

# Arrigo Sacchi and wine: why “buying the game” is more important than buying the champion

scritto da Fabio Piccoli | 31 Ottobre 2025



*Arrigo Sacchi's football philosophy—valuing the “game” (strategy) over the “champion” (talent)—offers a vital lesson for the wine industry. Too often, wineries hire expensive professionals based on CVs without a clear business strategy. This analysis argues that defining the company's “game” is the essential first step to successful recruiting and avoiding costly failures.*

The start of the Serie A championship offers the inspiration for a parallel that, although daring, proves illuminating for our world of wine. **Arrigo Sacchi's recent statement to**

**the *Gazzetta dello Sport*, in which he urged Inter not to “buy new players, but to buy the game... which, by the way, never gets injured,” is a mantra that deserves to be etched into the strategies of every winery.**

Sacchi, the ‘heretical’ coach of the stellar AC Milan of Van Basten, Gullit, and Rijkaard, always had a fixation: **the system and the game strategy prevail over the talent of the individual.** Players were called upon to adapt to a defined game model, not the other way around. Transporting this vision into the wine sector, where the ‘champions’ are the professionals we hire—from the Export Manager to the Sales Manager—allows us to grasp a systemic flaw in recruiting.

## **The ‘Transfer Market’ of wine and the absence of strategy**

How many times, as consultants, do we witness a veritable ‘transfer market’ for wine? We talk about the ‘player’ (the professional), their cost (often considered exaggerated), and their *curriculum vitae* (CV). **Rarely, and this is the sore point, does anyone ask if that professional will be able to adapt to the game strategy the company wants to implement, or, even before that, if such a strategy has even been defined.**

The risk, just as happens with football teams that buy top players in the “hope” that they will work in a certain system, is that wineries also hire a professional based on a CV, without first clarifying:

- What game do you want to play (strategy and company vision)?
- What championship do you want to play in (defined markets and objectives)?
- What target customers do you want to intercept (positioning)?
- What communication do you want to activate (tone and

channels)?

**It is dangerous to look for the players first when it is not yet clear what game you want to play.**

The origins of frustration...

**If the company has not clearly defined the market vision or the business model it intends to adopt, the integration of a new resource—even the most qualified one with the most enviable CV—will very easily be a failure.**

It is in this strategic vacuum that business frustrations are born. An Export Manager with years of experience in Asian markets is hired, only to discover that the company's 'game' is to consolidate direct sales at the winery or to attack Eastern European markets. **The Sales Manager or Marketing Director is fired because they did not bring the expected results.**

## **Miracles are not a business strategy**

Likewise, and this must be emphasized particularly in such a complex phase for our wine sector as well, **rather than seeking human resources, too many companies are looking for men or women capable of miracles.**

**And it is clear that miracles do not represent a business strategy.**

If, however, as is desirable, one is seriously looking for human resources, for skills useful to one's company, the question to ask is what is the best way to choose them.

**The strategy, the "game," does not get injured and does not ask for a raise.** It is an intangible, but fundamental, investment that precedes any human investment. Only after having "bought the game," designed it, and understood its rules, can one look for the player with the skills and

relationships useful for that particular role.

Sacchi's lesson is a warning: in wine, as in football, **the winning strategy is not the sum of individual talents, but the harmony between the individuals and a defined, superior 'game'**. It is time for companies to invest first in the 'game' rather than the 'champion,' to build cohesive teams and winning strategies in global markets.

One last note: on the market, there are still many women and men useful to Italian wine businesses. Do not be fooled by the prejudice that there are no competent human resources available to support our wine companies. **But before choosing, try to better understand your real needs and define a strategy appropriate for your company, capable of giving you clear objectives that will be the indispensable "filter" for your selection.**

And then, entrust yourselves to the professionals of selection, of recruitment; believe me, it is the best money spent, the money that in the end will make you grow... and save you by avoiding dangerous selection errors.

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## Key points

1. **Sacchi's philosophy:** The system (strategy) is more important than individual talent.
2. **Wine recruiting often fails** by hiring "champions" without a clear "game" (strategy).
3. **Define vision, markets, and positioning** *before* searching for new personnel.
4. **A defined strategy is the best filter** for identifying the right human resources.
5. **Using professional recruiters saves money** by preventing strategic hiring errors.

