

## Anne Frank Images Shed Light on Anti-Semitism in Italian Soccer

By JASON HOROWITZ

ROME — In the more than 70 years since the Nazis discovered Anne Frank's hiding place and then murdered her in a concentration camp, the Jewish girl's diary entries — brimming with life and optimism in the face of utter despair — have been read in classrooms, libraries and war zones around the world.

In Italy on Wednesday, her sentences resounded over the loudspeakers of soccer stadiums, a response to the shock and disgust felt by the country's political, cultural and Jewish leaders after fans of Lazio, one of Rome's teams, had left stickers in a stadium with the image of Frank wearing the colors of a crosstown rival to mock that team's supporters. Some Lazio fans have been known to engage in anti-Semitic behavior, and the association with Frank was meant as an insult.

"This has uncovered a problem that has been building up for a long time," said Adam Smulevich, author of "Presidents," a book about the Jewish roots of some Italian soccer teams and an active member of the Italian Jewish community. "But if we concentrate only on this one episode, we fail to see this is a much larger problem than just Lazio. It's an issue for all of Italian society."

Casual racism is frequent in Italian soccer — the president of the Italian Football Federation once bemoaned "banana eaters" entering Italy's leagues — and hateful chants among ultras, or extreme fans, are the norm. Still, the appearance of postcard-size stickers of Frank wearing the red-and-yellow jacket of Lazio's rival, A.S. Roma, has struck a nerve.

Mr. Smulevich and many others noted that any association with Frank was always considered an honor, not an insult, and reflected more on the ignorance of those who would use her image to cast aspersions.

"Using her image as a sign of insult and threat is, besides being inhumane, alarming for our country, which, 80 years ago was infected by the cruelty of anti-Semitism," said President Sergio Mattarella of Italy.

He was far from alone in his condemnation.

The country's prime minister, Paolo Gentiloni, called the images "unbelievable, unacceptable and not to be minimized." Antonio Tajani, the Italian president of the European Parliament, condemned the "hooligans" who used Frank's image to give offense, reminding people that the Jewish community was part of "our European Union" and that anti-Semitism had to remain "a horrible

experience of our past."

Matteo Renzi, the country's former prime minister and the leader of the Democratic Party, wrote on Facebook, "If I was the president of a soccer club, I'd go down to the field tomorrow with the Star of David instead of the sponsor."

The country's newspapers have published pictures of Anne Frank on the front pages alongside excoriating columns.

"We are all Anne Frank," read a front-page headline in Tuesday's editions of *La Repubblica*, under images of Frank smiling and wearing different Italian soccer jerseys. Wednesday's editions of *Corriere della Sera*, the country's leading newspaper, carried a soul-searching essay by one of Italy's leading authors, Alessandro Piperno, who is both Jewish and a lifelong fan of Lazio. "Please free us from the grotesque, and clean up the stadiums from this horrendous mob," he wrote.

Lazio's ultra fans have a history of anti-Semitism: In one infamous instance they cheered wildly as players hailed them with Benito Mussolini's fascist salute, and in another they displayed an enormous banner with the words "Auschwitz Is Your Homeland; the Ovens Are Your Homes" during a 2001 game against A.S. Roma. The stickers of Anne Frank are not new either, having appeared on traffic signs around the city in 2013.

As of Thursday, the Rome police, combing through video footage from the stadium, had identified 20 people — some of them as young as 13 and others already barred from the stadium for violence — who appeared to have put up the stickers, according to the news agency ANSA.

The ultra fans of Lazio usually occupy the northern curve of Olympic Stadium, which they share with their A.S. Roma rivals. (While Roma has a following among the city's Jewish community, their fans have also written, "Anne Frank roots for Lazio" on city walls.)

On Sunday, Lazio's ultras found themselves in the section on the opposite side of the stadium, the southern section where Roma fans usually sit during home games. The Lazio fans had lost rights to their beloved northern section as punishment for an incident earlier this month in which fans sang racist chants directed at a player on the opposing team who was born in Italy to Ghanaian parents.

After the game, cleaning crews found the stickers of Frank stuck to plexiglass walls, immediately prompting outrage.

Ultra fans did not see what the fuss was about. On their Facebook page, the ultras noted it was no crime to "harangue an adversary fan, accusing him of belonging to

Le immagini di Anna Frank mettono in luce l'antisemitismo nel calcio italiano



another religion,” and said they suspected that the outrage was drummed up to pose an obstacle to the team’s success on the field. “These are moves to hurt Lazio.”

From the team’s management, there were more familiar rituals of contrition.

The owner of Lazio, which is otherwise having a good season, visited a Rome synagogue and laid a wreath of flowers in the team’s blue and white colors. With “this gesture,” the owner, Claudio Lotito, said he wanted to make his position “clear and resolute,” but then he offered only to help educate young Lazio fans about “certain phenomena” and promised to sponsor an annual trip to Auschwitz for 200 of them.

Some Jewish leaders clearly found the statement lukewarm.

Rome’s chief rabbi, Riccardo Di Segni, characterized the pilgrimage as a publicity stunt. “This community is not a washing machine or a place where you can show up with a floral tribute and resolve everything,” he said. On Wednesday, the wreath was tossed into the Tiber River, and an Italian newspaper ran a recording of Mr. Lotito appearing to refer to the ceremony at the synagogue as a “show.”

Indeed, all of Italian soccer seemed to read off the same damage-control script on Wednesday, as team captains and referees held copies of Primo Levi’s Holocaust memoir, “If This Is a Man,” and listened to a reading from Frank’s diary.

But some fans seemed less than moved.

In Turin, some fans turned their backs to the field and sang the Italian national anthem. In Rome, some Roma fans kept on with their usual team chants.

And in Bologna, where Lazio played an away game, some of their ultra fans took their places in stands dedicated to a Jewish coach who had fled Italy’s racial laws before his death in Auschwitz in 1944. They chanted the Mussolini blackshirts’ slogan, “I don’t give a damn,” while Lazio players took the field wearing white T-shirts with Frank’s face above the words “No to anti-Semitism.”

The players on both sides listened respectfully as the announcer read Frank’s words: “I hear the approaching thunder that, one day, will destroy us too. I feel the suffering of millions. And yet, when I look up at the sky, I somehow feel that everything will change for the better, that this cruelty too shall end, that peace and tranquillity will return once more.”