

## WORLD CUP FRANCE 1998 / Semi-final

Paris, Stade de France, 8 July 1998

**FRANCE - CROATIA**

2-1

**THE DAY OF LILIAN THURAM**

For host France at the 1998 World Cup, a 3-0 triumph over debutant Croatia in the quarter-finals against Germany seemed a godsend. The French had already reached the semi-finals three times in their history but had never managed to reach the final, and the last two painful times they had been beaten by the Germans. It did not seem real to the French that they could play their home semi-final at the brand new Stade de France in Paris against Croatia, who had surprisingly reached the semi-finals in their first World Cup and were therefore considered to have already paid for the miraculous result. What is more, France had struggled mightily in the knockout games, scoring zero goals in regulation time and overcoming Paraguay on the golden goal and Italy on penalties, albeit showing excellent team play, and this was the best situation that could have happened to dispel the World Cup semi-final taboo. But on the other side they did not find a team, but a nation just emerging from five years of war of independence from Yugoslavia, torn apart by events but united by an enormous nationalistic spirit that lives each World Cup match as a battle to carry its flag high in the World. It is Croatia that has inherited most of the former Yugoslavia's footballing power, with a formation that is a perfect mix of tactics (Blazevic's pure 3-5-2 is rather anomalous in these years), physicality and pure class, with captain Zvone Boban conducting the orchestra and bomber Davor Suker scoring goals that are always decisive, after a year to forget at Real Madrid, where he experienced the conquest of the Champions Cup from the bench due to a very bad cohabitation with coach Jupp Heynckes. France got off to a strong start and dominated the field with an immediately inspired Zidane. inspired, but Croatia covered beautifully and struck on the counter-attack. In the 21st minute, Guivarc'h's violent free-kick from the distance was cleared by Ladic; it was the only shot towards goal that the Frenchmen managed to construct. Finding no space, Jacquet ran for cover and immediately fielded the second forward, young Thierry Henry, in place of Karembeu. But it was an excellent Croatia that played with the spirit of those who had nothing to lose: a spectacular exchange between Suker, Vlaovic and Asanovic, but the latter's shot went wide. Croatia took the field as the minutes passed and France went into difficulty, crushed by the pressure of those who could not fail this opportunity. Zidane tried to awaken his side with a spectacular volley in the 40th minute on Guivarc'h's pass, but Ladic touched it in for a corner. An ugly first half came to an end, but on the resumption of the game all hell broke loose. Thirty seconds had passed and Asanovic had overtaken three opponents in midfield and sent a fantastic 30-metre left-footed shot that sent Suker into the box, his control and left-footed touch beating Barthez. A resounding Croatian lead! Frost falls on the Stade de France, it could be a blow for the French, because the Croatians are magicians at keeping the scoreline and making the ball disappear. But it was Master Boban himself, perhaps pervaded by a state of arrogance, who lost a trivial ball on the edge of his own area through overconfidence, Thuram found himself in front of Ladic served by Djorkaeff and he smashed it past him. An immediate equaliser brought France back to life. Boban's mistake made him disappear from the pitch, so shortly afterwards Blazevic replaced him with Maric. France were galvanised and came close to taking the lead through Zidane, but the match exploded with reverses and constant attacks from both sides: anything could happen. Thuram seemed to be everywhere, defending and attacking, he was the transalpine team's man in the lead: in the 69th minute he asked Henry for a triangle on the three-quarter line, Jarni closed him down but Thuram stubbornly won back the ball.

ball and finished from the edge with a left-footed shot that went into the far corner! Incredible, Thuram had never scored in the national team before this match, and he made two in the World Cup semi-final. It all seemed to be going downhill for France, but in the 73rd minute, in a scrum in the Croatian box, Bilic and Blanc clashed and the French captain slapped Bilic, who collapsed to the ground. The referee took the bait and sent off Laurent Blanc. France in ten and without a captain for the eventual final. The French public's agony began as they counted down the minutes until the first World Cup final, but Croatia were tired and the blues compacted to the sound of the Marseillaise being sung in the stands: Lizarazu and Petit nipped every opponent's initiative in the bud and only Suker seemed unwilling to give up. In the 88th minute, Jarni's long throw was followed by Suker's great control in the area, but Desailly intervened like a gladiator to close in for a corner. With all of Croatia ahead in the 90th minute, the French counter-attack began with Zizou Zidane who ran 50 metres on the ball, won a rebound with the last defender but then clumsily shot wide. And it could cost him dearly for in the 94th minute Croatia's last sensational chance came when Maric's shot from the edge of the box was deflected and lobbed into the top corner.

a lob into the crossbar of the posts but Barthez flies in to make a resounding save! It was all over, France went on to face the favourite Brazil of the Ronaldo-Rivaldo-Bebeto trio, but Croatia won a historic third place by beating the Netherlands in the consolation final.

FRANCE: Barthez 6.5, Thuram 8.5, Lizarazu 7, Blanc 5.5, Desailly 7, Karembeu 6 (*from 30' Henry 6.5*), Deschamps 6.5, Petit 7, Guivarc'h 6.5 (*from 68' Trezeguet 6*), Zidane 7.5, Djorkaeff 6.5 (*from 75' Leboef sv*). Coach Aimé Jacquet.

CROATIA: Ladic 7, Bilic 6, Simic 6, Stimac 6.5, Soldo 6, Asanovic 7, Stanic 5.5 (*from 89' Prosinecki sv*), Jarni 6.5, Suker 7.5, Boban 4.5 (*from 64' Maric 6*), Vlaovic 6. Manager: Ciro Blazevic. Referee: Garcia Aranda (SPA) 6

On 46' Suker 0-1; on 47' Thuram 1-1; on 69' Thuram 2-1.



*Davor Suker and Lilian Thuram, the great protagonists of the 1998 World Cup semi-final.*

1998 FRANCE WORLD CUP / Final Paris,  
Stade de France, 12 July 1998

## **FRANCE - BRAZIL**

# 3-0

### **KING ZIDANE AND THE MYSTERY RONALDO**

2.30 p.m. on 12 July 1998: Ronaldo was resting in his hotel room, which he shared with Roberto Carlos, when he suddenly fell ill, had convulsions and his tongue rolled down his throat, he was gasping for breath and frothing at the mouth: his team-mate came to his aid, promptly opened his airway by grabbing his tongue and screaming for help, terrified. In Ronaldo's room, teammates and doctors arrive, the word dead, dead, dead is heard repeatedly shouted. Ronaldo is taken to hospital and when the line-ups are given at the Stade de France for the World Cup final he is not there and rumours are circulating that he has fallen ill. Ronaldo had been suffering from severe pain in his left knee and ankle for weeks but his presence at the World Cup was too important for his team, Brazil, and his sponsor, Nike. A never-ending series of infiltrations and the stress of the imminent final may have caused his ailment. But Ronaldo showed up at the stadium an hour before the match and asked coach Zagalo if he could play, as the CT scan, electrocardiogram and electroencephalogram done at the hospital had all come back negative. When the teams took the field and Ronaldo appeared from the tunnel, the Brazilians rejoiced, with him the title was safe! In fact, Brazil is the favourite, despite France playing the World Cup in front of their home crowd, thanks to the spectacular performances in this tournament, admittedly quite inconsistent. An atomic attack formed by Ronaldo, Rivaldo and Bebeto is contrasted by a cheerful defence, with two full-backs as strong in pushing (by far the best in the world) as Cafu and Roberto Carlos, but inconsistent in the containment phase. France started off aggressively and Brazil immediately seemed to be in trouble in terms of rhythm: Ronaldo looked like a stand-in for himself, pale, soft and bewildered. The other expected champion, Zizou Zidane, on the other hand, was in monstrous form, at 4' he took off with a double pass, exchanged with Djorkaeff and then with a tunnel served Guivarc'h who was stopped by the recovery of Junior Baiano just at the moment of the shot. Three minutes later, a Zidane free-kick caught Djoerkaeff sensationally free in the middle of the area but his header went wide. France were masters of the pitch, the Brazilians unable to mount any action, blocked by systematic French pressing, and perhaps by the shock of what had happened in the afternoon. But here Ronaldo deflects to the left, eludes Thuram and sends in a cross that Barthez blocks in two times. Brazil seemed to break the deadlock, Rivaldo headed in Leonardo's corner and Barthez performed a plastic and blatant dive. blatant dive. But it was only an impression: in the 27th minute, on Petit's corner from the left, Zidane arrived at the first post to head the ball into the net! Here was Zidane's first goal at a World Cup, right in the final in front of his own fans! Talk about 'predestined'! France took the lead and Brazil struggled to react: Dunga launched Ronaldo, who collided violently with Barthez as the ball came out and remained motionless on the ground, moments of terror, then the Fenomeno gave signs of reaction, complaining about the blow he had suffered. Ronaldo struggled to get up, but Brazil continued to be unwatchable. Merit also goes to the French, who are putting in the best performance of their lives on the most important day: Deschamps is monstrous in midfield, recovering and dispatching an infinite number of balls, Zidane is spectacular in dribbling, repeated veronic shots, but also excellent defensive rebounds, and seems to have risen to the position of master of world football. In the 41st minute another stupendous French action, Lizarazu for Karembeu, a rebounded shot that serves Petit in the area, a conclusion that hits the shoe of Junior

Baiano and goes on the outside of the net. The Brazilians did not run and France continued to show wonderful ball possession. In the 44th minute, on a long throw by Thuram, a clumsy sleeper by the two Brazilian centre-backs and Guivarc'h found himself alone in front of Taffarel who deflected into the corner. But the doubling was in the air, a corner from the left by Djorkaeff and Zidane, again with a header, netted 2-0 in the midst of a defence of pretty figures. It was the blow that sent a distraught Brazil to the rest: Zagalo fielded Denilson for Leonardo, trying the fantasy card, and the young dribbler shook the cariocas with his plays. On a long corner, Denilson tried to insert himself at the second post and was hooked by Deschamps, but the referee let it pass.

Brazil insisted, a cross from the left by Roberto Carlos, Ronaldo controlled his header at the second post and fired right-footed towards goal, but Barthez instinctively blocked the ball on the ground, the great flare-up of the crippled Fenomeno. Then Barthez put in his own effort with an absurd exit that left the goal unguarded, but Bebeto had the ball blocked by Desailly with a weak shot on goal. France struck on the counter-attack: in the 63rd minute Cafu's clumsy mistake and Guivarc'h again found himself alone in front of Taffarel, but again managed to miss with a shot over the crossbar.

Unbelievable that the centre forward of the finalist team has not yet managed to score a goal in this World Cup! Another French counter-attack, Desailly goes forward but then demands too much and enters late on Cafu deserving of his second caution: sent off! France in ten with 23 minutes to go, Brazil regaining belief. But the Greenoros did not break through and the blues managed without risk, starting off with dangerous counter-attacks thanks to the entry of Dugarry in place of Guivarc'h: Zidane launched him alone in front of Taffarel in the 82nd minute, but the ex-Milanista also clamorously missed his third goal by putting him off. In the 90th minute a thrill for France, Edmundo's dribbling touch on Denilson, his left-footed shot hitting the crossbar. In the middle of the second half, a new French counter-attack started with Dugarry, he crossed the half-field and it was Vieira's turn to assist Petit, who skilfully passed over Taffarel with his left for the final 3-0. It was over, the immense joy of the French people exploded, at the first World Cup triumph obtained precisely in Paris, while in Brazil the controversy raged over the use of a dying Ronaldo who conditioned the match of the former champions. There will also be a parliamentary question on the matter in Brazil, but Ronaldo will take full responsibility for his choice to take the field, silencing the rumours about pressure from Nike, coach Zagalo and the Brazilian federation. Will it be true? And was the illness just stress? The next day on his return to Rio de Janeiro, Ronaldo struggled to get off the plane, staggered and could not stand. He will return to the field after a month of absolute rest.

FRANCE: Barthez 7, Thuram 6.5, Lizarazu 7, Desailly 6, Leboeuf 6.5, Deschamps 7, Petit 7.5, Karembeu 6.5 (*from 57' Boghossian 6.5*), Guivarc'h 5.5 (*from 65' Dugarry 6*), Zidane 9.5, Djorkaeff 7 (*from 75' Vieira sv*). Coach Aimé Jacquet.

BRAZIL: Taffarel 6, Cafu 5.5, Roberto Carlos 6, Aldair 4.5, Junior Baiano 5.5, Cesar Sampaio 5 (*from 74' Edmundo sv*), Leonardo 5 (*from 46' Denilson 6.5*), Dunga 6, Ronaldo 5, Rivaldo 6, Bebeto 4.5. Coach Mario Zagallo.

Referee: Belqola (MAR) 7

On 27' Zidane 1-0; on 45' Zidane 2-0.

On 90' Petit 3-0.



Zidane's winning goal



Ronaldo's ghost in the final