

IBPA Personality of the Year Benito Garozzo



Benito Garozzo at 89, who is representing Italy in yet another Bermuda Bowl in 2017



Garozzo at an earlier age with some members of the Blue Team

Our Personality of the Year award rarely goes to players because of their bridge playing skills, but rather for some other element of their personality or achievements. This year is the exception.

The oldest player present at these championships is not playing in the Seniors, since he was selected to play for the Italian Open team. Benito Garozzo, who will celebrate his 90th birthday next month, split his early years between Cairo and Naples and started to play bridge in the early 1940s. He ran a jewelry business in Naples, but became a member of the Blue Team, starting in 1961, when he was added as a last-minute substitute in Italy's Bermuda Bowl team. On the Blue Team, he played in regular partnerships with Pietro Forquet until 1972 and with Giorgio Belladonna thereafter. He won 13 world championship titles and is considered by many experts to be the world's best-ever bridge player.

Forquet and Garozzo, as part of the Blue Team, won nine consecutive world team championships from 1961 to 1969: all seven Bermuda Bowls and both quadrennial World Team Olympiads. Garozzo then retired for two years, but returned to win the 1972 Olympiad. After 1972, Belladonna–Garozzo established a partnership and co-created their advanced version of the Precision Club system called "Super Precision", winning three more consecutive Bermuda Bowls from 1973 to 1975.

In total, in his incredible career, Benito won ten Bermuda Bowls, three Olympiads, five European Championships, two European Open Championships (one Open Teams and one Mixed Teams), one Cap Gemini, one Wernher Trophy at the American NABCs, twelve Italian Team Championships, five Coppe Italia (the last in 2016 at age 89) and countless other major national and international championships.

During the championship years, Garozzo came to be considered the best defender of all time. As such, he was nicknamed *il sottomarino* (the submarine) as a metaphor for his ability to "see under the water". As of September 5, 2011, when he turned 84, he was proud of being able to play as many as ten different bidding systems.

Garozzo lived in the United States for 25 years, from 1987, and became a U.S. citizen in January of 1994. His other pastimes include golf and horse racing. "I play golf almost every day," he says, "and I go to the races when I have no bridge game."

After the death of Lea DuPont in the spring of 2012, Benito Garozzo returned to live in Italy and started to play again at the top level. In June 2013, he was runner-up in the European Transnational Open Team Championships with Roman Zaleski's team. In Montecatini, this year, he and Franco Masoero finished second in the Senior Teams at Montecatini with Jeff Wolfson and Neil Silverman. And here he is, 56 years after his first Bermuda Bowl appearance, still going strong.