

***ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO DELEGATIONS OF THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL TEAMS OF
ARGENTINA AND ITALY***

Clementine Hall

Tuesday, 13 August 2013

Dear Argentinian Friends, Dear Italian Friends,

I thank you for this visit on the occasion of the friendly match between the national football teams of Italy and Argentina. It will be a little difficult for me to be a fan but fortunately it is a friendly match... and may it truly be so, I count on you!

I thank the staff of the Italian Football Federation and those of the Argentine Federation. I greet the players of both national teams.

You, dear players, are very popular: people follow you very closely and not only on the field but also off it. This is a social responsibility! Let me explain: during the game, when you are out on the pitch, you display beauty, generosity and camaraderie. If a match lacks these qualities it loses force, even if the team wins. There is no room for individualism; team coordination is paramount. Perhaps these three qualities: beauty, generosity and camaraderie can be summed up in a sports term that we must not forget: "amateur," enthusiast. It is true that national and international organizations professionalize sport, and it should be this way. But this professional dimension must never push aside the initial vocation of an athlete or team: be amateurs. When an athlete, even a professional one, cultivates this dimension of being an "amateur", society benefits and that person strengthens the common good with the values of generosity, camaraderie and beauty.

And this leads you to the awareness that before being champions, you are men, human beings with your merits and defects, with a heart and ideas, hopes and problems. And so, even though you are famous, you must always remain men in sports and in life. Men, heralds of humanity.

I would like to encourage you staff members, in your work. Sports are important but they must be true sports! Football, like some other disciplines, has become big business! Work to prevent it losing its character as a sport. May you also promote this enthusiastic attitude of "amateurs" that, for its part, definitively eliminates the risk of discrimination. When teams follow this path, the stadium is enriched with human qualities, violence disappears and families will return to the stands.

I remember that as children we went as a family to Gasómetro Stadium, father, mother and kids. We of course returned home happy, especially during the

championship of 1946! Who knows if one of you will score a goal like Pontoni? What do you say? I greet in a special way the Argentine directors and players! Thank you for the visit, so special for me. I ask you all to live sport as a gift from God, an opportunity to make good use of your talents but this is also a responsibility. Dear players, I would like especially to call to mind that with your conduct, both on and off the pitch, in life you are a point of reference. Last Sunday I chatted on the telephone with some young people of a group, who wanted to greet me, and I spoke to them for half an hour and naturally their preferred topic of conversation was tomorrow's match. They spoke of some of you and they said: "No, I like him for this and this reason or that". You are an example, a reference point. The good you do is impressive. With your conduct, the way you play, your values, you do good people watch you, take advantage of this to sow goodness. Even if you do not realize it, for many people who watch you with admiration, you are a role model for better or for worse. Be aware of this and be an example of loyalty, respect and altruism. You are also builders of concord and social peace of which are all in such great need. You are a point of reference for many young people and a living model of real values. I have faith in all the good that you can do among boys and girls.

Dear friends, I pray for you, that you may carry out this most noble vocation of sport. I ask the Lord to bless you and the Virgin Mary to keep you. And I ask you to please pray for me so that, I too, on the "pitch" on which God has placed me, may play an honest and courageous game for the good of all. Thank you.