

USA WORLD CUP 1994 / Final Pasadena -
Los Angeles, Rose Bowl, July 17, 1994

BRAZIL - ITALY

3-2 d.c.r.

BAGGIO'S LAST PENALTY TO THE STARS

The eve's anticipation is spasmodic for what is considered not only the best final this World Cup could have, but also the Final par excellence in the collective imagination of all soccer fans. Just so as not to burden the players of the two teams with additional responsibilities, coach Carlos Alberto Parreira of Brazil declares in a press conference, "This is the most important soccer match ever played." Sacchi miraculously recovers captain Franco Baresi, 23 days after meniscus surgery, to replace the disqualified Costacurta, and Roberto Baggio, hero of the Italian World Cup and renamed Divin Codino, who came out battered from the semifinal match with Bulgaria but was confirmed as a starter despite a conspicuous elastic band on his right thigh. At stake for both national teams is the fourth World Cup title under the scorching midday sun in Pasadena - Los Angeles (California). As expected, the match is very tactical, Brazil does not discover itself and Italy shows that it does not fear its opponents, favored by the odds. Brazilians careful to keep the ball and slow down the game to avoid being overwhelmed by the rhythm and pressing of Sacchi's Italy, then verticalizing in a lethal way on Romario and Bebeto. First goal-scoring action in the 18th minute with a Baresi throw for Massaro, who skipped past Mauro Silva finding himself in front of Taffarel, but shot the ball at him. The final could have taken another turn, but Brazil answered a few minutes later with a venomous free kick by Branco from a deflected position on the left: Pagliuca flew to clear, Mazinho ventured on the ball but stumbled and missed awkwardly. Baresi and Maldini are formidable in defense closing every space on Romario and Bebeto. The teams' two right wingers both come out in the first half with muscle problems: Brazil inserts the great promise Cafu in place of Jorginho, Italy revolutionizes the defense with Apolloni in the center along with Baresi, Maldini on the left and Benarrivo on the right to replace the injured Mussi. It is immediately apparent that Brazil comes out stronger from these changes, Cafu pushes much harder than Jorginho and is irrepressible: as the minutes pass the initiative is more and more in the hands of the Brazilians, who also seem athletically better prepared and more performing. The match is not unlocked, one waits for the play of the champion but Baggio and Romario still hide. The Brazilian defense is also impeccable with Aldair and Marcio Santos. In the second half Brazil rises and Italy contains but no longer has the strength to make dangerous restarts: it seems a slow agony. In the 20th minute of the second half, Romario and Bebeto sprint at the Azzurri defense, Maldini anticipates Bebeto but unintentionally serves Romario, Pagliuca's providential exit to close it down. The scorching heat sets in, great fatigue on the field, the pace drops and the match becomes perfectly balanced again. On the half-hour mark there is a sudden right-footer by Mauro Silva from outside the box, Pagliuca is in the path and parries, but the ball slips from his hands and ends up clamorously on the post! The goalkeeper retrieves it and goes to kiss the post in an image that remains engraved in History. Had it gone in, poor Pagliuca would have hung a rope from the crossbar. But Italy does not give up: in the 37th minute, splendid action by Donadoni on the right, in the middle of two opponents he fishes Roby Baggio in the center of the area, unfortunate control by the Divin Codino and right foot off target. Great opportunity, but evidently Roberto is cooked by the heat and the muscle problem. Teams exhausted, the match lives on flare-ups on a base of tired anticipation: it goes to extra time. Immediately Cafu is unleashed on the right, ball in the middle past Pagliuca but Bebeto fails to touch into the net on an empty goal and Pagliuca recovers. responds.

Italy with Roberto Baggio who kicks from 30 yards and commits Taffarel to a corner. Bebeto for Zinho, left-footed at the first post and Pagliuca clears. Baresi fantastic in his closures on the Brazilian attackers, on his return he proves he is a true star who deserved to play this final. Sacchi fields Evani for Dino Baggio, Parreira puts Viola on for Zinho, choices rather researched. Palpitating final minutes, Brazil crushes Italy with the fresh Viola who goes dribbling anyone, but is inconclusive, Italy tries to restart with all its remaining strength. Cafu triangulates with Bebeto and breaks through again on the right, ball in for Romario 2 meters from the goal, it seems to be over and instead Romario in turn clamorously puts it in the bottom. The Divin Codino then also has a match point, triangulates beautifully with Massaro, enters the box but then exhausted kicks over Taffarel without either force or precision. The two heroes of the World Cup missed their chances, for the first time in the History of Football a World Cup will be decided by penalty kicks.

Capitan Baresi opens the roulette and shoots sensationally to the stars before bursting into tears, but Pagliuca is resounding in repelling Marcio Santos' shot and it remains tied. Albertini and Evani score for Italy, Romario and Branco answer for Brazil, it's 2-2 after the third penalty shot. Goes Daniele Massaro on the penalty spot for Italy, the usual coolness leaves him at the most important moment of his career and Taffarel blocks a shot that is far from irresistible. Italy in trouble, also because Dunga is instead cool despite the unbearable heat and beats Pagliuca bringing Brazil to 3-2. Last penalty, it's Roberto Baggio's turn, and even the stones know how it ended. Roby is exhausted, he spies Taffarel but the ball runs away from him, as if lifted into the sky by millions of Brazilian arms (Ayrton Senna's hand from the sky, according to many carioca believers), ends up in the stands and Brazil returns World Champion 24 years after Pelé. An unexciting final, but with indelible images and emotions for Brazilians, Italians and fans all over the neutral world. It brings to a close a fine World Cup with an excellent U.S. following: perhaps it is the good time that soccer has broken through to the hearts of the States.

BRAZIL: Taffarel 7.5, Jorginho sv (*from 21' Cafu 7.5*), Branco 7, Aldair 7, Marcio Santos 7, Mauro Silva 7, Zinho 6.5 (*from 106' Viola sv*), Dunga 7, Bebeto 6.5, Mazinho 6, Romario 6. Coach Carlos Alberto Parreira.

ITALY: Pagliuca 7, Mussi sv (*from 35' Apolloni 6.5*), Benarrivo 6.5, Baresi 7.5, Maldini 7, D. Baggio 6 (*since 95' Evani 6*), Donadoni 7, Berti 6.5, Massaro 5.5, R. Baggio 5, Albertini 6.5. All. Arrigo Sacchi.

Referee: Puhl (UNG) 6.5

On penalties: Albertini 0-1; Romario 1-1; Evani 1-2; Branco 2-2; Dunga 3-2.



Roby Baggio stars the last penalty kick, in the background the Brazilians celebrate



Romario celebrates victory, he is the star of the U.S. World Cup.