You can talk, you can do what you want, but you can't do anything because they are just stupid people," "When I wasn't famous, I had a lot of friends, almost all of them Italian. The racism only started when I started to play football." "I hope I can help Italy become a modern country, just like England and the United States."

But there's more to Balotelli than just ethnicity and racism: endless memes, fights on the field, crazy accidents, or even his ridiculous wardrobe off the field.



In the interview he even mentions the shirt he wears, the one with the logo “Why always me?” a clear message to all those who never leave him alone, on the field and off.

He talks about his favorite goals: the ones against Rubin Kazan, when he played for Inter, the ones against Germany during the European Cup, the first wearing the City shirt during the Derby between Manchester City and Manchester United.

He even has something to say about President Obama. “His was an election that changed history. It made me really happy. I would definitely like to meet him.” There are four more years to do that!



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[1] <http://ftp.iitaly.org/files/balotelli1352348698jpg>

[2] <http://www.18-ius-soli.com/>