

# Lifestyle

SUNDAY, JULY 29, 2018



View of the full moon during the 'blood moon' next to the ancient Greek goddess Iphigeneia holding a child symbolizing peace and justice in central Athens. The period of total eclipse, when earth's shadow is directly across the moon and it is at its reddest, will last 1 hour, 42 minutes and 57 seconds, making it the longest viewable lunar eclipse of the century. — AFP

## Stick it like Gianni: Italian scores with football album collection

Newspapers recalling decades of sporting glory line the walls, cupboards overflow with stickers of footballing legends and on a desk, pristine packets lie tantalisingly waiting to be opened: welcome to the home of Gianni Bellini, the man with a claim to the biggest football sticker album collection in the world. Bellini boasts 4,000 complete albums filled with some two million stickers and another 400,000 yet to stick in. "Every day after I've finished work and picked up my grandson from school, I spend at least 4 to 6 hours working on them," Bellini tells AFP.

The 54-year-old typographer lives in the small town of San Felice sul Panaro around 30 kilometers (18 miles) from Modena—the heartland of renowned sticker maker Panini. He began his collection around age 13, before taking a small break a few years later, "more interested in girls" than stickers, he admits. But soon after getting married

aged 19, Bellini picked up where he left off, and published ads in newspapers around the world looking for fellow collectors to exchange albums with. "I received 600-700 letters a month, it was the start of correspondences and friendships, many of which I still have today," he laughs.

And his wife Giovanna, who is also a football fan, doesn't mind her husband's diehard hobby. "I support him and I'm happy too. That way he's always at home, where I can keep an eye on him, he doesn't go to the bar," she jokes. Every day, Bellini checks for new products online and keeps up with his some three hundred correspondents. "I send about 5,000 emails a year," he says, poring over a large diary where everything is logged. His entire collection is also archived on his computer. "It's an amazing feeling to finally have the album in your hands," says Bellini as he opens a fresh packet from Mexico. "But once that emotion is over, you're already thinking about the next album."

### Hidden treasure

Bellini spends 4,000 to 5,000 euros a year on his albums which are carefully stored at a temperature of 23 degrees. Nothing is for sale because "the real collector buys, exchanges, but does not sell," he says. Bellini's most prized album is that of the 1970 World Cup in Mexico: "Panini's first international album," he says proudly. On the other hand, the thought of the 1986 Egyptian championship album still makes him shudder: the album got lost when he sent it to be translated and he only found another copy 20 years later.

For Bellini, the albums are also a record of shifts in modern culture because "over the years, you see the changing hairstyles, shirts etc." The Panini factory in Modena has become almost a second home for him as he buys their albums and stickers direct. Although the Italian publisher represents only around half of his col-



Gianni Bellini, owner of the largest football sticker collection in the world, receives a delivery package with football stickers coming from Mexico, in San Felice sul Panaro, province of Modena.— AFP photos



Gianni Bellini holds an autographed picture of Italian former footballer Riccardo Ferri.



Gianni Bellini, owner of the largest football sticker collection in the world, poses for a picture in his studio.



Gianni Bellini shows a card of France's forward Antoine Griezmann.



Gianni Bellini holds an autographed picture of Alberto Juantorena, the Cuban former runner who won both the 400 and 800 m Olympic titles.



Gianni Bellini holds a card of France's goalkeeper Hugo Lloris.



Football stickers and albums stand on the desk of Gianni Bellini.