

WORLD CUP SPAIN 1982 / Semi-finals

Barcelona, Camp Nou, 8 July 1982

ITALY - POLAND**2-0****BRUNO CONTI'S 'KISS' ASSIST**

In the opinion of many, after beating Argentina and Brazil, the road to the title was all downhill for Italy. In reality, the semi-final against Poland presented a very dangerous obstacle. First of all, because historically Poland in the last 10 years had obtained excellent results in the international field by playing 'Italian-style' football (the '73 draw at Wembley that earned them qualification for the '74 World Cup had been a masterpiece), therefore compared to the last two matches the Azzurri would not have had the spaces that South American teams notoriously leave available for counter-attacks. Secondly, the Poles evoked unpleasant precedents, such as their elimination in the first round at the '74 World Cup. Moreover, for superstition's sake, after two triumphs of this magnitude a setback was to be expected and the Poles were certainly not a second-rate team. Having won the first round with Italy in second place, they then went on to win the semi-final by thrashing European runners-up Belgium 3-0 with Boniek's hat-trick and kept the lead in the three-way tie with a 0-0 draw against the USSR in the last game. In this very last match, the Polish star Boniek (Juve's new signing) had committed the foolishness of getting himself cautioned and thus disqualified for the semi-final. For its part, Italy could not field the disqualified Gentile, who had to purge himself of the cards he had received against Maradona and Zico. In Barcelona at 5.15 p.m. the teams took the field in unbearable heat: 42° in the Camp Nou bowl. The pace of the game is consequently very slow, the teams field specular formations devoted first to not taking penalties and the game is lacking. It was Bruno Conti who entertained the crowd with a spectacular defensive clearance in the space between the Italian area and the corner flag: surrounded by Poles he juggled two dribbles, a sombrero over Ciolek's head and a back-heel to lead his team-mate away on the wing. Italy gained confidence seeing such a wait-and-see Poland and began to grind out play around a great Antognoni. Paolo Rossi also moved in a different way compared to the previous matches, the hat-trick with Brazil had transformed him and he was practically unmarkable: on 18' he freed himself of 3 adversaries with a great play and served a good ball to Graziani who shot a great right-footed shot from the limit, just over the crossbar. Three minutes later Antognoni took a free-kick from the right vertex of the area, crossed into the middle where Pablito touched the ball just before Mlynarczyk could intervene, putting Italy into the net for a very important lead. Paolo Rossi joined Rummenigge and Boniek at the top of the scorers' table. Poland did not react, Italy took the upper hand showing exceptional authority and awareness of their own means. It was a pity that at the most beautiful moment, Antognoni was injured in a contrast with Matysik on the edge of the area and Bearzot substituted him with Marini. The same Marini, served by Graziani on 29', won a rebound with Buncol and found himself in front of the Polish goalkeeper but slipped at the moment of the shot and clamorously put high. Beppe Bergomi, known as "Lo Zio" because of his black moustache that showed him to be much more mature than his 19 years of age, did not make the disqualified Gentile regret it, cancelling out the feared bomber Lato; the only Polish chance in the entire first half was a violent free-kick by Kupcewicz that hit the post to the right of Zoff from a sidereal distance. Polish frustration grew at not being able to play against a perfect Italy and Majewski made a killer entrance on Rossi who flew pirouetting into the area and miraculously came out unharmed: only cautioned by referee Cardellino (in name and not in fact). In the

Resumption Poland tried to react without appreciable results, with Italy able to play at its best with the defence lined up and the counter-attack; the Poles beat like blacksmiths and the referee tolerated the rough play without admonishing. In the 64th minute, Lato got rid of Scirea with a skilful dribble on the right and made a cross for Buncol's header, Zoff was well placed and blocked the ball under the crossbar of the posts. Repeated fouls by the Poles continued, with Graziani coming off on a stretcher, in his place 'Spillo' Altobelli. In the 73rd minute, Altobelli himself gave the go-ahead for a deadly counter-attack, he launched Bruno Conti, moved to the left, who, like a train, headed towards the back of the net and sent in a masterful left-footed cross that Pablito only had to head into the net, kneeling in front of the goal as if in an act of veneration for such a wonderful assist. It was 2-0, the Azzurri went mad with joy and the Camp Nou was filled with tricolour flags. Paolo Rossi is now alone at the top of the World Cup scorers' table. In the 80th minute, Kupcewitz tried again with a free kick from distance that Zoff parried with some difficulty. The last 10 minutes were an Italian academy, without sinking the blow, the Azzurri kept possession of the ball amidst the applause of the public and the vain chases of the destroyed Poles. Italy returns to the final, twelve years after Mexico'70.

ITALY: Zoff 7, Bergomi 7, Cabrini 7, Oriali 7, Collovati 7, Scirea 7, Conti 7.5, Tardelli 6.5, Rossi 7.5, Antognoni 6.5 (*from 28' Marini 6.5*), Graziani 6.5 (*from 70' Altobelli 6.5*). Coach Enzo Bearzot.

POLAND: Mlynarczyk 6, Dziuba 5.5, Janas 5.5, Zmuda 5.5, Majewski 5, Kupcewitz 6.5, Buncol 6, Ciolek 4 (*from 46' Palasz 5*), Lato 5, Matysik 5.5, Smolarek 4.5 (*from 77' Kusto sv*). Manager: Antoni Piechniczek.

Referee: Cardellino (URU) 5.5

On 22' Rossi 1-0.

On 73' Rossi 2-0.



Paolo Rossi heads Bruno Conti's kiss assist into the net for 2-0.