

Tour Diary Viareggio 2015

24th January 2015 – 8th February 2015

Apia Leichhardt Tigers youth squad for a record 13th year flew out of Sydney on Saturday afternoon on the 24th January with Singapore Airlines bound for Italy, to compete in the world's oldest and most prestigious annual under 19s club tournament at Viareggio which is based in the Tuscany region of northern Italy.

Whilst at the Airport the Sydney entourage met Japanese players Honda of AC Milan and Kagawa of Dortmund prior to them returning to their clubs in Europe after Japan's AFC Cup exit.



Day 1 - Sunday 25th January 2015

Our touring team arrived at Rome's Fiumicino Airport after a 13 hour flight from Singapore landing at 7:20am on Sunday 25th January.

We walked through customs seamlessly collected our baggage and made our way to the exit, where we were greeted by our bus driver and former APIA player and lifelong supporter Alfredo Scimone.

Nearing the exist we could feel it was cold but we were pleasantly surprised with the good weather – approximately 8 degrees Celsius with forecast later in the day of 12 degrees Celsius and sunshine.

Our first stop in Rome was the Colosseum, which is in the centre of Rome, the touring group were advised, as we had limited time, that they only had time for photos.

The Colosseum is one of the greatest works of Roman architecture and Roman engineering and is currently under renovation.

Then it was off to Rome's world-wide famous Trevi fountain. Like the colosseum it was under renovation.

A traditional legend holds that if visitors throw a coin into the fountain, they are ensured a return to Rome. Approximately 3000 Euros are thrown into the fountain each day.

Whilst at the Trevi fountain we took the opportunity to have a quick lunch and sample the magnificent local bread rolls and smallgoods such as prosciutto, parmigiano cheese and salami.

From there we made our way to the Piazza di Spagna and the Spanish Steps and the nearby Via Condotti-Rome's most expensive street. A 100sq metre unit in this magnificent street is no less than \$4 million euro.

The Via Condotti is the home of Italy's and the world's most magnificent fashion houses and retail brands. They include Gucci, Bvlgari, Prada, Johnny Choo, Versace, Max & Co, Salvatore Ferragamo, Louis Vitton, Fendi and the Ferrari shop.

Nearing 12 noon and as is the case every Sunday the Pope makes an appearance in St Peters Square, when in residence The Pope addresses an estimated 75,000 crowd in the vast St Peters Square. But before proceeding towards the Vatican our touring group made a lightning visit to Rome's Ferrari shop.

Upon arrival at St Peters square we were shocked at the size and magnitude of the crowd. Not to mention the thousands of various groups of all nationalities from all over the world that converge on Rome every Sunday of the year.

At 2pm we made our way to visit the Stadio Olimpico in Rome, unfortunately for a third consecutive year this touring group did not have the opportunity to attend a Serie A match at Rome's Mega Olympic Stadium, as on this weekend the weekly Serie A match was played on the Saturday night.

After 48 hours since the group had slept in a proper bed, tour management decided to depart from Rome at approx. 3pm, stopping twice for refreshments and dinner and arrive in Viareggio at approximately 8pm.

The entire group quickly showered, unpacked and settled into their rooms, and were all soon fast asleep, after our long flight and hectic first day tour schedule in Rome.

11pm and tour management now struggling to stay up is currently preparing trials games and training schedules, as well as finalising the playing groups playing and training kits.



DAY 2 - MONDAY 26th JANUARY 2015

The playing group woke at 8.30am for breakfast and were informed it was now down to business. No sightseeing, our focus from here in on would be totally football and preparation for the tournament next week.

By 10am the playing group left the Hotel for a short 10 minute bus ride to the Campo Aviazione for our first training session as a group and the opportunity for all the bulk of the Sydney squad to meet and bond with their interstate team mates.

After a light stretch and warm up the players did a 30 minute intense fitness session followed by an 11v11 match. Coaches Rod Williams, Lince Romeo & Daniel Cummins took this opportunity to assess the players and work on shape and structure in preparation for the upcoming games.

It was a very intense training match with all players totally focused and committed.

Then it was back to our hotel for lunch and a well-earned rest in our rooms. By mid-afternoon the group ventured down to the beach promenade for a brisk stretch, recovery and bonding session.

Tournament organisers Guglermo Funel and Roberto Taponecco visited during this time to assist with the finalisation and planning of the playing schedule prior to next week's tournament and also surprised us with the official tournament trophy which was made of solid marble and brass.

The players at this stage were very very tired and extremely exhausted and after dinner and by 9.30pm the entire group was sound asleep.

A little jet lag, change in weather and the gruelling flight had of course finally taken its toll.

The players were listening to team management's strong advice – on this tour you need to conserve energy, no junk food, eat well, wear proper clothing to protect you from catching a virus or the flu and take every single opportunity to relax and utilize down time and of course go to bed early.

It appeared that all these words of wisdom and strong advice was being followed by the players.





DAY 3 - TUESDAY 27th JANUARY 2015

The playing group was up early as usual by 8.30am for breakfast looking fresh and well rested.

At 10am the Captains Blake Tuxford and Ben McCarron lead the team for a walk down the beach promenade for a brisk stretch, recovery and bonding session then back into their rooms in time to watch Australia vs UAE in the AFC Cup semi-final.

After an early lunch the team made its way to today's first friendly game at 3pm in Romangano, which is approximately a 30 minute drive from Viareggio. The friendly game setup today is a cup style tournament of 3 teams playing two games for 45 minutes. (See match report below)

APIA Leichhardt Tigers 2 vs Romangano 0

Line up (4-5-1) Tuxford, Millgate, Stenta, Bentley, Hirsch, Rydzewski, Cox, Karkalas, Colaianni, Cortese, Rinaldi

Subs: Browning, Grasso, Psaros, Moreira

This match was played near stone capped mountains on a synthetic pitch. Romangano, a regional team was outplayed by this energetic APIA team. An early goal from Julian Rinaldi with a lovely chip to beat the keeper from just inside the box put them in cruise control. Shortly after APIA went two nil up when Browning with a low hard cross from the left towards the penalty spot was smashed into the net by Ruszewski.

APIA Leichhardt Tigers 2 vs Massa 0

APIA Line up (4-5-1)

Ephram, McCarron, Adattini, Damatopoulos, Mari, Orchard, Moreira, Agostino, Cortese, Colandrea, Barnett

Subs: Psaros, Grasso, Browning, Bentley

Injured / Rested: Ryan Blumberg, Mat Cook, Antonio Tassone

Massa a national division 8 team, looked to be a much stronger opposition, and again the energetic APIA players looked the better side early on. APIA took the lead one nil when Mari scored beating the keeper at the near post after a driven free kick from the right by McCarron.

The only chance Massa had to score was cleared off the line by Damatopoulos, the back line of McCarron, Adattini, Damatopoulos, Mari looks really promising.

With 10 minutes to go, APIA against the run of play scored their second when Barnett from 30 yards shot to chip the keeper who was way off his line. The ball floated over his head and into the empty net. Young Barnett looks in fine form, dangerous all game with his attacking flair.

The match then started to get heated in the last minutes as Massa didn't appreciate being outplayed by a physically strong APIA team. Match ended 2 nil and APIA was the deserved winners.

Coaches Cummins, Williams and Romeo were so impressed with the performance today, mentioned that every player stepped up a notch, which is exactly what they wanted to see in preparation for the upcoming fixtures.

It was then back to Viareggio for dinner and some down time.

The players were all keen, every single one of them, to go to bed early, to prepare properly for the next day's gruelling schedule.



DAY 4 - WEDNESDAY 28th JANUARY 2015

The playing group was up early as usual by 8.00am for breakfast and in high spirits. It's amazing what a win does for team culture.

This touring team I must say are very well behaved and are all really nice boys, there has been no trouble what so ever, all of them have settled in extremely well and there is a genuine bond within the group.

At 10am the Captains Blake Tuxford and Ben McCarron will lead the team for a walk down the beach promenade for a brisk stretch, recovery and bonding session then back to prepare for their next friendly at 3pm in Monsummano, which is approximately a 50 minute drive from Viareggio.

Today's opponent is Monsummano Calcio an Eccellenza regional team in division 5 which is the top semi pro level in Italy, one league under Serie D.

APIA Leichhardt Tigers 1 vs Monsummano Calcio 2

Line up (4-2-3-1)

Tuxford, Bentley, Grasso, Damatopoulos, Browning, Rydzewski, Moreira, Orchard, Cortese, Colandrea, Rinaldi

Subs: Ephram, Barnett, Stenta, Psaros, Moreira, McCarron, Mari, Colaianni, Blumberg, Agostino

This match was played near snow capped mountains on a grass pitch, Monsummano Calcio fighting relegation in their competition was an ideal match for this young APIA team, they were experienced and physical.

The match started and both teams struggled to find rhythm as the grass pitch was bumpy.

25 minutes into the match, Monsummano had the best opportunity to score when their centre midfielder played a through ball to the strike and with a turn of pace burst between Grasso and Damatopoulos to go one on one with Tuxford however Browning closed the gap and cleared the ball to safety.

Then on the counter attack APIA nearly scored when a cross from Colaianni into the box found Rinaldi, Rinaldi's snap shot was saved at point blank by their keeper however it wouldn't have counted in any case as the referee awarded a free kick for offside.

On the 30th minute mark, APIA scored a Stoke City Rory Delap styled goal – Long throw into the box by damo which was missed by everyone only for Rinaldi to head into the net from the penalty spot past a shocked Monsummano keeper.

1-1 minutes later. Monsummano striker found space from 30 yards smashed his shot toward goal Tuxford pushed it onto the cross bar but the ball rebounded directly to their striker and he easily slot it past Tuxford.

The second half in fairness started as a real scrap, long balls from both team and then heavy challenges on the second ball. There were player diving, screaming with pushing and shoving however the referee did a reasonable job controlling the match.

After 15 minutes in the second half the Monsummano coach put the big guns on, they were older and slower but experienced and technically good.

Those players certainly made a difference, again a long ball forward into the box between Grasso and Blumberg, the striker ran onto the pass, went one on one with Tuxford and made no mistake scoring giving them a 2-1 lead.

The Monsummano coach was desperate for the game to be finished around the 40 minute mark calling for full time, he wanted a win in front of the home team's 50 odd spectators.

The match ended a 2-1 loss for APIA but there were some good performance out there today Blumberg, Damatopoulos, Rinaldi and Moreira in particular.



DAY 5 - THURSDAY 29th JANUARY 2015

The playing group was up early as usual by 7.00am for breakfast, today's recovery session was cancelled due to wet weather, we have been fortunate so far with the weather and it hasn't rained at all since being here.

The group then had the opportunity to walk the promenade for market day where stalls filled the street that spans approximately 5 km, however many failed to open due to the rain.

After an early lunch the team made its way to today's friendly game at 3pm in Montecatini, which is approximately a 60 minute drive from Viareggio

We arrived to a fantastic stadium it was a real professional setup, unfortunately the grass pitch was waterlogged which received heavy rain over the last three days. I'm actually surprised the match went ahead. This stadium will host a game for the Viareggio cup next week, however I highly doubt it will happen now after the players chopped it up.

APIA Leichhardt Tigers 0 vs U.C.D Cuoioielli 4

Line Up: 4-2-3-1

Ephraim, Millgate, Stenta, Adattini, Hirsch, Karkalas, Cox, Psarros, Tassone, Colaianni, Barnett

Subs: Mari, Tuxford, Agostino, McCarron, Blumberg, Rydzewski, Browning, Orchard, Cook

Rested: Bentley, Grasso, Moreira, Rinaldi, Colandrea, Damatopoulos, Cortese

Cuoioielli went one nil up after 17 minutes via an own goal by Stenta, the Cuoioielli winger crossed from the byline into the middle of the 6 yard box, the scuffed clearance went past Ephraim into the bottom corner.

2 nil Cuoioielli. A long floated diagonal free kick into the box far post, the striker headed back towards goal to Ephraim's far post and into the net.

Cuoioielli went three nil up, and in cruise control. A right sided cross from the edge of the box into the centre found the unmarked attacking midfielder a classy number 10 that placed his shot into the net.

At half time the Cuoioielli coach changed the entire team with his reserves. APIA also made a few changes and the team did really well not giving them an opportunity to score.

Tough opponents in truth, most players are nearly pros and this team is pushing for promotion into Serie d.

Missed penalty for Cuoioielli in the 70th minute, Blumberg with a last ditched sliding tackle unluckily caught the striker just before pulling the trigger. It was a soft decision by the referee. The striker then stepped up only to place his shot low wide of the post.

With just minutes to go, Cuoioielli wrapped up the game and went four nil ahead when another right sided low cross to the far post found their striker unmarked, the shot was fumbled by Ephraim and into the net.

It was then on the bus back to Viareggio for a shower, dinner, rest and recovery.

There was also a special treat for dessert, a rich chocolate cake to celebrate Stephan Adattini and Tony Raciti's birthday.



DAY 6 - FRIDAY 30th JANUARY 2015

The playing group was up early as usual by 7.00am for breakfast. It was 5 degrees outside, followed by torrential rain and wind. To sum it up, it was miserable.

However the scheduled friendly game today vs Pro Duta at 9:30am was planned to go ahead, but upon arrival and inspection of the ground both coaches decided to postpone the match, it was not worth risking the players wellbeing. The ground was absolutely flooded.

Coaches Daniel Cummins and Lince Romeo desperate for more time with the team decided to have a 45 minute shape and structure technical session instead as preparation for next week's cup match vs Palermo. It was then back to the hotel for rest and recovery before lunch.

After lunch the players went for a brisk walk and light jog through the park on a 7km round trip to ease the tight muscles and slight strains from the heavy pitches over the last three days. Coaches Cummins and Romeo have been very impressed with the professionalism shown from the players in preparing for next week's cup games.

Competition for places is very tight and the players are preparing well to ensure they're up for the challenges ahead.

After dinner the coaches Cummins and Romeo held a team meeting to discuss the importance of preparation, team tactics and individual roles and responsibilities required at the highest level.



DAY 7 - SATURDAY 31th JANUARY 2015

The playing group was up early for 7am breakfast. After working tirelessly overnight tour management with the help of the tournament organisers found a ground to play Pro Duta, yesterday's postponed fixture. It was on a lovely synthetic surface the Stadio Spotivo, about 15 minutes from Viareggio.

Getting a ground to hire on the weekend is extremely difficult in Italy. So we are very grateful to play a team competing in the tournament and another opportunity for the coaches to assess the players prior to next week's cup game

The Indonesians, after speaking with the club management, have a 2 year plan for this team's development with many 17 year olds playing this year they have set low expectations, however they expect to be very competitive for the 2016 edition. We wish them well.

The APIA player's not taking part in today's game prior kick-off at 9:45am had a 45 minute technical training session with coach Romeo.

APIA Leichhardt Tigers 1 vs Pro Duta (Indonesia) 3

Line Up: 4-2-3-1

Tuxford, Bentley, Grasso, Blumberg, Millgate, Rydzewski, Tassone, Karkalas, Colaianni, Browning, Barnett

Subs: Hirsch, Psarros, Cook, Orchard, Stenta

Fairly even game for the first 20 minutes both teams keeping possession, passing between defence and midfield, not really creating scoring opportunity.

After 25 minutes, Pro Duta went one nil up, free kick from 30 yards over the wall into the net to Tuxford's near post

1-1 neat combination play between Browning and Barnett, Barnett then beat his marker and slotted home near post

Wow! What a goal from Pro Duta their striker beat two Apia players from the edge of the box, Tuxford rushed out to close the strikers' angle but the forward slotted his shot into the net

The second half started like the first half, short passes between defenders and midfielders the occasional long ball went straight to the opposition where the build up would start again.

APIA did have a few half chances, Rydzewski smash a half volley from the sideline 40 yards out, the keeper saved easily, excellent technique.

3-1 Pro Duta, hopeful long ball, half cleared by the APIA defence the loose ball just inside the box, Pro Duta striker was first to react and placed the ball into the net

The match end 3-1 to Pro Duta. Our boys did ok in patches but overall we were out played. It was a massive learning curve for our players.

After lunch it was on a bus Genoa approximately a 3 hour drive from Viareggio to watch Genoa vs Fiorentina. Genoa is one of Europe's largest cities on the Mediterranean Sea and the largest seaport in Italy.

Genoa has been nicknamed the "proud one" due to its glorious past and impressive landmarks.

One of which being Genoa's and Sampdoria ultra impressive stadium "Stadio Luigi Ferraris", located right in the heart of this massive and bustling city, which has extraordinary views.

Upon arrival there was an electrifying atmosphere outside the ground.

Inside the ground words simply cannot describe the amazing scenes. Forget the football match; just sitting inside the ground is an experience in itself. Sheer chaos and pandemonium.

The supporter are passionate beyond belief, it is an experience unparalleled at any stadium in the world

It was then back to Viareggio with a stop for food, an extremely tired and exhausted group reached the hotel at 11pm and went straight to sleep.





DAY 8 - SUNDAY 1st FEBRUARY 2015

At 9:30am it was off for a morning recovery session at the local indoor heated swimming pool. In Italy you are not permitted to swim at the local pool without a cap. It is not negotiable.

The players appreciated the swimming and stretching session and then it was back to their rooms for a deserved shower and rest. All the players are in good condition physically, Physio Michael Sawan has been treating and planning recovery for each player to ensure they play and maximise performance.

After lunch the players rugged up and as a group they were off to the Carnevale Di Viareggio, with the Carnevale being less than sixty seconds from our Hotel. The Viareggio Carnival is the second biggest in the world after Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the carnival is held for five consecutive Sundays, with the opening day of the carnival last Sunday attracting massive attendance of over 150,000 spectators.

Today's crowd appeared to be close on 200,000, but we will know the actual attendance in tomorrow's paper in Italy to all public events they disclose the financial takings. No more need be said about this carnival spectacular, posted on Facebook is a massive picture gallery, which a thousand words could never describe.

The players were strictly told that straight after the carnival finished at 6pm, they must return to the Hotel. Three hours on their feet and many kilometres walking along the vast promenade was more than enough. They all duly complied, and they further listened to good advice not to eat any junk food, whilst at the carnival.

After an early dinner, shower and then a final team talk it was off to bed by 10pm in anticipation of our long awaited 1st cup match tomorrow afternoon.







AY 9 – MONDAY 2nd FEBRUARY 2015

Match day! Each player arrived for breakfast at 7:30am to the dining room table looking fresh and in the zone. We were ready, willing and able. No more jet lag, no more lack of sleep, we have acclimatized perfectly.

After breakfast we set off for a 3 hour drive to Asciano where the city hosted both clubs APIA and Palermo for a luncheon prior kick-off. Whilst at Asciano we briefly visited the city centre and had a tour of the museum.

We arrived at the stadium the Stadio Comunale in Asciano early so the players could prepare and focus for the match. The ground a grass pitch was soggy, close to unplayable.

Most of the Palermo players are born 96 or 97 they are tall, solid with an athletic type build, an Italian journalist told me prior kick off the number 10 Bentivegna is the one to watch and he certainly wasn't wrong.

APIA Leichhardt Tigers 0 vs Palermo 4

APIA Line Up 4-2-3-1

Ephraim, McCarron, Adattini, Damatopoulos, Cook, Moreira, Cox, Cortese, Agostino, Colandrea, Rinaldi

Subs: Blumberg, Hirsch, Karkalas, Mari, Millgate, Orchard, Rydzewski, Stenta, Tassone, Barnett, Tuxford, Colaianni, Grasso, Bentley, Psarros, Browning

Palermo Squad 4-3-3

Alastra, Pezzella, Accardi, Toscano, Monteleone, Grillo, Bentivegna, Pirrelllo, Ferchichi, Laguhina, Fiordilino, Marson, Dalia, Plmisano, Lucchiara, Sciho, Costantino, Grozdic, Acquadro, Punzi, Di Maggio, Patane, Edokpolriyobsa

12 minutes into the game Palermo went one nil up, Ephraim caught the Palermo striker with a late sliding attempted clearance, Bentivegna stepped up for the penalty and hammered home top corner giving Ephraim no chance.

The rest of the first half was quite solid for APIA, limiting Palermo with two decent opportunities to score but both times Ephraim saved easily. The backline of McCarron, Adattini, Damatopoulos and Cook did a fantastic job in clearing any potential dangers.

The first half ended 1-0, in fairness Palermo had majority possession and a few half chances. Apia kept it tight, frustrating the opposition players and staff. Cox was solid in midfield and Rinaldi has a bit of pepper about him that I like, being a real handful for the Palermo defenders.

The second half started and APIA must have still been in the sheds, it was a nightmare start. From the kick off Palermo went down the right hand side, Bentivegna crossed from outside of the box near the byline, their striker LaGumina scored with a diving header and put them two nil up.

It was three nil soon after and guess who? Bentivegna beat 3 Apia players outside the box then played a through ball to setup LaGumina who slotted home past Ephraim

With 10 minutes remaining it was four nil. A cross from the right side byline to the unmarked striker Grillo in the box, after a miss hit shot the ball somehow trickled into the net under Ephraim.

Match ended 4 nil to Palermo, in summary; Apia had a good first half, solid performance from the defenders, body on the line type defending. The second half I don't think they played poorly, Palermo just went into gear and to another level. Impressive performances by Adattini, Damatopoulos, Cox and Rinaldi. Coach Cummings and Romeo can take many positives out of today's game.

Each player would have learned something today from this experience that's for sure.





DAY 10 – Tuesday 3rd FEBRUARY 2015

On the way home from yesterday's game, we received a call from the tournament organisers that if it was raining tomorrow the scheduled game was going to be cancelled. The weather forecast over the next five days in Viareggio was a cold 5 degrees, rain and possible snow. The rain didn't ease so team management worked tirelessly to sure a game was going to be played and first thing this morning New York All Stars confirmed availability pending a ground.

The playing group arrived for breakfast at the usual time around 7:30am, during breakfast we received confirmation that the friendly game vs New York All Stars was going ahead as a grass ground was available only 15 minutes from Viareggio.

The playing group got ready and on the bus, kick off was scheduled for 10:30am.

APIA Leichhardt Tigers 2 vs New York All Stars 1

Surprisingly we arrived at the ground thinking the pitch was going to be a pool, it wasn't the best but suitable to play. The sand underlay absorbed the water so it wasn't a slippery side or a mud bath.

APIA Line Up 4-2-3-1

Tuxford, Bentley, Grasso, Mari, Hirsch, Colaianni, Karkalas, Tassone, Orchard, Browning, Barnett

Subs: Ephram, Stenta, Psarros, Moreira, Blumberg, Agostino, McCarron

Apia was the better side and in complete control of the game, the match was more of a practice type hit out. It was difficult for both sides to play football given the water logged pitch.

Mari scored the first for APIA when Browning crossed from the right into the box past their keeper with Mari there to tap in on the far post.

Apia's second came from Psarros who hit it laces into the bottom corner after Browning beat two players and continued down the left hand side, crossed to an unmarked Psarros and what a strike it was giving APIA a two nil lead.

New York pulled one back in the dying minutes with a penalty, and after a rally from New York and with the player parents screaming for a last minute equaliser, APIA held on to give the camp a much needed confidence booster. Interestingly yesterday, New York only lost to FC Verona one nil.

After lunch the players went for a brisk walk and light jog through the park on a 7km round trip to ease the tight muscles and slight strains from the heavy pitches over the last couple of days.

It as dinner and a team talk and later in the evening the team gathered in the dining room for a tactical awareness talk with the President of the Tuscany Soccer Association, Roberto Tapanecco. Roberto has been an ally and supporter of the club since day one. In fact in the early years of the clubs participation in the tournament, he was our assistant coach for the tournament.

It was impressive stuff and Roberto's interest in the camp, the players and support, preparation and awareness for the tournaments big match was greatly appreciated.

The players were again early to bed and their spirits lifted. They are ready to make amends.





DAY 11 – Wednesday 4th FEBRUARY 2015

Match day 2 today vs PSV Eindhoven! The players arrived for breakfast at 7:30am to the dining room table all excited. The opportunity for the players is here, it's now their time to shine.

After breakfast the Captains Blake Tuxford and Ben McCarron led the team for a walk down the beach promenade for a stretch and an opportunity to mentally preparing for the game.

Today's game is at Lido Di Camaio approximately 15 minutes from Viareggio played at the Stadio Beneli which is a synthetic pitch. The stadium is overlooking snow-capped mountains in the backdrop.

APIA Leichhardt Tigers 0 vs PSV Eindhoven 4

APIA Line Up 4-2-3-1

Tuxford, McCarron, Adattini, Damatopoulos, Cook, Moreira, Cox, Cortese, Rydzewski, Colandrea, Rinaldi

Subs: Blumberg, Hirsch, Karkalas, Mari, Millgate, Orchard, Agostino, Stenta, Tassone, Barnett, Tuxford, Colaianni, Grasso, Bentley, Psarros, Browning

PSV went one nil up after 3 minutes, a corner was not cleared by the APIA defence, with a scramble in the box to get the ball, it fell unluckily to Hiwat from PSV who smashed it past Tuxford. **ABSOLUTE NIGHTMARE START!**

APIA did have a chance to score via a free kick from 40 yards via Colandrea, however his shot hit the wall and deflected easily for the keeper.

Just as I was about to write APIA are playing well, In the 17th minute, PSV hit APIA with a quick counter attack, the winger and striker played two one two's, the winger continued into the box and setup the unmarked PSV striker Paal that scored easily past Tuxford.

PSV three nil up after 23 minutes, A long hopeful ball forward, miscommunication between the APIA central defenders, Van Der Moot was first to react and ran onto the ball to slot past Tuxford. Shocking from APIA.

In the 28th minute it was four nil, long ball to from the centre back to their right winger he crossed first time far post, an unmarked Van Der Moot was there to side foot into the net.

APIA wounded just managed to get into the sheds for half time in order to regroup.

The players returned and what a difference Cummins' team talk had, they played so well. Increase the intensity, closed them down, had shape and structure. The entire second half I can't recall PSV having any real clear cut chances.

The players actually realised what was required to compete against full time pros, its 10x more than what is needed in Australia. The boys should be proud of their performance in the second half.

Cummins made all the required substitutes today – Barnett on, Rydzewski off 35th minute, Mari on, Damatopoulos off 40th minute, Tassone on, Moreira off 70th minute, Karkalas on Cortese off 75th minute, Hirsch on Cook off 85th minute.

Coach Cummins was extremely proud of the players today; the determination shown and not concede for over 70 minutes against top notch pros was amazing. They definitely will return home better players from this experience.

After the game the touring group stopped off at Forte Dei Marmi, one, if not Italy's and Europe's most magnificent suburban districts, for a 20 minute visit. It is very difficult to give a description, as it is unlike any other suburb in the world.

The streets, shops, villas and units are all immaculate and maintained beyond belief, to a standard of opulence, cleanliness and mind boggling fastidious detail about the whole town.

No graffiti, no cigarette butts, no rubbish, nothing vandalised, nothing broken, everything neat, immaculate, simply stunning everywhere you looked. Incredibly out of this world appearance, beyond belief.

It was then back to the hotel for Dinner, relaxation, a team talk and then to bed.





DAY 12 – Thursday 5th FEBRUARY 2015

We awoke to heavy rain and a very cold 5 degrees. The playing group was up early as usual by 7.30am for breakfast.

After breakfast and a short walk down the beach promenade, the playing group returned for lunch, packed their bags, and rested for a short 1 hour period before departing for the game.

Today's game is against Camaiore who are currently mid table in the Serie D. Initially the match was scheduled to be played on grass however after heavy rain the night before; we played on their artificial training ground overlooking a picturesque Mountain View 5 minutes away.

APIA 0 vs Camaiore FC 3

Line Up 4-2-3-1

Ephraim, Grasso, Stenta, Blumberg, Hirsch, Colaianni, Tassone, Orchard, Browning, Psarros, Agostino

Subs: Tuxford, Moreira, Karkalas, Millgate, Rydzewski, Rinaldi

Observing the Camaiore warm up you could see these guys many in their late 20's, were a cut above the sides previously played on tour, a fantastic opportunity for the APIA players to learn and develop as a footballer.

The opening 15 minutes was played with intensity, although dominated by Camaiore, the APIA players didn't give them an inch of space or time for their opponents to find rhythm.

The score finished three nil to Camaiore, the goals that they scored all in the first half were absolute quality.

The first was a screamer from 40 yards going top corner, the second was a freekick from 20 yards, over the wall and into the top corner far post. The third was three one two's starting from half way, the midfielder went one on one with Ephraim and placed it into the net.

Camaiore were frankly in training mode, their quality was simply too good for our young kids.

APIA again didn't manage not to concede in the second half with Browning and Psarros the standouts for APIA

On a sad note a Camaiore players tore is ACL which was hard to see by both sets of players, on the substitution they actually used two APIA players which was a nice gesture to embrace the good relationship between the clubs. The APIA players when asked what it was like to play in their team replied "Amazing, they are so good, their technical ability is unbelievable"

Upon leaving the ground and much to the amusement of the boys, our bus driver struggled to fit the bus through the narrow passage it took him about 30 minutes and needed to make a 60 point turn. I think the boys learned every swear word in Italian. They are all in high spirits

It was then hotel for a 7pm dinner, shower and a final team talk and it was off to bed by 10pm in anticipation of the AC Milan match tomorrow afternoon. Amazing no injuries or sickness, every player wants to play in tomorrow's match, which is brilliant to see.



DAY 13 – Friday 6th FEBRUARY 2015

An early start for the day as the team was required to be at breakfast no later than 8am.

Today we would be our third and final group match against current Primavera Italian and Viareggio champions AC Milan.

After breakfast and a short walk down the beach promenade, the playing group returned for lunch, packed their bags, and rested for a short 1 hour period before departing for the game.

After an early lunch and final team talk in the hotel, it was off to our final match of the tournament, in all 3 cup matches and eight trial matches/training matches.

APIA Leichhardt Tigers vs. AC Milan (1-1)

APIA Line Up 4-2-3-1

Tuxford, McCarron, Adattini, Damatopoulos, Cook, Mari, Cox, Cortese, Rydzewski, Colandrea, Barnett

Subs: Blumberg, Hirsch, Karkalas, Mari, Millgate, Orchard, Agostino, Stenta, Tassone, Barnett, Tuxford, Colaanni, Grasso, Bentley, Psarros, Browning, Moreira, Rinaldi

In front of a strong capacity crowd, the locals came out in force and huge with numbers to witness a flurry of goals and a goal feast for AC Milan, of course. The APIA team looked pumped, prepared, and up for the challenge.

Right from the kick-off you could see that APIA was up for it, AC Milan didn't have any clear chances to score. APIA was under enormous pressure on every attack however the boys simply were unbeatable. They closed space, they squeezed, kept shape and structure, they were strong on the ball, valued possession, played as a united team and fought for each other.

AC Milan in the first half looked to create 2 v 1 scenarios out wide, trying to expose our full backs. Mari on the left and McCarron on the right did an amazing job.

In the 22nd APIA took the lead, Adattini with a free kick from half way, float long ball into the box. The Milan keeper was off his line and misjudged the clearance, the ball looped over his head into the net. The entire team celebrated jubilantly.

APIA did everything in their power to hold on and not concede. Cox, Cooke and Barnett were possessed, they didn't stop running all game.

The second half started and AC Milan came out firing, I heard their coach blow his players up at half time. I asked someone what he said "If you don't want to be here get on the bus now and if you don't win you should be ashamed of yourself"

Again, wave after wave of attacks by AC Milan, APIA kept to their job minimising any potential threats from Milan to score.

Unfortunately APIA could only hold out for 11 minutes in the second half, clumsy challenge on the Milan right winger resulted in a free kick. The free kick was delivered just off the penalty spot and was headed in by Rondanini past a helpless Tuxford. The APIA players were gutted.

The rest of the half was much the same for Milan, APIA struggling to get out of their own half.

AC Milan now looking for a goal piled on the pressure, with 15 minutes to go they had 8 or 9 half chances.

Tuxford, kept APIA in the game with three point blank saves, Milan doing everything to get the ball in the box or within striking range. The last 15 minutes was unbearable to witness. Unbelievable amounts pressure.

APIA did though manage to hold on for a draw, mainly thanks to Tuxford with his second half performance, coach Cummins made a few subs also to keep the team lively. Rinaldi for Cortese (60th min), Colaianni for Rydzewski (80th Min), Agostino for Rinaldi (90th Min)

Milan not impressed at full time took their frustrations out on the officials and our players. Our boys didn't care and sang loud in front of them and the crowd.

On leaving the ground our players were asked for their autograph and jerseys by the young supporters. I think even one player got a kiss from a girl on approval from her father. God help us!

Danial Cummins after the game said,

"They prepared themselves mentally and physically"

"I had nothing to do with the result; it was all the players themselves"

"They wanted it badly, they were determined"

"I am personally proud to have had the opportunity to have been associated with the squad"

"It was the players themselves and nobody but the players themselves that delivered this memorable result for the club, which will be spoken about for many years to come"

After the game, our camp were not keen to leave the stadium, and team management, even less so.

And why would we? It was nearly 60 minutes after the match before we boarded our bus.

Congratulations phone calls were flooding in both from within and from our many supporters in Italy, not to mention from Australia – it was amazing that within minutes after the full time whistle, how many people knew about the result.

The 100 or so calls received were greatly appreciated and satisfying.

As we entered the hotel, the Smurro family (owners of the hotel) warmly embraced the players. They were also so proud.

They knew that the next day the locals would be asking them about this Australian team.

After dinner the camp although ecstatic and exuberant, was totally drained. It had been a tough and super intense 13 days.

Although the players love the sport they have chosen to play and think about it all the time and every day of their lives, you could sense deep down they were tranquil, relaxed and really pleased, for a week or so at least, there would be no more pressure, no more games, and no more stretching and training.

No more recovery sessions, they deserved their down time as they had all collectively played the best they have ever performed in their careers. Every single one of them.

Club president Tony Raciti said later that evening, "Simply unbelievable, magnificent. Tomorrow morning 62 million Italians will be shocked with this result. The Italian football world will be talking about it.

How times have changed. In our first 5 to 6 years participation in the tournament we struggled to get past the half way mark in matches. In some matches in the entire 90 minutes we never once entered into our opponents' penalty area.

Look how far Australian football has come. I am proud, we as a club are proud, I am simply lost for words. This incredible performance has enhanced Apia's participation annually on this tournament.

As for 2016 Apia will be the only club exclusively invited to participate. No other Australian club will be admitted.

It was back to our hotel and a late dinner at 8pm, in preparation for the tour's gala dinner and awards night.

As is the case every year our hotel's family owners, the Smurro family, went the extra length to ensure an immaculate dinner for our gala dinner and for the numerous local guests that we invite to our night.

These guests are all the persons who are our support staff, and much valuable assistance to our group, whilst in Italy.

After dinner we had our award presentation with the following award winners.

Man of the match vs. Palermo – Christian Cortese

Man of the match vs. PSV – Stephan Adattini

Man if the match vs AC Milan – Blake Tuxford

Most improved player on tour – Nicholas Karkalas

Youngest player of the tour – James Psarros

Player of the Tournament - Dominic Cox

Birthday Boys on Tour – Stephan Adattini 18 , Joseph Barnett 19, Nicholas Karkalas 18 , Sam Orchard 17





Day 14 – Saturday 7th February 2015

No more football. Tournament over. Last full day in Italy. Total rest day, so the touring group took the opportunity to visit two world class cities in Pisa and Florence, also whilst in Florence the group had the opportunity to visit to the Italian Football Federation headquarters Coverciano.

Our first stop was Pisa where the entire group had the opportunity to take photos and witness the incredible leaning Tower of Pisa.

The height of the tower is 55.86 metres from the ground on the low side and 56.67 meters on the high side. The width of the walls at the base is 2.44m. Its weight is estimated at 14,500 metric tons

Construction of the tower occurred in three stages across 199 years. Work on the ground floor of the white marble campanile began on August 14, 1173, during a period of military success and prosperity.

The tower has 296 or 294 steps; the seventh floor has two fewer steps on the north-facing staircase. Prior to restoration work performed between 1990 and 2001, the tower leaned at an angle of 5.5 degrees but the tower now leans at about 3.99 degrees. This means that the top of the tower is displaced horizontally 3.9 metres from where it would be if the structure were perfectly vertical.

After Pisa we visited Coverciano the Italian Football Federation headquarters, Coverciano is the primary training ground for all Italy national football teams from the U-15 age group and above including women, as well as the Italian Armed Forces' representative football team.

Facilities include four standard football pitches, multipurpose gym, swimming pool and two tennis courts. In addition, there is a library, hotel, conference hall and restaurant located on site. The Hotel Coverciano can accommodate over 100 people; the venue is thus often used by foreign touring teams and by Italian clubs at the higher levels who are based in the Florence area. Today Atalanta was here and our players took a brief opportunity to watch them train and take photos.

It was then a short drive into the city centre, Florence is the capital city of the Italian region of Tuscany. It is the most populous city in Tuscany, with approximately 380,000 inhabitants, expanding to over 1,520,000 in the metropolitan area.

The touring group had 4 hours to experience the city culture, sightsee some landmarks and sculptures. Many however went shopping at the markets renowned for its leather and jewellery.

After our tour of Pisa and Florence it was an early dinner and then the players were given the opportunity for an evening walk along the promenade for a late night supper of crepes.

The players were back in their hotel room by 11pm, a short nap and up by 3am, for our long journey back to Rome long flights haul back to Australia.

We hope you have enjoyed reading our tour diary, and we have been pleasantly surprised that our tour diary has averaged 1500 views per day

In closing our players have witnessed both from a football and cultural sense in 14 days, what would have taken 10+ years in Sydney.

Ciao.



