Fabián O'Neill, football player

By Conrad O'Neill Malcolm

O'Neill, Fabián Alberto (1973-), former professional footballer, was born in the city of Paso de los Toros in the Uruguayan Department of Tacuarembó, on 14 October 1973. He is the eldest of five children born to Luis Alberto O'Neill and Mercedes Domínguez.

His Irish connections can be traced back to his great-great-grandparents, Elizabeth Murphy and Thomas O'Neill from County Cork, son of Isabel and Michael O'Neill. In early 1837 Michael O'Neill and Isabel Sullivan emigrated to Uruguay and their only son Thomas was born the same year in Las Piedras, Canelones. Thomas married Elizabeth and built up a farm in 'Marincho', Flores, some 200km north of the capital city, Montevideo. This marriage produced eleven children. Benito, the youngest, married María White Cogley, and was Fabián's great-grandfather. From this point onwards the family spread throughout Uruguay, with some members emigrating to Australia. They were mainly involved in livestock farming (O'Neill n/d).

Fabián O'Neill began his professional football career playing for the Montevideo Club Nacional de Football, one of the most successful clubs in the country, in 1992. As a midfielder he quickly gained the nickname of "Mago" (Wizard), as he was very good at dribbling and kicking with both feet.

In 1996 he moved to Europe to play for the Italian Series A team Cagliari-Calcio, following in the footsteps of other Uruguyan stars such as Enzo Francescoli and Daniel Fonseca. After the club was relegated to Series B in 2000 he transferred to Juventus FC where he played from 2000 until the end of 2001. Unfortunately, with Juventus, 'his form dipped as he found himself starved of first-team chances' (Vickery 2002). In 2002 he moved to Perugia as part of a transfer deal. In Perugia he began to play more regularly and was finally able to show the Italians his wizardry. He was released at the end of the 2002 season and returned to Cagliari-Calcio, who have again been relegated to Series B.

After this, O'Neill decided to retire and return to Uruguay to take an active part in the running of his cattle ranch. In January 2003 Club Nacional de Football convinced him to join their ranks again. A few months later, O'Neill, who was combining his job as a footballer in Montevideo with that of a rancher and racehorse-owner, decided to retire from high-level professional football at the still young age of thirty, though the club did try to dissuade him. After his retirement he played part-time for a club in the interior league and now coaches a local team.

O'Neill first played for the Uruguayan national team in June 1993. He represented his country in nineteen matches, scoring three goals. He was selected and played for Uruguay at the FIFA World Cup 2002.

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