

ENGLAND WORLD CUP 1966: Semi-final
London, Wembley Stadium, 26 July 1966

ENGLAND - PORTUGAL

2-1

FOOTBALL COMES BACK HOME

Eusebio was very frightening for the English, it was the last hurdle to overcome to reach the coveted World Cup final, the first in their history. In fact, the inventors of football (back in 1863) had snubbed the maximum competition for national teams since the first edition in 1930, coming out of isolation only after the war, and making a historical impression in 1950 at the first participation by being eliminated by the United States, a team made up of immigrants and mercenaries put together for a trip to Rio de Janeiro. The next three editions were not much better and, while England were always the team to beat in friendlies, they never made their mark in the big matches. But this was a chance for redemption: 'Football comes back home' reported the national newspapers of the time, it was time to return to the roof of the world. And the team prepared by Sir Alf Ramsey was first-rate in every department: goalkeeper Banks had been the revelation of the World Cup with his feline leaps, the defence was very solid with captain Bobby Moore as the great leader, in midfield there was the backbone of the strong Manchester United with Bobby Charlton and Nobby Stiles, and finally in attack a battering ram like Geoff Hurst, a six-foot-nine, two-shouldered cuirassier but with a surprising dexterity of movement. In front of 95,000 spectators at Wembley, England had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and felt they could do no wrong, despite Portugal being a very strong team, but victory was their only chance to change history. This burden of responsibility froze the English a little in the first minutes, while Portugal took the field more relaxed, with nothing to lose. In the 12th minute England finally made their presence felt with Ball's cross from the left, Costa Pereira's exit was poor and the ball slipped right to the feet of Jacky Charlton, Bobby's brother and national team stopper, but he was anticipated by José Carlos' slide-rule intervention; the ball then reached Hunt but his shot was parried by the revived Pereira. England grew on the pressure of the crowd and a Bobby Charlton full back, but in the 28th minute there was great fear for a right-footer from Eusebio after a triangle with Simoes, Banks was alert and headed in for a corner. Shortly afterwards Bobby Charlton made Wembley explode as he slotted home a right-footed drive from the far post after goalkeeper Pereira had recklessly headed Hunt's effort wide: England took the lead. For a few minutes Portugal were at the total mercy of the English, who played great football, then the Lusitanian reaction came from Eusebio, who hit a spectacular right-footed volley from José Augusto's cross, but Banks again responded with a fantastic dive. In the final minutes of the first half Portugal attacked en masse but without precision, just as they did at the start of the second half. In the 52nd minute the Portuguese also claimed a penalty kick for a hand in the box by Stiles to unintentionally stop a cross from the unleashed Simoes. Stiles played in a marking on Eusebio and was perfect, although the Portuguese proved to be in terrific form he almost always remained on the sidelines thanks to the exceptional anticipation of Manchester's unstoppable motor. The last 10 minutes were thrilling: in the 80th minute Hurst got into the box on a defender's throw (the play used by the English for most of the match), skilfully skipped past José Carlos with a dribbling return pass and handed Bobby Charlton a perfect assist, which the English star could not miss: it was 2-0 with an unstoppable right-footer. It all seemed to be over, but here was Portugal again: a minute later Torres, with an imperial header, overtook Banks and Cohen, putting the ball behind them on Simoes' cross from the right, but Jacky Charlton burst through and prevented the goal with a handball.

avoided the goal with a handball. An unexceptionable penalty kick (today it would also be an expulsion). Eusebio shoots and scores. Eight minutes of passion announced for Wembley. In the 86th minute, Torres headed the fast Simoes who penetrated the area alone in front of Banks, but no one knew how Stiles recovered from behind and slipped in ahead of him at the moment of the shot. In the last minute Bobby Charlton's left-footed shot was parried by Pereira, who then passed to Eusebio, who took off on one of his proverbial 50-metre sprints down the left flank, then converged and touched on Coluna, dribbled clear of Peters and hit the top corner, but Gordon Banks, who flew like a tiger over his prey, was on hand to deflect it into the corner. A moment of terror followed by the referee's final whistle.

A moment of terror followed by the referee's final whistle: England were in the final, and it was world consecration for an absolute and complete champion like Bobby Charlton. Finally, football comes back home!

ENGLAND: Banks 8, Cohen 6.5, Wilson 7, Stiles 7.5, Jacky Charlton 6, Moore 7, Ball 7, Peters 6.5, Bobby Charlton 8, Hurst 7, Hunt 7. All. Alf Ramsey.

PORTUGAL: Costa Pereira 6, Jose Carlos 5, Baptista 6, Hilario 5.5, Graca 6, Festa 6.5, Torres 7, Jose Augusto 6, Eusebio 7, Coluna 6.5, Simoes 7. Manager: Otto Gloria.

Referee: Schwinte (FRA) 7

At 30' Bobby Charlton 1-0.

On 80' Bobby Charlton 2-0; on 82' Eusebio (Rig.) 2-1.