

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 Djorkaeff sensationally free in the middle of the area but his header went wide. France mastered the field, 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