

WORLD CUP SPAIN 1982 / Second Round Barcelona,
Estadio Sarria, 29 June 1982

ITALY - ARGENTINA

2-1

THE ITALIAN MIRACLE

Italy arrived at the 1982 World Cup with enthusiasm under the heels: after the last pre-World Cup friendly match, the president of the Federcalcio Sordillo declared: "I have never seen anything worse in twenty years of football". Instead, Italy's first match against Poland was a good game, it ended nil-nil but the Azzurri repeatedly touched the advantage and hit a clamorous crossbar with Tardelli. Then, however, Italy cancelled out the good test against the Poles by defending the goal scored by Conti against Peru for a whole time, until Collovati caused the own goal of the disappointing 1-1 final. Paolo Rossi, just back from a two-year disqualification for betting, was a ghost, the attack was non-existent and Bearzot was under accusation for not having called up the league's top scorer Pruzzo and the fantasist Beccalossi, a reason for which an Inter fan apostrophised him as "Scimmione bastardo" (big bastard monkey), getting a slap from the coach. Italy went through to the second round, also drawing 1-1 with Cameroon with a goal from Graziani, finishing level on points, only to have scored one more goal than the Africans, unjustly eliminated like Algeria. Second behind Poland, Italy finished in a prohibitive three-way group, with World Champions Argentina and the stellar Brazil of Zico, Falcao, Eder and Socrates. Argentina had started the World Cup with a surprising defeat against Belgium in the opening match: but the reigning champions had added the class of 21-year-old Diego Armando Maradona and the goals of Ramon Diaz to the solid base of '78, and had had no problem passing the round by liquidating Hungary 4-1 (two goals by the Pibe de Oro) and regulating El Salvador 2-0. On the eve of the match, controversy raged due to the allusions made by some journalists to a homosexual relationship between Paolo Rossi and Antonio Cabrini and for the 20 million lire prize granted to each Italian team by the FIGC after their disappointing first round success: at this point Bearzot lost his patience and announced a press silence; from this moment on, only captain Dino Zoff would speak to journalists. Around this general mistrust Bearzot's team compacted and became an unbeatable battleship. Claudio Gentile marks Maradona, the feared Argentine star, and in the first minutes he systematically anticipates him at every attempted pass from his teammates. The first time he touched the ball was in the 8th minute and he set up Diaz for a left-footed shot from outside the area that saw a great response from Zoff. On 14' Tarantini came in with hammer feet on Tardelli's legs, the referee incredibly let it pass and even cautioned Rossi for protesting. This behaviour of the referee encouraged the Argentinians and Italians to fight hard for the entire first half, with the game stagnating: Italy was more concerned with stopping the various Kempes, Ardiles, Diaz, Maradona and Bertoni with man-marking than with building and Argentina could find no space in the perfect Azzurri rearguard. The Azzurri's markings were ruthless and first Kempes, then Maradona and finally Ardiles were cautioned for fouls of frustration or protests. The match became inflamed in the second half, with Italy immediately making themselves dangerous by taking advantage of the wide spaces conceded by the Argentinians, who decisively shifted their centre of gravity to attack, thanks to the sprints of Graziani and Conti. In the 52nd minute, Tardelli fired a great shot from the distance and Filliol flew to remove the ball from the crossbar.

The Argentine forcing triggered the deadly Italian counter-attack, which led to a lethal 4-on-2 in a few seconds in the Argentine half: Conti launched Antognoni, who touched to his left on the galloping Tardelli, a fantastic diagonal run with his left that went into the far corner. Italy in the lead. The reaction of the world champions is immediately unleashed and for ten

for ten minutes they stormed the Italian area. In the 60th minute, Zoff made a two-time save on Olguin's close-range header; in the 61st minute, Passarella's free kick was taken by surprise and Zoff managed to deflect it into the corner; in the 64th minute, Maradona's free kick from the edge of the area hit the post to Zoff's right with an exceptional parabola. Three minutes later Ardiles tunneled Oriali and headed towards the area, with Oriali himself grabbing hold of the Argentine's shirt, knocking him out. Ardiles would play the rest of the match with a noticeable cleavage on his torn shirt. On the free-kick taken by Ardiles himself, Passarella's header hit the crossbar, Italy restarted on the counter-attack and for the Argentinians, unbalanced all the way forward, it was pain: Graziani dislodged Paolo Rossi on the offside line and Pablito headed straight towards the opponent's goal all alone, but went to shoot right at Filliol coming out, Conti burst in, who had followed the action and carried the ball towards the back, then with a heel stop sent Filliol, who was trying to stop him, out of time, and touched back to Cabrini who with a left-footed volley put the ball into the crossbar with an empty goal for 2-0. The Azzurri's enthusiasm exploded, while the Argentine reaction broke against the granitic Italian defence: even Menotti's double change in attack (Valencia and Calderon for Diaz and Kempes) did not change the situation. Just when Italy seemed to be in with a chance, Passarella shot a free kick from 30 metres when Zoff was still setting up the barrier and scored the 2-1 goal that reopened the match. But immediately afterwards Gallego was sent off for a foul on Tardelli with the ball far away and the end was all blue: three times Italy came close to scoring the third goal on the counter-attack with Antognoni, Altobelli (who took over from the still inactive Paolo Rossi) and Conti, who in the 90th minute, on one-on-one with Filliol, tried to humiliate him by passing him over with a "spoon", but the goalkeeper was not surprised. An unstoppable Bruno Conti, capable of playing full-back and winger without ever giving up great plays: he was the great revelation of the World Cup, when everyone was expecting Maradona's explosion. Italy repeated the feat of four years earlier in Buenos Aires, rendering a team with stratospheric potential harmless. And given the premises, one can speak of a true Italian miracle.

ITALY: Zoff 7.5, Gentile 7.5, Cabrini 7.5, Oriali 7 (*from 75' Marini sv*), Collovati 7, Scirea 7, Conti 7.5, Tardelli 7.5, Rossi 5 (*from 80' Altobelli sv*), Antognoni 7, Graziani 7. Coach Enzo Bearzot.

ARGENTINA: Filliol 7, Olguin 6.5, Tarantini 6, Gallego 5.5, Galvan 6, Passarella 7, Maradona 6.5, Ardiles 6.5, Diaz 5.5 (*from 58' Valencia 5.5*), Kempes 5 (*from 58' Calderon 6*), Bertoni 5.5. All. Luis Cesar Menotti.

Referee: Rainea (ROM) 5

Gallego sent off in the 84th minute

At 55' Tardelli 1-0; at 67' Cabrini 2-0; at 83' Passarella 2-1.