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## **We encompass the Europe of friendship, professionalism and seriousness**

According to economists, a European championship win is worth one GDP (Gross Domestic Product) percentage point for the winning country. This is a very sizeable proportion (amounting to €12 to €15 billion for Italy), which could bring a smile to an otherwise stagnant economy. However, the true advantage, or gain, lies elsewhere. And it is admittedly hard to quantify. It involves feelings, values, friendship and solidarity, heart and passion. And it involves dignity and pride, including the ability to have a great time running after a ball, as boys and girls do all over the world, in the hope of whipping the ball into the corner and scoring the winning goal. That goal sometimes makes history, although most of the time it is recorded amongst the most cherished mementoes.

### **Three snapshots at the end of a breathtaking sequence of penalty shootouts that propelled Italy to the pinnacle of European football made a lasting impression.**

The first is the endless embrace between Italy's head coach Roberto Mancini and his friend Gianluca Vialli. Two lifelong friends, two seasoned men, two champions who won Sampdoria its first and only *Scudetto* back in 1991. In that liberating embrace, they both broke into tears. Mancini appeared before the TV cameras but spoke for just a few seconds, evidently still moved as he answered questions in monosyllables. Their friendship, further strengthened by Vialli's recovery from a years-long battle with cancer, was crowned in Wembley's football temple. During this sporting challenge we came to realise that this national team is all about friendship. Friendship is an emotion that Italians value and know how to embrace. The second snapshot is that of goalkeeper Gigio Donnarumma: after saving two crucial consecutive penalties against the English masters, he left the goalpost with an almost incredulous look on his face. As if to say, "I am Gigio, I am twenty-two years old, I am a goalkeeper, I just did my job, which is to prevent the opposing team from scoring." At the award ceremony, where he was named Player of the Tournament, he was equally poised and composed. As if to say: "I was just doing my duty", like one of us would do when presented with a job well done. *This young champion, his professionalism, epitomises the youths that are the future of this country. Indeed, that's exactly what all of us need: an Italy that wins, that can sustain and overcome difficulties, that can roll up its sleeves and bring out its best. It encompasses our youths' ability to bounce back and move on to the future, pulling the country out of the doldrums.* The third snapshot portrays Leonardo Spinazzola, the left-sided midfielder who tormented opposition defenders until he ruptured his Achilles tendon during the quarter-final win over Belgium. At Wembley, we saw him jumping on his crutches alongside his teammates, and he was the first to receive his winning medal. With his strength and courage, Spinazzola is the emblem of our Country, so severely wounded and devastated by the Covid pandemic. Despite being so severely scarred (the images of army trucks transporting piled-up coffins out of the Italian town of Bergamo last year remain a lasting shock to everyone, as the cruel virus that claimed the lives of an entire generation, that of our elders, and with them our collective memory), Italy has managed to get back on its feet. Perhaps by leaping about on crutches, like the Italian national team footballer. *But we know that we will soon return to racing together, for we must win an even greater victory in the battle against our greatest enemy: COVID-19. Then we shall resume our journey towards rebuilding a stronger, more just and more beautiful Italy. And possibly, even kinder.* All of us are calling it a re-construction, alongside President Mattarella and Prime Minister Draghi, as it was termed in the aftermath of the Second World War. Indeed, the *Azzurri* possess the perfect spirit to achieve this feat: young talents and seasoned champions of integrity in terms of team discipline, resilience, courage and imagination. Today we are the Italians. No longer those "same old Italians", as we are defined on unhappy occurrences. That's why we deserve the joy of bringing the European Cup back to Rome after 53

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years. We are indeed Europe. The Europe of friendship, professionalism, reliability, with the maturity of today's twenty-year-olds. That is how the future is earned and deserved. And it does not only apply to football.

Domenico Delle Foglie