



U90C ID | ELITE IDENTIFICATION TOURS

ITALY & SWITZERLAND

June 21 – 28, 2026

Milan · Lake Como · Zurich

Pre-Trip Guide

Name _____

Position _____

A Brief History

AC MILAN

AC Milan was founded in December 1899 by Herbert Kilpin, an English footballer from Nottingham and Alfred Edwards, an English businessman who became the club's first president. They chose red and black from the start: red for the team, black to intimidate opponents. Those colors have not changed. **Fans call them the Rossoneri: the red and blacks.**

The club moved into the San Siro in 1926. It holds over 80,000 and has been shared with city rivals Inter Milan since 1947. The local derby is called the Derby della Madonnina, named after the gold statue of the Madonna on top of Milan Cathedral.

Timeline

| | |
|----------------|--|
| 1899 | Founded by Herbert Kilpin and Alfred Edwards, both English. First competitive match in 1900. |
| 1908 | Breakaway faction forms Internazionale. The city rivalry begins. |
| 1926 | Moves into the San Siro. |
| 1963 | Becomes the first Italian club ever to win the European Cup. |
| 1988–90 | Back-to-back European Cups. Later voted greatest club team of all time by World Soccer magazine. |
| 1994 | Wins the Champions League final 4–0 against Barcelona. |
| 2007 | Champions League win. Kaka wins the Ballon d'Or the same year. |
| 2022 | Wins Serie A for the first time in 11 years. |

Trophy Record

| | |
|--|---|
| Champions League / European Cup | 7 titles — 1963, 1969, 1989, 1990, 1994, 2003, 2007 |
| Serie A | 19 titles |
| Coppa Italia | 5 titles |

AC MILAN — PLAYERS WORTH KNOWING

| Era | Player | Position | Why It Matters |
|-----------|-------------------|------------|---|
| 1970s–90s | Franco Baresi | Defender | Captained Milan 15 years. Defined the libero role. #6 retired permanently. |
| 1985–2009 | Paolo Maldini | Defender | 902 appearances over 25 seasons. Widely considered the best defender in history. #3 retired. |
| 1987–95 | Marco van Basten | Striker | Three-time Ballon d'Or. 125 goals in 205 appearances for Milan before ankle injuries forced retirement at 28. |
| 1987–93 | Ruud Gullit | Midfielder | 1987 Ballon d'Or. Versatile and decisive. Core of the 'Immortals' era squad. |
| 1999–2009 | Andriy Shevchenko | Striker | 175 goals for Milan — second highest in club history. 2004 Ballon d'Or. Clinical finisher. |
| 2001–11 | Andrea Pirlo | Midfielder | Controlled matches through positioning and passing. Template for the modern deep-lying playmaker. |
| 2003–09 | Kaka | Midfielder | 2007 Ballon d'Or. Technical, fast, decisive. Key in the 2007 Champions League run. |
| 2018– | Rafael Leao | Forward | Current first-choice forward. Named Serie A MVP 2021–22. |

COMO 1907

Como 1907 is based in the city of Como at the southern end of Lake Como, about an hour from Milan. Colors: blue and white. Nickname: The Lariani, from Larius, the Roman name for the lake.

The recent history is one of the more unusual trajectories in Italian football. After going bankrupt twice and dropping to amateur leagues, Como was purchased in 2019, rebuilt from scratch, and promoted to Serie A in 2024 after a 21-year absence. In 2026, they qualified for European competition for the first time in 119 years.

Timeline

| | |
|----------------|--|
| 1907 | Founded at a bar in central Como. |
| 1927 | Moved into Stadio Sinigaglia on the lakefront. |
| 1984 | Best-ever Serie A finish: 5th place. |
| 2004 | Declared bankrupt. Dropped to Serie D — amateur football. |
| 2019 | Purchased by Indonesian billionaires, the Hartono brothers. Full rebuild begins. |
| 2022 | Cesc Fabregas appointed head coach and co-owner. |
| 2024 | Promoted to Serie A after 21-year absence. |
| 2025–26 | Top-half Serie A finish. First European qualification in club history. |

Key Figures

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Cesc Fabregas | Head coach and co-owner. Won the World Cup with Spain (2010), two European Championships. Played for Barcelona, Arsenal, Chelsea. |
| Thierry Henry | Minority shareholder. Former Arsenal and France striker. |
| Heather O'Reilly | Club advisor, women's program. Three-time World Cup winner with the USWNT. |

THE WOMEN'S GAME

Women's football in Italy became fully professional in 2022. Before that, even top-division players were on amateur contracts. Investment, attendance, and competition have grown significantly since.

AC Milan Women

Established in 2018 when the club acquired a Serie A Women's license. Competes in Serie A Femminile. Earlier Milan-branded women's teams existed as far back as 1965, but today's squad is the first directly connected to the men's organization.

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Valentina Giacinti | Striker, former captain. Won the Serie A Femminile Golden Boot with 21 goals in one season. |
| Daniela Sabatino | Striker. Italian international. One of the league's most experienced forwards. |

Como 1907 Women

Earned promotion to the Eccellenza (fourth tier, Italian women's football) in 2024, scoring 85 goals, conceding 11. Hired Heather O'Reilly, three-time World Cup winner with the USWNT, as program advisor. Stated goal: follow the same trajectory as the men's team.

ITALIAN SOCCER CULTURE

How The Game Is Played Here:

- Structure and discipline over improvisation. Positioning and shape are drilled from an early age.
- Catenaccio, "the chain" in Italian, is the defensive system developed here in the 1940s–50s. Tight backlines, controlled transitions. Aspects still shape how Italian teams set up today.
- Technical ability over athleticism alone. Close control, movement off the ball, and reading the game are prioritized.
- Referees have authority. Dissent is not a cultural norm in Italian youth football.

On The Pitch:

- Shake hands before and after every game and training session.
- Acknowledge good play from opponents; Italian football culture respects skill.
- These are professional academy environments. Treat them accordingly.

Language: Helpful Words and Phrases

| Word | Pronunciation | Meaning |
|---------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| Calcio | KAL-cho | Soccer / football |
| Forza | FOR-tza | Come on — standard cheer |
| Bravo / Brava | BRA-vo / BRA-va | Well done (masc / fem) |
| Portiere | por-TYEH-reh | Goalkeeper |
| Catenaccio | ka-ten-AH-cho | Italy's defensive chain system |
| Grazie | GRAT-syeh | Thank you |
| Prego | PRAY-go | You're welcome |

Practical Notes

- June in northern Italy averages 75–82°F with occasional afternoon thunderstorms. Pack for both.
- Switzerland uses the Swiss Franc (CHF), not the Euro. Budget separately for the Zurich day.
- US electrical plugs don't fit Italian or Swiss outlets. Bring adapters.
- All team transportation is included. You won't need to navigate transit for organized activities.

KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Ten questions. Answers on the following page.

1. What year was AC Milan founded, and what nationality was its founder?

2. What does calcio mean, and how do you pronounce it?

3. What is the Derby della Madonnina, and where does the name come from?

4. How many times has Italy won the FIFA World Cup, and in which years?

5. How many competitive appearances did Paolo Maldini make for AC Milan?

6. What happened to Como 1907 in 2004, and how did the club recover?

7. Who is the current head coach of Como 1907, and what is unusual about his role?

8. What is catenaccio, and what does the name mean?

9. What is distinctive about the location of Stadio Sinigaglia?

10. What is the FIFA Museum, and where is it?

ANSWERS

1. AC Milan was founded in 1899 by Herbert Kilpin (the driving force and first captain) and Alfred Edwards (first president). Both were English.

2. Calcio means "kick." Pronounced KAL-cho.

3. The derby between AC Milan and Inter Milan. Named after the gold Madonna statue on top of Milan Cathedral.

4. Four times: 1934, 1938, 1982, and 2006.

5. 902 appearances over 25 seasons (1985–2009).

6. Declared bankrupt, dropped to Serie D — amateur football. Purchased by the Hartono brothers in 2019 and rebuilt, reaching Serie A in 2024.

7. Cesc Fabregas. He is also a co-owner of the club, not just an employee.

8. A defensive tactical system developed in Italy in the 1940s–50s. Catenaccio means "the chain."

9. It sits directly on the shore of Lake Como. The lake and Alps are visible from the stands.

10. The FIFA World Football Museum in Zurich, Switzerland. Full history of world football, original World Cup trophies, interactive exhibits.

REFRAMING YOUR MINDSET

The Mental Game · On-Trip Workbook

ABOUT THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook works alongside the mental game sessions built into your trip. Each section introduces a concept, then gives you space to think through it on your own and discuss it with the group.

There are no right answers here. The goal is to get you thinking about the habits and patterns you already have and to decide which ones to keep and which to change.

Write in the spaces. Respond to the discussion questions honestly. The more you put in, the more you'll get out of it!

SESSION 1: THE FIRST THREE SECONDS

On all of my teams, we have a first-three-seconds rule. That's because I can tell everything I need to know about an athlete in the first three seconds after a play.

If a player makes a mistake that loses the ball, or worse, costs us a goal, I always look at how they respond. Are their hands thrown in the air? Are their eyes closed and head thrown back? Are they blaming teammates? Or do they take a more positive and productive approach? Are they moving off the ball? Are they recovering to get the ball back? Are they communicating effectively with teammates to re-secure possession?

I tell players all the time: **it's not about the mistake, it's about your response to the mistake.** As a coach, I see that response often happens in the first three seconds of a play. It tells me the type of teammate you are, the type of competitor you are, how you problem-solve, and whether or not you can see the bigger picture.

It goes both ways. If you do something incredible, what's your next play? How do you continue to work for your teammates, communicate, and move on to connect an entire game?

There are 5,400 seconds in a 90-minute match. That's 1,800 opportunities to respond to different moments on the field and 1,800 moments to make the next three seconds count.

Discussion Questions

1. How do you respond when you make a mistake on the field?

2. How do you pull yourself out of a rut when you feel like you're having a bad game?

3. What helps you reset?

SESSION 2: THE POWER OF A MISTAKE RITUAL

We know mistake rituals work. A lot of athletes use them as part of their superstitions. Some of us listen to the same playlist, keep the same warm-up order, or have the same kick-off routine, without really knowing why. Turns out, there is science to back it up.¹

Researchers studied the brains of people who practiced a simple ritual consistently over one week. These participants were given a task specifically designed to make them fail. Some had a mistake ritual, some didn't. The ones with a ritual? **The part of their brain that fires when they mess up was actually quieter.** Not checked out, not careless or sloppy, just steadier. You see, the participants who could process the mistake as information avoided letting it become a full-on identity crisis.

Participants that had the tools to reset didn't let the simple errors impact their entire performance.

Think about what that means for you. The way you fix your ponytail before a corner, tighten your gloves before a PK, reset your shin guard after a missed tackle, those aren't just nervous habits. You're literally training your brain to stay regulated under pressure. That routine is an anchor. It's telling your nervous system **we've been here before, we know what to do.**

Having a ritual doesn't make you better. It makes you less afraid of being worse. And in a 90-minute match with 1,800 three-second moments to respond to, that ability to reset is everything.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you have a routine or habit you do before or during a game (tightening your pony tail, tapping your cleats, taking a deep breath)? Where did it come from?

2. Have you ever noticed that some days mistakes roll right off you, but other days one mistake throws off your whole game? What do you think is different about those days?

3. If you could design a quick reset, something you do right after you mess up to help you move on, what would it look like?

¹ Hobson, N. M., Bonk, D., & Inzlicht, M. (2017). Rituals decrease the neural response to performance failure. *PeerJ*, 5, e3363.

SESSION 3: THE STORY YOU TELL YOURSELF

Your first three seconds after a mistake reveal your response. Your ritual helps regulate it. But underneath both of those things is something bigger; it's the story you're telling yourself about who you are as a player. And that story plays in the background of every training session or game, whether you're aware of it or not.

I learned this firsthand playing in the Guatemalan Women's National League. While the status of getting to play for my city was exciting, the reality was that I was a ten-minute benchwarmer on the team. On a good day, I was lucky to maybe get even fifteen minutes of playing time. If you've ever been in that role, you know the mental weight of it. The stress of not knowing when/if you're going in and the stress of wanting to prove to your teammates that you won't let them down if you do go in. That, on top of wanting your coach to see you as someone who deserves to start adds a lot of noise. That mental noise can be exhausting. And if you aren't careful, that noise can and will completely destroy your game.

For me, I needed to recognize that I couldn't change my role on the team. I didn't control my role, the coaching staff did. What I could control though, was my narrative.

It was important for that narrative to shift. It wasn't that my coach was only playing me for fifteen minutes, it was that my coach *trusted* me to come on the field and finish games. The reality was that there were specific things I brought to the field, strengths and characteristics, that put me out there at exactly the right moment. When I stopped fighting the story and started owning it, everything changed. How I carried myself in training, how I stepped on the field when my number was called, how I saw my value to the team.

That's the difference between "I'm only getting fifteen minutes" and "I'm the player my coach trusts with the last fifteen minutes." Same situation. Completely different player identity.

The real test came in the National Final. Ten minutes into the game, the player I typically subbed in for went down unexpectedly with an ACL tear. Everything shifted in an instant. But here's the thing, I was ready. Not just physically. Mentally. Because I had already done the work of owning my role. I knew my coach trusted me. I knew why I was on that roster. When it was time to step up, I didn't have to find confidence from scratch. I had already built it in the quiet moments, in practice, in the narrative I chose to reframe for myself.

And the science actually backs this up. Researchers have found that the way you talk to yourself in your head, that inner voice, directly affects how you perform under pressure. When you tell yourself you can grow and get better, your brain responds differently to hard moments than when you tell yourself you're just not good enough. Athletes who are intentional about what they say to themselves actually perform better when it counts.² That's exactly what reshaping your narrative does.

It's not about being cheesy or faking positivity, it's about deciding what story your inner voice is telling you, so that when the pressure hits, your brain already knows who you are and what you're capable of. It's about training your brain the same way you train your feet.

Every player has a story they tell themselves. The question is whether yours is working for you or against you.

² Hatzigeorgiadis, A., Zourbanos, N., Galanis, E., & Theodorakis, Y. (2011). Self-talk and sports performance: A meta-analysis. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 6(4), 348–356. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691611413136>

Discussion Questions

1. When you think about your role on this team, what do you tell yourself? Does that thought make you feel confident, or does it hold you back?

2. Has there ever been a moment where something felt really hard or unfair, but you found a way to flip it and keep going? What did that feel like?

3. If you could change one thing about the voice in your head during a game, what would it be?

SESSION 4: WHAT KIND OF COMPETITOR DO YOU WANT TO BE?

Every training session, extra skills practice, every game, you are building towards your player identity.

It goes far beyond just your technical skill or tactical understanding of the game. Piece by piece, choice by choice, you are building the type of competitor you are becoming.

The player who throws their hands up after a mistake is making a choice. However, so is the player who resets, communicates, and gets back to work. The player who spirals after one bad touch and lets it bleed into the next ten minutes is making a choice. But so is the player who has a ritual, resets, and finds a way back to themselves.

None of this is about being perfect. The best competitors in the world make mistakes. The difference is that the true competitors have a shorter distance between making a mistake and moving on to the next play of the game. It has nothing to do with talent. It's a mindset and a mentality.

So, here's the question worth sitting with: when things get hard, when you make a mistake in front of everyone, when you're not getting the minutes you want, when you're losing, and nothing is clicking, who do you want to be in that moment? Because that player doesn't show up by accident.

You build that player in practice. You build them in how you talk to yourself on the bus ride home after a bad game. You build them every time you choose the next three seconds over the last three.

The competitor you want to be is already in there. Reframing your mindset is about how you let that competitor show up.

Discussion Questions

1. If your teammates were asked to describe the kind of competitor you are right now, what do you think they would say?

2. What is one moment this season where you showed up as the competitor you want to be?

3. What is one thing you want to work on mentally this season?

END OF TRIP REFLECTION

Before you head home, take a few minutes with these questions. You don't have to share your answers with anyone if you don't want to.

What stuck with you from this trip?

What is one thing you observed about how players here compete — in training or in a game — that you want to bring back?

Write down one specific thing you are going to work on mentally when you get home. Make it concrete not just "be more confident" but what that actually looks like in a moment.

Your identity statement

Based on everything in this workbook, your response, your ritual, your narrative, write a 2–3 sentence statement about who you are as a competitor. Not who you want to be someday. Who you are right now, and what you're building toward.

