

Looking Back

with Chris Lloyd



ECHO MEMORIES
More than just
a supplement

The only Darlington-born footballer to ever play in the World Cup

The unlikely Italian hero

The Italian 1974 World Cup squad. Spot the odd name out:

1 Zoff 2 Spinosi 3 Facchetti
(c) 4 Benetti 5 Morini 6
Burgnich 7 Mazzola 8
Capello 9 Chinaglia 10
Rivera 11 Riva 12 Albertosi
13 Sabadini 14 Bellugi
15 Wilson 16 Juliano 17
Re Cecconi 18 Causio 19
Anastasi 20 Boninsegna 21
Pulici 22 Castellini.
Coach Valcareggi

THE 1974 Italian World Cup squad is packed with famous footballing names. There's Dino Zoff, one of the greatest goalkeepers of all time who is the oldest person ever to win the trophy. There's captain Giacinto Facchetti, the first great attacking full-back. There's Romeo Benetti, the tough-tackling sweeper who practically invented the catenaccio system that dominated world football for a decade. There's Gigi Riva, or Rombo di Tuono – the Roar of Thunder, as he was nicknamed – who remains Italy's leading scorer.

And at No 15, there's Wilson.

Giuseppe Wilson. The Lazio legend who today is one of Italy's top TV pundits.

Or Joseph Wilson, as he was christened in Darlington. In fact, he is the only person to be born in Darlington and to play in the World Cup finals.

"That's great," he said on Wednesday, when told of his unique place in sporting history.

He was speaking en route to



TEAM PHOTO: Lazio in the early 1970s, with captain Pino Wilson seated third from the right. Standing second from left is Giorgia Chinaglia, with whom Pino also played for Italy and New York Cosmos. Today's front cover shows Pino holding up the Scudetto trophy – the Italian Championship – which he led Lazio to for the first time in 1974

launch his new biography to Lazio fans before going to the TV studios in Rome to prepare for the Brazil versus Croatia opening match. By way of apology for his broken English, he said: "I just remember what I study in school." But no apology was needed as there was not a word of Italian going the other way.

Giuseppe was born in Arnold Road – "you know more than me", he laughed – off Hundens Lane. It is famous for its 1824 tunnel beneath the Stockton and Darlington Railway, and for its fine collection of sheds that can be seen from the new Eastern Transport Corridor.

It should also be famous as the birthplace of an Italian footballing legend. His father, Dennis, worked for Darlington Forge until being sent overseas in the Second World War. "My father was the friend of the brother of my mum and their meeting is in Naples – I never asked them any more," said Giuseppe.

Dennis brought Lina D'Francesca back to Darlington where they married and where Joseph – known to the family and to football fans as Pino – was born on October 27, 1945.

"My grandfather was director of music in a band and my grandmother, Elizabeth, is I think an ordinary woman," said Pino.

The Darlington winter of 1945-46 proved too gruelling for the young mum who had grown up in the warmth of Naples, and so the three of them, waved off by Dennis' fam-

ily at Bank Top station, went to Italy to start a new life.

"I don't know exactly the reason why my mum decided to come back, but the climate, the weather, and my father got a job as a supervisor at a Nato base – there were a few reasons," said Pino.

Young Joe grew up in Naples, and

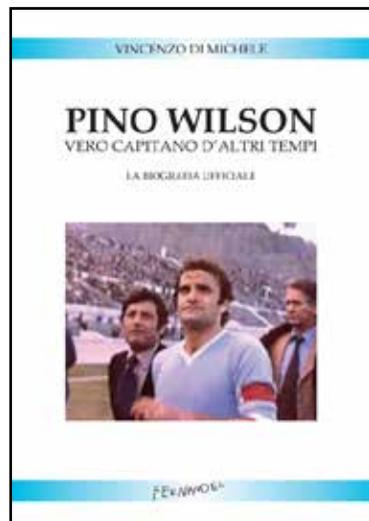
quickly caught the eye of the local professional football team, Inter-napoli. His mother, though, insisted he finished his law degree first – until top-division Lazio, of Rome, came in for the 20-year-old left back. This was the big time, and Pino was already being spoken of as a potential international player, but if he

Giuseppe Wilson on tonight's big match, England versus Italy

It is the first game for both, and I think none of these teams wants to lose the first game, so the result is the only important thing. I think it will be a very bad match – they will just be thinking about the result



PIN-UP PLAYER: In his heyday, Pino was a cover star heart-throb



NEW BOOK: Pino Wilson – Vero Capitano d'altri Tempi by Vincenzo Di Michele

If you have anything to add to today's Echo Memories:

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FACTS FROM THE PAST

The Arnold Road tunnel was probably designed by George Stephenson in 1824 to allow cattle and sheep to pass beneath the Stockton and Darlington Railway

#echomems

finals gives his first interview 67 years after he left his hometown

Giuseppe Wilson on the 2014 World Cup

I think the best teams are Brazil, Spain, maybe Argentina, maybe Belgium. I think the Belgians will be the very big surprise

were to represent Italy, he had to do 15 months' national service before he could claim citizenship.

It was then that he changed his name from a very Darlington Joseph to an Italian-sounding Giuseppe.

He played for Lazio – the club where Paul Gascoigne made his name in the 1980s – for 11 years, making 324 appearances and scoring six goals. Tall and strong, elegant yet physical, with a deep tan and bushy sideburns, the Darlo lad looked every inch a typical Italian defender: classy but clinical.

He stuck with Lazio when, in 1970-71, his second season, they were relegated to Serie B – the second division.

He was installed as captain and led them back to Serie A at the first attempt, and then to surprisingly challenge Juventus and Milan for the 1972-73 Scudetto – the championship. With a team which included Giorgio Chinaglia and Luciano Re Cecconi, Lazio lost out on the last day of the season.

But they kept the faith, and next season Pino led them to their first ever title, assuring him a place in the fans' hearts.

Lazio, though, were not everybody's favourites. Italian football of the era was violent and Lazio were among the worst perpetrators. There were ugly scenes when they played Arsenal and Bobby Robson's Ipswich Town in European cup matches – one report said that Wilson was "a player Ipswich will not forget" – which resulted in Lazio being banned from Europe for a year.

But, belatedly at the age of 28, he



BIRTHPLACE OF AN ITALIAN STAR: Arnold Road, in Darlington

was finally selected for Italy. He sat on the bench in Turin for a friendly against an England side which included Peter Shilton and Bobby Moore – Italy recorded their first win against England for 40 years and Pino seemed to describe it as the best game of his life – and then he made his debut in a friendly in January 1974 playing West Germany – "I was against Beckenbauer, Muller and Scharzenbeck", he said.

For the World Cup in West Germany that year, he was handed the number 15 shirt. Italy were one of the favourites.

Pino sat out the opening game against Haiti, a 3-1 victory in which Haiti ended Zoff's 12-match record of not conceding a goal. With 20 minutes to go, Pino's Lazio teammate, Chinaglia, was acrimoniously substituted, and as he passed the manager, Ferruccio Valcareggi, he flicked a rude gesture at him – "il vaffanculo", they say in Italian and it's very naughty indeed.

The Italian squad fractured, and never recovered.

Pino was called into action in the second game, a creditable 1-1 draw against Argentina, but in the final

group game he couldn't prevent Poland winning 2-1. Italy were eliminated, much to the dismay of an unforgiving Italian public.

Pino's Azzurri career was over, but he stayed another five seasons at Lazio, becoming the club's most capped player and cementing his place in the fans' hearts. The title of his new biography, Pino Wilson – True Captain of Yesteryear, seems to capture him well.

Pino spent the twilight of his career in the late 1970s playing for star-studded New York Cosmos in the US, before retiring back to Italy with his wife and two children – his father, Dennis, died in 1979.

TODAY, Pino works as a pundit for RAI, the Italian equivalent of the BBC, and appears regularly on a TV show whose name he translated as Afternoon for the Champions.

Aged 68, he has never been back to Darlington since the day he left as a baby. "I played with Lazio against Sunderland and Newcastle, so I have been near," he said. "I would like to come. My work is very, very difficult but I say everything can happen."

The only family he has in his hometown is a cousin, Ian Wilson, whom he met for the first time three years ago.

After half-an-hour of Pino battling valiantly and patiently with a fading mobile signal and a wide language gulf, his destination approached.

"I like to remember Darlington first of all for my father," he said. "He was very important for me. My father will be happy that this conversation took place."

■ Pino Wilson – Vero Capitano d'altri Tempi by Vincenzo Di Michele is published by Fernandel and is available in Italian on Amazon for £11.85. With many thanks to Pino and Vincenzo for their help with this article.



IN ACTION: Pino playing for Lazio



ON TV: Pino during a recent television interview