

Ball brothers

The Samuel brothers wrote a great chapter in the history of local football, says **Carmel Baldacchino**.

The Samuel brothers are very well known among the old timers of Floriana. There were three of them, Salvu, Ġuži and Harry. Each of them was a fine footballer in his own right whose name has since been written in letters of gold in the history of Maltese football.

Ġuži Samuel was born in Floriana in 1894. He started playing football in the streets of Floriana with Floriana Victoria. This was a youth team founded by his elder brother Salvu in 1908. This club formed the basis of the great Floriana team of the pre-World War I era. It was the start of a great era for Floriana. Between 1909 and 1913, the 'Irish' won the Championship three times in succession and the Cup twice. The secret behind this success was Floriana's great forward line, which read like a fairy tale. Jack Herbert, Salvu Samuel, Jack Holland, Alex Semini and Ġuži Samuel were all specialists in the art of scoring goals.

Before settling down with Floriana, Ġuži played for Columbia FC and St Barbara FC of Valletta. He made his debut for Floriana on the left wing in 1910 when he was still 17 years old. He soon settled down in the side and before long he formed a deadly partnership with Jack Herbert.

Ġuži took part in all the League and Cup competitions held in Malta between 1910 and 1918. Competitive matches in those days were few and far between but Ġuži also played in many prestigious matches against the best service teams of that era.

Between 1914 and 1918 Floriana did not form a team. Ġuži therefore, was forced to seek other pastures. During this period, he played for Hamrun Spartans and Sliema Wanderers. Unfortunately, the records for this period are very sketchy and we do not know the exact number of competitive matches played by this great player.

In 1952 Emmanuel Spiteri asked him in an interview to name the best game of his career. Ġuži chose the 1909 encounter between Floriana and HMS Russell. It was a tough and exciting game full of fair but full-blooded tackles. Games like this nearly always finished in trouble in those days. Floriana lost 1-0 after an unfortunate mistake by goalkeeper Karmenu Psaila. Usually so safe and reliable, Psaila mis-kicked a clearance and the ball tricked behind him and over the fatal line.

That evening, the players of HMS Russell and a bunch of their supporters

went to *Balzunetta* to celebrate their victory. Floriana enjoyed an awesome reputation in those days. Their supporters did not take kindly to this defeat and much less to the celebrations. Tempers rose to fever pitch and the evening ended with a big punch-up outside the British Flag Bar.

Ġuži, like his brother Salvu possessed a terrific shot. Once, when Floriana were playing against HMS Bacchante he nearly broke the arm of the goalkeeper with one of his famous cannon shots.

In 1919, when still at the height of his career, Ġuži immigrated to the United States together with his brother Salvu. On the way to America, they stopped for a short while in England where Ġuži was given a trial with Southport United against Liverpool. For a time, it seemed as if he might play professional football for the English club but in those days the life of a professional footballer was very difficult. Abandoning perhaps, a chance of a soccer career in the top league of the World, he resumed his journey for the United States.

Upon settling down in Detroit he started playing for Solvay FC. In 1921 he helped form the famous Maltese club, Sons of Malta FC that was composed solely of Maltese emigrants.

Ġuži captained the team until 1924 when he left the club to join the Hungarian team, Magyar FC of Detroit with whom he stayed up to the end of his career in the late 1920s.

To most footballers there is nothing sweeter than the thump of the ball against the net and for Salvu Samuel it was no exception. To beat a goalkeeper either with a crisp drive or a well-placed header made him tingle with joy.

Salvu Samuel was born at Gharghur on May 7, 1892 but he was brought up at Floriana. He started playing football at a very tender age when in 1906 he joined St Barbara FC. In 1907 he entered the Lyceum of Valletta and it was here that his goal-scoring prowess started being noticed.

In 1908, together with Salvu Tabone and other Floriana stars of the future he formed the youth club, Floriana Victoria. This club had both a football team and a cricket team. They played against the teams of Service Garrison Schools, the Drummers of Service teams and other Maltese youth teams of the era. They must have been quite good because in the two years of their existence they never lost a match!



Salvu Samuel

Floriana Victoria formed the nucleus of the famous Floriana team of the pre-World War I era. Other future Floriana stars who started their career with Victoria were Ġuži Samuel, Alex Semini and Jack Herbert.

In 1908, although barely 16 years old he played for Floriana in the famous Imtarfa Cup Match. He was by far the youngest player in the ground and he was marked by the great Lawrence Busuttill. *Balolu* was a typical tough fullback of the era and he must have cut a fearsome figure for the Floriana youngster.

It was the start of a great era for Floriana. Between 1909 and 1913 the club won the League Championship three times in succession and twice the cup competition. During this period

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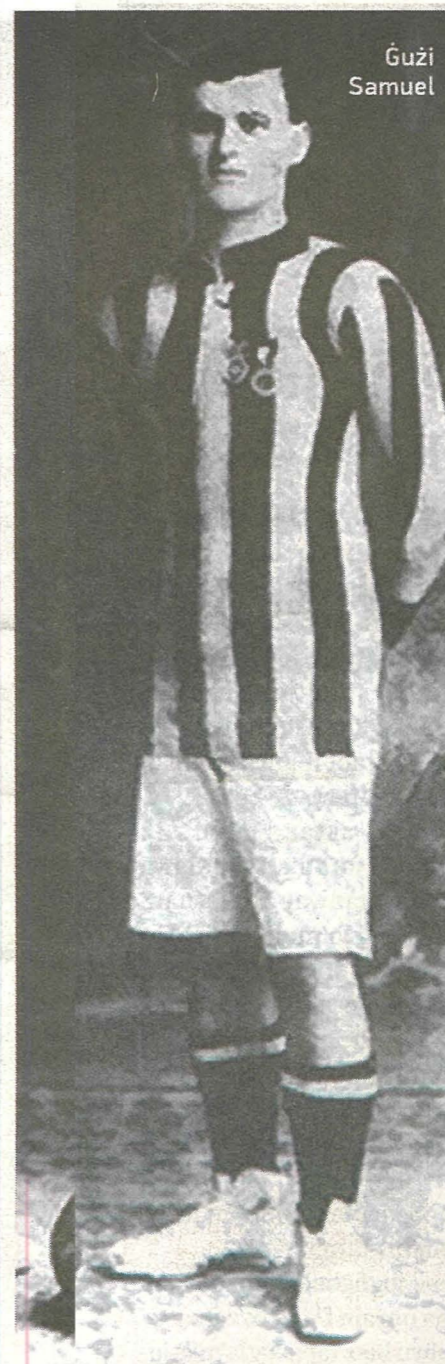
Floriana never suffered a goal in the league. On the other hand, their forward line made up of Jack Herbert, Salvu Samuel, Jack Holland, Alex Semini and Ġuži Samuel was the terror of the land.

Salvu was twice league top-scorer during this period. A natural right-footed player he could play with ease either at inside right or inside left. In 1913 he went with Ruggieru Friggieri and other Floriana stars to play some matches in nearby Sicily. It is reported that he scored in all the eight matches he played in Palermo.

In 1914, when Floriana did not form a team he joined Valletta United and although it cannot be proved he probably won the League Championship with the Citizens. He did not stay long at Valletta however, and in 1916 his work at the Dockyard took him to Mudros in the Greek Archipelago.

In Mudros he played for the Naval Camp XI where it is reported that he scored 25 goals from 35 matches. An expert penalty taker it is said that he never missed a kick. Salvu was known for his cannon-ball shots, which terrorized goalkeepers. Once in Mudros, in a game against HMS *Europa*, he let go a terrific shot, which hit one of the posts and sent the whole contraption tumbling to the ground!

In 1920 like many Maltese of his era he caught the emigration bug and



Ġuži Samuel



Harry Samuel

together with his brother Ġuži he emigrated for America.

His career was relatively short, but one should not judge him by his competitive record. In those days, competitive matches were few and far between but in the gaps between competitions many first-class matches were played against Services XI's, which in those days were always full of British professionals. Salvu was the product of another era. It was an age of great teams and great footballers.

Born in 1903, Harry Samuel made his league debut for the Irish at outside left on November 6, 1920 against Paola United. He scored two goals that day, showing from the start all the skills and prowess of his famous brothers.

It was not long before his skills were fully acknowledged, and he was moved to the inside-left position from where he could stamp his class on the team.

He stayed with Floriana all his life. Between 1920 and 1929 he won five championship medals, one cup and three Cassar cup medals and was picked to play for the Amateur XI five times. A great amateur player he never made a penny from the game, and at least as far as can be ascertained he was never even cautioned by a referee for ungentlemanly conduct.

In 1922 he helped to form the famous Floriana Tigers team which dominated amateur football in the

1920s. Samuel was not only a prominent member of the team, but he also coached the side. Under his guidance the Tigers were Amateur Champions four times and Amateur Cup Winners twice.

Samuel's biggest disappointment was perhaps that he was never picked to play for the full MFA XI. It is a fact however that he spoilt his own chances when he chose to play for the Tigers in the Amateur League rather than for Floriana in the First Division.

In those days, before the final unification of the game in Malta there existed a great rivalry between the Malta Football Association and Malta Amateur Football Association and there was very little co-operation between the two bodies.

On his retirement from the game in 1929 he did not give up football. He was elected on the Floriana committee where he served faithfully until 1935 when he was elected Council Member of the Malta Football Association, a role which he kept up to the end of the Second World War.

It is also possible, although this cannot be proved, that he was one of the founders of the famous Constitutionals FC of Paola which later changed its name to Hibernians FC. Harry Samuel died in 1992 and with his demise went the last shreds of the great Amateur era of Maltese football. •