

younger brothers in December 1981, at the age of eight, as a boat refugee. Her mother escaped eight years later. She is presently pursuing an M.S. in behavioral science at Johns Hopkins University.

The Circolo della Briscola

by Enrico Dàvoli

In March 1991, an old friend telephoned me because his wife had left him. He said he merely wanted to talk with me, to have someone listen to him, to have a sounding board. Rejecting my “macho” offer to get drunk together, or to “get together with the boys,” or even for “just the two of us” to have dinner at a quiet restaurant, my final suggestion — a game of *briscola* — was slowly, deliberately accepted with a very happy, “Hey, Enrico, that’s not a bad idea. I used to play with my Sicilian grandmother, who told me the only way to win was to cheat! Let’s do it! But I haven’t played for 25 years!” Well, I hadn’t played for 30 years, but I recall having played the game of *briscola* with my *nonno* (grandfather) Bruno from Calabria, who always taught me that to win consistently one had to remember all the cards which had been played. We set a date; we would see whose grandparent was correct!

I learned how to play *briscola* during my family’s frequent visits to my grandparents’ very modest, cold-water flat on Hester Street in New York City’s “Little Italy.” In that tiny flat, the kitchen was the center of family activities during my youth in the 1930s and 1940s. Everyone in that large family — our grandparents had six children

and fifteen grandchildren — tried to congregate there at least monthly. I recall much laughter and shouting, lots of hot food — pasta, *ragù*, *brasciola*, *caffè espresso*, *pizzelle*, and the like, good southern Italian peasant fare — and the inevitable *briscola* card games which followed all those eating “orgies.” *Briscola* is one of several traditional Italian card games which we, the sons and daughters of immigrant families, learned from our fathers and grandfathers, part of what I like to refer to as an oral tradition. We played with decks of American poker cards, but we always removed all the eights, nines, and tens, leaving a deck with

40 cards, the number necessary for playing *briscola*. The “picture cards” — queens, jacks, and kings — were then assigned the numerical values eight, nine, and ten, respectively. I would not learn of the existence of those classical, beautifully decorated, tarot-like Italian playing cards — *carte da gioco* — until my first trip to Italy in 1970, where I witnessed a street-corner game



outside a small *caffè* in Piazza San Marco in Venezia. I have never again played *briscola* with a poker deck. Throughout Italy, the game of *briscola* is played with words more than it is with cards. Partners resort to figurative language, cunning, and enigmatic signals to dupe their opponents into believing that the hand of cards they hold is exactly the opposite of what they have been dealt. It is a battle of wits.

From that low-key, somewhat inauspicious beginning precipitated by my friend’s wife leaving him, we proceeded to play sporadically, usually once every two to four months that first year. Today, we have grown to 44 dedicated, impassioned members — *soci* — who meet to play monthly, dine informally, almost always “family-style,” at players’ homes or at one of the many



area Italian restaurants, vicariously trying to recreate the warm, exuberant ambience of Italian homes. We also enjoy an unparalleled competitive camaraderie in our quest for a trophy awarded annually. Two of our *circolo* are recognized "international champions." The *circolo* now plays a pre-Christmas mini-tournament at Washington's Holy Rosary Catholic Church against visiting professors from Italy and conducts an annual awards dinner in conjunction with the International Lodge of the Order Sons of Italy in America in January at the Tivoli restaurant. Our *soci* would, indeed, prefer to play weekly, if only our wives would consent!

Enrico Dàvoli is a pediatrician. He is also the president of the Circolo della Briscola and a very active member of the Italian community in the Washington area.

Soccer — The Beautiful Game

by Walter A. Roberts III

I have been playing soccer since I was six years old. When I graduated from DeMatha Catholic High School in 1993, though, I thought that my soccer-playing days were essentially over. I enrolled at the historically Black Morehouse College, which at that time did not have an NCAA soccer team. But it did have a club team that competed at a high level, and I joined the team my third day at school. I became team captain, manager, and assistant coach. I also spearheaded the team's efforts to become an NCAA Division 2 team. We had players from all over the globe, from the Caribbean to West Africa; that was my first experience of the international nature of the game.

After completing college and returning to Washington, D.C., from Atlanta, I began to look into the amateur game in the metropolitan area. In my efforts to find an adult team to play with, I was amazed to learn how significantly soccer had grown over the short time of four years. In just a few brief searches on the Internet and a few pick-up games on the Mall, I came across all types of contact names and leagues. I found ethnic leagues, men's amateur leagues, co-ed leagues, women's leagues, embassy leagues, recreational leagues, and I was stunned to find out that the youth leagues that I had grown up playing in had almost tripled in size.

Seeing this growth and also having been armed in my college experience with the passion not only for playing but also for coaching and teaching the game, I decided to find a career in soccer. I am presently the athletic director for DC SCORES, a non-profit organization that operates a soccer league along with creative writing workshops

in 16 elementary schools throughout the District of Columbia. With my mother, I coach the Washington soccer club, Isis, an under-12 urban girls' travel team. I also coach an under-12 boys' recreational team, comprised of children from the DC SCORES program.

I particularly enjoy coaching these youth teams because each reflects a special piece of the future of soccer in this country. Soccer is a unique sport in that it has few limits or boundaries; it is similar to a universal language, spoken by all who have ever touched their foot to a ball. It is undoubtedly the most popular sport in the world. On both of my teams, the cultural representation is a mirror

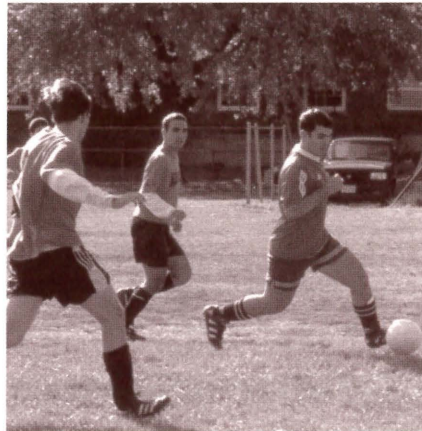


Photo: A spirited game of soccer takes place on the field at Jefferson Junior High School in Southwest D.C.

Photo by Harold Dorwin