

MARADONA AND THE HAND OF GOD

Episode 66

Fans from all over the world went to Mexico in the year 1986 to celebrate the World Cup. Some 24 teams represented their nations to see who could be victorious and lift up the World Cup trophy.

The 1986 World Cup was marked by several controversies. First of all, it was originally going to occur in Colombia. However, FIFA modified some terms and Colombia announced that it couldn't host the competition because they didn't have the money to modify everything required by FIFA. At that time, Mexico, Canada, and the United States offered to have the event. Each nation made a presentation, but FIFA only considered Mexico. They didn't even visit the other two nations.

Another controversy surrounding the 1986 World Cup was related to the mascot. The mascot for the event was a caricature called Pique. Pique was a jalapeño with a big mustache and sombrero. It wore the colors of the Mexican team. However, several Mexicans did not like his stereotypical appearance.

Yet another controversy related to the hours of the games. The matches occurred in the middle of the day because it was more profitable to transmit them to Europe during that time. But that meant that the players were playing during the hottest moments of the day. On top of that, they were in higher-altitude cities of between 2,000 and 8,700 feet high. The weather was not kind. It was very hot and it was humid. In some games it even rained.

But all the information I have mentioned didn't mean anything next to the biggest controversy of the 1986 World Cup: Maradona and the Hand of God.

Argentina was doing a great job in the World Cup. They were winning game after game. In the group phase, Argentina won against South Korea and Bulgaria, and then they tied with Italy. In the round of 16, Argentina won against Uruguay. Later in the quarterfinals, Argentina faced England.

The nations of England and Argentina had a complicated past. Only four years before the World Cup, they were involved in a war over the Falkland Islands, or in their Argentinian name, the Islas Malvinas. These islands are only 300 miles from the coast of Argentina. Several groups established colonies on the islands, but they were under English control consistently since the year 1833.

In 1982, the leader of Argentina, General Leopoldo Galtieri, decided to take control of the islands to promote a sense of patriotism among the Argentinians. England and their leader, Margaret Thatcher, responded to the invasion with military

force, resulting in a war. The war lasted only 10 weeks, with England victorious. During the conflict, 258 English and 649 Argentinians died.

Relations between England and Argentina continued being tense. Even though Argentina didn't win the war in the Falkland Islands, they had the opportunity to win the quarterfinals in the World Cup.

The two teams and a big number of fans were in the Estadio Azteca in Mexico City. Argentina appeared in blue jerseys that they had bought three days before. England wore white.

The first half of the game saw several opportunities to make a goal, but no points. The action became more intense in the second half, mainly thanks to the Argentinian captain, Diego Maradona.

Diego Maradona was 25. He was very popular in the world of soccer. He started to play professionally a little before turning 16. He was with Argentinos Juniors, and later Boca Juniors. Then he spent two years in Spain with Barcelona, followed by several years in Naples, Italy.

Diego Maradona was already a super player in the 1986 World Cup, but the second half of the quarterfinal match between England and Argentina cemented him in soccer history.

Only 6 minutes into the second half, Maradona took control of the ball. He neared the English net. He passed the ball to a teammate and continued running. His teammate kicked the ball. The ball was high in the air. Maradona and the English goalie ran to the ball. Maradona hit the ball and made a goal.

The fans and Argentinian players went crazy. The English players spoke to the referees. The goal was illegal. From some angles, it seemed that Maradona had hit the ball with his head. But according to the English, Maradona didn't touch the ball with his head as it seemed, but rather he hit the ball with his hand. In spite of protests, the referees validated the goal, and Argentina was one step closer to victory.

A few minutes after his first goal, Maradona made history when he took the ball from an English attack. He turned and took off some 60 meters towards the English net. Five English players attacked him, but no one could take the ball from him. Maradona gave one last kick and scored another goal.

In Argentina, the fans that were watching the game on TV shared the sentiments of the commentator Victor Hugo Morales when he exclaimed: "I want to cry, my God, long live soccer! What a goal!" Later he continued, "Maradona, a memorable run, in the play of all time, cosmic kite, what planet did you come from?"

In the last moments of the game, England scored a goal, but it didn't matter. At the end, Argentina won with their two goals, even though one was very controversial. With this victory, Argentina advanced to the semifinals.

After the game, Maradona spoke with reporters. When they asked him about his first controversial goal, Maradona responded: "It was a little bit Maradona's head and another little bit the hand of God."

Even though there were photos from several angles that showed his hand hitting the ball, Maradona kept saying that it was 'the head of Maradona and the hand of God.' Years later, Maradona admitted that he had hit the ball with his hand, not with his head. He knew that he used his hand, but the ref said "goal." Maradona expressed that he believed the goal was justice for what England did in the Falkland Islands.

In the semifinals, Argentina beat Belgium 2 to 0, arriving to the final round unbeaten. In the final match, Argentina faced Germany (West Germany at that time), who were the favorites.

Argentina started the battle with the first goal. A little later, they got a second goal. They seemed destined for victory. Then, Germany made a goal, followed 7 minutes later by another goal. It was a tie of two to two. With only seven minutes left in the game, Maradona passed the ball to Jorge Burruchaga, who made the third and final goal in the conclusion of the World Cup. Argentina had won.

For his part, Diego Maradona received the Golden Ball for being the best player in the tournament. His second goal in the quarterfinal against England was voted the Goal of the Century in 2002. And his first goal still has the title "the Hand of God."



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