

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP MEXICO 1986 / Round
of 16 Leon, Estadio Nou Camp, 15 June 1986

BELGIUM - U.R.S.S.

4-3 *d.t.s.*

BELANOV'S HAT-TRICK NOT ENOUGH

After only 16 years, the World Cup returns to Mexico, due to the forfeit of the designated Colombia for financial reasons. Compared to the last World Cup, the formula has changed radically: for the first time, after the first round, there is an immediate switch to a knockout round, to avoid 'messes' such as the 'Peruvian marmelada'. The first round does not offer too many surprises and all the best teams qualify for the round of 16. On the first day of the round of 16, the hosts Mexico easily overcame Bulgaria 2-0, with a spectacular goal by Negrete in an acrobatic reverse. Shortly afterwards, the Soviet Union and Belgium took to the field, with the Soviets the overwhelming favourites after an exciting first round, where they showed the 'football of the 2000s' made of great movement, a dense network of passes and supersonic speed, winning their group ahead of Platini's France with a resounding 6-0 victory over Hungary. Belgium, on the other hand, had a modest start, finishing behind Mexico in the group and denouncing strong disagreements in the locker room, especially between one of the senators, Gerets, and coach Guy Thys, who had even excluded him in the last match of the group. The USSR got off to a rocket start and immediately came close to scoring with Belanov (ball in the stars from an optimal position on an assist by Kutznetsov), and twice with Yakovenko (great save by Pfaff in the 6th minute and post a minute later). Belgium were sly and played all in their own half, with star player Scifo even playing full-back on more than one occasion to stem the Soviets' athletic might, but they showed they could hurt with stinging counter-attacks, as in the 15th minute with a fine header from Vercauteren on Claesen's assist (outside of the net). The Russians' momentum seemed to fade as the minutes passed, but before the half-hour mark, on an assist from Zavarov, centre-forward Igor Belanov exploded with a marvellous right-footer from outside the area that struck Pfaff in the crossbar: a ballistic masterpiece. 1-0 to the USSR. Belgium reacted well, led by the overflowing Ceulemans, and put the Soviets in difficulty with repeated actions.

attack at the end of the first half, while the USSR tried to put the game to sleep. In the 8th minute of the second half, the USSR moved forward with a beautiful manoeuvre, Rats' cross from the left and Belanov's header with a safe shot hit the post, then Yakovenko arrived with his left, Pfaff was beaten but Vervoort repelled on the line. The hard law of goal: Belgium threw themselves forward and on Vercauteren's long cross from the left, Demyanenko jumped wide and behind him came Vincenzino Scifo who controlled and beat Dasaev. The USSR suffered the repercussion and struggled to change the rhythm of the match, which remained perfectly balanced, until, in the 70th minute, Zavarov aimed at the Belgian defence, dribbled in and then set up Belanov, who slotted past Pfaff on his way out for the new Soviet lead. But it only lasted seven minutes: a long throw from Demol found Ceulemans unmarked in the box, control and a shot into the net. The linesman raised the flag for a couple of seconds signalling a rather obvious offside by the Belgian captain, but then lowered it again and referee Fredriksson after a brief consultation validated the goal. What a mockery for the Soviets, who threw themselves forward again with the newly-entered Rodionov, after a slalom he entered the area, ball to Belanov, touch on Yaremchuk and left-footer that hit the crossbar! And that's three woodpeckers for the Russians. But Belgium also had a great chance three minutes from time with Scifo, who had his close-range header blocked by Dasaev's great reflex. The match even became epic in extra time: the USSR attacked with all their personnel, showing enviable athletic freshness after more than 90 minutes, at high altitude and in prohibitive temperatures, while Belgium struck with their

counter-attackers. First chance at the feet of Claesen, who hit it badly. Belanov replied, Yevtushenko's deflection and a feat by Pfaff, who anticipated Rodionov's tap-in. In the 12th minute of the first overtime Belgium won a corner kick after the usual counter-attack, the ball back to Gerets who made a perfect cross on the second post where the free Demol came out and scored with a powerful shot: the carelessness of the Soviet rearguard was incredible. 3-2. The tactical theme at this point became exponentially evident, with the USSR throwing 10 players into the opponent's half of the field, and of course Belgium found the open spaces with their counter-attacks: in the first minute of the second overtime Vercauteren ran on to the left and put an assist to the free Veyt, alone in the area, but he sent the ball incredibly high. Shortly afterwards Cljsters recovered a loose ball and the ball fell right to the feet of Claesen, who again beat the defenceless Soviet goalkeeper on the volley in perfect coordination: 4-2 and it seemed to be the end for Lobanowsky's army. But after a handful of seconds Bal escaped to the right and put in a cross from the back that was perfect for Belanov, who was blatantly pushed with his hands by defender Renquin: penalty! Belanov himself scored his hat-trick and it was 4-3 with ten minutes to go. The Soviet Union's siege resumed, and they were unable to break through, so Scifo sent in the freshman Van der Elst, who drank up Bessonov like a bowling pin and beat Dasaev, but the ball skimmed off the post and went clumsily out. The finale was exciting, with continual face-offs and the incredible Yevtushenko's cross-shot in the 121st minute took Pfaff by surprise and seemed to slip under the crossbar, but with a stroke of the kidneys the phenomenal Belgian goalkeeper slapped in the corner on the referee's final whistle and the first drops of a thunderstorm extinguished the Soviet dream of winning the World Cup: unfortunately Lobanowski's fantastic play had found its bread for its teeth against a tactically perfect Belgium and with Pfaff and Scifo superlative.

BELGIUM: Pfaff 7.5, Gerets 6 (*from 112' Van der Elst sv*), Renquin 5.5, Grun 5.5 (*from 99' Cljsters sv*), Demol 7.5, Vervoort 7, Vercauteren 7.5, Scifo 8, Ceulemans 7.5, Claesen 7.5, Veyt 6. All. Guy Thys.

U.R.S.S.: Dasaev 6, Bal 6.5, Bessonov 5.5, Demyanenko 5, Kutzetsov 6, Rats 7, Aleinikov 6.5, Yaremchuk 7, Yakovenko 7 (*from 78' Yevtushenko 6.5*), Zavarov 6.5 (*from 71' Rodionov 6.5*), Belanov 8.5. All. Valeri Lobanovsky.

Referee: Fredriksson (SVE) 5.5

On 27' Belanov 0-1.

On 56' Scifo 1-1; on 70' Belanov 1-2; on 77' Ceulemans 2-2;

on 102' Demol 3-2; on 110' Claesen 4-2; on 111' Belanov (Rig.) 4-3.



Igor Belanov chases the ball in the epic match against Belgium.