

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP MEXICO 1970 -
Semifinal Mexico City, Estadio Azteca, 17 June 1970

ITALY - WEST GERMANY

4-3 *d.t.s.*

THE MATCH OF THE CENTURY

How much has this match been talked about in the last 50 years? A simple football match has stuck in the memory of millions of people, everyone knows the outcome of this World Cup semi-final. What happened in extra time is, to say the least, unrepeatable, a succession of crazy emotions that sent the more than 100,000 spectators at the Azteca in Mexico City into ecstasy, as well as the television viewers who saw it live (in Europe it was late at night, which made the event even more impressive). So much so that at the entrance of the Azteca Stadium today you can find a plaque commemorating the 'match of the century'. West Germany was favoured by the fact that they had dominated their group by goals (as opposed to Italy) and eliminated World Champions England in the quarter-finals (Italy, on the other hand, the modest Mexico). Despite Rivera's match against Mexico, Valcareggi had relegated him back to the bench in favour of Sandro Mazzola, to give the team more balance against the German offensive power. Italy surprisingly took the lead after only 7 minutes: Boninsegna triangulated with Riva and fired a left-footed shot from outside the area that surprised Maier. The game was slow and reasoned, the heavy pitch due to a downpour before the match did not help and with the altitude and humidity it was a cocktail that cut the players' legs. In the 17th minute Beckenbauer started from the middle of the field with a fantastic progression and skipped past Mazzola, Burgnich, Cera and Facchetti, with the latter knocking him down in the middle of the area but the referee let it pass. Italy managed and slowed down the game, the first German chance was around the half-hour mark with a cross by Löhr from the left that Müller did not control, but unintentionally served Seeler in front of the Azzurri goalkeeper: Bertini slipped in from behind and anticipated the German just as he was putting the ball into the net. In the 33rd minute a left-footed shot from 35 yards by Grabowski, deflected by Bertini, took on a dangerous parabola, which Albertosi promptly repelled for a corner. In the final minutes Italy came forward again with a good chance for Riva, but Maier came out well and put in a corner kick. In the second half, out came Mazzola and in came Gianni Rivera for the usual relay match: the Golden Boy was inspired and dragged Italy on the attack in search of a double with some excellent plays. But after a quarter of an hour of Italian dominance, Germany went wild and the Italian defence spent 10 nightmarish minutes. Newcomer Libuda committed Albertosi in the 63rd minute, and a minute later a reckless pass from Bertini was intercepted by Müller, the ball was passed to Grabowski who served Overath in the middle of the area, his left footer and the ball hit the crossbar.

Immediately afterwards Beckenbauer set off with a majestic penetration and was tripped by Cera as he entered the box: for the Peruvian referee it was a free kick from the edge but the Germans claimed a penalty. Kaiser Franz injured his shoulder. Overath moved well and then invented an illuminating assist for Grabowski, his shot beat Albertosi but not Rosato who made a miracle save, Seeler arrived on the ball but was tackled by Bertini, the ball ended up with Müller who, three metres from goal, clumsily kicked over the crossbar. The Germans were again infuriated by the missed penalty on Seeler but the referee had given the advantage which Gerd Müller squandered. The German super-bomber seemed to be having an off day and his huge legs on a tiny body did not get one right today. With Germany unable to equalise it was Albertosi who gave them further thrills, with embarrassing faux pas in sending and passing: the most clamorous in the 83rd minute when he sent Grabowski's ball into the back of the net, the ball bouncing towards goal and the goalkeeper with a feline leap anticipating Müller and knocking the ball out,

while the referee had whistled an improbable free kick for a foul by Grabowski. It was the 90th minute and Albertosi chased away the fear with a prodigious intervention on a Seeler header. It seemed to be over, but the seconds of added time never passed and the Germans, as they were known, never gave up: in the 92nd minute they earned a throw-in in attack, Grabowski's percussion on the left found space for the cross, in the middle of the area there was the free Schnellinger in search of glory, ironically a Milan defender, who with a touch on the volley found the equalizer at the last second. The morale of the Azzurri is down now, but with the start of extra time they do not spare any dangerous offensive sorties. Beckenbauer is on the pitch with a conspicuous bandage immobilising his right shoulder and he stoically holds the field, keeping his proverbial class intact. The first German chance was a header by Müller, which was neutralised by Albertosi; it was just the warning sign of the goal to come in the 5th minute of the first period of extra time. Libuda's long corner from the right, Seeler with a fantastic header towards the centre where the new-entrant Poletti got in the way and touched it towards Albertosi: Müller stepped in, anticipating the goalkeeper and touched it into the net. It was the goal of mockery, after Italy had led the scoring for the entire match. It seemed the end and instead it was the beginning. Four minutes passed and Rivera kicked a free-kick from the three-quarter line, the ball spilled into the area where Held misjudged the control, Tarcisio Burgnich broke through, throwing himself forward perhaps for the first time in the match, and with a precise right-footed shot beat Maier: 2-2. Schemes broke down and the teams attacked each other constantly, also because a draw was tantamount to fate's decision (a coin) to go through to the semi-finals. They might as well dare: Libuda was unstoppable on the right, skipped past Facchetti and crossed for Seeler, his header was put in for a corner by Bertini, placed in front of Albertosi. Germany pressed and Italy struck with a fantastic counter-attack: Rivera launched Domenghini on the left, who immediately centred on Gigi Riva. Rombo di Tuono stopped with his left, again with his left he got rid of Schnellinger and again with his left he shot a perfect diagonal that beat Maier: 3-2 for Italy. The crowd was delirious, the first overtime ended with a resounding reversal of the result. Germany seemed to suffer the blow and it was Albertosi again who made himself the protagonist in the negative by throwing the ball onto the back of the unsuspecting Poletti, Müller intervened and Albertosi mowed him down just outside the area to make up for it. Overath took the free kick, Seeler headed it in and Albertosi redeemed himself with a great save in the corner. Libuda went on to strike, cross again for Seeler, whose header was a phenomenon despite being little more than a dwarf. The ball then reached Müller, who mocked Albertosi and Rivera, positioned to cover the post, with an imperceptible header on Seeler's parabola. We were still level! With all the pride of a World Cup semi-final, the Azzurri brought the ball up the middle, Rivera brought the team up and then passed to De Sisti, who in turn served Facchetti, who threw the ball to Boninsegna on the left who, with a wonderful dart, skipped past Schulz and passed towards the centre where Rivera, who had followed the action, rushed in and with a flat right-footed shot, he dispatched Maier to make the score 4-3 and enter the legend. This time Germany had no more of it and Italy managed the final minutes with great momentum thanks to the untamed runs of Domenghini and De Sisti. If you want to explain the beauty of football to someone who doesn't love it, show them the extra time of Italy-West Germany 4-3.

ITALY: Albertosi 6.5, Burgnich 7, Facchetti 6.5, Bertini 6.5, Rosato 6.5 (*from 91' Poletti 5.5*), Cera 7, Domenghini 8, De Sisti 7.5, Boninsegna 8, Mazzola 6.5 (*from 46' Rivera 8.5*), Riva 8. All. Ferruccio Valcareggi.

WEST GERMANY: Maier 6, Vogts 5.5, Patzke 6 (*from 65' Held 6*), Schnellinger 6.5, Schulz 5.5, Beckenbauer 7.5, Grabowski 7.5, Overath 7.5, Gerd Müller 7, Seeler 7.5, Löhr 6.5 (*from 51' Libuda 8*). Manager: Helmut

Schön. Referee: Yamasaki (PER)

5.5

At 7 minutes Boninsegna 1-0.

On 92' Schnellinger 1-1.

At 94' G. Müller 1-2; at 98' Burgnich 2-2; at 104' Riva 3-2; at 110' G. Müller 3-3; at 111' Rivera 4-3.



The plaque at the entrance to the Atzecca Stadium in Mexico City.



The decisive moment: Rivera embraced by Boninsegna had just bagged the 4-3 goal.