

WORLD CUP ARGENTINA 1978 / Second Round, Group B Mendoza,
Estadio Ciudad de Mendoza, 21 June 1978

BRAZIL - POLAND

3-1

THE REGIME STOPS BRAZIL

After the defeat against Italy, Argentina found themselves in the second round to play the final with Brazil, Poland and Peru. On the first day Argentina and Brazil immediately took the lead in the standings (Brazil-Peru 3-0, Argentina-Poland 2-0) and on the second day there was a direct clash that ended in a scoreless draw, so that the last day would be decisive: if both teams had won their respective matches, the goal difference would have been decisive. Due to an inexplicable FIFA decision (or one that could simply be explained as 'to benefit the hosts') the two matches were not played at the same time, but Brazil-Poland was scheduled for 3.30pm and Argentina-Peru in the evening: in this way the Argentinians would know exactly what result they would need to reach the final. No small advantage, as Brazil against Poland would have to win by the largest possible margin without knowing whether it would be enough or not. Moreover, the stadium in Mendoza was packed with Argentinians who cheered Poland wildly and booed every action of the Brazilians, so much so that if it had been played in Warsaw the Poles would probably not have had such support. Poland had once again played a very good World Cup, with the inclusion of young Boniek in the proven frame that had finished fourth in 1974, and after the defeat to Argentina had beaten Peru 1-0, remaining for all intents and purposes still in the running for a final in the event of a victory over Brazil. Playing with 40,000 owls in the stands must not be pleasant, and if after less than two minutes your best player (Zico, the star of the World Cup) gets seriously injured and has to leave on a stretcher you probably start to think it's not your day. To close the circle in the 5th minute, Cerezo was splendidly launched by Amaral and found himself alone in front of the Polish goalkeeper, but the linesman stopped him for a non-existent offside (at least 3 metres in play), and then it got really tough. But the Brazilians do not let

They were intimidated and took advantage of the first opportunity to take the lead: in the 12th minute Gil won a free-kick from the limit and Nelinho fired a dazzling bomb that slotted into the crossbar at the speed of light. Brazil wanted to score as many goals as possible and Poland did not want to disappoint their 'new' fans and struck back, with chances flowing from both sides. But as the minutes passed, the tactical organisation and athleticism of the Poles emerged, while the Brazilians suffered from the absence of Zico and could not find offensive outlets. Poland was masterfully orchestrated by Deyna, who triggered the devastating accelerations of Lato and Boniek, but both were not incisive in front of goal.

Finally, as time was drawing to a close, Boniek broke forward and triangulated first with Lato and then with Deyna, finding himself in the middle of the Brazilian area; Amaral anticipated him and the ball soared, but the Brazilian defenders were not quick to clear and the quickest of all was Lato, who slipped between Amaral and Oscar, touching into the net for the deserved Polish equalizer. For Brazil it was a blow and in the second half they risked collapse: in the 49th minute Szarmach hit the post but the referee had interrupted for an obvious hand check by the Polish left winger; in the 51st minute Poland's great counter-attacking action with Deyna, Lato and Szarmach, with Deyna's venomous left-footed shot touching the post. The Argentine public were ecstatic to see Brazil on the ropes, but right at the Poles' best moment the Brazilians took the lead again. It was in the 57th minute and Toninho produced one of the rare forays down the left flank, a seemingly innocuous cross that Makulewicz pushed away: Jorge Mendonca, substitute for

Zico, who until then had been unwatchable, controlled and kicked from the edge of the area and hit the post, and Roberto Dinamite was on hand to put the ball into the net. Poland threw themselves forward and on the counter-attack Brazil conceded the encore, in one of the most incredible actions in the history of football: Dirceu sprinted to the right and with a fantastic tunnel skipped past Makulewicz and into the box, touched to Gil who passed to Mendonca, shot and post, Dirceu arrived with his left and hit the crossbar, the action continued and the ball again reached Dirceu who again charged with his left from outside the box and again hit the post, Roberto burst in with a cannon and put it in! Three posts in the space of 10 seconds. From here to the end the match was spectacular, a succession of emotions thanks to a Poland never tamed and determined to sell its skin dearly. In the 67th minute, Lato ate up a made goal on Boniek's assist, while Brazil, on the counter-attack, came very close to scoring the fourth goal first with Gil and then Cerezo. In the 71st minute, Szarmach was brought down by Mendonca and lost his boot. He picked it up from the ground and pretended to hurl it at the Brazilian, who, frightened, moved away: the referee laughed and took no action. In the 79th minute, the new-entry Lubanski committed Leao with a shot from outside the area and three minutes later he clumsily missed from an excellent position after a great action by Deyna. There was also time for some great play by the great Rivelino in the final minutes and for a fantastic free-kick by Nelinho that was miraculously deflected into the corner by Kukla. Brazil left the pitch satisfied: Argentina would have to beat Peru 4-0 if they were to take the final away from them. Instead, the evening became a resounding mockery for the Brazilians and for the entire football world: Cubillas' Peru, after an excellent start (even a clamorous post on 0-0) melted like snow in the sun, conceding four goals in the second half and losing 6-0. For the Argentinians it is an epic feat, for the rest of the world it is a farce. Peruvian goalkeeper Quiroga, a naturalised Argentinean by birth, is engulfed in controversy for his conduct in the match, which was nothing short of disgraceful. The doubt that the Peruvian goalkeeper (perhaps not only him) was bought remains somewhere between legend and reality, with admissions and retractions made over the years by the goalkeeper himself and other Peruvian players, and possible implications of drug trafficking bosses as well. The fact remains that the 'Peruvian marmelada' eliminated the Brazilians and launched Argentina towards the Buenos Aires final, in one of the lowest moments of sportsmanship in the History of Football.

BRAZIL: Leao 6.5, Toninho 7, Oscar 6.5, Amaral 5.5, Cerezo 6.5 (*from 77' Rivelino sv*), Nelinho 7, Batista 6.5, Zico sv (*from 7' Jorge Mendonca 7*), Gil 7, Roberto Dinamite 7.5, Dirceu 7. Coach Claudio Coutinho.

POLAND: Kukla 7, Zmuda 5.5, Maculewicz 5, Szymanowski 6, Nawalka 6, Gorgon 5.5, Lato 7, Kasperczak 6 (*from 64' Lubanski 6*), Szarmach 6.5, Deyna 7, Boniek 7. Manager: Jacek Gmoch. Referee: Juan Silvagno (CIL) 6

At 13' Nelinho 1-0; at 45' Lato 1-1.

On 58' Roberto Dinamite 2-1; on 63' Roberto Dinamite 3-1.