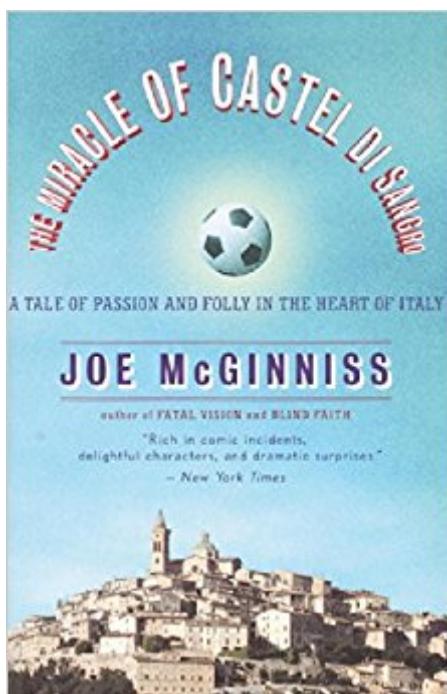


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# The Miracle Of Castel Di Sangro: A Tale Of Passion And Folly In The Heart Of Italy



## **Synopsis**

Master storyteller Joe McGinniss travels to Italy to cover the unlikely success of a ragtag minor league soccer team--and delivers a brilliant and utterly unforgettable story of life in an off-the-beaten-track Italian village. When Joe McGinniss sets out for the remote Italian village of Castel di Sangro one summer, he merely intends to spend a season with the village's soccer team, which only weeks before had, miraculously, reached the second-highest-ranking professional league in the land. But soon he finds himself embroiled with an absurd yet irresistible cast of characters, including the team's owner, described by the New York Times as "straight out of a Mario Puzo novel," and coach Osvaldo Jaconi, whose only English word is the one he uses to describe himself: "bulldozer." As the riotous, edge-of-your-seat season unfolds, McGinniss develops a deepening bond with the team, their village and its people, and their country. Traveling with the miracle team, from the isolated mountain region where Castel di Sangro is located to gritty towns as well as grand cities, McGinniss introduces us to an Italy that no tourist guidebook has ever described, and comes away with a "sad, funny, desolating, and inspiring story--everything, in fact, a story should be" (Los Angeles Times).

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

We already knew Joe McGinniss could chill our blood (*Fatal Vision*) and arouse both our pity and distaste for the Kennedys (*The Last Brother*), but who knew he could be so funny? (Well, maybe readers who remember *The Selling of the President* back in 1968.) Even those who have no interest in soccer--the majority of Americans, he ruefully admits--will relish the author's vivid account of a

team from Castel di Sangro, a tiny town in Italy's poorest region, that against all expectations made it to the national competition. Whether he's chronicling his ordeal at possibly the least-inviting hotel in Italy (the heat doesn't come on until October, no matter the temperature; he is assigned to a room up four flights of stairs though there are no other guests), or sketching a colorful cast of characters that includes the team's sinister owner and an utterly unflappable translator, McGinniss prompts roars of laughter as he reveals an Italy tourists never see. He also saddens readers with a shocking final scene in which he confronts the nation's casual corruption, which taints men he's come to respect and even love. Although not a conventional memoir, this stirring book reveals as much about the author's passionate character as about the nation and the players who win his heart, then break it. --Wendy Smith --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

McGinniss's obsession with soccer was born during the 1994 World Cup competition hosted by the United States. When travels acquainted him with several Italian fans even more addicted to *il calcio* (the "game" or the "kick") than he was, a fascination with this behavior motivated him to follow the team from Castel di Sangro, a tiny city in the Abruzzo region, through the season. This is a quirky, wonderful tale that is undoubtedly better in this excellent reading by Dick Hill, who brings characters and Italian phrasing to life, than in the print version. The first miracle was that Castel di Sangro made it to S'erie B through a sudden death shootout ending a playoff game. The second miracle? Can they stay in S'erie B, or will they be relegated back to C1? Surprisingly enough it matters: to the players, their fans, the author, and finally to the listener. This is real-life tragicomedy/adult soap operaAfunny and moving. For an understanding of *il calcio*, its followers, Italian professional leagues, and life in rural Italy, this is it. Very adult phrasing in two languages. A must for serious sports collections, a delight for any sports devotee. Highly recommended.ACliff Glaviano, Bowling Green State Univ. Libs., OH Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

It's been quite some time since I was moved to write a review. This book, a suggestion by a stranger upon hearing that I wanted to learn more about soccer, and Italian soccer in particular suggested this book. I'm not going to go into the story or background because many reviewers do that well and I want some things to remain a surprise. This is s story about that is about soccer yes and Italy. It is even more about the heart and soul of athletes. It is about human nature, ups and downs, savage disappointments, triumphs unimaginable, twists and turns unforeseen, laughs, and finding a place in the world. It is also about balances and soft voices...I was so sad to read that Joe

McGinnis had passed away in 2014. I so wanted to write him a thank you note for teaching me about joy and perspective and soccer. And affirming my love for the complexities of Italy. And this book above all. I refuse to lend to any one because I ways want it near to look at. Selfish? Maybe. In the end, I can't stop thinking of it. It's all like a movie, Joe.

This was fun, if you're a fan of soccer/football or you love Italy. Many good stories and characters. Best to learn the author's Italian as he learns it. Once he mentions a word he will use it again and expect you to remember. That's ok. But the author, to me, seemed rude and intrusive in the world and situation he was experiencing. He came across, at times, as the typical ugly American. But he was a good writer and he truly immerses himself in his subjects. (I've read a couple of his other books). But is you don't care for soccer this one might be either a puzzle to you, or just plain irritating.

If you want to read a book about a pompous American in Italy, this book's for you.

I have not read anything else by Joe McGinnis, and stumbled across this book while researching my maternal grandfather's birthplace of Chieti, Italy. Since I wanted to read something about life in Abruzzo, and I do like soccer, I took a chance. I was pleasantly surprised and enjoyed this book very much. The style reminded me of the works of Paul Theroux and William Least Heat Moon - a travel adventure in which the author is a character in the story, leavened with McGinnis's entertaining sense of humor .

What a deliciously captivating idea! An American moves to Italy to follow and hopefully befriend a soccer team through its full upstart season. Mr. McGinniss enthusiastically begins with all the innocence and excitement one would hope, and the reader is quickly immersed in the author's exhilaration and joy as the book unfolds. Unfortunately as Mr. McGinniss' envelopment in the team and town of Castel di Sangro deepens, so does his acrimony and contention. One can appreciate that what he is trying to convey to the readers is his own gradual emotional transformation here, as he becomes increasingly disillusioned with the apparent dirt behind this magnificent team and its "miracle." What Mr. McGinniss ends up doing however is gradually imposing his own opinions and judgements both on the people in this fine town and in the end on the poor reader himself. As he gradually alienates himself from players, manager and owner, so too does he gradually alienate himself from the readers. In the end Mr. McGinniss can only see Italy and it's complex culture of

"football" through the eyes of an ugly, vindictive American, and one is left only with distaste for the author. Nevertheless this bittersweet journey of Mr. McGinniss has many warm, evocative and beautifully insightful moments and at times can be marvelously enjoyable

Inside there is a great story of uncelebrated heroes, and villians, behind what might be considered the more mundane situation -- that a soccer team from a small village manages promotion to a B league with the season-long goal of surviving. Along the way, there are many great details of the local players, supporters, life within Serie B soccer, and the fabric of society in a small, working-class Italian hillside town. Set on this smaller stage, the story has it all -- life, death, compassion, greed, character, and corruption -- woven together with many amusing and curious subtexts and insights about a "strainero" trying to fit in to a whole other culture and language. The story is a great success at real-life drama. The only unfortunate part is that the story slowly unravels how much the author completely blew a real opportunity to fit in more and delve deeper beneath the surface of his adopted society -- opting more and more to impose his own self-righteous mindset and judgement on matters (he was as much a "bulldozer" as he accused the soccer team's manager of being) rather than taking a step back to learn more about the inner workings of another culture. This isn't ethnocentrism or even an example of American arrogance -- the author simply self-destructed at his mission to respect, observe, and ask in order to learn and report. Even so, the book is a great success in spite of the author's mistakes. He gained access to a remote, close-knit community amidst the throes of several major events -- also capturing moments of great humor. The author's detailed accounting of his conversations and experiences there makes it a fascinating story in its own right.

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