

Published August 19th, 2020

Athlete Giorgio Tavecchio - Italian born, Moraga-raised gastro-preneur

By Jon Kingdon



Giorgio Tavecchio fingers to sky Photos provided

Giorgio Tavecchio is the Chief Executive Officer of ElevenTwelve, an importer from Italy of wine, pasta, sauces, and spreads. After graduating from Campolindo and the University of California at Berkeley, he has followed three F's in his life: Family, food, and football.

Tavecchio was born in Milan, Italy to an Italian father (Renato) and an Italian-American mother (Gabriella) who worked for the American government. With his mother being transferred every three years, the Tavecchios lived all over the world but eventually found a home when she was transferred to San Francisco: "My parents would always look for the best schools and the best soccer teams and clubs for me and my brother and that is how we ended up in Moraga when I was 9. We liked it so much we put down our roots here and my parents still live here."

After one last move to Washington, D.C., the Tavecchio's returned to Moraga in 2005 where Giorgio began his freshman year at Campolindo High School and he was exposed to the game of football: "I ended up kicking for the Campolindo football team by chance. One fall day during my sophomore year (2006), a friend of mine asked if I wanted to be the kicker for the football team. My mother urged me to try and to this day, I believe it was to stop me from damaging our furniture by kicking mini-soccer balls all around the house. The next day, I showed up to football practice and had fun kicking the

football. What really sealed my fate was the team barbecue after practice. The ribs were absolutely delicious, so I thought to myself "If I have to kick a few footballs to get these once a week, I'll do it!"

After graduating from UC Berkeley with a degree in political science and economics and having kicked 48 field goals for the football team, Tavecchio eventually kicked in the NFL for the Oakland Raiders and the Atlanta Falcons. Tavecchio became the first player to hit two 50-plus yard field goals in his debut in NFL history and was named AFC Special Teams Player of the Week.

All of these experiences eventually led to the creation of ElevenTwelve. "The past three years, the University of California has run a coaching clinic in Torino, Italy where I have coached the kickers and served as a translator as needed," said Tavecchio. "It was there that I became close friends with Paolo Tempo, an accountant, who grew up playing American football in Italy in the 1980s. From that friendship, blossomed an idea to share some of the wonderfully communal experiences we had in Italy and a lot of those experiences were set around a big table with a lot of wine and food."

Tempo then brought in David Merlo, a food and beverage wholesaler, with whom he played youth football together and Tavecchio brought in Vincenzo D'Amato, who also emigrated to the United States from Italy, and though they competed against each other at Cal, became best friends.

To Tavecchio and his cohorts, it's more than providing a simple product, it's a desire to bring the Italian love of food to their customers. "It should be a vessel to serve as a communal experience at the table," Tavecchio said. "The food itself is the most unique aspect of the Italian dining experience. What I really appreciate and treasure with Italian food and the culture behind it is that there is a deep respect and tradition that is very cherished nowadays and it lends a respect that Italians relate to food. The food nourishes the body but the experience and the mood behind it, and the story and the culture that goes into our products, creates the opportunity to nourish more of the soul."

Chef Boyardee, they are not.

Tavecchio is not an executive that stays behind the desk. When I interviewed him over the phone, he apologized for the noise because "I'm packing up some boxes from some recent online orders because our warehouse manager is on vacation."

The intangible aspects of football are essential factors in ElevenTwelve operations. "The respect and

teamwork from the football setting and the way Italians look at food and how artisanal production and craftsmanship is revered, cheered, respected, and sacrificed for in Italy, it's the same pattern with ElevenTwelve but in a different context. What I did for my teammates is what we do for our products, for the cheese, wine and pasta making traditions, which shows our respect for the service and the sacrificing for the better good of the tradition. It's pursuing a goal that is bigger than you."

So where does the name ElevenTwelve come from? Of course, there is a football connection to the name - it's the jersey numbers for Merlo (11) and Tempo (12). "It's an homage to our playing days as football players," Tavecchio said. "We chose 11 and 12 out of respect for our elders. We wanted it to be something curious, something mysterious and different that would make people wonder why we're named ElevenTwelve."

The coronavirus has forced the company to adjust on the fly, keeping things up and running. "Our initial strategy was to go more business-to-business, getting into retails and restaurants," Tavecchio said. "So, we pivoted and got our website up earlier than we had planned and we've been open for business online. We've been pleased with the progress we've seen online and with the feedback we've received from our customers. We are young enough to handle these things with the quickest agility possible, not having too much of a backlog in business procedure and accounts payable. Thankfully, all of our products were delivered in late 2019 prior to the virus and we have avoided having to move anything during the tense time of the outbreak and we are beginning to receive more of our products, although it is taking a little longer to get here due to the customs and more of the bureaucracy. We have both private and business clients in the small retail and boutique shops at this point and look to do more with the restaurants once things settle down."

Tavecchio has not yet closed the door on his returning to the National Football League. "I kick and lift three times a week if I'm not working and doing stuff for ElevenTwelve, so those two things are keeping me busy. I never try to make excuses. I'm just trying to be the best kicker that I can be and take advantage of whatever situation can come my way because there is nothing else that you can do."

With his experience in the NFL, Tavecchio is trying to connect with the various teams. "After kicking with the Atlanta Falcons, I have been making great inroads with them," he said. "When you look at the NFL stadiums, it has evolved from hot dogs, hamburgers and peanuts to luxury boxes, field level suites and gourmet foods. There seems to be an explosion of attention on the food service side and the quality of offerings at the stadiums. As things progress, I'd love to have those discussions with the Raiders, if the stadiums do have fans. We're working on it with all the sports but at this point we are focusing on the football market. We can form our pasta into the shape of football (Pasta al Football) and color them to match a team's colors."

Growing up in Moraga also provided a foundation for Tavecchio, having worked in high school at Ristorante Amoroma, still maintaining a friendship to this day with the owners.

Returning periodically to visit his parents brings back a lot of memories for Tavecchio. "I've always liked driving around Moraga around sundown during the summertime when it was going from hot to cool to crisp fresh air. Driving through the neighborhoods, it just felt so peaceful and it smelled so fresh with the eucalyptus trees and all the flowers and the beautiful colors and it was such a warm and welcoming place to grow up. That's something that I will never forget about Moraga. When people ask me where I'm from, I say that I have lived everywhere but I consider Moraga my home because of how close I felt with the community. At one point, I was a volunteer coach at Campolindo and lived at home so there are a lot of deep roots that have been planted in Moraga that have shaped who I am, shaped the story of my family and shaped our experience in the United States. It's those little things that make me grateful."

Tavecchio is now sharing an exclusive promo code LAMO with the Lamorinda community for 25% off for all the ElevenTwelve products which can be ordered at www.eleventwelveusa.com



Giorgio Tavecchio at Campolindo

Reach the reporter at: sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com

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