

# The Beautiful Game

To celebrate the return of calcio to British television **James Sugrue** speaks exclusively to **Laura Esposto**, co-presenter of Channel Five's *Football Italiano*

**I**talian football is finally back on British screens thanks to Channel Five's new *Football Italiano* programme. Every week you can now watch a live match on Sunday afternoons with presenters Mark Chapman and Laura Esposto. To celebrate its return, the lovely Laura took some time out to tell us about life as a calcio presenter for both Five and Milan Channel as well as her beloved Rossoneri's chances of glory this season...

**Have you always been a football fan or did you fall in love with the game later when you started working in calcio?**

Always! I've been a fan since I was very young and I used to go to watch my local team Bologna when I was growing up. Then I moved to Milan in 2001 and started working for Milan Channel so I got involved in football more and more. Now there's only one team for me – the Rossoneri. I still like Bologna, but I can't be one of those people who have a big team and a little team to support, it's all or nothing.

*Laura Esposto left her career as a model behind to get closer to the game she loves*

**How did you become a television presenter and get your first job in football with Milan Channel?**

It was just a case of meeting someone who worked for Milan Channel at the same time as they were looking for a new girl to work on their programmes. I was working as a model then, but they asked me if I'd like to do something in television and I was keen to get some experience in something different. I started off as a reporter for a reality programme that has singers competing against each other and I'd get to speak to all the contestants. Then they asked if I'd like to be involved in football and I agreed as I thought that would be a lot better than modelling. I love football so this is my ideal job.

**What made you decide to come to England and how did the move come about?**

It was quite similar to how I first got into working in television in Italy. The people at Channel Five saw me on Milan Channel, they were looking for an Italian girl to present *Football Italiano* who could speak English and knew what they were talking about when it came to football. I thought it would be a great chance to do something new, but I guess I was in the right place at the right time.

**You must do a lot of travelling between England and Italy every week. Has it been hard to move about so much?**

No, I've travelled a lot in the past so it's not a problem for me. I worked in Los Angeles as a model for two years and I did the same thing then, so I'm used to it. I'm not afraid to move around all the time and travel to foreign countries, it's easy when you enjoy travelling like I do. It stops you getting bored and means you're always doing something new and different. It makes me feel free and I can make my own decisions about my life. I think it's much more fun than spending every day in the same office.

**Have you found the way football is shown in Britain any different from how it is done in Italy?**

Not really, I don't think so. The way we show the game on *Football Italiano* is very similar to the Italian programmes, which is great. I think the British football

shows are very similar to the Sky Calcio programmes in Italy, which have the same kind of studio style as we do.

**You seem to have a good relationship with co-presenter Mark Chapman. Do you enjoy working with him and do you listen to him on Radio 1?**

Mark's great, I really enjoy doing the show with him. He can be quite a quiet person and never gets angry. Having him with me makes it very relaxing doing the show and it's always easy to work with Mark. I have heard him on the radio, but I don't think he seems any different from when he's on *Football Italiano* or off the screen. Not for me anyway, but maybe that's because I met him and saw him on television before I heard him on the radio.

**There have been some great guests on the show already – who has been your favourite?**

I don't have any favourites, everyone we've had on the programme has been really nice. I couldn't say that any one person has been better than anybody else as everybody has brought something different to the show. Roy Hodgson was very professional, Lee Sharpe was a lot of fun to work with and then there's Gabriele Marcotti, who brings so much knowledge of the game. They are all the same in that you are always learning from them.

**We're getting to that time of year when the individual player awards are announced. Who has been your favourite to watch recently?**

Kaka! I know I'm biased because he's a Milan player, but he's one of the best I've ever seen. I also like Zlatan Ibrahimovic, he's very good. I know he plays for Inter, but I can't say only the Milan players are the best. He's an excellent player, even if he does play for the Nerazzurri.

**And finally, can Milan win the Scudetto this year?**

I have no idea. They haven't had the best start, but we can speak again in January about whether they will win Serie A, it's too early to say now. All of the teams can go on and get better during the season, like the Rossoneri often do. I expect them to improve, probably after the FIFA Club World Cup in December as that is perhaps their main focus at the moment. After that they will have their attention on the Scudetto a bit more. There are so many good teams this year though – Inter, Juventus and Roma all look very strong.

*Channel Five presenter Laura Esposto is one of the more glamorous fans you might see at an Azzurri game*



*Milan star Kaka is one of the world's greatest players, according to Laura Esposto*

## PROGRAMME INFO

### Football Italiano

Laura Esposto and Mark Chapman bring you live coverage from a top Serie A match alongside special guest pundits at 1.30pm every Sunday on Five. Commentary from Tony Jones and John Barnes

### Match highlights

Catch up with all of the action in Serie A with Five's weekly highlights package each Saturday at 11.30am

### Extended highlights

Late night coverage of one of the weekend's top matches with Tony Jones in the early hours of every Wednesday