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WORLD CUP USA 1994 / Round of 16 Pasadena
- Los Angeles, Rose Bowl, 3 July 1994

ROMANIA - ARGENTINA

3-2

HAGI'S BRUSHSTROKES

These are very difficult days for Argentina's national team: after two spectacular matches against Greece (4-0) and Nigeria (2-1), in which Basile's four-pronged formation had made the whole world's eyes glaze over, making Argentina the great World Cup favourites, everything had changed in the space of a week. First the disqualification of Diego Armando Maradona, found positive in the anti-doping test, and immediately after the resounding defeat against Bulgaria (0-2) which caused Argentina to slip to third place in the group, repechaged for passage to the round of 16. Caniggia was also injured and three days later, the South Americans were already on the pitch for the round of 16 against a swinging Romania, capable of beating Colombia 3-1 but also of taking four from Switzerland. Despite the 'halved' attack, Basile's men remain favourites and face the Romanians head-to-head, supported by the warm South American crowd that fills the Rose Bowl in the Los Angeles suburbs. First Batistuta and then Balbo were hypnotised by goalkeeper Prunea, throwing away two good chances in the opening minutes, Romania were holed up and the first time they got out of the half they earned a free-kick from the edge of the area: everyone expected Hagi's left-footer but instead Dumitrescu went to beat him and painted a wonderful curling parabola into the top corner that surprised the distracted Islas. Argentina didn't take to it and immediately found a penalty kick with Batistuta, who got rid of two defenders with a backheel and then collapsed on the ground, brushed aside by Prodan, hoping the referee would fall for it. He does fall for it. He goes for the penalty spot, the goalkeeper is displaced and it's 1-1. Romania made no calculations, Argentina wanted to win at all costs, so the match exploded into a wonderful shoot-out that elevated it to one of the most beautiful matches ever seen at a World Cup. The equalizer lasted the beauty of 2 minutes because on an insistent attack by the biancocelesti, a textbook counter-attack by Romania began: Hagi to Lupescu who closed the triangle deep on the right flank, the Romanian 10 stalled, waited for Dumitrescu to enter the area and served him with an assist that was like a brushstroke by Leonardo da Vinci. Dumitrescu only has to touch it into the net, anticipating Islas for 2-1. Hagi was on a fine day and a long throw triggered Dumitrescu's sprint down the left, he headed in from the back and served Popescu on to the penalty spot, who hit the ball into the net with a clear header, but Islas was able to parry it away. Argentina restarted, Balbo put Ortega in front of the goalkeeper but el Burrito got stuck and was stopped, Romania restarted, Hagi's left-footed shot was blocked by Islas, Popescu arrived, Islas immolated himself. A match that gives the spectator no respite. And we are in the 20th minute of the first half. As the minutes pass, the match remains open and beautiful, but inevitably the eagerness of the two teams subsides, the heat is asphyxiating and Argentina struggle to find new spaces in search of an equaliser. Romania was a cobra ready to strike with its counter-attacks, the last of which at the end of the first half again with Dumitrescu, Islas fouled the shot and Caceres managed to clear on the line. The Argentinians returned from half-time with only one thing on their mind: to destroy their opponents. In a few minutes they created three great chances but failed to materialise, with Batistuta failing to break through on goal as usual, first being stopped by Prunea's fists and then by a miraculous intervention by Belodedici. Redondo penetrated the area with great stride and was brought down, but Pairetto let it go on. In Argentina's moment of maximum effort, however, there was the bite of the Romanian cobra again:
Dumitrescu made 60 metres with the ball on his feet and on the edge of the area he stalled and then rewarded the insertion of Hagi, who, with his right-footed shot, beat Islas. 3-1 would kill a horse, but Argentina did not give up.

Argentina didn't give up: Simeone flew towards the goal launched by Ortega, was mown down from behind and rolled into the box. It looked like a clear penalty and an expulsion, the match would be reopened, but the referee awarded a free kick from the edge and a caution to Selymes. Pairetto was right, a foul outside the area;
Batistuta hoes the ground kicking the free kick and Prunea parries. Just when Argentina seemed to have no more left, 15 minutes from the end, came an unpretentious shot by Caceres from a very long distance, Prunea did not hold it back and Balbo arrived like a hawk for the tap-in that reopened an endless match. endless game. Ma invece dell'Argentina ammiriamo nuovamente il Maradona dei Carpazi, Gheorghe Hagi, che con un lancio meraviglioso attraversa la stratosfera e mette in moto Dumitrescu dall'altro lato del campo, l'attaccante si libera di due difensori e tira un diagonale di sinistro che Islas respinge.
Argentina's strength and hopes were extinguished: there was no longer the lucidity to find new goal balls. Argentina's incredible defeat sounded like a resounding thud, while for Romania it was a triumph: they flew to the quarter-finals for the first time in history, where they would face Sweden as favourites. But once again, when they are not playing as *underdogs*, they fail. Sweden prevailed on penalties, putting an end to the Romanians' amazing ride at the 1994 World Cup.

ROMANIA: Prunea 7, Prodan 6.5, Mihali 6, Belodedici 7, Lupescu 7, Popescu 7, Petrescu 6.5, Selymes 6, Dumitrescu 8 (*from 89' Panduru sv)*, Hagi 8 (*from 86' Galca sv)*, Munteanu 7. All. Angel Iordanescu.
ARGENTINA: Islas 6.5, Caceres 6.5, Chamot 5, Sensini 5 (*from 63' Medina Bello 5)*, Ruggeri 5, Redondo 6, Simeone 6.5, Basualdo 6.5, Batistuta 5.5, Ortega 6, Balbo 6.5. Manager: Alfio Basile.
Referee: Pairetto (ITA) 6

At 9' Dumitrescu 1-0; at 15' Batistuta (Rig.) 1-1; at 17' Dumitrescu 2-1.
On 57' Hagi 3-1; on 74' Balbo 3-2.