



Sport - Rocco Commisso, the last great Calabrian in America dies with him

Roma - 17 gen 2026 (Prima Notizia 24) Rocco Commisso, President of Fiorentina, until yesterday, the day of his death, was certainly—at least in the collective imagination of us Italians—the most famous Calabrian in America.

Son of a carpenter, he was born 76 years ago in Marina di Gioiosa Ionica and spent the last months of his life fighting an incurable illness. Fully aware of the gravity of the disease that had struck him, he continued to work until the end, even from his hospital bed, with a tenacity and passion that over time made him a true icon of the business and sports world. Italian, Calabrian, and Italo-American of extraordinary charisma, with an emigration story behind him that was exhilarating and rich in entrepreneurial successes. I chased him for years between New York and Florence, especially once he became President of Fiorentina Calcio, bought from the Della Valle family in 2019, but he always refused, not wanting to talk about topics other than sports and those not concerning the soccer team of which he had become president. In the end, I came to terms with it, but his story is the most exciting and emblematic thing one could imagine in telling the Italian emigration to North America today, especially in Pennsylvania where his family of origin had settled. He arrived in New York at the age of 12, and no one could ever have imagined or expected that 50 years later, the street urchin from Marina di Gioiosa Ionica would become a member of the prestigious Forbes 400 list, thanks to an extraordinary career in the cable television sector that spanned nearly half a century of American financial history. His passion for sports matched his love for the sea he had at home in Calabria. As a young man, he played soccer with the Columbia Lions from 1967 to 1970, then joined a freshman team that finished the season undefeated, leading Columbia to its first-ever NCAA playoff appearance. For his on-field performances—as recounted by great American sports chroniclers—"Rocco Commisso was awarded All-Ivy League recognition three times and was invited to try out for the U.S. national soccer team ahead of the 1972 Olympics. In the mid-1970s, he co-founded Friends of Columbia Soccer and served as president from 1978 to 1986, during which time Columbia won eight consecutive Ivy League titles and became the only Ivy League university to reach the NCAA championship final." Not surprisingly, in 2004, for Columbia's 250th anniversary, the university newspaper Daily Spectator listed Rocco Commisso among the 250 greatest undergraduate alumni of all time. There's more: For many years, Columbia has awarded an annual men's soccer prize in his name, and in 2013, the university honored his contributions by naming the soccer stadium at Baker Athletics Complex after him—today called Rocco B. Commisso Soccer Stadium. The pinnacle of achievement. His official biography is jaw-dropping. After graduating from Mount Saint Michael Academy in the Bronx in 1967, he attended Columbia University on a full soccer scholarship, earning a degree in industrial engineering and an MBA. Then, after his business economics degree in 1975, he spent a decade in finance, first at Chase Manhattan Bank (now J.P.

Morgan Chase) and later at Royal Bank of Canada, where he was entrusted with U.S. financing activities for media and communications companies—a strategic role of the highest profile with significant economic and social weight. From 1986 to 1995, he served as executive vice president, chief financial officer, and board member of Cablevision Industries Corporation, and during his tenure, the then-private company rose from 25th to 8th among the nation's largest cable companies, serving 1.3 million customers at the time of its merger with Time Warner. A true industrial revolution in the communications sector. In 1995, he founded Mediacom with the goal of acquiring and revitalizing cable systems in the country's smaller, underserved communities, eventually becoming—incredibly—the fifth-largest cable operator in the United States, enabling him to offer high-speed data, video, phone, and mobile services to over 3 million households and businesses across 22 states. What Silvio Berlusconi had achieved in Italy, he had already done in the United States—and with at least quadruple the commercial value of what happened in Italy. Rocco was "the man of records" for Americans, but above all a "Italian genius" that America never stopped admiring and loving. There are a thousand and more accolades he now carries to heaven for a life spent in service to his adopted land. Among the most celebrated in recent high-society chronicles: the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award, the National Italian American Foundation's Life Achievement Award, the Ellis Island Medal of Honor, and the Vanguard Award for Distinguished Leadership—the highest honor in the American cable television industry. A true diamond in the rough, a man authoritatively invited and inducted into New York's most prestigious associations: the Broadcasting & Cable Hall of Fame, the Cable Center Hall of Fame, and the Columbia University Athletics Hall of Fame. Not to mention that under his leadership, Mediacom was named U.S. Best Managed Company by Deloitte Private and The Wall Street Journal from 2021 to 2025. The news of his passing was announced by the Viola club itself with these heartfelt farewell words: "With great pain and sadness, the Commisso family—wife Catherine, children Giuseppe and Marisa, and sisters Italia and Raffaelina—announce the passing of President Rocco B. Commisso. After a prolonged period of treatment, our beloved President has left us, and today we all mourn his loss. For his family, he was an example, a guide, a loyal and faithful man who, alongside his wife Catherine, reached the milestone of 50 years of marriage, and with his children was a stern yet loving father, as was his character—sweet and determined. His love for Fiorentina—as the statement reads—was the most beautiful gift he gave himself, spending unforgettable days with the boys and girls of the youth teams, always with a caress and a smile for everyone. Unstoppable, he worked until his final days, dedicating himself to his companies Mediacom and Fiorentina, and to their future." His life was dedicated to sports and lived with an insane passion. 2017 will remain a legendary year for American sports, as it's when Rocco Commisso acquired a majority stake in the New York Cosmos, becoming its president—and today the Cosmos are the most recognized soccer brand in the world. After starting to play at Yankee Stadium in 1971, the historic club won a record eight professional titles and brought some of international soccer's greatest stars to the U.S., including Pelé, Franz Beckenbauer, Giorgio Chinaglia, Carlos Alberto, and more recently Raúl and Marcos Senna. Behind it all was him, the boy from Locride. In July 2025, the New York Cosmos were acquired by North Jersey Pro Soccer, based in Paterson, New Jersey, but Rocco Commisso retained a minority stake in

the club. The New York Cosmos remember Rocco Commisso today as a passionate leader "who dedicated his life to soccer and the future of the sport in this country. Rocco fought for the best in American soccer, believing in the growth of the sport, the importance of community, and the power of clubs to inspire the next generations." From America to Italy, the leap is short. In Italy, he first tried to buy Milan and in June 2019 purchased Fiorentina, the club with which he forged his most important bond—rooted precisely in his love for sports. In Italy, and especially in Florence, today is symbolically a day of mourning. With him, the city of sports had begun dreaming big again; the story of the team, like his, is the story of us all. But it's also a day of mourning in Calabria, where he was born and left the memory of a good man who never forgot his roots and remained tied to his childhood memories for the rest of his life. "Soccer," the Viola club emphasizes further, "was his love, and Fiorentina became it seven years ago when Rocco took command of the Viola club and began loving its fans, colors, and the city of Florence. 'Call me Rocco,' he simply said to everyone, with his extraordinary empathy. He was always close to Florence and the Florentines, in everyday life and even in the toughest period of the Covid emergency, when the 'Forza e Cuore' campaign donated generously to city hospitals. The Rocco B. Commisso Viola Park, Fiorentina's home, will live forever bearing his name—a permanent mark of his affection and desire to look to the future of the youth. Precisely 'his' boys and girls who grew up in the youth academy, winning youth trophies and advancing to the men's and women's first teams. Under his leadership, Fiorentina reached two Conference League finals and one Coppa Italia final." Prompt and impeccable comes the thanks from the Commisso-Dynasty. "The Commisso family wishes to thank all those who were close to him in these most delicate moments and is certain that Rocco's memory will remain forever in the hearts of the many people who loved him and shared difficult and beautiful moments with him. A great thought in this sad time goes to everyone at Fiorentina—staff, players, employees—to all who knew Rocco, to the entire Viola people, and especially to all those boys and girls who will continue to carry the Viola colors and the memory of our Rocco to Italy and the world. We miss you and will always miss you." His was a beautiful story, one that for a day brings the name of Calabria and its Marina di Gioiosa Ionica back to the major American networks with the passionate tone with which he always lived. It would be nice to think and imagine that Calabria today—especially Locride, his homeland—would pause for just one minute in mourning for him, but it's the least one could imagine for such an exhilarating and gripping Italian story. Farewell, President.

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