



THE GAME OF FLORENTINE SOCCER

In their 1612 vocabulary the Crusca Academy defined it: “Calcio is the name of an ancient game proper of the city of Florence, with positioning such as a battle, but ordered and with a ball as fast as the wind ...”

It is a game that started during ancient roman times in which two teams with an equal number of players were fighting for possession of a ball, organized as a real battle on a field full of sand. It was a competition for men that included actual fighting, running, physical resistance, and endurance of verbal abuse by others without reaction, team spirit and great determination.

It has been played in Florence since ancient time, many times in strange circumstances: once it is recorded as having been played on the frozen Arno River on Jan. 10, 1491, another much more dramatically on Feb. 17, 1530 while Florence was under siege by the army of Charles V. People were starving, and morale was at the extreme, everybody thought that Florence would fall at any time.

With incredible proud ness the people of Florence decided to play a game between the Green and White teams in Santa Croce Square in plain view of the assailing army posted on the overlooking hills. The screams of the participants reached the sieging army loud and clear, the ball could be seen flying way high and the musicians, with their trumpets were poised high on roofs to be heard even better during the game.

Such was the show of strength that the assailants felt humiliated and soon took leave believing that the Florentines would not surrender any time soon.

The game is still being played today in Florence according to the ancient rites and can be seen at the end of June. Before the game a procession of 530 people meets in front of the church of S.Maria Novella, each has his own important role and is dressed in a 1500 costume. They file through the streets of the old city accompanied by the sound of trumpets and church bells tolling and flag throwers twirling their flags high in the sky. The prize of the tournament is a calf and is played by four teams representing the four districts of the city: S. Spirito (WHITE), S. Croce (BLUE), S.Maria Novella (RED) and S.Giovanni (GREEN).