

ARGENTINA WORLD CUP 1978 / First Round

Buenos Aires, Estadio Monumental, 6 June 1978

ARGENTINA - FRANCE**2-1****THE HARSH LAW OF GOAL**

Argentina and France had only one outcome at their disposal for this match: to win. Argentina for national pride, to give joy to a people who clung to the World Cup as the only source of hope in the daily disquiet brought by General Varela's 1976 coup d'état: tens of thousands of desaparecidos, political opponents or just suspects who disappeared from circulation from one day to the next. Years later their tragic fate came to light, immense tortures that also took place during the World Cup, a few hundred metres from the Monumental Stadium and their bodies abandoned in the Atlantic Ocean to be eaten by sharks. Every Thursday the mothers of the desaparecidos paraded in the Plaza de Mayo with photos of their children, without ever getting answers from the military junta. The French motivation was purely sporting, after the defeat to Italy in the opener (1-2) any result other than victory was tantamount to elimination. Hidalgo risked everything and removed the veteran Guillou to entrust the keys of the national team to the young upstart Michel Platini, 22 years old from Nancy; alongside him he lined up the 23-year-old Rocheteau, the emerging Saint Etienne bomber, with the other two forwards Lacombe and Six for an attacking France. And Argentina, also an attacking team with four offensive players such as Houseman, Kempes, Luque and Valencia on the pitch from the start, were surprised by the transalpine bravado and conceded for the first quarter of an hour, risking a goal on two occasions: Lacombe's diving header in the 8th minute and Rocheteau's header from Six in the 15th minute. In the 17th minute Argentina woke up to a brilliant little Osvaldo Ardiles: he exchanged passes with Kempes and entered the box, dribbled clear of three defenders and gave Kempes a golden assist, but the giant Argentine got in the way of his team-mate Valencia and fumbled the ball, then Luque came from behind to head in a right-footed volley, but French stopper Lopez cleared on the line. Shortly afterwards Gallego took a surprise free-kick, unleashing Houseman, and it was child's play for him to beat the onrushing goalkeeper, partly because the linesman had raised his flag and the referee stopped play. Then Valencia tried, getting rid of Battiston on the left and catching Kempes in the middle of the area, a great left-footed volley and a miraculous response from Bertrand-Demanes. France resumed to grind out the game with Platini touching down countless balls without wasting any of them and Six's left-footed runs overwhelmed the Argentine defence. The South Americans retaliated with the devastating accelerations of the long-haired Luque, who seemed to be endowed with supernatural strength when he sprinted towards his opponent, and his long-haired twin brother Kempes, who was no less explosive. The match was beautiful with the two teams thinking only of attacking with continuous frontal reversals. In the 40th minute Houseman served Kempes for a great left-footed shot that hit the post. In the last minute of the game, Kempes again made a great play, first skipping past Bathenay, then Michel, then lobbing Luque in the box, Luque promptly shot over the line of French defenders and his left-footed shot crashed into the arm of Tresor, who was desperate to stop it. The referee consulted with the linesman and awarded the generous penalty (the foul was clearly unintentional) at the urging of a crowd that was, to say the least, unhappy.

infernally. Passarella placed the ball a span ahead of the somewhat ruined penalty spot; Platini approached the ball and moved it to the penalty spot to unnerve him; the Argentine captain seemed to want to bite the cheeky Frenchman but then ignored him and moved the ball forward again, while Platini complained to the referee that the ball was not 11 metres from the goal. The tension is

cut with a knife. Passarella did not let himself be rattled and kicked an impregnable left-footed shot and Argentina were ahead with the referee whistling the end of the first half. The French returned to the pitch determined to turn the game around and dominated the first few minutes of play without, however, managing to trouble captain Passarella and his defence. Perhaps a weight attacker to the French rather than three movement strikers. In the 57th minute, Valencia exchanged passes with Kempes in the three-quarter and then fired a dazzling left-footer from over 30 metres out that flew just wide of the crossbar and Bertrand-Demanes made a prodigious backward save, crashing disastrously against the post as he fell back. For the good transalpine goalkeeper there is a stretcher and a substitution, but it will be nothing serious. Battiston's great ball for Lacombe, who lobbed past Fillol but hit the crossbar, Lacombe was back on the ball but Platini was quicker than he was, and he slotted the ball in without delay with a left-footed shot.

Argentina reacted immediately, Kempes juggling at the edge of the area, then suggesting the insertion of Luque who, from an excellent position, seemed to strike poor Baratelli but Lopez's providential slip deflected the lethal shot into the corner. In the 64th minute Rocheteau spilled into the middle from the right, Six's header was blocked by Fillol. In the 70th minute, Platini crossed the whole field with the ball on his foot, passed Passarella and made a masterful assist for Six, who overcame the last defender Tarantini and, in front of Fillol, clumsily shot wide. Having wasted the match point, the harsh law of goal was mercilessly applied: Ardiles served Luque on the edge of the area, controlled and volleyed into the top corner, the 2-1 gorgezo and the Monumental exploded with joy as the white and blue flags flew. Two minutes later, France tried again with Rocheteau's counter-attacking left-footer, Fillol deflecting it into the corner. Platini in the 79th minute served Six in, the French pixie burned Olguin who pushed him as he was about to finish:

Platini calls for a penalty but the referee doesn't quite hear it. The French game gradually gave way to frustration and there was a bad intervention by Lopez on Luque who fell badly and fractured his arm. Argentina, who had already lost Alonso to injury, had no more substitutions and were down to 10 until the 90th minute, but France had already fired all their bullets. A truly merciless draw placed in front of the beautiful French national team the 2 teams that will prove to be the strongest of the World Cup, Italy and Argentina, thus eliminating in the first round a great team, perhaps not yet fully mature for these stages. But we will meet them again soon.

ARGENTINA: Fillol 7, Tarantini 6, Olguin 6.5, Passarella 7, Gallego 7, Galvan 6.5, Ardiles 7, Houseman 7, Kempes 8, Luque 8, Valencia 6.5 (*from 64' Alonso sv; from 72' Ortiz sv*). Manager: Cesar Luis Menotti.

FRANCE: Bertrand-Demanes 7.5 (*from 58' Baratelli 6*), Battiston 6.5, Bossis 6.5, Lopez 7, Tresor 6.5, Bathenay 6.5, Six 6.5, Rocheteau 6.5, Lacombe 6, Platini 7.5, Michel 7. All. Michel Hidalgo.

Referee: Dubach (SVI) 5.5

At 45' Passarella (Rig.) 1-0.

On 60' Platini 1-1; on 73' Luque 2-1.