

FROM THE AUTHOR OF THE BESTSELLING
TORRES, MESSI AND RONALDO

NEYMAR

LUCA
CAIOLI



THE MAKING OF THE WORLD'S
GREATEST NEW NUMBER 10

Neymar

About the author

Luca Caioli is the bestselling author of *Messi, Ronaldo* and *Torres*. A renowned Italian sports journalist, he lives in Spain.

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Contents

- 1** Praça Charles Miller
- 2** Prose and Poetry
A conversation with José Miguel Wisnik
- 3** Mogi das Cruzes 16
- 4** São Vicente
- 5** Praia Grande
- 6** 100 per cent Jesus
A conversation with Newton Glória Lobato Filho
- 7** Liceu São Paulo
- 8** Childhood dreams
A conversation with Leonardo Carrilho Baptista
- 9** Santos
- 10** Peixe
- 11** Showtime
A conversation with Robson de Souza, aka Robinho
- 12** Madrid
- 13** A Copinha
- 14** Pacaembu
- 15** Baroque and minimalism
A conversation with Eduardo Gonçalves de Andrade, aka Tostão
- 16** Having fun

17	Ayrton Senna
18	Monster 127
19	Beatlemania 134
	<i>A conversation with Dorival Silvestre Junior</i>
20	Doha
21	2011
22	The gift of improvisation
	<i>A conversation with Muricy Ramalho</i>
23	Remake
24	Thanks all for everything
25	Number 11s
	<i>A conversation with José Macia, aka Pepe</i>
26	NRJ 193
27	A special day
28	Maracanã
29	An Artist
	<i>A conversation with Vicente del Bosque</i>
30	A good kid
	<i>A conversation with Luiz Felipe Scolari, aka Felipão</i>
31	Barcelona
	A career in numbers
	Bibliography
	Acknowledgements

Praça Charles Miller

Handlebar moustache, out-of-control quiff, white shirt, black shorts and football clamped between his hands: the photos from times past, those where a puff of magnesium was used as a flash, provide us with an image of Charles William Miller.

Charlie, son of John, a Scottish engineer who like 3,000 other Brits ended up in South America to help build the railways, and Carlota Fox, a Brazilian with English ancestors, was born in São Paulo, in the Brás district, on 24 November 1874. When he was nine years old, he was sent to Europe to study, as was customary in high society. He arrived in Southampton and started out at Banister Court School before going on to a secondary school in Hampshire.

Banister was a small private school founded by Reverend George Ellaby as a place where captains of the Peninsular Steam Navigation Company could send their sons. The headmaster during Miller's time was Christopher Ellaby, son of Reverend Ellaby. Christopher Ellaby was a passionate follower of football.

In England, the beautiful game already had its official rulebook, with the Football Association having been founded in London on 26 October 1863. This was the first national football federation which brought together the rules of the game. Ellaby, during his Oxford years, was captain of the college team. He passed on his enthusiasm for the game to his students.

Charles Miller was a competent athlete and soon became the captain of the school team. They gave him the nickname 'Nipper' because of his smooth baby face and

stick insect body. Despite his build, he became an excellent centre forward and on occasions he played left wing. 'He is our best striker. He is fast, his dribbling is excellent and he has a shot on him like a thunderbolt. He scores goals with great ease,' was how the school paper reported on him. Forty-one goals in 34 matches with Banister Court and three goals in thirteen matches with St Mary's Church of England Young Men's Association, who would become Southampton Football Club, now a Premier League team, attest to this. Miller's style of play was light-footed and a bit on the cheeky side. He had great imagination, superb ball control and a passion for the dummy which left his opponents baffled. So much so that at seventeen he was invited to play for Corinthian Football Club in London, a club set up with players from British schools and universities to match the then superiority of the Scottish teams - Corinthian, a name which, years later, with Miller's advice, would become one of the most famous clubs in São Paulo (albeit it would be called 'Corinthians').

1894. After Charlie finished his studies, he went back to Brazil. In his luggage he put two Shoot footballs, made in Liverpool, a present from a teammate; an air pump to blow them up, a pair of football boots, two football tops (one from Banister and one from St Mary's) and a hefty tome containing the rules and regulations of the Football Association. The story goes that during this trip home Charlie did not stop training, dribbling round passengers and obstacles from one end of the ship to the other. On 18 February Charlie docked in Santos and John, his father, asked him what he had brought back from England. Charlie replied, 'My degree. Your son has graduated with distinction in football.'

The twenty-year-old Anglo-Brazilian began to work, like his father, at the São Paulo Railway Company. He registered with the São Paulo Athletic Club, which had been founded in May 1888 by British communities. There, members played

cricket, not football. They knew how to play but no one was interested in it – until Charles Miller started to lay the foundations.

At the club, he explained the rules, and also terminology such as ‘half-time’, ‘corner’, ‘ground’ and ‘penalty’ to his friends, workmates, and top officials at the Gas Company, the Bank of London and the railways. Eventually he pulled together a group of followers. He convinced them to train on a ground at Várzea do Carmo, between Luz and Bom Retiro, nowadays known as Rua do Gasometro. There were plenty of people who were curious to see what was going on at the ground. Not long after, Celso de Araújo wrote in a letter to his friend, journalist Alcino Guanabara of Rio de Janeiro: ‘Near Bom Retiro, there is a group of Englishmen, maniacs as only the English can be, who are kicking around what only can be described as something which looks like a cow’s bladder. It would appear that this thing gives them great joy but also great pain when this sort of yellowish bladder enters a rectangle made of wooden poles.’

Sceptics aside, football between gentlemen in the British community was beginning to gain a foothold, and Miller finally managed to organise a match on 14 April 1895. In Várzea do Carmo, two teams made up of Brazilians and Englishmen came together: São Paulo Railway and Companhia de Gás. The ‘Railwaymen’ won 4-2, captained by Miller, who scored two goals. There were few spectators: friends, managers and employees plus some donkeys that were grazing nearby. It did not matter, however, as it was the first official football match in Brazil. This was the day that the most popular sport in Brazil was born.

It is true that before Charlie returned home to Brazil from England, employees from English companies and British sailors played matches in the street or on the beaches of Rio between 1875 and 1890, with one game being played in front of the residence of Princess Isabel, who ruled the Brazilian Empire under the name of Dom Pedro II. It is true

that at São Luis College in Itu, the Jesuit Father José Montero introduced the game of *bate bolão*, a game played by professors and pupils, like Etonians used to. It is also true that games such as *ballon anglais* were played in various confessional and lay colleges in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Rio Grande do Sul. But for Brazilians Charles Miller was *O pai do futebol*, the father of football, because, apart from that first historic match, Miller gave birth to a football club within the heart of São Paulo Athletic Club and his support was fundamental in creating the first Brazilian football federation on 19 December 1901: a Liga Paulista de Futebol, which, one year later, gave rise to the first football league.

This got under way on 3 May 1902 with five teams (São Paulo Athletic Club, Associação Atlética Mackenzie College, Sport Club Internacional, Sport Club Germânia and Clube Atlético Paulistano). SPAC (São Paulo Athletic Club) dominated the first three seasons. With his ten goals in nine matches, Charles Miller was the leading goalscorer for the 1902 season and scored the two winning goals in the final tie with Paulistano. With their light blue and white striped or all white shirts with black shorts and black socks, SPAC retained the title in 1903, again beating Paulistano. The following year, another victory, and Charlie was joint leading goalscorer with nine goals, tying with his teammate Boyes.

Miller played with SPAC until 1910, by which time football in Brazil was played not only by the city-based white elite who saw football as a symbol of modern Europe but also by the lower classes who used football to express themselves – something that was not available to them in other social settings.

An example of the popularity of football was the tour of Corinthian Football Club of London. The English football players arrived on the SS *Amazon* on 21 August 1910. They played three matches, against Fluminense and two other teams, thrashing them all. They then went to São Paulo to

play Palmeiras, Paulistano and, on 4 September, SPAC. It was one of the last matches that the then 36-year-old Charles Miller would play.

The English players demolished SPAC 8-2. (They scored several goals in the other matches as well.) 'We did not expect anything else; everyone knows that Corinthian is a team which plays technical football,' wrote the journalist Adriano Neiva da Motta e Silva, aka De Vaney, 'whereas we were, in footballing terms, still sucking on our dummies.'

Footballing issues aside, the most striking aspect was the interest that the arrival of the English team generated. The papers were full of stories about their arrival, crowds waited for the footballers outside the Hotel Majestic and above all were the sell-out crowds at the Velodrome where the matches were played. 'The spectators applauded every move and French perfume filled the air. They were something special, those matches with Corinthian,' reported the papers in São Paulo.

In 1910, Charles Miller hung up his boots for the last time, thereafter dedicating his time to working at the Royal Mail Line. Years later he was to set up his own travel agency, while also acting as the English vice-consul. He married Antonieta Rudge, one of the leading Brazilian pianists, who was to leave him in the 1920s for the poet, Paulo Menotti Del Picchia. He had two children and did not completely lose his ties with football: he refereed, worked as a sports manager and was always a passionate fan of the game.

Charles William Miller died on 30 June 1953 at the age of 79. He saw São Paulo transform itself into a metropolis; he saw *futebol*, which he had introduced to the country half a century earlier, become a national passion. He saw Brazil host the *Coppa Rimet* – the World Cup – and suffered, along with millions of Brazilians, the pain of one of the greatest defeats in footballing history, the *Maracanazo*.

Charles Miller is still remembered today. In Brazilian footballing slang, *chaleira* (the 'teapot', which derives from

‘Charles’) is the term used to define the move that Miller invented at the start of the 20th century: flicking the ball into the air with the heel, with one leg behind the other. Exactly one year after his death, to represent him in the daily life of São Paulo, the city council gave his name to the square where *Estadio Municipal Paulo Machado de Carvalho* is situated (better known as *Pacaembu* from the name of the area). Today this enormous space in the heart of the São Paulo metropolis, almost like a Greek arena in its shape, is closed off at one end by a zigzag of skyscrapers which loom over the trees and by *Pacaembu* at the other.

Pacembu is a cream-coloured building in liberty style set into the hill. It was opened on 27 April 1940 by the president of Brazil, Getulio Vargas, the city mayor Prestes Maia, and the architect, Ademar de Barros. At the time, it could hold 71,000 spectators. Today, after its refurbishment in 2007, it can hold 40,000. The house of the Corinthians is an absolute jewel of a building: one of the most stunning postcard views of São Paulo. Inside, under the four columns at the main entrance, beneath the gigantic clock, there is the *Museu do Futebol*.

The museum opened its seventeen rooms on 29 September 2008. There are photos, videos, recordings of famous figures in football, memorabilia, souvenirs, odd artefacts and statistics. The exhibition is a journey through the history of Brazilian football in the 20th century.

Hilário Franco Junior, a professor of medieval history, has written a book about football, *A Dança dos deuses: Futebol, Sociedade, Cultura* (‘The Dance of Gods: Football, Society and Culture’), which has been scrutinised by the football critics. The book summarises the history of football in Brazil from four perspectives: ‘In the beginning, football was criticised as it was deemed futile and of no use but it did not take long for the sport to be transformed from a sport for the elite to a working man’s game. In the 1930s, there was the first blip. Brazil started to become aware of a social

cross-breeding, as it were, as pointed out by intellectuals such as Gilberto Freyre, Paulo Prado and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda. Half-caste, coloured people and white people were starting to live together. There was no need to feel ashamed anymore and if the half-caste could play football, even better. In the 1938 World Cup, the half-Portuguese, half-Brazilian Leônidas da Silva was the leading goalscorer. This was a wake-up call for the country. A coloured player and a half-caste player were there playing in the tournament, despite the requests of those who had asked for them to be excluded.

‘The next key moment is *Maracanazo*. This was in 1950, when Brazil were beaten by Uruguay. The playwright Nelson Rodríguez labelled this moment “psychological Hiroshima”. Indeed it was. It was a blow to the psyche of Brazilian society and the political classes who had hoped to piggyback on the success of the tournament to gain victory in the upcoming elections. It was a national crisis, but it was turned on its head in 1958: Brazil bounced back and went on to win in Europe. In Paris, the Brazilians chorused, “We are the best in the world!” It was an explosion of national pride.

‘From that moment on, Brazil wanted to overcome feelings of national inferiority by being champions again, as they did in 1962 and 1970. But it was not always possible. There was a drought of victories, then the military dictatorship, repression, torture, political opponents disappearing into thin air ... Society looked to football in silence. Doubt was creeping in, despite a couple of triumphs.

‘It is a feeling which still pervades Brazilian football today. Brazil appreciates football, it has great players, but it is not the footballing powerhouse it once was. There are other powers in world football and there are excellent players outside of Brazil. Brazil wants to be the Brazil of the future; it feels as though the Brazil of the future has arrived – but then the problems start. Brazil moves forward in a zig-zag

rather than in a straight line. It takes one step forward and two steps back. In football it is no different.'

After the professor's lesson, juxtaposing medieval utopias with football in society, we can see this story portrayed at the *Museu do Futebol*. Two schoolkids wait their turn to go in. The noisy schoolkids can get lost in the winding rooms and corridors, briefly stopping where the interactive exhibits allow them to take a penalty and work out the speed of their shot, play on a miniature football pitch, or play table football with little wooden model players who get bashed energetically from side to side.

At the entrance to the museum, a great hall gives the visitor the idea of what football is in Brazil, via a colourful collection of flags, banners, posters, emblems, puppet key rings, gadgets, caricatures, papers, caps and rugs. These are in homage to the passion of the fans.

An escalator takes the visitor to the first floor. Straight in front is Pelé, who welcomes the visitor in three different languages. The visitors are guided from room to room by a series of images of a ball, kicked by a little boy, which skips and bounces from one pitch to another. Baroque angels fly in the dark above. Life-size models of football legends dribble, shoot and shimmy in the air. A plaque reads, 'There are 25 of them, but there could easily be 50 or 100 because they were the founders of football, an art form which is played in Brazil. Gods or heroes, idols of various generations who can be seen as angels whose wings or rather feet take us to places where creativity, poetry and magic is nurtured. They are true angels of Baroque art.' Angels with names like Pelé, Sócrates, Gilmar, Carlos Alberto, Bebeto, Tostão, Garrincha, Ronaldo, Gerson, Rivelino, Didi, Vavá, Romario, Ronaldinho Gaúcho, Roberto Carlos, Rivaldo, Taffarel, Zico, Zagallo, Falcão, Nilton Santos, Djalma Santos, Jairzinho, Julinho Botelho, Zizinho.

A boy called Paulo who came to the museum with his classmates is engrossed by the video of the goal that never

was, Pelé against Ladislao Mazurkiewicz, the Uruguay goal-keeper, in the 1970 World Cup semi-final. Again and again he watches it. He then is amazed at the long list of Baroque Angels, name after name. He gazes up at the images and comments to his friend, 'How come Neymar is not here?'

Neymar Jr has not yet risen to this level of football greatness but outside the stadium, under the winter sun, the football shirt which the street traders sell the most of is the gold-and-green shirt with number 10 on it, the one belonging to the latest poet of Brazilian football.

Chapter 2

Prose and Poetry

A conversation with José Miguel Wisnik

Who are the best 'dribblers' in the world and the best goal-scorers? The Brazilians. It goes without saying that their football is football poetry: it revolves around dribbling and goals. *Catenaccio* [an extremely defensive style] and triangulation represents football prose: it is based on synthesis; a collective and organised game, i.e. reasoned execution of the football code.

Writing in a 1971 essay entitled '*Il calcio "è" un linguaggio con i suoi poeti e prosatori*' ('Football "is" a language with its poets and writers of prose'), Pier Paolo Pasolini, film director, writer and great football fan, set out the similarities between literary genres and styles of playing football, offering a significant distinction between football poetry and football prose: a dichotomy which José Miguel Wisnik, Brazilian musician, composer, essayist and professor of Brazilian literature, uses as the basis for his analysis of the game he so dearly loves. He is a huge fan of Santos.

His reasoning is set out in a book, *Veneno remédio: o futebol e o Brasil* ('Poison remedy: football and Brazil'), published a few years ago. Today he reflects on what Neymar means, or what he could mean, for the history of football in his country. This is a player whom he jokingly describes as 'the Baudelaire of football'. Sitting comfortably in his study in São Paulo, he takes his time before the verbal floodgates open.

'Brazilian football created a tradition which is based on the *ellipse*, a style of play which consists of creating non-linear ways of occupying space and breaching the defence. I based my ideas on what Pasolini wrote about football prose and football poetry. We say that football prose is more

linear, more tactically responsible, collective, defensive; it involves counterattack, triangulation, cross-overs and rational movements. The idea of football poetry is that of a football which creates new spaces out of nowhere in a non-linear way, using dribbling as the deciding factor. It can be used to penetrate the opponent's space or just to be effortlessly beautiful or effective. It can be a means to an end or a way to get to goal. Mané Garrincha, for example, took dribbling to the extreme but at the same time was very effective. In the history of Brazilian football, there were glorious moments where dribbling was just for the sake of it but at the same time effective.

'In the 1930s, when Gilberto Freyre analysed Brazil from a sociological, anthropological and historical perspective, he noted that the identity of Brazilian football was closely linked to the identity of the half-caste people. The Brazilians took the English choreographed, formulaic style and turned it into more of a dance, mixing nifty footwork and capoeira and samba dance skills. This obviously has had a huge impact on how our culture is interpreted: the idea that efficiency is only valued if it is accompanied with pleasure; in other words, the ideal situation is bringing together the concepts of work and partying. Brazilian football, in this context, is both the poison and the antidote because it is a form of cultural realisation like popular music or carnival, but it is also a problem because it promotes the idea that our culture glorifies laziness and gratuity over efficiency.'

Can we go back to the concept of football and poetry and how it takes us to Neymar?

'Sure. That was just an introduction. So, Brazilian football gave a style to English football which Freyre defines as curvilinear and Pasolini poetic. A style of play which was developed in South America in the 1960s and reached a climax in the 1970 World Cup in Mexico. At this time, Brazilian football created a repertoire of non-linear moves

which can be considered as ellipses, a concept of both geometry and rhetoric. Moves which are based on curves or freezing of time. Just think about all the various types of dribbling: dummies to the left, shimmies to the right, fakes, using the moment to beat your opponent in a static situation. Also the one-two, the lob, the “falling leaf” where the ball would deftly swerve downwards just at the right time. A classic repertoire which existed in Brazilian football from 1962 to 1970. It then existed only as a trait or style but from the 1970s onwards Brazilian football adapted to the new reality in international football, i.e. physical and athletic fitness, team play, different formations and specialisation of attackers and defenders.

‘In the World Cups of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, Brazil tried various solutions. The football poetry was still there somehow, with players like Zico, Sócrates and Falcão playing in 1982, or with Romario, who in 1994 still played *ellipse* football in a national team which had adopted a more prosaic style. Up until the arrival of Ronaldinho, a footballing genius who brought back the entire repertoire of Brazilian football. You could see Didi’s “falling leaf”, Pelé’s lob or Garrincha’s dribbling. Ronaldinho was an artist of mannerisms, almost as though he was “quoting” other players’ famous moves. Ronaldinho is well aware of this and as an author quotes another writer, he “quotes” a goal of a player from the past.’

And now we get to Neymar ...

‘Yes, all of the above was to get to Neymar. In a time when no one believes a poetic tradition exists and that it is disappearing even in Brazil due to a tendency to play football prose, along comes Neymar. A player who represents someone who wants to keep this poetic style alive.

‘Neymar has an extraordinary dribbling repertoire. Impressive, I would say: a repertoire that shocks you with its

inventiveness, its freshness. It is pure *ellipse* football. If you don't believe me, watch the dribbling with his heel against Seville in one of the first games of the [2013/14] Spanish league season: something unexpected, which no one even dreamed of.

'At Santos, from when Neymar was thirteen years old, he was marked out as the future champion. He is part of a generation which has been trained and grown to be something important. Often important groundbreaking news does not live up to the hype. Neymar, however, completely lived up to the qualities that were ascribed to him. In addition to his magical ability on the ball, he has a natural charisma, extraordinary likeability and the ability to manipulate his public image, just like a pop star. He has conquered the hearts and minds of girls and the public alike and is acknowledged by other clubs' fans and by great players from the past and present. In his years at Santos he showed all his exuberance, all his ability to dribble the ball, thus confirming that the tradition continues with him.

'Yes, Neymar is a poet, a graffiti artist: his sonnets are daubed all over the city's walls. His hair, his way of putting his shirt collar up and his celebrations are all part of his poetic performance. Neymar is a sort of modern-day man of the people, full of energy and life and an absolute star of the current era. He has great vision on the pitch, he has killer passes and he has a superb ability to capitalise on opportunities. He is not just a great dribbler; his relationship with dribbling is not merely rhetorical, as with Robinho who was a poor finisher and whose one-two passes were often just for effect. Neymar has a technologically advanced style, intricate but frighteningly effective. Efficient but without losing its appeal for the spectator. It is on another level, brand new and gives a new dimension to poetic football.

'I see him being in a very interesting situation. Much has been said about him being able to adapt to the *Seleção* [Brazil's national football team]; he proved this during the

Confederations Cup. *La Canarinha* [another nickname for the national side] has found a style of play which exploits Neymar's potential to the maximum. The great expectation is how he will fit in at Barcelona. Santos managed to keep him until 2013. Seeing that a player who was at the height of his powers was not sold to a European club or an East European club straightaway was important for Brazil's self-esteem. To be honest, at Santos he was left to his own devices and I hoped he would go to Barcelona to mature in international football.'

Can Neymar's poetry and Barcelona's prose fit together?

'Barcelona's football is not football prose. It is a complete mutation in how to play football in that it combines occupation of space and expansion of the area of play on the wings, which echoes the Dutch style of play, with South American football traits such as the *tiki-taka* heel flick. You could define it as football written in prose, extremely agile but not overly structured. The presence of Messi and the dribbling which pierces the defence leaves one in no doubt of the determining presence of South American football. I believe that Barcelona, in its great moments, has squared the circle. To bring together prose and poetry, to bring together European football and South American football and to go beyond football's classic dichotomy. What will happen now there is Messi and Neymar? They have different styles. Messi's dribbling is not as exuberant as Neymar's: it is efficient; there is a sense of mystery about the way he moves forward with the ball - you can hardly tell how he does it. He does not move like a Brazilian. His intuition is out of this world, he has a sixth sense for when his opponent is about to present him with an opportunity or when space is opening up. Messi is the straight line to Neymar's ellipse.'

Chapter 3

Mogi das Cruzes

Chaotic traffic: scooter and motorbike horns blasting. Flyovers, skyscrapers, low-level housing, viaducts searing above traffic jams, industry, roadworks, *favelas*. São Paulo, a megalopolis with 11 million inhabitants, seems to go on forever; it seems to want to keep visitors in its clutches and not let them go. The city spreads along the three-lane Rodovia Ayrton Senna, the newest of its kind in the country, dedicated to the eponymous national hero and São Paulo racing driver who died during the Imola Grand Prix on 1 May 1994.

The bus leaves from the Rodoviário de Tietê Terminal (the largest in Latin America and the second largest in the world after New York), with passengers scurrying here and there as they go on their way. The bus is perfectly on time but struggles to get out of the city traffic jams; it scrapes past lorries and cars which dart in and out of the lanes. A toll booth, and it changes motorways. As it heads for Itaquaquecetuba, the city finally lets the bus out of its clutches into the open countryside, which is green and with a plethora of hills that look as though they were sketched out using a ruler. Kites fly high in the sky and bone-dry, dusty football pitches, dotted between the vegetation, mark the *favelas* clinging on to the hillside: red bricks that look like they have been stuck together by a kid playing with Lego, makeshift roofs, satellite dishes, large sheets to cover construction works that have never been completed. Stagnant water, burnt-out cars, kids crossing the motorway on their bikes to get back home with their shopping.

Then the sharp downhill of Serra de Itapey. At the bottom, the skyscrapers of Mogi da Cruzes, one of the Alto Tiete municipalities, an area to the east of greater São Paulo. It was here that Neymar Santos da Silva played football, and here where his son, Neymar Junior, was born: a place with 40,000 inhabitants, its population having doubled in the last fifteen years as commuters have flooded in. They live here and every morning head off to work in the capital; every evening, on the platform at Estação da Luz in São Paulo, they wait patiently to be squashed into the carriages on Line 11 of the Companhia Paulista de Trens Metropolitanos, a creaky and rickety local train which takes them home.

At least there is work in Mogi, where industrial behemoths such as General Motors, Valtra (manufacturers of tractors), Gendau Group (steel works) have plants and employ a large portion of the population. The tertiary sector boasts companies such as Tivit and Contractor, two of the largest telemarketing companies. Agriculture is booming: vegetables, mushrooms, persimmon fruit, medlar and flowers (principally orchids). Stunningly beautiful examples of the latter – in an explosion of colours, whites with shades of fuchsias, violets and lilacs such as the *Olho de Boneca* (*Dendrobium nobile*) – are on show in one of the town's tourist attractions: the *Orquidario Oriental*. 'Oriental'? Yes, you read right: the East.

At the start of the 20th century, Mogi experienced an influx of immigrants from Japan: men and women who worked in agriculture, horticulture and trade. They created a lively and flourishing community that did not lose touch with its roots: there are monuments, restaurants, cultural associations, festivals, schools, and the town has been twinned with Toyama and Seki. It is a shame that Torii, the Japanese-style gate, symbol of the Japanese immigrants, which was situated at the entrance to the town, was taken down in the spring of 2013 for health and safety reasons. The heavy rains had severely damaged it.

Luckily, one of the other icons of Mogi has not been ruined by the bad weather. A massive shiny sculpture in stainless steel, towering thirteen metres into the sky, at first sight it looks like Don Quixote from La Mancha but it is actually an homage to Gaspar Vaz for the 450th anniversary of the founding of the city. Gaspar Vaz was the rusher who opened the way to Mogi from São Paulo and founded the town in 1560. From Avenida Engenheiro Miguel Gemma, where there is a shiny statue of the adventurer who came to the area looking for gold (or natives who he could turn into slaves), the bus reaches the Geraldo Scavone terminal in a few minutes. Exactly one hour to travel around 50 kilometres between São Paulo and the town.

Through the cobbled streets of Vila Industrial and we arrive at Estádio Municipal Francisco Ribeiro Nogueira, better known as Nogueirão. The large gate is shut but someone comes and opens it. This is the home of União Mogi das Cruzes Futebol Club, a club which celebrated its centenary on 7 September 2013. It was founded by Chiquinho Veríssimo, a white textile tradesman, and Alfredo Cardoso, a black shoe-smith. The club was born on Brazil's Independence Day. The football kit is red and white or completely red, with a Tiete valley snake for its mascot (*Mogi* in the local native tongue means 'the river of the cobras').

União is one of the oldest footballing clubs in the region. Over its long history, it has seen the first touches of players like Cacau (now playing for Stuttgart), Maikon Leite (now playing for Náutico) and Felipe (now playing for Flamengo). It has always been a club which fluctuates between amateur football (in 1947 it was champion of the regional Amador tournament) and the lower Brazilian leagues.

Its golden era was from the 1980s to the start of the 90s, when it fought for promotion to the first division of the Paulista league. However, it did not make it and the only league title it has won is the 2006 Campeonato Paulista