

Italy deservedly won the 1982 World Cup, and if there were reservations about their overall performance in Spain, there was no denying that they were the most improved team over the tournament. Even by their own standards their record in the opening group matches was abysmally negative. They failed to win a match, drawing all three of their games - as did the modest Cameroon, who retired undefeated from the fray - and progressed to the next stage by virtue of their superior goalscoring: two goals to Cameroon's one!

Paolo Rossi, the prodigal son of Italy, returned from a two-year suspension after the bribes scandal, struggled to find his form in those early encounters, but became transformed in the second round to finish as the tournament's leading goalscorer with six goals.

The Italians physically dealt with the holders, Argentina, in the first half, then beat them fairly and squarely after the break. Not content with that, they three times took the lead against Brazil, which was once too often for the South Americans, who had been the outstanding team both for the quality of their football and for entertainment value. Indeed, the contrast in styles of this match provided the second-most memorable encounter of the World Cup, the top game unquestionably being the pulsating, emotionally and physically drained players were called upon to settle the matter by penalty kicks. It was the first time that this unsatisfactory system had been used in the World Cup, but sadly, in a competition covering 52 games, there was no margin for a play-off.

The Germans, two down at one stage, in fact salvaged part of their reputation against the French, who were only slightly inferior to Brazil in terms of attractiveness. However, there were less savoury aspects of German play. Humiliated by one of the outsiders, Algeria, the Germans gave a miserly display on other occasions. They descended to the feigning of injury which oddly enough helped them reach the 1966 final against England, and a blatant foul on French substitute Patrick Battiston by goalkeeper Harald Schumacher at a crucial moment disrupted the French rhythm and yet went unpunished. Just as disturbing was the furore caused by the apparent arrangement between the Germans and Austria which prevented Algeria from going into the second round.

The Germans could claim that Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, easily their most gifted player, was handicapped throughout by injury. Indeed, he seemed to be either coming on or going off late to preserve his fitness. Yet the Italians were hit more seriously, in the final alone having to start without Giancarlo Antognoni and losing Francesco Graziani in the early stages.

Italy's success was a triumph for manager Enzo Bearzot, whose endeavours to unfetter his international players from the strictures of Italian domestic football had invariably foundered in the past. This time they were technically right, professional and clinical in their finishing. Another to savour the fruits of success after many campaigns was their goalkeeper and captain Dino Zoff, at 40 the oldest player in the finals. His display against Brazil belied both his years and ageing reflexes.

The youngest player of the tournament was 17-year-old Norman Whiteside of a Northern Ireland side who were one of few teams to play above themselves. They reached a peak against their dismally disappointing Spanish hosts, beating them 1-0 despite having to play for the greater part of the second half with 10 men following the sending-off of Mal Donaghy. Yet their defence never once faltered or allowed itself to be drawn into rash tackles that would inevitably have led to howls for a Spanish penalty. Such fears were understandable, for two of Spain's three previous goals had come from the spot.

The refereeing was of no greater standard than the play overall, and, despite the increase in goalscoring, this was in many respects the most unenterprising World Cup of all time. Forwards were scarce; those of above-average ability were almost non-existent. Rossi was one of the few successful orthodox leaders. Most teams packed the midfield, but whereas those like Brazil and France used the midfield as a springboard to attack from all angles, too many others relied on the mistakes of the opposition to goad them on to the offensive.

England could rightly claim to have been forced out of the competition by the vagaries of its system, for they remained unbeaten. However, just how much of the euphoria which surrounded their performances was borne of Bryan Robson scoring after 27 seconds of the first game and of catching the French on their worst day is debatable. For the Scots, in a difficult group, defensive errors proved costly when they had revealed imagination and skill in combating sides of differing quality in Brazil and the rather over-rated USSR.

The minnows certainly enlivened Spain. Honduras, Algeria and even Kuwait had their moments. New Zealand played better than their results suggest, and El Salvador shored up their defence after conceding 10 goals to Hungary.

Generally, though, the Eastern Europeans were dreadfully dull and stereotyped, especially Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. Poland, for whom Grzegorz Lato equalled Kazimierz Deyna's 102 caps, operated fitfully, despite their third place.

Few of the top stars enhanced their reputations. Diego Maradona, in spite of his multi-million pound rating, was a big disappointment, as indeed was the Argentine side generally. Chile and Peru failed to excite, and even the admirable Brazilians would have been better rewarded with more accomplished performers at centre-forward and in goal.

France, with Marius Tresor, Michel Platini, Jean Tigana and Alain Giresse outstanding; Zico, Falcao, Socrates and Junior memorable for Brazil; Rossi, Bruno Conti and Gaetano Scirea in the blue of Italy; these were among those to be affectionately recalled. But there were many others who faded into obscurity - as did some 50 matches, including the final.

QUALIFYING COMPETITION

EUROPE

GROUP 1

West Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Albania

Helsinki, 4 June, 1980

Finland (0) 0

Bulgaria (1) 2 (Markov, Kostadinov) 7800

Finland: Sairanen (Nurmio); Lampi, Tolva, Houtsonen, Ranta, Ronkainen (Ismail), Pyykko, Toivola, Rautiainen, Hakala, Nieminen.

Bulgaria: Christov; Zafirov, Kolev, Maldjanski, Karakolev, Dimitrov G., Kostadinov, Markov (Tsvetkov P.), Jeli-azkov, Kostov, Tsvetkov C. (Iliev).

Tirana, 3 September, 1980

Albania (2) 2 (Braho, Baci)

Finland (0) 0

Albania: Kaci; Baci, Hysi, Turgaj, Berisha, Ragami, Zeri, Lleshi, Marko, Minga, Braho.

Finland: Isoaho; Lahtinen, Helin (Rajaniemi), Tolva, Ahonen, Pyykko, Dahllund, Virtanen, Pulliainen (Turunen), Himanka, Hakala.

Helsinki, 24 September, 1980

Finland (0) 0

Austria (1) 2 (Jara, Welzl) 8099

Finland: Isoaho; Lahtinen, Tolva, Houtsonen, Ranta, Virtanen, Pyykko, Dahllund, Ronkainen (Turunen), Tissari, Rajaniemi (Jakosari).

Austria: Koncilia; Obermayer, Pregesbauer, Pezzey, Zuenelli, Wartinger (Welzl), Hattenberger, Prohaska, Jara, Schachner, Krankl.

Sofia, 19 October, 1980

Bulgaria (1) 2 (Jeliuzkov, Slavkov)

Albania (0) 1 (Pernaska)

Bulgaria: Christov; Zafirov, Dimitrov B., Maldjanski, Blangev, Slavkov, Markov (Iliev), Kerimov, Dimitrov G., Kostadinov, Jeliuzkov.

Albania: Kaci; Baci, Hysi, Turgaj, Berisha, Cipi, Ballgijni H., Lleshi (Bajazidi), Zeri, Pernaska, Braho.

Vienna, 15 November, 1980

Austria (3) 5 (Pezzey, Schachner 2, Welzl, Krankl)

Albania (0) 0

Austria: Feurer; Dihanich, Obermayer, Pezzey, Mirnegg, Prohaska, Hattenberger, Jara, Welzl, Krankl, Schachner (Keglevits).

Albania: Kaci; Baci, Berisha, Hysi, Turgaj, Cipi, Ballgijni H., Pernaska, Lleshi, Braho (Bregu), Bajazidi.

Sofia, 3 December, 1980

Bulgaria (0) 1 (Yonchev)

West Germany (2) 3 (Kaltz 2 [1 pen], Rummenigge)

Bulgaria: Christov; Dimitrov G. (Slavkov), Zafirov, Rang- gelov, Vassilev, Iliev, Markov, Jeliuzkov, Zdravkov (Ker- imov), Djevizov, Yonchev.

West Germany: Schumacher; Kaltz, Stielike, Forster K. H., Dietz, Briegel, Magath (Votava), Muller H., Allofs K. (Borchers), Hrubesch, Rummenigge.

Tirana, 6 December, 1980

Albania (0) 0

Austria (1) 1 (Welzl)

Albania: Kaci; Baci, Hysi, Berisha, Turgaj, Ragami, Zeri, Lleshi, Marko (Lame), Pernaska, Braho (Kola).

Austria: Feurer; Weber, Obermayer, Pezzey, Mirnegg, Hattenberger, Prohaska, Jara, Welzl, Gasselich (Baumeister), Schachner (Jurtin).

Tirana, 1 April, 1981

Albania (0) 0

West Germany (1) 2 (Schuster 2) 30,000

Albania: Kaci; Targaj, Berisha, Hysi, Cocoli, Xhafa, Lame, Ballgijni H. (Baci), Pernaska, Minga, Lleshi.

West Germany: Schumacher; Kaltz, Stielike, Forster K. H. (Hannes), Dietz, Magath, Schuster, Muller H., Allofs K., Rummenigge, Hrubesch.

Hamburg, 29 April, 1981

West Germany (2) 2 (Krauss og, Fischer)

Austria (0) 0

West Germany: Schumacher; Kaltz, Stielike, Forster K. H., Briegel, Schuster, Magath, Breilner, Muller H., Rum- menigge, Fischer (Allgower).

Austria: Koncilia; Krauss, Obermayer, Pezzey, Mirnegg, Hattenberger (Weber), Prohaska, Hintermaier (Baumeis- ter), Jara, Krankl, Welzl.

Sofia, 13 May, 1981

Bulgaria (1) 4 (Slavkov 2, Kostadinov, Tsvetkov C.)

Finland (0) 0

Bulgaria: Velinov; Vassilev, Balevski, Bonev, Dimitrov G., Grigorov, Tsvetkov P. (Yonchev), Slavkov (Zdrav- kov), Kostadinov, Jeliuzkov, Tsvetkov C.

Finland: Isoaho; Lahtinen, Tolva, Vaittinen, Pekonen (Bergqvist), Houtsonen, Dahllund (Jakosari), Ikalainen, Pyykko, Ismail, Valvee.

Lahti, 24 May, 1981

Finland (0) 0

West Germany (3) 4 (Briegel, Fischer 2, Kaltz) 10,000

Finland: Isoaho; Houtsonen, Tolva (Helin), Vaittinen, Lahtinen, Kupiainen, Ikalainen, Virtanen, Pyykko, Kousa, Valvee (Ismail).

West Germany: Schumacher; Kaltz, Hannes, Forster K. H., Briegel, Dremmler, Breilner, Magath (Borchers), Muller H. (Allgower), Rummenigge, Fischer.

Vienna, 28 May, 1981

Austria (1) 2 (Krankl pen, Jara)

Bulgaria (0) 0

Austria: Feurer; Dihanich, Weber, Pezzey, Mirnegg, Pro- haska, Hattenberger, Jara, Welzl, Krankl, Keglevits (Schachner).

Bulgaria: Christov; Sabatinov, Balevski, Maldjanski, Vassilev, Zdravkov (Kostadinov), Dimitrov G., Jeliuzkov, Grigorov (Markov), Slavkov, Tsvetkov C.

Linzi, 17 June, 1981

Austria (3) 5 (Prohaska 2, Krankl, Welzl, Jurtin)

Finland (0) 1 (Valvee)

Austria: Feurer; Dihanich, Pezzey, Weber, Mirnegg, Hat- tenberger, Prohaska (Kreuz), Jara, Welzl (Schachner), Krankl, Jurtin.

Finland: Huttunen; Helin, Lahtinen, Vaittinen, Houtso- nen, Ikalainen, Virtanen, Kousa (Rajaniemi), Turunen, Dahllund, Valvee.

Kotka, 2 September, 1981

Finland (0) 2 (Houtsonen, Kousa)

Albania (0) 1 (Targaj pen)

Albania: Kaci; Baci, Hysi, Berisha, Turgaj, Ragami, Zeri, Lleshi, Marko (Lame), Pernaska, Braho (Kola).

Finland: Isoaho; Lahtinen, Dahllund, Vaittinen, Peko- nen, Turunen, Houtsonen, Pyykko (Ronkainen), Utrai- nen, Kousa, Jakosari.

Albania: Musta; Targaj, Hysi, Cocoli, Berisha, Lleshi, Pernaska (Minga), Lame, Luci (Ragami), Ballgijni H., Ballgijni S.