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~~**DIEGO MARADONA AT WORLD CUP**~~

~~1986: THE ARCHANGEL~~

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~~03/03/2017 by STUART HORSFIELD ([HTTPS://THESEFOOTBALLTIMES.CO/AUTHOR/STUART-HORSFIELD/](https://THESEFOOTBALLTIMES.CO/AUTHOR/STUART-HORSFIELD/))~~



FOUR YEARS CAN feel like a lifetime when you are a child. Since Spain 82 I had busied myself with playing organised football for the first time. Training with two under-14s teams, school teams, and the regional rep-team, I was starting out on my own journey as a footballer.

time and space for yourself. I was growing up.

~~cel book found it three years since our last meeting, Diego Maradona~~  
~~(<https://thesefootballtimes.co/2017/03/03/diego-cup-1986-the-archangel/>)~~  
~~Twitter.com/share?dev17/has been on a life-affirming journey. Following his shameful dismissal against Brazil in 1982,~~  
~~'change&via=thesefootballtimes&url=<https://thesefootballtimes.co/2017/03/03/diego-cup-1986-the-archangel/>)~~  
~~struggling to adapt to life at a top European club, where success was not~~  
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~~A bout of hepatitis, a broken ankle following a challenge by Andoni~~  
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~~Twitter.com/share?dev17/thesefootballtimes.co/2016/08/04/andoni-goikoetxea-the-butcher-of-bilbao/),~~  
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~~and a mass brawl between players and officials of Barcelona and Athletic Bilbao at the end of the 1984~~  
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Copa del Rey final marred the Argentine's turbulent stay in Catalonia.

The escape route was another world record transfer fee of £6.9 million to Napoli of Serie A, at the end of the 1983-84 season; the birthplace of Catenaccio, Gaetano Scirea and home to his nemesis, Claudio Gentile. In the south of Italy, Maradona was adored by the citizens of Naples. Feeling loved and appreciated, El Diego honed his skills and learnt to moderate his temperament. Maradona was growing up.

Mexico 86 should have been Columbia 86. A raging civil war, endemic violence and the obligatory drug problems, meant that a FIFA delegation pressured the Columbian government to withdraw its mandate to host the World Cup. In January 1983, the South American country duly obliged. After alleged internal FIFA politicking, Mexico was selected as the replacement host.

September 1985: an earthquake reaching 8.0 on the Richter Scale shook Mexico City. There were 5,000 confirmed casualties, and some estimates put the number nearer to 10,000. Public buildings were destroyed, transport infrastructure was decimated and the estimated repair costs were \$4 billion. This was the backdrop to the tournament, and if ever a World Cup finals needed a saviour, it was this one.

**F**ollowing their ignominious exit in Spain, Argentina had a different manager at a World Cup for the first time since 1974, and his name was Carlos Bilardo. In 1983 he had visited Maradona in Spain, who was recovering from his bout of hepatitis; while there, the man Diego calls *El Nájeron* asked him to be his captain. At the time, Maradona was only 22-years-old, but César Luis Menotti's replacement was intent on building the national side around its talisman.

Daniel Passarella, walk out of the squad just prior to the opening group game. The defender never really came to terms with the captaincy being taken from him and handed to Maradona.

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(<https://thesefootballtimes.co/2017/02/23/diego-maradona-at-world-cup-1982-the-innocent-devil/>)

Read | [Diego Maradona at World Cup 1982: the innocent devil](#)

So what was a perceived as an average Argentine team in poor form, and as yet an unknown starting line-up and a young captain, took to the field against South Korea in the opening group game. To begin with, the game looked like a replica of any of Argentina's 1982 fixtures. The South Koreans opted for the tried and tested tactic of kicking Maradona, either before he got the ball, while he had it, or after he'd released it.

But you sensed that this time it was different; there was no reaction from the 25-year-old. Frustration, yes, but also a steely determination to get up and get on with the game. Maradona's refusal to react and have more and more of an influence on the game saw the Asian side resort to an

The game finished 3-1 as Maradona assisted all three goals. His performance was outstanding, albeit ~~cagey~~ of the trophy minnows. Brazil, my pre-tournament favourites, had played a day earlier a rather uninspiring 1-0 win over Spain. [Zico](#)

<https://theserootsalltimes.co/2016/06/06/zico-the-colossal-genius-of-brazils-timeless-son/> was a change & via <https://theserootsalltimes.co/2017/05/05/diego-l-cup-1986-the-archangel/> I was starting with a clean slate, and anyone could claim my sapp. // send?

<https://theserootsalltimes.co/2017/03/03/diego-l-cup-1986-the-archangel/> weeks. As things stood, Maradona had put down the early marker.

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The second game saw Argentina face Italy in a repeat of the 1982 x-rated fixture, which saw Claudio Gentile nullify Diego Maradona via the medium of violence. This would be the test – this game above all others would signify whether Maradona had matured into the world-class player everyone believed he was.

For me, the game has additional significance in that my future stepfather brought me an old black and white portable television to put in my bedroom to watch the tournament on. The type with a circle of wire for an aerial and a dial which needs a finite touch to tune. If ever there was a way for a person to ingratiate themselves into my life, that was it. A television in my own room; I was set for the summer.

So with the television tuned, I settled down to the first of many games on the 17-inch screen. Gentile was no longer a member of the Italian squad, but Scirea was still there and so was Pietro Vierchowod, an able if slightly less Machiavellian centre-half than Gentile. However, this was now a Maradona who was plying his trade in the lion's den. Playing every weekend in Serie A for the last two years had certainly influenced the forward.

It was a reformed character that took to the field. Despite going 1-0 down to an Italian penalty after six minutes, Maradona rallied his troops and took it upon himself to drag Argentina back into the game. This time the Azzurri couldn't get near him as he was too quick and too clever for the Italians, drifting in and out of central positions so that the centre-backs didn't know whether to go with him or hold their position.

In the 36<sup>th</sup> minute a clipped pass over the Italian back four from Jorge Valdano had Maradona racing through in the inside left position, and with an instinctive side-foot volley; he guided the ball into the far corner.

pitch. Another impressive physical feat based on their size (and his).

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Read | Diego Maradona and the reality behind the Hand of God

The ghost's of 1982 had been vanquished with a subtle stroke of his left foot. The game finished 1-1 and now the world was starting to take notice of this Argentine team and their inspirational number 10. My mind was made up: Diego Armando Maradona would be my player of choice for the summer of '86.

The final group game saw a straightforward 2-0 victory against Bulgaria. Maradona created the second goal with a cross whipped in from the left, where Jorge Burruchaga couldn't fail to score. Argentina finished top of the group and would face Uruguay in the second round. The initial

Argentina versus Uruguay is the South American equivalent of England versus Scotland. Separated only by the River Plate, the two countries contested the first World Cup final, which Uruguay won 4-2 (<https://thesefootballtimes.co/2015/07/29/a-tale-of-one-city-montevideo/>). Since then football has been the tool of choice for both nations with which to demonstrate their superiority over each other (<https://thesefootballtimes.co/2017/03/03/diego-cup-1986-the-archangel/>)

The game was a scrappy affair, the occasion outweighing the performance. The England team struggled to find rhythm played in fitful bursts, before an intentional misdemeanour once again halted the game. Argentina took a 1-0 lead in the closing minutes of the first half.

As the game wore on, Maradona was becoming more and more influential. It was the poise and balance with which he received the ball and then, in one or two touches, was away from his marker that had me agasp. I hadn't seen a player have such sustained influence on games. The Brazil 1982 squad just rotated their brilliance amongst the whole team, but here was one man so far ahead of the other players on the pitch it was almost unfair.

My predilection for not supporting a club did not extend to the international arena. I always wanted England to win; I accepted we didn't have world-class players, but while they were in a tournament I would want the Three Lions to succeed. A poor start had been replaced by cautious optimism thanks to a rejuvenated [Gary Lineker](https://thesefootballtimes.co/2015/07/12/gary-lineker-in-the-land-of-the-rising-sun/) (<https://thesefootballtimes.co/2015/07/12/gary-lineker-in-the-land-of-the-rising-sun/>), who scored five goals in two games to set up a quarter-final clash with my new hero and his Argentine compadres.

Kick-off was at midday local time, playing in the bright sun to suit the European viewing public. As it turned out, 22 June 1986 would leave one of football's most indelible prints of all-time.

During God Save The Queen the camera cuts to Maradona, who is looking at the England team. Dark eyes casting a disdainful glance up and down the English players, his face betrays the emotion of a nation that four years earlier had lost the Falklands War. [Bobby Robson's](https://thesefootballtimes.co/2015/01/15/sir-bobby-robson-the-finest-man-in-football/) (<https://thesefootballtimes.co/2015/01/15/sir-bobby-robson-the-finest-man-in-football/>) men innocently sung their anthem, while the Artful Dodger in blue decided how best to make the English pay. The dye was cast.

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Read | Diego Maradona at World Cup 1990: the weeping angel

The first half was a cagey affair, with Argentina the better side. England were more content with stopping Argentina rather than playing their own game. The 0-0 scoreline at half-time flattered England, but it was a case of so far so good, and the status quo of my favourite player against the team I wanted to win was being perfectly preserved.

On 51 minutes, however, it happened. An attempted one-two by Maradona saw the ball loop off Steve Hodge towards Peter Shilton. Maradona continued his run and leapt to head the ball. Goal. If I'm honest, I didn't see the handball as it happened, but after the first replay, I felt it start.

The flushed face, the lump in the throat, eyes starting to sting, as I blinked away tears that I couldn't believe I was producing. I slapped my left hand along with the England players, in the vain hope that an additional English protest would see the referee overturn his decision.

moment, in my house, it was a personal affront.

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~~It is said that memories are just snapshots of time, not a re-run of events in real time, but in those two~~

~~incidents, I clearly remember everything – the physical feelings and the emotions. I could eulogise~~

over that second goal all day, pick apart and discuss each of those 12 touches, the faints, and the jete stride between the four and four touch to maintain control. It was perfection.

Argentina went on to win 2-1. The following days saw xenophobic comments splashed across all the English tabloid papers, while kids at school would try to punch the ball into the goal while shouting Maradona. What about the second goal? Why did I seem to be the only person trying to replicate the piroquette, which set the Argentine captain on his way towards goal? Not for the last time did I value performance of the beautiful game over the result.

Argentina were now unstoppable, the semi-final against Belgium was merely a stepping-stone in what seemed to be Argentina's pre-ordained destiny to win the World Cup. Maradona scored another two goals in a comfortable 2-0 win. The first was an almost converse replica of the goal against Italy. This time, it manifested via a run into the inside-right channel and a volley with the outside of the left foot into the far corner. The second goal was a poor man's version of his goal against England, this time with fewer touches and less distance covered. A goal of the tournament contender at any other finals, such was the standard of the goal against England that many overlook his effort against Belgium.

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(<https://thesefootballtimes.co/2017/03/17/diego-maradona-at-world-cup-1994-the-fallen-angel/>).

Read | Diego Maradona at World Cup 1994: the fallen angel

The final saw Argentina take on the efficient West Germans. They had barely registered on my radar throughout the tournament and were functional rather than inspirational. [Lothar Matthäus](https://thesefootballtimes.co/2015/02/10/when-lothar-matthaus-went-to-inter/) (<https://thesefootballtimes.co/2015/02/10/when-lothar-matthaus-went-to-inter/>) – the man Maradona would later claim as the best player he ever came up against – was the final throw of the dice for the rest of the world in their quest to stop El Diego.

Matthäus probably did a better job of stopping Maradona play than anyone else had done in the tournament, but by now, the rest of the Argentine team were filled with so much confidence that they seemed to collectively acknowledge it was their turn to secure victory.

Argentina scored in the 23rd minute through full-back José Brown, to go in at half-time 1-0 up. The tie looked to be over after Jorge Valdano produced a composed finish after 55 minutes. The Germans, however, have a reputation for resilience and two quick goals, 74 and 81 minutes, suddenly had Bilardo's men questioning themselves. How could they get to within nine minutes of winning the World Cup after dominating the tournament and then throw it away?

2.

Argentina's ~~shame~~ ~~glory~~ ~~frump~~ perceived no-hopers to world champions. Never before had a tournament been dominated by just one player. Never had one man made such a difference to a team.  
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There have been many legends at many World Cups – Pelé <https://thesefootballtimes.co/2015/03/09/pele-national-treasure-brazil-santos/>) and Johan Cruyff <https://thesefootballtimes.co/2016/03/24/that-was-cruyff-how-a-legend-changed-the-game/>) to name just two – but they were all part of a great team. I doubt very much there will be a tournament dominated by one player to such an extent ever again.

Maradona arrived at Mexico 86 as a player on the cusp of either becoming one of the world's best or one of the world's greatest. He left the tournament, in my opinion, as the greatest player of all time. How could such a performance be followed?

Diego would return to the World Cup in Italy, but this time injury would prevent a repeat performance. However, the son of Naples would cause national controversy in his adopted home on the way to a repeat final. Maradona would be back again, this time as the Weeping Angel

For the purpose of perspective:

Maradona 3-1 South Korea (3 assists)

Maradona 1-1 Italy (1 goal)

Maradona 2-0 Bulgaria (1 assist)

Maradona 1-0 Uruguay\*

Maradona 2-1 England (2 goals)

Maradona 2-0 Belgium (2 goals)

Maradona 3-1 West Germany (1 assist)