

The hand of God

"**The hand of God**" was a phrase used by the Argentine footballer Diego Maradona to describe a goal that he scored during the Argentina v England quarter finals match of the 1986 FIFA World Cup. The goal took place on 22 June 1986, at the Azteca Stadium in Mexico City. Under association football rules, Maradona should have received a yellow card for using his hand^[1] and the goal disallowed. However, as the referees did not have a clear view of the play and video assistant referee technology did not yet exist, the goal stood and Argentina led 1–0. The game ended with a 2–1 win for the Argentines, thanks to a second goal scored by Maradona, known as the "Goal of the Century". After the match, Diego Maradona stated that the goal was scored "a little with his head, and a little with the hand of God".



A parody of Michelangelo's fresco *The Creation of Adam*, with Maradona's jersey sleeve depicted on the arm

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The goal

At the end of the first half, while the game was still tied at 0-0, Maradona was beginning to influence the end outcome of the match. Six minutes into the second half of the game, Maradona took the ball out of the box with his left leg and passed it to teammate Jorge Valdano. Valdano tried to take on several English defenders, but the ball was intercepted and thrown back and forth and eventually cleared towards England's goal by English midfielder Steve Hodge.

Because of the position of the players, Maradona would have been caught offside, but as the ball came off an opponent, he was onside. Alone inside the penalty box and with the ball dropping down, Maradona contested the ball with goalkeeper Peter Shilton, who stood 20 centimetres (8 inches) taller than Maradona. Shilton jumped forward with his right hand, while Maradona did so with his left arm outstretched. Maradona's fist, which was raised close to his head, touched the ball first and hit the ball into England's goal. Maradona began to celebrate while glancing sideways at the referee and the linesman for confirmation. He then fully celebrated the goal when it was given.



The moment when Diego Maradona flicks the ball with the hand past the outstretched arm of Peter Shilton

Tunisian referee Ali Bennaceur gave the goal, but after the English players' protests he sought the advice of his second linesman who confirmed the goal.

Mexican photographer Alejandro Ojeda Carbajal immortalized this moment in a photograph in which Maradona can be seen hitting the ball with his hand.

Now I can say what I couldn't at that moment, what I defined at that time as *The Hand of God*. What a hand of God, it was the hand of Diego!

("Ahora sí puedo contar lo que en aquel momento no podía, lo que en aquel momento definí como «La mano de Dios»... Qué mano de Dios, ¡fue la mano del Diego!")

— Diego Maradona, in his autobiography^[2]

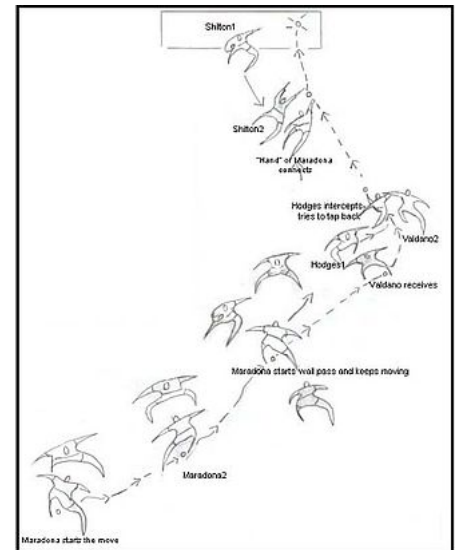
"History is already written"

In 2005, 19 years after scoring the controversial goal, Maradona confessed on a program *La Noche del 10*, that the goal was actually scored with his hand.

Several world media outlets reported the news, creating controversy.^[3] Even Peter Shilton rejected the apology, arguing that it was now too late.^[4] Maradona, a few days after the article came out, denied everything, saying that the newspaper had misquoted him. Maradona responded:

"I never spoke of forgiveness. I said only that the story could not be changed, that I do not have to apologize to anyone, because it was a football game in which there were 100,000 people in the Azteca stadium, twenty-two players, that there were two linesmen, that there was one referee, that Shilton (the goalkeeper) speaks up now and he hadn't noticed, the defenders had to tell him. So the story is already written, nothing can change it. And that was what I said. I never apologized to anyone. Besides, I don't have to apologize by making a statement to England. For what? To please who? What pisses me off the most is that they repeat this in Argentina and talk to people who know me. They talk about contradictions. At forty-seven I think that apologizing to the English is stupid."^[5]

(«Yo en ningún momento hablé de perdón. Hablé solamente de que la historia no se podía cambiar, de que yo no tengo por qué pedirle disculpas a nadie, porque fue un partido de fútbol en el que había cien mil personas en el Azteca, veintidós jugadores, que había dos líneas, que había un árbitro, que Shilton «el arquero ese» sale a hablar ahora y él no se había dado cuenta, se lo tuvieron que decir los defensores. Así que la historia ya está escrita, ya no la puede cambiar nada ni nadie. Y eso fue lo



illustrated sequence of the move of the "Hand of God" goal

que dije. Yo nunca le pedí perdón absolutamente a nadie. Aparte no tengo que pedir perdón yendo a hacer una nota a Inglaterra. ¿Para qué? ¿Para ganarme a quién? Lo que más me jode es que se hacen eco en Argentina y hacen hablar a... gente que me conoce. Hablan de contradicciones. A los cuarenta y siete años me parece que pedirles disculpas a los ingleses es una estupidez.»^[5]

A few days later, The Sun newspaper confirmed that it had modified the interpretation of Maradona's words and asked to change the name to *The Devil's Hand*. In the original text of the interview, it could be seen that Maradona had never asked for forgiveness for the goal from the Hand of God.

Falklands War and "symbolic revenge"

In the 2019 documentary film *Diego Maradona* directed by Asif Kapadia, Maradona links the event to the Falklands War four years earlier, saying "[w]e, as Argentinians, didn't know what the military was up to. They told us that we were winning the war. But in reality, England was winning 20–0. It was tough. The hype made it seem like we were going to play out another war. I knew it was my hand. It wasn't my plan but the action happened so fast that the linesman didn't see me putting my hand in. The referee looked at me and he said: 'Goal.' It was a nice feeling like some sort of symbolic revenge against the English."^[6]

Subsequent use

The "Hand of God" became a popular phrase and is still referred to around the world. Some other famous football handballs are:

- In the first round of the 1990 World Cup between Argentina and the USSR, in the first half of the 0–0 draw, a Soviet attack failed as Maradona intercepted the shot with "the hand of God" without the referee noticing.^[7]
- During a league match against Espanyol on 9 June 2007, Argentinian Barcelona player Lionel Messi scored by launching himself at the ball and guiding it past the goalkeeper with his hand in similar fashion to Maradona's Hand of God goal.^[8]
- During the final minutes of the second leg of the play-off for the 2010 World Cup between Ireland and France, William Gallas scored the decisive goal from a Thierry Henry assist that gave France a 2–1 aggregate victory and qualified them for the World Cup. Controversy followed immediately as replays showed Henry repeatedly centering the ball with his hands moments prior to passing the ball to Gallas. Despite protests from the Irish side, Swedish referee Martin Hansson did not admonish Henry and allowed the goal. After the match ended, sports media from around the world gave Henry's cross several nicknames, ranging from "The New Hand of God",^[9] to the more scathing "The Hand of Frog", the latter using an insulting term towards French people.^[10]
- Uruguayan footballer Luis Suárez illegally stopped with his hand a likely goal from Ghanaian Dominic Adiyiah in the quarter-finals of the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Suárez was shown the red card. At the subsequent press conference, the striker said he had done so with the "Hand of God".^[11]
- On 11 February 2020, in Group G of the 2020 AFC Cup, Joshua Grommen of Ceres-Negros F.C. scored the second goal of their game against Preah Khan Reach Svay Rieng FC by diverting the ball

into the net with his hand. Despite vocal protests from the opposing side, the goal was given as officials had failed to notice the blatant handball.^[12]

See also

- Goal of the Century
- Maradona, the Hand of God*

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External links

- The Hand of God (BBC) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6VXbqA1YRqY>) on YouTube
- Top 10 Famous Soccer Handballs (<https://howtheyplay.com/team-sports/Top-10-Famous-Soccer-Handballs>)