

Maria Teresa Lavazza 1937–2020

Maria Teresa Lavazza, whose Italian bridge teams defined the competitive pinnacle for decades, died July 21 in Turin, Italy. Italian bridge great Alfredo Versace posted a tribute on the Neopolitan Bridge site: “From today we will be more lonely: Italian and world bridge alike will miss her.” Lavazza’s passing marks the end of an era.



photo by Michele Leone

An art expert married to Italian espresso impresario Emilio Lavazza, Mrs. Lavazza took up bridge in her 30s. In 1980, she formed the Lavazza team, which she built in a formidable bridge force. In 1999, she was asked to serve as the selector and captain of Italy’s Open team. When the Italian Bridge Federation made the decision in 2012 to move from selecting its national Open team to a team trials process, she stepped down. In the graceful letter announcing her decision, she thanked everyone who supported her. “I also thank those who criticized me and stood in my way: disappointments apart, they encouraged me to do better and better.”

She continued to field winning teams and at the end of 2017, she was invited by the Italian Federal Committee president to resume her non-captaincy of the national team. She accepted his invitation.

Versace was only 15 when Lavazza and longtime team member Italo Santia decided to take him to play in his first Italian Championships. “We had great success as a Lavazza team first and then as the National team. Lavazza was a winner. She encouraged you to be your best; she was a leader.”

At the European Championships in Ostend, Versace said, “Maria Teresa insisted on fielding an Argentinian boy who had been living in Italy for a while. This decision was not popular but it proved right. We won thanks to him and all who criticized her shut up. Today, this young boy is considered the best player in the world and I agree: he is Agustin Madala. Maria Teresa was like that: She was able to spot talent and turn them into champions.”

Lavazza was awarded the WBF Honour Trophy in 2006. When the International Bridge Press Association named her their 2012 Person of the Year, the awards write-up inventoried the contents of her trophy case as a captain or coach: all the major team titles – three Olympiads, two Bermuda Bowls and a Rosenblum; a World Transnational Teams and five European Open Teams. As a player, she celebrated wins in the European Mixed Teams and the European Champions Cup (twice).

Team Lavazza has been a familiar name at ACBL’s North American Bridge Championships. Her teams have won well over a dozen major events, including the three big team trophies – the Vanderbilt, the Spingold and the Reisinger. Their latest NABC victory was in the Reisinger last fall in San Francisco.

Lavazza’s social commitment surpassed even her dedication to bridge. She championed stem cell research as a treatment for degenerative diseases, and for more than 20 years, served as the president of the Piedmont section of the Italian Donors Association of Umbilical Cord Blood.

In a July 22 Facebook post, The City of Health in Turin and its Children’s Hospital Regina Margherita mourned the loss of their “wish fairy.” Among other achievements, the association – under Lavazza’s captaincy – founded the pediatric cancer day hospital, inaugurated a department dedicated to palliative care and support for children with rare and incurable diseases and created a pediatric emergency room.

Life Master Milestones

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42	N	O	S	I	R	43	A	V	E	R	S	44	E	L	I		
46	I	N	T	L	47	O	N	E	N	O	T	48	R	U	M	P	
49	D	E	L	A	50	51	R	S	A								
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61	S	H	O	W	S	B	O	T	H	M	A	J	O	R	S		
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