

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP MEXICO 1970 - Quarter-
finals Toluca, Estadio Luis Dosal, 14 June 1970

MEXICO - ITALY

1-4

THUNDERCLAP

Maximum result with minimum effort: that was what the Italian national team achieved in the first round of the 1970 World Cup in Mexico. A winning debut 1-0 against Sweden, then two dull 0-0s against Uruguay and Israel, first place in the round with one goal scored and zero conceded in 3 games. The failure to use the reigning Golden Ball winner Gianni Rivera, who only took the field in the second half of the third game against Israel, had sparked controversy against coach Valcareggi, who was convinced that Mazzola and Rivera could not coexist. His preference for the Interista moustache had sent the Rossoneri Golden Boy into a rage, with threats to leave the camp and return to the Italy; the intervention of the FIGC president Franchi had calmed tempers and convinced Rivera to remain available. Given the stunted results of the first phase, Valcareggi announced a relay between Mazzola and Rivera in the quarter-final against Mexico: Mazzola would play the first half and Rivera the second. The host Mexico was certainly not a high level formation, but Italy in the past had suffered a lot from the matches with the host teams (see Chile'62) and above all from the home referees: however, Mexico had closed its round on equal points with the Soviet Union (0-0 in the direct clash) and beating Belgium and El Salvador. For Italy it was the moment of truth, for the first time since 1938 (it seems absurd...) they had made it through the first round and were playing a knockout match worth the World Cup semi-finals. The Toluca stadium is overflowing with Mexicans (officially 30,000, maybe more), used to following their team at the Azteca in Mexico City (100,000 seats) and forced to change cities as they finished second in their group. The start of the match was well-balanced, the teams attacking in alternating phases with good rhythm despite the heat and the altitude, until on 13 minutes the Mexican fantasist Frago took advantage of a slip by Rosato and headed towards the area to serve a delightful assist to Gonzales who struck Albertosi with his first intention. It was Italy's first goal in this World Cup and they were in pain: Mexico did not give up attacking and Italy went into a crisis, missing all the passes and unable to react. In the 17th minute, Pulido launched a great shot from 30 metres and Albertosi, diving, put it into the corner not without difficulty. The Azzurri needed a bit of luck to recover: on 25' Gigi Riva insisted in a personal action on the right in the midst of 5 adversaries that seemed to have the better of them, but Cagliari's goal scorer, newly crowned champion of Italy, managed to offload to Domenghini who kicked towards goal without much conviction. His shot was unintentionally deflected by the defender Pena and displaced his own goalkeeper, giving Italy an undeserved draw. Mexico reacted, spurred on by their own public, and Italy closed in, waiting to launch the counter-attack. The only chance for the Azzurri happened at the feet of captain Facchetti (at his 50th presence in the national team), served by Boninsegna his right footer was rejected by Calderon, Riva arrived but committed a foul on the goalkeeper and the action vanished. At halftime the expected relay took place and with Rivera on the field it was a different Italy: after 2 minutes there was the irresistible progression of Boninsegna who jumped over 2 men and was then stopped by Guzman just as he was kicking in front of the goal. goalkeeper, some protest but the intervention seems regular. The teams attacked each other, the match became beautiful and open to any solution. It was class in these cases that tipped the scales, and Gianni Rivera was the right man at the right time: in the 64th minute he threw for Riva, who controlled the edge of the area, freed himself for the left and slotted in Calderon with a precise diagonal shot to the far post. It was "Thunderbolt's" first goal at the World Cup, finally the lethal weapon

The Azzurri's number one unblocked. But watch out, a minute later there is a corner for Mexico and Pulido makes a perfect header in the middle of the area that beats Albertosi but the free Cera, lurking at the post, deflects his header over the line. Miraculous. Two minutes later the unleashed Pulido, a team-mate of quantity and quality, fired a torpedo from 30 metres that Albertosi flew to deflect with a great feat. Mexico was all forward and Italy was deadly with its counter-attack in the 70th minute: this time it was Riva who launched Rivera, who galloped across the opponent's half of the field, jumped over the goalkeeper and passed into the goal, but full-back Valtorla rebounded on the line, Rivera tried again, rebounded again, Domenghini arrived, rebounded, Rivera again, dribbled and touched into the corner, and this time it was 3-1. The counter-attacking action was repeated in the 76th minute, with Rivera amazingly sprinting 30 metres and then opening up for Riva, who won the rebound with the opposing goalkeeper and deposited the 4-1 into the net. To seal Rivera's fantastic performance, the spectacular crossbar hit in the 88th minute at the end of another deadly Azzurri counterattack on the De Sisti - Riva - Rivera axis. In the 93rd minute there would also be a penalty for Italy for Boninsegna's landing in the area, but the referee did not infringe on the hosts. A triumph that puts coach Valcareggi in big trouble ahead of the semifinal: how can someone like Rivera be kept out again?

MEXICO: Calderon 4.5, Valtorla 5.5, Peña 4.5, Guzman 5.5, Perez 5, Pulido 7, Gonzales 6.5 (from 68' Borja sv), Munguia 6 (from 60' Diaz 6), Valdivia 5.5, Fragoso 6, Padilla 5.5. Coach Raul Cardenas.

ITALY: Albertosi 7, Burgnich 6.5, Facchetti 7, Bertini 6.5, Rosato 6, Cera 7, Domenghini 7 (from 84' Gori sv), De Sisti 7, Boninsegna 7, Mazzola 6 (from 46' Rivera 8), Riva 7.5. Manager: Ferruccio Valcareggi.

Referee: Scheurer (SVI) 6

At 13' Gonzales 1-0; at 25' Domenghini 1-1.

At 63' Riva 1-2; at 70' Rivera 1-3; at 76' Riva 1-4.



Gigi Riva, 'Rombo di Tuono', wearing the Cagliari shirt.