



PENGUIN INTERNATIONAL RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

Penguin Coaching Academy Tour to Italy 9 to 13 April 2019

Article by Neil Young, Richard Young and Craig Brown

Introduction

Through the offices of Penguin Membership Secretary Vincent Bramhall and a chance introduction through the Penguinini (the Italian Penguin members) to Luigi Grande a link was established to the Penguin Coaching Academy. Luigi then introduced the Penguins to Andrea Nicotra (from Sicily) from the Italian Rugby Federation Committee. Penguin Secretary Graeme Inglis then met with Andrea to discuss how the Penguins could help support rugby in Italy, especially at the grass roots level. Andrea was very enthusiastic about the Penguin Coaching Academy and in particular he saw value in assisting the development of rugby within the Italian Prison system, which was a project he had been working on for a number of years.

Andrea suggested a playing trip with the ideal scenario of the King Penguin playing a prison team and running coaching sessions but it was decided the best option was for the Penguins to send coaches to visit the Prison and provide expert coaching to the team. All was agreed and Andrea arranged for Penguin coaches to visit a prison near Bologna to coach the inmates prior to their game and then return to watch from the sidelines the next day.

So, the Penguins travelled to Italy for the first time to undertake coaching activities following previous 7s playing visits over 10 years ago. Other recent visits to Italy by the Penguins include 6 nations weekends to support England and Scotland playing against the Azzuri.

This visit had a particularly interesting aspect to it with some coaching arranged inside a local prison to help develop the inmates team. The prison team played in the local league with all home game!

Brothers Neil and Richie Young duly accepted the task and set off from Newcastle via Amsterdam to Bologna. They based themselves at the Hotel Holiday in Bologna which was reasonably close to both the prison and Colorno Club where the activities would take place.



Neil and Ritchie in Bologna with Neptune

Day 1 – Coaching at Colorno RFC

Originally the Penguin coaches were due to visit the Prison on the Thursday afternoon but due to official business the coaching was changed to Friday. Not one for sitting around the Young brothers managed to find a contact for Nick Scott who was on sabbatical from the



RFU at the time and working with Colorno RFC near Parma. Nick is championing the new coaching philosophy currently being evolved in England, whereby everything is coached through a game and players are tasked with challenges to “beat the game”. With the Young brother’s knowledge and experience of this from back home it wasn’t long before they could offer their expertise and add further knowledge to the coaches and players at Colorno RFC.

The Penguin coaches initially worked with the U14’s and 16’s but stayed on to do some work with the U18’s focusing on identifying space in attack.

Colorno is a fantastic community club in which the founding members drive minibuses to the local villages to collect children so they can enjoy their rugby at the club. Through a scheme from the Club’s president and associated sponsorship they also offer some of their players from further afield scholarships at local schools to support them whilst playing at the club.

There was a real rugby family ethos about Colorno and with them needing to win their last senior game to be promoted to the Pro12 and their current women’s team hosting 7 Italian internationals I am sure we will be hearing more about this club on the rugby circuit in the future.



Coaching at Colorno RFC

The Penguins coaches retired a little exhausted after their early start, travel and the long sessions with Colorno but were delighted with day one and looking forward to their visit to the Prison the following day.

Day 2 – Coaching at the Prison

The coaches were collected on Day 2 by Stefano Cavallini, the President and founder of the local prison team Giallo Dozza.

They made their way to the training session and on meeting the coaches in the car park went through the various security checks to enter the prison. After working their way through the corridors they finally met the team and went outside to the pitch. The make up of the squad was interesting in the fact that only one of the prisoners was Italian, the remaining players were Romanian, Albanian, Moldovan and a mountain of a man from India.

Richie spoke to both coaches about the importance of using games rather than drills and shared some useful links for them to use. After introducing some new warm up ideas to give the prisoners more game related activities the team was split into their specialisms and the Penguin coaches worked with both sets of backs & forwards. Of course the team coaches were involved in all aspects including numerous discussions.

Richie worked with the backs on building an attack from set piece and running lines to give more attacking options and also offer them further knowledge on where to attack.

Neil focused on the lineout and looked at some of the technical aspects needed to lift alongside some movement to identify space in the line. The forwards then moved onto the scrum and were like sponges with the information, changing the way they bind and pretty much the whole set up of the scrum.

All of the players had only played rugby since entering the prison, some of which have played for over 4yrs with some of the players only being there a few months.

The Prison team coaches confirmed that the incoming and outgoing of players never offers them a settled squad which leads to sometimes having up to 30 players available and at other times they struggle to field 18.

The session finished strongly and the players were like sponges and thirsty for more information, in anticipation their Saturday game. After 2 hours the guards collected the players and the coaches left for the hotel.

Day 3 – Match day at the Prison

Stefano collected the coaches at midday and they headed off for what was an historic day for the Club. Giallo Dozza needed to win today to finish 3rd in their league, their highest ever finish in the Italian Divisions. They took on Carpi, the team in 4th place who would leapfrog them if they failed to win.

It was hoped the players had taken onboard the coaching points from the Penguin Coaches session from the previous day. It was key that their lineout improved, having not won a lineout in their previous four games. It was evident from the outset they had listened and they dominated the set piece.

The backs made good use of the ball and ran some fantastic lines to carve open Carpi.

Both Penguin coaches spoke to the players throughout and offered pieces of advice, once again the players listened, adapted and had some real positive impacts in the game. The game was end to end, the boot of the fly half Aldi proving the difference, with three penalty kicks in the first half and a try from forward Deep in the second half. Giallo Dozza won a close game 14-5, it was easy to see what this meant for the team and the coaching staff alongside President Stefano Cavallini who set the club up.

The Penguins coaches were presented with two playing jerseys, both signed from the players. The Academy coaches repaid the gratitude by naming a forward and back MOM to receive a Penguin T-Shirt each.

The players used their time afterwards to ask more questions and thanked the coaches for their knowledge.

On the drive back to the hotel Stefano spoke in depth about his passion for the team and the opportunities he has provided but hopes that he can find someone to continue the legacy once he is no longer able to.

The opportunity to coach a prison team was an amazing opportunity and one that will live long in the memory. A film called Four Seasons was produced about the team, having seen part of the film the Academy Coaches were able to spot four familiar faces from the existing squad, here is a link to the film trailer named – La Prima Meta/ First Try
<https://youtu.be/phSGdbHs8Zs>

Post match the Prison Warden commented he had not seen such a reaction from his inmates to the rugby activities to any other exercise/physical activity team spore in his career. Of course this was an immensely positive action with local rugby communities set to support the inmates on release to accept them into the rugby family and the wider community

The Penguin Academy Coaches Neil & Richie would like to thank Nick Scott and Colorno Rugby for their hospitality on Day 1. Both are extremely grateful to Stefano Cavallini for the opportunity to work with the prisoners and to be a part of the club's historic day, what an amazing experience and with some luck maybe able to bring the King Penguin side over for a game next year.



Finally thanks to the 2 Penguin Academy coaches Neil and Richard for their great efforts.