

FIFA World Cup 1978

by Leslie Vernon

World Cup Final tournaments are rightly considered milestones in the history of Association Football. Through the advent of television, the entire population of the globe is brought within not only viewing, but practically shouting distance of the event, and this incredible mass audience judges, analyses, discusses every kick, every goal, every refereeing decision. Playing in front of such an immense 'crowd' puts a great deal of responsibility on the players, their mentors (the managers and coaches), on the administrators, in fact on everyone connected with the finals. Big-time football is part of the showbiz scene, it thrives on publicity, it needs the financial and emotional support of the fans, therefore the game's 'image' must be an attractive one. Despite the usual precautionary noises made by the powers that be before a ball was kicked in earnest, I regret to say that the 1978 finals did not present football in the best possible light. Enthusiastic crowds are part and parcel of the game, indeed without their 'background' presence, a match would be reduced to an academic exercise. But in Argentina, the nationalistic fervour of the home supporters often degenerated into an unpleasantly chauvinistic demonstration, proving once again the sad truism that sport and politics are indivisible. Living under a military dictatorship, struggling against a rocketing inflation rate, the people - although likeable and friendly - mistakenly began to look upon their football team as the symbols of their nationhood. Their victories, however dubiously achieved, were regarded as proof of superiority in other fields totally unconnected with football. After the final game, when Passarella, captain of Argentina, lifted the FIFA World Cup sky high, one could almost sense the relief, as though a disaster was averted. One commentator, for instance, asserted that if Rensenbrink's shot which hit the post minutes before the end of normal time had gone in, and Holland had won, there would have been a revolution in Argentina! The fact that such an outrageous assessment cannot be laughed out of court, demonstrates how serious, not to say debased, the situation was. Football, the glory game, has never been intended to serve any political philosophy and the concept of the World Cup - as originated by that honourable French gentleman, Jules Rimet - has certainly never included the fostering of chauvinism. But of course, taking football 'too seriously' has always been a characteristic of South American life, and managers like Cesar Luis Menotti of Argentina, and Claudio Coutinho of Brazil, constantly walk the tightrope which separates a national hero from a bungling incompetent. Poor old Roca of Mexico, didn't even dare to return home after his managerial stint with his country's unsuccessful squad.

But we are mainly concerned with the football itself, and let me say at once that although perhaps the general standard wasn't as high as in some previous competitions, the 1978 finals were still a fascinating, constantly entertaining tournament. The preceding qualifying competition provided the talking point as to whether the allocation of places was based on a fair system or otherwise. While we mourned the failure of England to make the last 16, our sorrow wasn't eased by the knowledge that such footballing nonentities as Iran, Tunisia and Mexico were triumphant qualifiers from other geographically selected groups. One side of the coin of this particular argument propagates the obvious, namely that the 16 strongest countries should contest the World Cup Finals. The opposing side says that the preliminary competition is also part of the Cup, and that participation in the game's premier tournament's Finals act as a great boost in such underdeveloped continents as Africa and Asia. It would be futile to pursue this question, because in any case, Joao Havelange, in his FIFA presidential election address, promised a bigger share of the cake to the lesser fry, and Tunisia's surprisingly mature football in Argentina underlined the progress made by countries hitherto regarded as no-hopers.

Despite fears to the contrary, the 'Mundial '78', as the Argentinians called 'their' World Cup (in more senses than one), kicked off on time on pitches which if not good, were tolerable, with the media just about adequately catered for, bar television, which was, as always, exemplary. No tournament or even single event can live up to the ballyhoo which surrounded the World Cup; consequently, with hindsight, one can now say that the abysmal opening game between the holders, West Germany and Poland was a blessing in disguise.

After that 0-0 debacle (the fourth consecutive opener without one single goal!), everything else had to be an improvement, and when on the following day after only 31

seconds play, Lacombe scored for France, we were all out of our seats screaming with delight. Sharing the points was obviously a 'good idea' for both the Germans and the Poles, as they both confidently expected to collect maximum spoils from Group II minnows, Tunisia and Mexico. Poland were perhaps marginally the better side, both Deyna and Lato missing chances and Sepp Maier making one or two characteristically classy saves. A day later, after Mexico took the lead, Tunisia played some excellent football straight out of some obscure African coaching manual, and scored three clever goals to win convincingly 3-1! Stunned by this unexpected setback, the Mexicans were unable to resist the rampant Germans, and conceded six goals without once being able to pierce the tough Teutonic defence. One unfortunate error allowed Lato to score for Poland against Tunisia, and afterwards, Tomaszewski's goal was kept intact miraculously as much by skill as by luck - 1-0! On the last playing day of this Group II, the Poles easily accounted for Mexico, but West Germany's match against Tunisia was a different cup of tequilla. Here were the World Champions facing the much scorned 'parvenues' of the competition, and they were forced to fight for survival. Territorially, perhaps, Helmut Schoen's team could claim superiority, but if any one of the dozen dangerous Tunisian attacks had resulted in a goal, the West Germans would have been out of the competition. As it happened, another clean sheet for Sepp in yet another goalless draw, meant second place in the Group, behind the equally unconvincing Poles.

Argentina were the seeded country in Group I and, surprisingly, Italy asked to be put in the same section, because of the ready-made support waiting for them in Buenos Aires, where there is a large colony of Italian immigrants. The unfortunate French and Hungarians, drawn into the same Group, made it undoubtedly the strongest foursome of the competition, and the football provided by these countries did not disappoint the sternest critics. Didier Six's centre found Lacombe, and the French striker scored with a brilliant header. But Italy came back strongly - Rossi equalized, and substitute Zaccarelli scored an excellent goal following an intricate move. On the same day, Hungary took the lead against Argentina through Csapo, but once again this early lead was wiped out, this time by Luque, capitalizing on a goalkeeping error, and late in the game, Bertoni got the winner for the jubilant hosts. This was a highly explosive affair, in which two young Hungarians, Torocsik and Nyilasi, lost both their patience and tempers, and were sent off by the Portuguese referee, Garrido. Sad to say that in a way, the refereeing in this match established a pattern which consistently assisted the home country to achieve her objectives. An accidental handling offence by Tresor, the brilliant centre-back of France, was astonishingly punished by a penalty, when Michel Hidalgo's team faced Argentina in their second match. And although Platini equalised Passarella's spot-kick, Luque got the winner with a marvellous shot. Italy beat depleted Hungary with ease, and in the match which decided the top-placings, they also defeated Argentina. France's win over the Magyars further emphasized this country's progress, and they were regarded as the most unlucky non-qualifiers for the last eight.

While goals were plentiful in Group I, they were at a premium in Group III, where Brazil were expected to walk all over the opposition. But their uninspiring drawn game against Sweden gave an early warning that this was not a vintage year for the three times World Champions, and eventually, Austria finished ahead of the pack. Brazil, without the discarded Rivelino and Zico relegated to substitute, scraped in at second place, while Spain and Sweden were deprived of a spot in Round II.

Naturally, we paid special interest to Group IV, where Scotland represented not only British football, but in many ways, the English League as well. Holland duly beat Iran 3-0 in their first match with a Rensenbrink hat-trick which included two penalties. Scotland were also awarded a spot-kick against Peru, but the acrobatic Quiroga saved Masson's tame effort. Cubillas scored with two long-range shots, and the South Americans won 3-1! To speak of a 'shock result' would be an understatement, because this scoreline was regarded as a 'great tragedy' for Scottish football. In its wake, Ally MacLeod's credibility as an international manager was questioned, and the behaviour of the Scottish squad while on tour was criticised. As a further blow, Willie Johnston was found guilty of taking an illegal stimulant, and was consequently jettisoned by the Scottish FA, and banned for a year by FIFA. His expulsion from the camp plus the subsequent Press revelations were other contributory factors which spread gloom and despondency in the Scottish camp, and their astonishingly inept performance against Iran (1-1) made them look even more foolish when one remembered the pre-World Cup bragging and their over-confident statements. When all was lost, Scotland came good and beat Holland - indeed at one stage, even the mini-miracle of a victory by three clear

goals, which would have meant qualification, seemed possible. But a Johnny Rep thunderbolt ended this forlorn hope, and the 3-2 win was less than enough. Incidentally, these long-distance goals became the feature of the World Cup, and every time there was a free-kick awarded within 25 to 30 yards of goal, a sense of anticipation was evident on and off the pitch. Peru were eventually the surprise winners of this Group, and all four 'seeded' countries finished second - a series of results which helped to form a second stage Group 'A', which consisted of four strong European countries and a Group 'B' dominated by the South Americans, with 'cuckoos' Poland the underdogs.

Holland, the eventual finalists, played the Austrians off the park, and their 5-1 victory gave them a substantial advantage over both Italy and West Germany, who fought out a sterile goalless draw in their game against each other. The Germans' defensive tactics and their apparent delight in taking one point off the Italians didn't augur well, and indeed, Helmut Schoen's last World Cup campaign was doomed to failure. They did take the lead in the Holland match twice, but the Dutch came back strongly and first Haan, then Rene Van der Kerkhof equalized. The decision was left to the last game, with Holland needing just a draw against the, by now, less than rampant Italians. They did even better, winning 2-1 - Brandts scoring for both sides, and Haan beating Zoff from fully 30 yards! In Group 'B', Argentina, after beating Poland, drew with Brazil 0-0 in a match best to be forgotten - the naked violence was a depressing testimony of what football can be about in our times - if the stakes are high enough. Running neck-and-neck, only goal difference separated these two South American giants, and when Brazil beat Poland 3-1, Argentina had to score at least four goals against Peru to reach the final. The fact that they were allowed to kick off about four hours later than Brazil was a much discussed topic, but FIFA insisted that previous arrangements with TV companies had prevented them altering the blatantly unfair blueprint of the competition (my adjectives, not theirs!). The hosts duly scored not four but six times against Peru whose goalkeeper Quiroga was actually born in Argentina. No blame should be attached to the bemused Quiroga, who incidentally, in one game, was cautioned because he deliberately fouled Lato of Poland inside the Polish half of the field! But one Brazilian paper wrote: 'If Brazil had won 50-0 against Poland, Argentina would have beaten Peru 52-0!' Slight exaggeration, and he forgot to mention that Brazil didn't win anything like 50-0 ... Claudio Coutinho, Brazil's manager, also joined the ranks of those who denounced Peru, and he declared that his country's team were the 'moral' winners of the Cup. To which Cesar Luis Menotti, Argentina's chain-smoking boss replied: 'I congratulate Brazil on their moral victory. Now, I hope Coutinho will congratulate us on our 'real' win?'

Because, as one might have guessed after such preliminaries, Argentina did win the Cup - the third host country to do so in the last four tournaments! They scored through the excellent Kempes in the first half against Holland, but Nanninga equalized in a much better second half - not only for the Dutch, but for football itself. Rensenbrink hit the post minutes before the Italian referee Gonella blew for extra time. In that period, the Argentinians got on top, and Kempes again and then Bertoni netted in front of a delirious crowd. Brazil, technically still the best footballing nation in the world, finished third after beating Italy 2-1 in a highly enjoyable game in the traditional non-event called 'play-off for third place', and they were the only unbeaten side in Argentina.

No World Cup competition can possibly fail to intrigue and entertain. The 1978 finals were no exception, but it left a bitter taste in the mouth. Must the home countries be so blatantly assisted from the draw to the final match? Would it not be better to revert to the old quarter-final, semi-final system instead of two lots of mini-leagues? Should the referees be censored for their weak-kneed handling of the games? These are only a few of the relevant questions which must be answered - positively - before Spain 1982: On the credit side, we have seen the emergence of attacking football. Argentina, if perhaps not a great team, were always positive and adventurous - they played with four forwards (two of them 'old-fashioned' wingers). Holland are still the flagbearers of total football, and Italy were only successful when they abandoned their traditional defensive stance. The ball-control of the Brazilians was delightful, the shooting power of Haan, Dirceu, Cubillas, unforgettable. The tournament lacked great star players, but I would give Fillol, Passarella, Ardiles and Kempes 'world-class' rating alongside Krol, Rensenbrink, Bettega, Tresor, Platini, Nelinho, Oscar, Dirceu, Prohaska, Krankl, Maier, Zoff and Hellstrom. In these days, when the team is more important than its component parts, one cannot hope for more, so we must be satisfied with the slightly below par tournament which goes into the history books as Argentina - Mundial '78.

GROUP 1

Mar del Plata, 2 June, 42,000

Italy (1) 2 France (1) 1

Italy: Zoff; Scirea, Gentile, Bellugi, Cabrini, Antognoni (Zaccarelli), Tardelli, Benetti, Causio, Rossi, Bettega.

France: Bertrand-Demanes; Tresor, Janvion, Rio, Bossis, Michel, Platini, Guiflou, Dalger, Lacombe (Berdoll), Six (Rouyer).
Scorers: Italy: Rossi (30 mins), Zaccarelli (52 mins); France: Lacombe (1 mb);
Ref: N. Rainea (Romania).

Buenos Aires, 2 June, 77,000

Argentina (1) 2 Hungary (1) 1

Argentina: Fillol; Passarella, Olguin, Galvan, L. Ardiles, Gallego, Valencia (Alonso), Tarantini, Houseman (Bertoni), Luque, Kempes.

Hungary: Gujdar; Kocsis, Torok (Martos), Kereki, Toth, J. Pinter, Csapo, Nyilasi, Zombori, Torocsik, Nagy, L.
Scorers: Argentina: Luque (15 mins), Bertoni (86 mins); Hungary: Csapo (10 mins);
Ref: A. Garrido (Portugal).

Mar del Plata, 6 June, 32,000

Italy (2) 3 Hungary (0) 1

Italy: Zoff; Scirea, Gentile, Bellugi, Cabrini (Cuccureddu), Antognoni, Tardelli, Benetti, Causio, Rossi, Bettega (Graziani).

Hungary: Meszaros; Kocsis, Martos, Kereki, Toth, J. Csapo, Pinter, Zombori, Pusztai, Fazekas (Halasz), Nagy, L. (Toth, A.).
Scorers: Italy: Rossi (35 mins), Bettega (36 mins), Benetti (60 mins); Hungary: Toth, A. (81 mins, pen);
Ref: R. Ruiz (Uruguay).

Buenos Aires, 6 June, 77,000

Argentina (1) 2 France (0) 1

Argentina: Fillol, Olguin, Galvan, L. Passarella, Tarantini, Valencia (Alonso (Ortiz)), Gallego, Ardiles, Houseman, Luque, Kempes.

France: Bertrand-Demanes (Baratelli); Tresor, Battiston, Lopez, Bossis, Bathenay, Michel, Platini, Rocheteau, Lacombe, Six.
Scorers: Argentina: Passarella (46 mins, pen), Luque (73 mins); France: Platini (60 mins);
Ref: J. Dubach (Switzerland).

Mar del Plata, 10 June, 28,000

France (3) 3 Hungary (1) 1

France: Dropsy; Tresor, Janvion, Lopez, Bracci, Petit, Bathenay, Papi (Platini), Rouyer, Berdoll, Rocheteau (Six).

Hungary: Gujdar; Balint, Martos, Kereki, Toth, J. Nyilasi, Pinter, Zombori, Pusztai, Torocsik, Nagy, L. (Csapo).
Scorers: France: Lopez (24 mins), Berdoll (37 mins), Rocheteau (42 mins); Hungary: Zombori (41 mins);
Ref: A. Coelho (Brazil).

Buenos Aires, 10 June, 77,000

Italy (0) 1 Argentina (0) 0

Italy: Zoff; Scirea, Gentile, Bellugi (Cuccureddu), Cabrini, Antognoni (Zaccarelli), Benetti, Tardelli, Causio, Rossi, Bettega.

Argentina: Fillol; Galvan, L. Olguin, Passarella, Tarantini, Ardiles, Valencia, Gallego, Bertoni, Kempes, Ortiz (Houseman).
Scorer: Italy: Bettega (68 mins);
Ref: A Klein (Israel).

	FINAL TABLE						
	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
ITALY	3	3	0	0	6	2	6
ARGENTINA	3	2	0	1	4	2	4
France	3	1	0	2	5	5	2
Hungary	3	0	0	3	3	8	0

GROUP 2

Buenos Aires, 1 June, 77,000

West Germany (0) 0 Poland (0) 0

West Germany: Maier; Kaltz, Vogts, Russmann, Zimmermann, Beer, Bonhof, Flohe, Abramczik, Fischer, Muller, H.

Poland: Tomaszewski; Gorgon, Maculewicz, Zmuda, Szymanowski, Nawalka, Deyna, Maszaler (Kasperczak), Lato, Lubanski (Boniek), Szarmach.
Ref: A. Coerzera (Argentina).

Rosario, 2 June, 25,000

Tunisia (0) 3 Mexico (1) 1

Tunisia: Nalli; Jebali, Dhouiab, Jendoubi, Kaabi, Gommidh, Tarak, Agrebi, Temime (Labidi), Akid, Ben Aziza (Karoui).

Mexico: Reyes; Ramos, Martinez Diaz, Vazquez Ayala, Tena, De La Torre, Cuellar, Mendizabal (Lugo), Isirdia, Rangel, Sanchez.
Scorers: Tunisia: Kaabi (35 mins), Gommidh (79 mins), Dhouiab (86 mins); Mexico: Ayala (45 mins, pen).
Ref: J. Gordon (Scotland).

Rosario, 6 June, 15,000

Poland (1) 1 Tunisia (0) 1

Poland: Tomaszewski; Gorgon, Maculewicz, Zmuda, Szymanowski, Nawalka, Deyna, Kasperczak, Lato, Lubanski (Boniek), Szarmach (Iwan).
Tunisia: Nalli; Jebali, Dhouiab, Gasm, Kaabi, Gommidh, Tarak, Agrebi, Jendoubi, Temime, Akid.

Scorers: Poland: Lato (42 mins).
Ref: A. Martinez (Spain).

Cordoba, 6 June, 35,000

West Germany (4) 6 Mexico (0) 0

West Germany: Maier; Kaltz, Vogts, Russmann, Dietz, Bonhof, Flohe, Muller, H., Rummenigge, Fischer, Muller, D.

Mexico: Reyes (Soto); Ramos, Martinez Diaz, Vazquez Ayala, Tena, De La Torre, Cuellar, Mendizabal, Lopez Zarza (Lugo), Rangel, Sanchez.
Scorers: West Germany: Muller, D (15 mins), Muller, H (30 mins), Rummenigge (38,71 mins), Flohe (44,90 mins).
Ref: F. Bouzo (Syria).

Rosario, 10 June, 20,000

Poland (1) 3 Mexico (0) 1

Poland: Tomaszewski; Gorgon, Szymanowski, Zmuda, Rudy (Maculewicz), Deyna, Maszaler, Kasperczak, Boniek, Lato, Iwan (Lubanski).

Mexico: Soto; Flores, Cisneros, Gomez, Vazquez Ayala, De La Torre, Cuellar, Cardenas (Mendizabal), Ortega, Rangel, Sanchez.
Scorers: Poland: Boniek (43,84 mins), Deyna (57 mins); Rangel (52 mins).
Ref: J Namdar (Iran).

Cordoba, 10 June, 35,000

West Germany (0) 0 Tunisia (0) 0

West Germany: Maier; Kaltz, Vogts, Russmann, Dietz, Rummenigge, Bonhof, Flohe, Muller, H, Muller, D, Fischer.

Tunisia: Nalli; Jebali, Dhouiab, Labidi, Kaabi, Agrebi, Gasm, Gommidh, Tarak, Temime, Akid (Ben Aziza).
Ref: C Orosco (Peru).

	FINAL TABLE						
	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
POLAND	3	2	1	0	4	1	5
WEST GERMANY	3	1	2	0	6	0	4
Tunisia	3	1	1	1	3	2	3
Mexico	3	0	0	3	2	12	0