

Italian teams, still a little slow (Photos by Harvey Felberbaum)

Rome Grizzlies defeat the Falcons

Italian-American Football

By WILLIAM HAVEMORE

ROME — Rome's Grizzlies, the local AIFA (Associazione Italiana di Football Americano) entry, won their fourth game, on Sunday, when they defeated the Modena Falcons, 12-6 in a contest played deep in mud and in the rain.

The contest, played under a variable of NCAA rules, featured a U.S. gridiron rarity, an extra period. Regular play ended with the score tied, 6-6, and under AIFA procedures, the referees called for a ten minute overtime. A mini-football game ensued which the Grizzlies won by 6-0, with Spencer Banks scoring on a long reverse.

Banks, one of the American Grizzlies (AIFA squads are restricted to two U.S. citizens apiece) found his winning piece of daylight at the end of some razzle-dazzle involving Quarterback Marco Volterra and Left Halfback Chicco Disegni. The whole thing looked like one of those dream plays that kids make up in street touch football, the sort of action that Bill Cosby describes in his urban life monologues.

As the extra ten minutes ran out, the Falcons, apparently undaunted by Banks' heroics, were still trying to stay in the game, and were, in fact, grinding out yards, getting close enough to the Grizzly goal line to cause a considerable amount of tension in the hearts of the locals.

Regular play had featured a touchdown apiece for the Grizzlies and the Falcons. Modena scored, early in the

game, when Also Starnzani, a fleet halfback, ran a quick eight-five yards around right end, accelerating nicely on a sloppy field, and crossing the goal line a good twenty yards ahead of the mob.

The Falcons, coached by American Jim Leonard, a former NATO team defensive tackle, showed the best offensive line this observer has seen in watching three AIFA games. Unfortunately for them, their personnel proved a little small for the Grizzlies.

The Rome aggregations, essentially self-coached, has a big, rough defensive team, featuring the ubiquitous Banks at free safety, a good, mobile 220 pound noseguard named Mingenti, and an absolutely murderous middle linebacker, Carl Mobley. But Grizzly play continues to be so subject to the mistakes of inexperience and lack of guidance as to make the Rome team capable, quite literally, of beating themselves silly.

A third quarter touchdown, by Mobley on a four yard plunge, was called back, and rightly so, when a Rome offensive lineman was caught holding. In fact, Grizzly penalties colored the entire afternoon, as the locals lost a good hundred plus yards to the officials.

However, sooner or later the talent and size of the home team was bound to count for something; and, in the event, quarterback Marco Volterra, a big strong fellow who ought to run more and throw less, put together a series of fourth quarter plays that ended with

his own five yard touchdown run.

The play itself was fascinating to this observer. It appeared to be a sort of improvised cross between a QB option and a dive off tackle. If you saw Volterra's path of progress on a diagram, you wouldn't believe it had happened that way.

Whatever it was, the run proved to be all that was needed to get the Grizzlies into overtime; and after that, the Rome team simply kept lateralizing the ball until someone got loose.

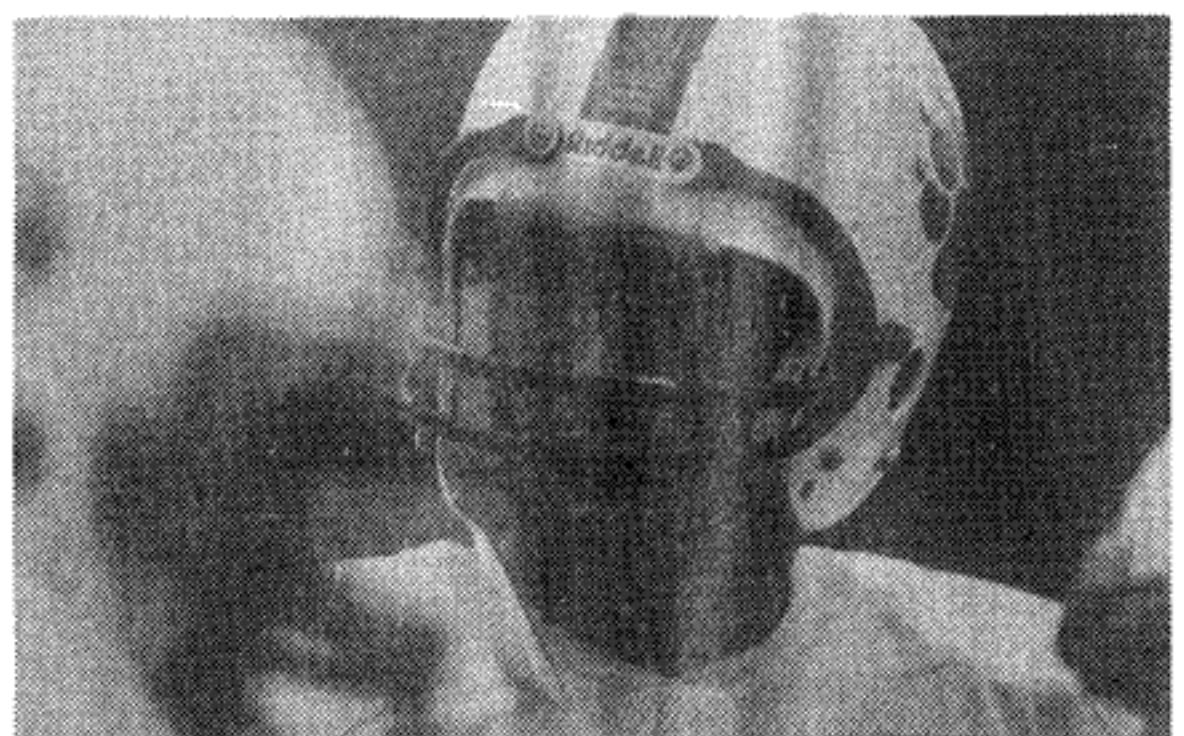
American football, as played by Italians, is an exciting, if faintly erratic game. The hitting, believe it or not, is very, very hard. There is, as might be expected, a certain lack of acquaintanceship with what used to be called "the fundamentals".

The Grizzlies, the brainchild of all-time Italian tennis great Nicola Pietrangeli, and heavily supported by the membership of Cercolo Canottieri (a local tennis and rowing club), have won four out of their first five games. As the second half of the season begins, management has decided to call a halt to this triumph of Italian individuality, and is going outside the team for guidance.

Who knows what the Grizzlies can do if they have a coach? Meantime, they're lots of fun to watch.



Fullback Carl Mosley



Grizzly QB Voltaro keeping order in an Italian huddle.