



Dealing with a bitter relegation with Perugia was tough, as was slipping back down to Italy's Serie B. After years of continuously improving, I was forced to stand still, or even take a step back, although, if the truth be told, I did expect my agent to call and tell me that a Serie A club had made enquiries about me. Playing in Serie B offered little stimulation, but the phone remained silent, despite me now being considered by the 'experts' as 'a good striker with goals in him'. But moves back 'upstairs' came only to my teammates. At that point, I began to think they had people in their corner who were more capable than I had in mine.

All I had to occupy my mind were the lengthy training sessions till June, the ones that Gaucci had forced upon us in the wake of relegation, although we found an unlikely ally in the local newspapers, who showed a hint of solidarity towards us. It was no fun, but then, straight out of the blue, came a chink of light. Glasgow Rangers showed an interest. It was timely because I was becoming a little fed-up looking on as other young Italians moved to teams in the likes of England and Spain.

It was an interesting proposition because Rangers had just signed Rino Gattuso, and Gaucci was fuming mad. He jumped up and down and shouted loudly about developing Rino and then this foreign club comes along and takes him, so there was a protracted compensation battle going on in the background. But Rino had decided to move, and perhaps I would be next. It was perhaps the perfect scenario for both clubs. Rangers knew Perugia were unhappy with the manner in which Rino had moved to Glasgow and perhaps saw an opportunity to sign me and build in a compensation payment for Rino at the same time. This might have calmed down the warlike intentions of chairman Gaucci, who had threatened to take Rangers all the way to UEFA.

That summer, Rangers had been spending big on new players and were obviously keen to try and make an impact on the Champions League, and their signings had a distinctly Italian flavour. Roma midfielder Jonas Thern, a Swede, signed up, as did defenders Lorenzo Amoruso and Sergio Porrini from Fiorentina and Juventus.

I called Rino to ask him about Glasgow, Scotland, Rangers and even the Old Firm, and soon realised that if all the talk was true, I had a unique opportunity to play for one of the oldest and most famous clubs in the world – who, in 2005, would win their 51st national title, and earn a badge with five stars – who were adored by a set of fans capable of creating an electrifying and fantastic atmosphere. My old friend explained to me about the spirit of Scottish football, which was far removed from the excessive tactics of ours, and told me of the great players at the ambitious club: from Paul Gascoigne to the Danish ‘brother of Art’ Brian Laudrup and the Ibrox idol, Ally McCoist. He told me of wealthy chairman David Murray, who had invested heavily in a bid to make Rangers a force in European football. Up until the interest shown by Rangers, I had never even considered the possibility of playing Champions League football, but suddenly the bar was raised, and by quite a considerable height. If, however, professionally speaking, I had already decided to try my luck across the English Channel, it was my relationship with Monica that might have led to me staying in Italy. We were getting on so well, and the partnership was blossoming. We saw each other only when my schedule, and her work patterns allowed, which was usually a couple of days a week. I was worried that any transfer abroad would have an adverse effect on our relationship, especially as I realised she could be ‘the one’. My doubts, however, were swept away when Monica, courageously and without hesitation, said she would come with me to Scotland if the move went through – if that was what I wanted. Of course it was!

My agent confirmed that Rangers were definitely interested and I instructed him to get the ball rolling. I had little trouble in convincing him it was the right move (thanks to his hefty cut). I followed the instinct that had always helped me make the right decisions, even if this was the most risky to date.

That instinct had led me to wander around a lot and change teams regularly, but it had always been to the benefit of my career. I was always up for deepening my knowledge of the game and the best way to do that was with different clubs and traditions, even more so as this potential new experience would be played out abroad. I planned a trip to Glasgow to see for myself if this really was the move to open a new chapter in my life.

Cavalleri and I agreed to go to Glasgow, and he was waiting for me in the lobby of a hotel on the outskirts of Rome and, knowing me well, asked if I had remembered my passport. Less than a minute after arriving at the hotel, I was back behind the wheel and speeding towards Perugia to pick it up. I had left it in a drawer at home, and I eventually reached Fiumicino Airport just in time to take off for Glasgow. It wasn't the best start, and god knows what Perugia director Ermanno Pieroni, who was accompanying us on the journey, thought. That evening, I met Rangers coach Walter Smith for the first time during dinner in a nice Italian restaurant and I spoke English like the classic tourist, but was able to understand something of the conversations thanks to Vincenzo Morabito, another FIFA agent involved in the transaction.

Mr Smith spoke with a real passion for his team. He talked about his desire for success in Europe, the importance of winning a 10th successive championship and how he wanted to set out his team on the field. He even told me that with my record I would score more than 30 goals a season. He was so positive and I was sat facing an affable, balanced, elegant man, with a great sense of humour and someone who knew me as a player, and appreciated my qualities. We said our goodbyes and agreed to meet up in a couple of days to deliver our answer. That night, we stayed at the very elegant Cameron House Hotel, a fairytale castle in the countryside, overlooking Loch Lomond and surrounded by a beautiful golf course.

The day had turned out to be long and stressful, and it was late when we got to the hotel. At midnight, I decided to take a stroll down to the edge of the loch just as the sun was setting. I stood transfixed, staring at the beauty in front of me. Moments later, a thin and light rain had taken the place of the sun. Rather than falling, those drops literally 'sailed' in the air which, I believe, the Scottish called 'drizzle!'

While playing in Serie A, I had adorned some of the biggest and most intimidating stadiums around. I had played in the likes of the Meazza, Olimpico, Dall'Ara and San Paolo. But while all these stadiums have their history and a certain fear factor for visiting players, I had never once felt the need to buckle under the strain. On the contrary, in fact, I would say I enjoyed them, and thrived in red-hot atmospheres. When I played against Inter Milan, in the San Siro, the thought of facing players such as Paul Ince, Ivan Zamorano and Xavier Zanetti aroused in me emotions never felt before. There were more than 60,000 inside the stadium, and while the two captains, Federico Giunti and Gianluca Pagliuca, carried out the tradition of exchanging pennants and handshakes near the centre circle, I looked up and saw this massive 'human wall', easily capable of drowning out the players on the field. It was an imposing sight, and one had to bend the neck in an almost unnatural way just to see a small part of the blue sky above me. I thought to myself, 'Marco, you better get going today.' It was the reason I had wanted to become a professional footballer, to play in famous grounds in front of big crowds. And when I returned to Glasgow for further talks with Rangers, I knew it was a love affair I would be able to continue. The sight of Ibrox – a real, authentic jewel – left me open-mouthed and speechless, due mostly to its perfect mix of old world charm and modern innovation. It was an amazing arena, and I hadn't even seen it full yet. Supporters even had the privilege of being able to have their own seat in the stands with a plaque adorned by first and last name.

I told Rangers I wanted to play for them and it remained for club and legal teams to attend to the finer points of the contract. Meanwhile, I was taken along the famous old corridor to the trophy room, and it's no lie to say an entire afternoon wouldn't be enough to look round it. What an incredible room, full of cups and trophies but with history oozing from every brick. And then it was time to sign the contract, and once again I felt enormous pride in signing my name on that sheet of paper. I was a Glasgow Rangers player and boy did that sound good. I had one last look at the ground before saying my goodbyes and leaving for the airport. I knew something good was happening and I had positive vibes about the club I had just signed for.

The main Scottish newspapers had published a photograph of me and it seemed everyone recognised me. They said hello and asked politely for autographs. This was also a natural occurrence in Italy, of course, but in this case just four hours had passed since I signed my contract, and I hadn't yet pulled on the Rangers jersey. It was a great feeling and I didn't want to hide it. In fact, I didn't want to return to Italy – I wanted to get started with Rangers straight away!