

2006 WORLD CUP GERMANY / First Round  
Cologne, FIFA WM Stadium, 17 June 2006

## **GHANA – CZECH REPUBLIC**

# 2-0

### **THE SURPRISE OF THE SUPER EAGLES**

The 2006 World Cup in Germany restored the hierarchy somewhat. After half of the favourites were eliminated between the first round and the round of 16 in 2002, there were no particular surprises in 2006, with Germany, England, Argentina, the Netherlands, Portugal, Italy and Brazil easily winning their first matches and dominating their groups. The only team in difficulty was France, which drew with Switzerland and South Korea but then clinched qualification by beating Togo. Among the outsiders, the Czech Republic crushed the United States 3-0, displaying extremely effective vertical football, with new star Rosicky flanked by old hands such as Nedved and Poborsky. In the same Group E, Italy made their debut with a 2-0 win over Ghana, and the group already seemed decided on the eve of the second match. The Czechs faced Ghana, who had not disappointed against the Azzurri, showing a compactness uncommon for African football but with obvious offensive limitations. Ready, set, go! In Cologne, there are many fans who have travelled from the neighbouring Czech Republic, while the neutral crowd is all for Ghana, who immediately take the lead. Appiah elegantly controls the ball in the attacking third and sends it to the edge of the box, where Ujfalusi makes a sensational defensive mistake with his head. Asamoah controls the ball with his chest as he enters the box and fires a left-footed shot past Cech. After just one minute, Ghana is in the lead. The Czech Republic tries to react but without much conviction. The match is long and the technical superiority of the Czechs is evident, so there is no need to force the issue. Ghana is solid, well organised, and does not suffer, responding blow for blow to the Czechs' initiatives, thanks to a top-class midfield consisting of Essien (Chelsea), Appiah (Fenerbahçe), and Muntari (Udinese), who is bursting with energy and blocks all of Nedved and Rosicky's initiatives in their infancy. Around the half-hour mark, there is a chance for each side within a minute: first, Nedved opens up on the right to Poborsky, but his diagonal shot goes wide, then Appiah makes a great run into the box, served by Asamoah, turns but then shoots high. As the minutes passed, the Czechs' lucidity faded, while Ghana's play grew in intensity and awareness, with spectacular counter-attacks, but unfortunately they were not incisive up front, never hitting the target with their shots. In the 43rd minute, the Czech Republic launched a nice fast break, with Nedved sending Poborsky down the right wing, who crossed back to Rosicky, but he couldn't find the net. The match heated up in the second half, with Poborsky crossing from the right side of the box and Nedved, alone in the centre of the area, beating Kingson with a header, but the referee ruled it offside. Correct. In the 51st minute, Kingson made a long, low clearance that found Asamoah, the young Modena striker, who beat Rozenhal and shot with his right foot from the edge of the box, but Cech flew across to tip it away for a corner. The Czech Republic restarted, Rosicky accelerated and passed to Nedved on the right, who passed to Stajner on the right, who shot low to the far post. Rosicky made a dummy run and Plasir shot, but Kingson deflected it over the bar. The match is in the balance, but in the 19th minute of the second half, Elizondo awards Ghana a penalty: Ujfalusi hooks Amoah, who had controlled a long-range shot from Pantsil and was about to shoot at goal in front of Cech. Amid protests from Ghana, the referee shows Ujfalusi a red card. It seemed all over for the Czech Republic, but Asamoah hit the post and the score remained 1-0. However, the Czechs had nothing left in the tank and, down to ten men, they were overwhelmed by a physically dominant Ghana: in the 71st minute, Amoah got away from Jankulowski and headed for goal, entering the area and firing a right-footed shot that Cech saved. Two minutes later, Asamoah passes back to Muntari, who shoots with his left foot, but Cech is unbeatable. The Czech goalkeeper keeps

his team in the 77th minute when he deflects Essien's shot with his foot and then Asamoah's shortly after. It's a siege, Ghana could manage the game but continues to attack, like a boxer who sees his opponent in the corner and fills him with punches until he sees him on the mat, and the more he beats him, the happier he is. The Ghanaians are playing brilliantly and are happy, their moves are spectacular, and eight minutes from the end, they deservedly double their lead: Appiah passes to Asamoah, who plays a one-two with Appiah and then touches the ball into the box for Muntari, who beats Cech at the near post with a terrific left-footed shot into the top corner. The Ghanaian and German fans are delirious, and the stands are a riot of colour. In the 88th minute, Pimpong breaks through the Czech defence, then, as Cech comes out, he naively touches the ball to Muntari, who is clearly offside, and he scores. But the goal is disallowed. In injury time, Ghana's tension drops and the Czechs have a burst of pride that brings them close to scoring twice, but a double miracle by Kingson, first on Sionko and then on Polak, seals the result at 2-0. In the evening, Italy is held to a 1-1 draw by the United States, and the last game of the group becomes decisive for everyone. Italy beat a morally disintegrated Czech Republic 2-0, Ghana beat the United States 2-1 and qualified for the round of 16 in their first World Cup appearance. Unfortunately for them, they will face Ronaldo and Adriano's Brazil, who will give them no chance. But we will see them again four years later.

GHANA: Kingson 7, Pantsil 7, Mensah 6.5, Illiasu 6.5, Mohamed 6.5, Essien 7, O. Addo 6.5 (from 46' Boateng 6.5), Appiah 7, Amoah 7 (from 80' E. Addo sv), Muntari 7.5, Asamoah Gyan 7.5 (from 85' Pimpong sv). Coach: Ratomir Dujkovic.

CZECH REPUBLIC: Cech 7, Grygera 6, Ujfalusi 4, Rozenhal 5, Jankuloski 5.5, Galasek 5 (from 46' Polak 6), Poborsky 6 (from 56' Stajner 6), Rosicky 6, Lokvenc 5, Nedved 6, Plasil 5.5 (from 68' Sionko 6). Coach: Karel Brückner.

Referee: Elizondo (ARG) 7

1' Gyan 1-0.

82' Muntari 2-0.

*Sent off in the 65th minute: Ujfalusi.*