

ARGENTINA WORLD CUP 1978 / First Round

Buenos Aires, Estadio Monumental, 10 June 1978

ARGENTINA - ITALY

0-1

BETTEGA'S SNUB TO THE ARGENTINE GENERALS

Everything was going perfectly for Argentina. After the victories against Hungary and France, the home team already had the pass for the second round and it would have been enough to beat an Italy that had also already qualified to win the group, avoid meeting Brazil and thus be able to play the second round in the welcoming and packed Monumental in Buenos Aires. Bearzot, for his part, was tempted to field the reserves and let the starters rest in order to have them fresher in view of the second round, but in the end he fielded the same "eleven" that had impressed in the first two matches, brilliantly won 2-1 against France in a comeback and 3-1 against Hungary. A draw would have been enough for Italy to win the round (due to the better goal difference) and there was no better situation to unleash the defensive catenaccio with a few counter-attacking sorties to lighten the opponent's grip. But the Argentine team was frightening and, sponsored by General Videla's military regime who saw in this event a unique opportunity to disguise their ferocious dictatorship, they were obliged to always win, thanks to the boost of a very warm public. As expected, Italy took the field very well covered, aiming for a draw, and its compactness immediately put the Argentine attack in difficulty, which, as demonstrated in the first two matches, needed space to explode its physical strength. In the 7th minute Bellugi left the field due to injury and Cuccureddu entered in his place. Bearzot moved Claudio Gentile to mark Kempes and left Ortiz to the Sardinian defender. Argentina lacked the acceleration of Luque, who was absent due to both the arm injury suffered in the final against France and the bereavement caused by the death of his brother in a car accident. The Argentine pressure increased with an asphyxiating pressing in the middle of the field, but in attack they were unable to make themselves dangerous, while Italy showed a delightful dribbling in the restarts with first-intention plays that eluded the adversary's pressing. The first chance on goal was for Italy in the 25th minute: from Causio's corner, the young Paolo Rossi's header left Bettega who hit a shot into the small area, but Fillol miraculously repelled it. Roberto Bettega was fresh from a fantastic year with Juventus, whose goals led to the Scudetto victory and the Champions Cup semi-final, in which they were eliminated by Brugge in extra time (1-0 in the first leg with Bettega's goal, 0-1 in the return and Vanderycken's decisive goal in the 101st minute). Zoff had to commit himself twice in one minute to an Argentinian flare-up between the 28th and 29th minutes: firstly, he flew to deflect a Kempes free-kick into the corner and, on the subsequent corner, he blocked a towering header from Passarella. In the 33rd minute there was a clumsy mistake by Cuccureddu, who misjudged his header and instead of releasing it, served Kempes who wasted it from a good position and put it out. "Ossie" Ardiles was Argentina's man everywhere and seemed unstoppable, but the forwards were well controlled by the Azzurri markers. In Italy, "Baron" Causio stood out with elegant and spectacular plays: on the right flank he did whatever he wanted, dribbling, tunnels, sombreri, heel touches, as well as returning to double the mark on Ortiz's incursions. The first half ended 0-0 and for Italy it was certainly a satisfying result. Of course, it did not express the spectacular play of the first two matches, but Argentina is one of the favourites for the World Cup, and not only because they play at home. The unfolding

The match did not change in the second half, with the South Americans always imposing the game and Italy stemming the attacks and breaking on the counter-attack. In the 53rd minute, a free-kick from Antognoni grazed the post with Filliol annihilated. The Argentinians were constantly looking for Kempes and Gentile inexorably anticipated him, nullifying the adversary and gradually extinguishing the hosts' dangerousness; when Ortiz, Bertoni or Valencia managed to jump the man then there was always the free Scirea to impeccably close down, so that Zoff remained safe. In the 67th minute, Italy took the lead with a great goal: Antognoni served Bettega who made a quick triangle on the volley with Paolo Rossi, masterfully cutting the Argentine defence in two and coldly beating Filliol on the way out. A textbook counter-attack, three touches and the ball in the net, the Buenos Aires crowd petrified. The Italian goal disoriented Argentina, who failed to react and the Azzurri came close to doubling the score a few minutes later. Causio was superlative, dribbling past three opponents before crossing for Bettega, whose header overtook Passarella but put the ball over the crossbar and was also kicked by the frustrated Argentine free-kicker. The atmosphere became incandescent in the final, at every clash the crowd exploded calling for fouls in favour of their favourites, but referee Klein was excellent at not allowing himself to be conditioned and the Italians concentrated on not responding to provocations. Every Argentine effort was thus futile and Italy, against all odds, brought home a momentous victory that at this point did not preclude any goal in this World Cup. Everything was going perfectly for Argentina and General Videla's plans, but they had not reckoned with Bettega and Italian pride.

ARGENTINA: Filliol 6.5, Olguin 6, Galvan 6, Passarella 6.5, Tarantini 6, Ardiles 6.5, Gallego 6, Valencia 6, Bertoni 5.5, Kempes 5, Ortiz 5 (*from 73' Houseman sv*). Manager: Cesar Luis Menotti.

ITALY: Zoff 7, Gentile 7.5, Bellugi sv (*from 7' Cuccureddu 6.5*), Scirea 7.5, Cabrini 7, Benetti 7, Tardelli 7, Antognoni 7 (*from 73' Zaccarelli sv*), Causio 8, Rossi 7, Bettega 7.5. Coach Enzo Bearzot.

Referee: Klein (ISR) 7.5

At 67' Bettega 0-1.



Roberto Bettega put through Filliol and launched Italy against all odds.