

**MICHAEL  
GALLWEY**

# **GOLDEN GENERATIONS**

The Story  
of the  
**2006**  
FIFA Men's  
World Cup

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## Group A

RATHER THAN the opening match being contested by the current holders, as had been standard practice since 1974, it was now the turn of the host nation to get the tournament under way. For Germany it represented an ideal opportunity to get their tournament started on the right note. An opening match against Costa Rica, arguably the weakest team in their group, was a chance for Jürgen Klinsmann to show that this team had progressed in the right direction since the debacle of the European Championships in 2004 and that he was indeed the right man to lead them into the new era. The selection choice was not exactly straightforward though. Captain and talisman Michael Ballack was nursing a calf injury heading into the tournament and had been ruled out of participating in the opener. Bernd Schneider, the right-winger from Bayer Leverkusen and fellow veteran from the 2002 World Cup squad, took the captain's armband, while Tim Borowski, a Bundesliga winner with Werder Bremen in 2003/04, replaced Ballack in the starting line-up.

For the Costa Ricans, the tactical acumen of Brazilian coach Alexandre Guimarães, who had turned around their fortunes during the qualification campaign, was likely to be their determining factor. They were a team that could create chances but would also give away just as many, a 3-2 friendly defeat to France, where they had been 2-0 ahead at half-time, highlighting

their attacking potential and defensive vulnerabilities. Strikers Paulo Wanchope, once of Derby County and Manchester City, and Rónald Gómez, the only Costa Rican with more than one goal in World Cup history, were the main players and the ones most likely to cause the hosts problems in the opening fixture.

A young, attack-minded team playing against a defensively vulnerable one was always likely to lead to a fast start, but few would have predicted how the opening 20 minutes of the match would play out. The Germans started on the front foot, controlling possession and taking the game to their opponents, and it only took six minutes for them to make the breakthrough. Phillip Lahm, playing at left-back rather than the right-back or central midfield positions he would become more predominantly known for, received the ball out wide on the left. Rather than driving to the byline and sending in a cross, he cut back inside on to his favoured right foot, creating a favourable angle. Aided by a slip from Costa Rica midfielder Danny Fonseca, Lahm curled a beautiful effort into the far side of the goal, the ball clipping the post as it found the back of the net. It was a goal-of-the-tournament contender already and it was just the first goal. Having taken the early lead, Germany looked to push on and increase their advantage, with Bastian Schweinsteiger following his Bayern Munich team-mate's lead and drifting in from the left-hand side, slipping the ball through for Miroslav Klose, whose effort was well smothered by goalkeeper José Porras. The Germans seemed to be sending most of their attacks down the left-hand side, with the link-up play between Lahm and Schweinsteiger causing the Costa Rican players problems.

Despite the early dominance, Costa Rica showed that they were in Munich to do more than just make up the numbers. Wanchope managed to win a header near halfway, the ball falling to his partner Gómez, who dinked it beyond the German defence.

Arne Friedrich, the German right-back, did not manage to match the aggressive offside line his defensive colleagues had played and Wanchope suddenly found himself one-on-one with Jens Lehmann. Managing to keep his composure, something English fans will not remember him primarily for, he took a couple of touches before slotting the ball beyond Lehmann. With their first chance, Costa Rica had stunned Germany and drawn level at 1-1. It was a goal completely against the run of play, but an early warning sign for the Germans.

Rather than trying to settle the game down, Germany came immediately back on the offensive, seemingly determined to regain the lead as soon as possible. That only took five minutes. Making use of the right flank this time, stand-in captain Schneider managed to beat Luis Marín to the byline and played an intelligent pull-back into the area, where Schweinsteiger, having drifted all the way over from the left, was free in space on the edge of the area. His first touch drove him into the box and his clever low ball to the back post found Klose waiting for the simplest of tap-ins. It was a typical poacher's effort from the striker, and it saw the Germans retake the lead. Germany 2, Costa Rica 1, a scoreline that would not have looked out of place at the end of the match, yet it had taken just 17 minutes for the opening three goals of the tournament.

Finally, after the frantic opening 20 minutes, the match began to settle down into a steady rhythm. The Germans were dominating the ball, moving it around well but falling short when it came to the final third. To their credit, Costa Rica were defensively well organised, belying their pre-tournament characterisation as a team weak at the back. Even with the Germans controlling the majority of the ball, it was the Central American team that created the next clear-cut chance, Wanchope again breaking the attempted offside trap, although this time Germany coped with perfectly.

Then it was Costa Rica with the best chance once more, as just after half-time a cleverly worked corner found Fonseca free in the penalty area, but he could only guide his header wide.

It was a miss that would prove costly, as just after the hour Germany added a third. Once more it was Phillip Lahm causing problems with his overlapping runs down the left. His cross was deflected by Costa Rican defender Martínez, only to find Klose free at the back post. His header was well saved by Porras, but he was the quickest to react to the loose ball, slamming it into the roof of the net to give Germany a two-goal cushion for the first time. Just eight minutes later and it was Lahm again who had burst beyond the defenders, this time finding himself through on goal but he could only fire a tame effort at Porras.

It was a chance that should have been taken, and a few minutes later was made to look an even worse miss. Costa Rican midfielder Walter Centeno found space in the middle of the German half, was able to chip the ball through to Wanchope, who again flicked the ball beyond the outrushing Lehmann to bring the score to 3-2. The German defenders immediately called for offside and the Costa Rican attackers looked straight towards the assistant to make sure the goal counted, but the flag stayed down. Replays showed that the goal should have been disallowed as Wanchope had strayed just beyond the central defenders, but it stood. Both central defenders, Per Mertesacker and Christoph Metzelder had tried to close down Centeno rather than having one drop with the runner. Although the goal should not have counted, it showed that the German defence could be breached with runners in behind.

As often happens in the second half of close matches, the introduction of substitutes disrupted the flow of play. Costa Rica sent on Christian Bolaños to try to inject extra pace into their attack, while Germany replaced Klose with Oliver Neuville, with the departing striker getting a deserved standing ovation from the

home crowd in Munich. The Central Americans were unable to create any extra momentum to push on for an unlikely equaliser and, just three minutes before the end, any hopes of snatching a point were over. Schweinsteiger took a quick free kick from the left-hand side, rolling the ball into the path of Torsten Frings in the centre of the pitch. Letting the ball roll across his body, Frings unleashed an effort from 40 yards that perhaps caught everyone by surprise. His effort was unstoppable, swerving viciously into the top right corner beyond the despairing dive of Porras. If Lahm's goal was a goal-of-the-tournament contender, his team-mate may have ended that specific competition just 80 minutes later.

A couple of late substitutions aside, Frings's goal was the last meaningful moment of a truly legendary World Cup match. Germany 4, Costa Rica 2. For the Central Americans it was a performance of real heart and spirit, defending well and finishing their chances on the counter, although there were few actual chances, with many attacks breaking down before the final third. For the hosts it was a mixed performance. In an attacking sense they had scored four goals, including two stunning strikes. They had played on the front foot and dominated in the way that Klinsmann had been trying to promote since his appointment. However, there were question marks raised by the defensive performance. Their attempt at a high defensive line was too easily exposed by the pace of the Costa Rican forwards, and the goalkeeping selection of Lehmann over Kahn could be called into question as the Arsenal stopper was beaten by the only two chances Costa Rica created. Ultimately, an opening match win is still a win, and a positive result against neighbours Poland would all but secure Germany's passage into the knockout rounds. For Costa Rica to have any chance of reaching the latter stages for a second time, they would almost certainly need to beat fellow inexperienced team Ecuador, but a defeat would almost certainly



see them out of the tournament after just two matches. The expectations had been set by this classic encounter, and the 2006 World Cup had kicked off in true style.

After the opening-match victory for the hosts, it was the turn of their neighbours to the east. Poland entered the tournament as comfortable second favourites in the group, although expectations beyond that were incredibly limited. Led by experienced captain Jacek Bąk in central defence and striker Maciej Żurawski, whose 16 goals had just helped Celtic win the Scottish Premier League by a comfortable 17 points, the Poles certainly would have fancied their chances against their South American opponents.

Fresh from a first World Cup appearance in 2002, Ecuador had once again successfully navigated the battle that is CONMEBOL (the South American football confederation) qualifying, finishing fourth and impressing with victories over both Brazil and Argentina. *La Tri* were perhaps expected to be solid at the back, with defenders Iván Hurtado, Ulises de la Cruz and Giovanny Espinoza all featuring in a defence that combined experience and skill. It was more than just a defensive team that Ecuador brought to Germany, however, with Carlos Tenorio and Agustín Delgado leading the line, and future Manchester United star Luis Antonio Valencia providing the youthful dynamism down the right-hand side.

With this match perhaps representing the decisive factor in who qualified alongside Germany, it was unsurprising that it started in a cagey fashion. The opening 20 minutes presented little action aside from a speculative shot from Segundo Castillo that was easily caught by Poland goalkeeper Artur Boruc. Ecuador settled the quicker of the two, and it was the South Americans who took the lead in the 24th minute. De la Cruz took a throw-in from an advanced position on the right. Delgado was the first to the ball and flicked a header towards the middle of the penalty

area for his strike partner Tenorio. The striker was sharper than his marker Marcin Baszczyński and glanced his header into the far corner, beyond Boruc's dive. It was a simple goal that Poland would have been disappointed to have conceded and it should have been a wake-up call.

Yet, just five minutes later, Ecuador should have doubled their lead. In a similar fashion to the goal, De la Cruz fired a throw-in into the area for Delgado to win, and the ball again reached Tenorio. This time he was tightly marked by two defenders but wriggled his way free on the byline and managed to pull the ball back to Delgado, who had found a little bit of space. For a player of Delgado's quality, it should have been a simple finish, but perhaps the occasion got the better of him and he wastefully fired his shot over the bar. A couple of minutes later and the left side of Poland's defence was breached again, with De la Cruz allowed to run into the box unchallenged before his shot was eventually cleared behind for a corner. With Ecuador beginning to turn the heat up, Poland would have been relieved to hear the whistle blow for half-time with the score still just 1-0.

The break seemed to settle Poland down and they began to regain some composure and take control of the match. Despite their possession, though, they were unable to break down the resolute back line of Ecuador. Hurtado and Espinoza seemed almost unbeatable but they were dealt a major setback when Hurtado stayed down after colliding with Euzebiusz Smolarek. Although the captain tried to carry on, he was ultimately forced off and there was renewed hope in the Polish camp.

While Poland began to exert pressure on Ecuador, there was always a threat on the counter-attack and the shaky Polish defence from the first half was still open to being exposed. When Édison Méndez received the ball in between the defence and midfield, he was given time to slide a through ball in for substitute Iván

Kaviedes. The forward was clear on goal, having timed his run beyond the attempted offside trap, and played a simple square ball for Delgado to tap home into an empty net – 2-0 Ecuador and seemingly game over.

For the Poles, it was desperation time. Smolarek created their first real chance with a shot straight at Cristian Mora in the Ecuador goal. Ireneusz Jeleń, on as a substitute, hit the crossbar and saw the ball bounce clear, and fellow substitute Paweł Brożek curled an effort against the post, all within the last six minutes of the match. Ultimately, Poland were unable to break down the stubborn South American defence. In truth, they did not deserve anything from the match. They had struggled to create any chances until the final minutes, when they were desperate, and looked vulnerable at the back to almost every Ecuador attack. For *La Tri* it was a superb result and performance. After they took the lead, they should have added more in a first half they controlled. The second period saw them relinquish the control but they still never looked like conceding. The injury to Hurtado was the big disappointment from the match, although they still looked strong defensively without their leader. With Poland facing a now buoyant Germany and Ecuador facing off against a Costa Rica side who had struggled to cope defensively in the opening match, the South Americans had given themselves an excellent chance of qualifying for the knockout stages in just their second appearance at the World Cup finals.

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Having won their opening fixture against Costa Rica, Germany knew that they could book their place in the knockout phase with a victory in their second match. It would not be an easy path to qualification, however, as standing in their way were long-time rivals Poland. German-Polish tensions existed beyond the

sphere of football and had been a continuous problem between the two nations for centuries. As a recognised nation, Poland had effectively ceased to exist in 1795, having been partitioned for a third time by Prussia, the Habsburg Monarchy and the Russian Empire in the aftermath of the failed Kościuszko Uprising. What little was left of Poland was further divided between the three ruling powers and Polish identity was slowly but surely pushed into the background. This eradication of Poland existed for over 100 years until the end of the First World War, when the victorious Allied powers finalised the Treaty of Versailles, the peace treaty that saw the official end of the war. As a part of the treaty, Germany had to renounce all rights and title over the territory and recognise the independence of Poland.

While the Second Polish Republic was rebuilding its nation, Germany was undergoing its own transformation, with the initial implementation of a democratic system of government followed by the rise of the National Socialist Party, Adolf Hitler and Nazism. The German government had been unhappy at the terms of the treaty, and once Hitler had reached power he began to ignore the terms imposed on his nation. He increased the size of the armed forces and started laying down plans for taking over Europe and removing those he and his party viewed as 'subhuman'. The actions of Hitler and Nazi Germany can and have been discussed in many books and articles, but one of their actions was agreeing with the Soviet Union to divide Poland up between themselves in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. It has since been estimated that around six million Polish citizens were killed during the Second World War, with the majority of those being murdered by the oppressive regimes that had divided the country up among themselves at the start of the conflict. After the war had come to an end, the leaders of Great Britain, the United States of America and the Soviet Union decided at the Yalta Conference to allow a Communist

government to be established in the re-formed Poland, a nation that was also significantly smaller than it had been pre-war, with the eastern section of the country being annexed to Soviet rule. As Ryan Hubbard wrote in his book exploring Polish football in the 20th century, 'The Poland that emerged from the ashes of World War Two bore few similarities with the country which had been forced into the conflict.'

While Poland had to recover physically, politically and economically after the war, it also had to recover in a footballing sense. Polish football had been banned by their German occupiers during the war and many of their internationals prior to the conflict were among the victims of the brutality. Poland was not considered a leading international team before the war and that trend continued afterwards, although as the 70s began there were clear signs of the tide turning. Led by Kazimierz Górski, a striker whose own career had been halted by the war, the Poles entered their best-ever period, winning Olympic gold in 1972, silver in 1976 and two third-place finishes at World Cups in 1974 and 1982.

The 1974 tournament held in West Germany was perhaps when the Polish team was at the height of its power as they progressed comfortably through the first group stage, including beating Argentina, who would win their first World Cup four years later. The second group stage saw them placed in a group with Sweden, Yugoslavia and the hosts, with the match-up between the neighbours the last fixture of the group. Both nations won their first two matches, meaning the head-to-head in Frankfurt was the clincher for who would be going to the final to face the Netherlands. Poland knew they had to win as a draw would favour the Germans. As always, the Polish plan was to utilise their pacy forwards and cause problems for the opposition in behind their defensive line. Mother Nature, however, had other plans. The

match was played amid a torrential thunderstorm, neutralising the Polish threat, and a solitary Gerd Müller goal was enough to send the Germans through to the final that they would ultimately emerge victorious from. The Polish delegation had asked for the match to be postponed, but their request was refused by the Austrian referee. Had the match been played under different conditions, then the result may have turned out differently and Poland's golden generation may have had an unlikely World Cup triumph to always look back on.

The meeting in 1974 had been the last competitive meeting between the two, but the Poles had never been able to get one over their nextdoor neighbour even in friendly matches. With the troubled political history between the two nations, there was an ever-existing tension that often played itself out on proxy grounds, including the football pitch. For many Poles, beating Germany was the ultimate goal. A chance to get one over their former oppressors. A chance to avenge the 1974 defeat that could have been Polish football's crowning moment. Prior to the meeting at this tournament, both nations were experiencing battles to control the hooliganism that was prevalent within their domestic game. The fear was that the Polish hooligans would be crossing the border and heading to Dortmund looking to create trouble rather than soak up the match atmosphere. There had been violence between Polish and German fans on the border in November 2005, in a fight that was openly declared as just being for practice ahead of the World Cup the following summer. Fortunately, the match ultimately passed by with little trouble from the crowd, with the German police detaining known Polish hooligans beforehand and any violence being limited to drunken clashes in Dortmund city centre that led to around 300 arrests, which was considered a positive number, given the pre-tournament concerns.

With the animosity off the pitch fizzling out into small skirmishes, the hope was that the action on it would match the preamble the game had been given by the media. It certainly had all the ingredients for a memorable one. The hosts knew that a win would guarantee them a place in the knockout stage with a match to spare, while Poland had to win to avoid being all but eliminated after losing their opening match to Ecuador. A grudge match with everything on the line definitely fitted the bill for a classic World Cup encounter. Another positive for everyone bar the Poles was the return of Germany captain Michael Ballack, who was declared fit to make his first appearance of the tournament, having watched the opener from the bench. Paweł Janas also made changes ahead of the match, with Ireneusz Jeleń and Bartosz Bosacki starting in place of Mirosław Szymkowiak and Mariusz Jop as Poland switched from a 4-4-2 to a 4-2-3-1.

As can often be the case in derby matches, the opening exchanges were cagey as both teams tried to feel their way into the match, with the first chance arriving after ten minutes as Ballack worked some space on the left-hand side, played Mirosław Klose in, but his low effort was easily saved by Artur Boruc. It was Klose again who was provided with the best opportunity of the half, allowed to drift into space in the penalty area to meet a clever Philipp Lahm cross. From a German perspective, there are few other strikers you would want the ball to fall to just six yards out, yet Klose could only glance his header past the post. Perhaps it was the outrushing Boruc that caused his attention to be momentarily distracted, but it was a chance that the ultimate penalty-box poacher would have been disappointed to miss. There were few true openings during the rest of the first half until just five minutes before half-time when Podolski was almost played through behind the Polish defence by Klose, but the ball deflected off his heel and halted his progress. Then in added

time he received the ball in space in the area after good link-up play between himself and Lahm. He managed to stab his shot beyond Boruc, but it also rolled beyond the far post. Despite the German dominance of the ball throughout the half, it remained 0-0 at half-time, with the hosts creating very few chances of note.

The second half continued in much the same vein, with Germany controlling the tempo and Poland defending efficiently. Also, like the first half, although Germany had control of the ball, they could not create any clear chances, with a snapshot from Klose forcing a smart save from Boruc the only real action early in the half. With 75 minutes gone, Poland looked to be edging their way towards a point that would keep their qualification hopes alive, until Radosław Sobolewski clipped the heels of Klose as he was cutting inside in the Polish half and earned himself a second yellow card, having been booked in the first half. It was not a bad challenge, but a clear cynical foul to stop the counter-attack that deserved a yellow card.

With the extra player, Germany further cemented their dominance but it still did not feel like the luck was falling in their favour. As the clock entered the 89th minute, a Lahm cross was met by a looping Klose header that bounced off the crossbar, and Ballack on the follow-up saw his effort rebound off the bar as well. Although substitute David Odonkor did ultimately smash the ball into the net, Ballack had been offside and the flag correctly went up. It appeared as though the Polish goal was living a charmed life, and Boruc certainly deserved that bit of luck, given how well he had played in keeping the Germans at bay.

But like all elite teams, the Germans never stopped pushing for the late winner and it finally arrived in the first minute of added time, and it was a goal made by their bench. Bernd Schneider picked up the ball on the right and dinked a pass over the head of the Polish left-back for Odonkor to race on to. Letting the ball



bounce, he hit a first-time volleyed cross into the penalty area for fellow substitute Oliver Neuville to slide on to and fire past Boruc to give Germany the winner. A far from prolific striker, Neuville had a habit of scoring vital late goals for his adopted nation (he was born in Switzerland but opted to represent Germany), having netted an 88th-minute winner against Paraguay in the Round of 16 at the previous World Cup. More than just a winning goal to seal qualification, it was one that brought full optimism back into the German camp. As Thomas Hitzlsperger describes in Raphael Honigstein's *Das Reboot*, all the remaining negativity surrounding the German team prior to the tournament fully disappeared in that moment. Germany had embraced its status as host nation and created a party-like atmosphere across the country.

The game barely had a chance to restart before the final whistle was blowing and then the party could really get started. Strangely, it was Germany's first competitive victory against European opposition since the European Championship Final against the Czech Republic in 1996, a run that included nine matches across the World Cups in 1998 and 2002 and European Championships in 2000 and 2004. Neuville's goal had confirmed Germany's qualification with a match to spare and had left Poland in need of a miracle. The Poles had to hope that Costa Rica could somehow beat Ecuador and they then needed to beat the Costa Ricans, while hoping Germany could beat Ecuador and that the goal difference swing would be enough to counter Poland's minus three after the opening two matches.

Having watched Germany beat Poland the previous evening, the task for Ecuador was simple. For *La Tri*, all they had to do was beat Costa Rica and they would secure their passage into the second round. The Central Americans knew they needed a win to keep their hopes alive, but a draw would not eliminate them from contention entirely. All signs pointed towards a

comfortable victory for the South American nation, as they had looked impressive in all facets of their game against Poland in the opening match, while Costa Rica, despite threatening on the counter-attack, looked defensively suspect against Germany. With the confidence flowing, Luis Fernando Suárez opted to name an unchanged line-up, while his counterpart Alexandre Guimarães brought in the vastly experienced Harold Wallace for Gilberto Martínez, as he pushed his full-backs up towards more traditional wide midfielders in an effort to try to take the game to their opponents.

If Costa Rica's gameplan was to come out firing as suggested pre-match, then they could not have wished for a worse start. Agustín Delgado, Ecuador's first-ever World Cup finals scorer, battled his way through some weak challenges in the final third and, although his shot was blocked, he had drawn three defenders towards him and could play a simple ball out wide right for Antonio Valencia. He whipped in an inch-perfect cross on to the head of Carlos Tenorio, who could not miss from the edge of the six-yard box. Taking an early lead for a team that boasted Ulises de la Cruz, Iván Hurtado and Giovanny Espinoza, who would finish their careers with 101, 168 and 90 caps respectively, was a huge boost to their chances of success. Hurtado's career at international level was so successful that he holds the record as Ecuador's youngest-ever player, has 46 more caps than any other male Ecuadorian footballer and was the most-capped male international from any South American nation until recently, when he was overtaken by Argentina's Lionel Messi.

For the rest of the half, Costa Rica dictated the play, retained the ball well and showed some of the intent that had perhaps surprisingly marked their opening match. Despite all the possession though, they were unable to fashion any real chances, although Douglas Sequeira really should have at least hit the

target when provided a with a free header at the back post just before half-time.

Guimarães must have been relatively pleased with his team's performance and the half-time message would probably have been about encouraging his players to keep playing in the same fashion but to not allow Ecuador any easy opportunities to take the match further away from them. As translated from Robert Burns's poem 'To a Mouse', 'the best-laid schemes of mice and men go oft awry', and this was certainly true for Costa Rica at the start of the second half. De la Cruz, having been booked for time-wasting just eight minutes into the second half, launched a throw-in beyond the defensive line. Édison Méndez won his header and flicked the ball over the head of Luis Marín for the onrushing Delgado, who took a touch to drive deeper into the right-hand side of the penalty area, before hitting a fierce shot beyond José Francisco Porras in goal. The old adage of the goalkeeper needing to do better at the near post may have been brought out for this one, but the sheer power on the shot from Delgado would have made it difficult for any keeper to get a hand to.

Having secured their lead, Ecuador were content to allow their opponents to keep the ball, confident in their ability to prevent them from mustering any proper goalscoring opportunities. And so it proved, with *Los Ticos* failing to cause any problems for the Ecuadorian defence, barely looking like scoring one goal, let alone the two that they needed to give themselves a fighting chance of qualification. They did nearly create a grandstand finish with just three minutes remaining, as Kurt Bernard held the ball up well on the left-hand side of the penalty area and laid it off for Álvaro Saborío, who dinked a first-time effort over the head of Cristian Mora, only to see the ball bounce off the underside of the crossbar and bounce clear. Had the ball bounced slightly differently, there could have been a chance for Costa Rica to create an incredible

ending to a match that had been petering out, but ultimately it was Ecuador who would add the third goal of the match. Agustín Delgado, receiving the ball on the halfway line, produced a sublime back-heeled chip to flick the ball over Sequeira, who had come to challenge him, and laid a simple pass into the space on the right flank for Méndez. With the freedom of the half, he played an excellent cross to the far post for Iván Kaviedes, who had been brought on at half-time. He had the simple task of knocking the ball first-time beyond Porras and putting the finishing touches to a brilliant win for Ecuador.

Having qualified for the group stage four years earlier but struggling to make a tangible impact, the fact that they had qualified with a match to spare this time around was the cause for a party atmosphere among the travelling Ecuadorians. The most important thing that any football club or nation wants to see is progress. This was certainly the case for this crop of Ecuadorian footballers and, having a plus-five goal difference meant that they only needed a draw against Germany and they would top the group, potentially avoiding a tricky match-up against England in the second round.

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As has been the case since the 1986 World Cup, the final group fixtures were played simultaneously. It was not always the case that the final matches ran side by side, and it was only thanks to an outrageous act of gamesmanship that the rules were changed. At the World Cup in Spain in 1982, Algeria had shocked the world by beating West Germany 2-1 in their opening match of the tournament. With Austria winning both their opening matches and West Germany and Algeria winning one and losing one each, they entered the final round of fixtures with any two from three qualifying. Algeria beat Chile 3-2 to move themselves level on four

points with Austria but, crucially, with a neutral goal difference. Austria had a plus-three goal difference and four points, and West Germany had two points and a plus-two goal difference. Having watched Algeria play the previous day, both nations knew that a one or two-goal margin of victory for the West Germans would mean they topped the group and Austria would qualify second. Although both teams have denied any allegations of collusion, after West Germany took the lead ten minutes into the match, the contest faded and neither team seemed to muster any attacking intent. It ended 1-0 and Algeria were eliminated amid fury from the players and staff from the nation and those in attendance in Gijón. In response, FIFA changed their rules, meaning that the final two matches of any future group would take place concurrently to minimise the ability of teams to manufacture a result that would work in both their favours.

For Group A, this was a non-factor as the matches were simply to decide the final positioning of the group rather than who could qualify. Ecuador knew that avoiding defeat to their hosts in Munich would mean that they went through as group winners. However, rather than going all-out to try to maximise their chances of winning the group, they made five changes, resting key players such as Hurtado, Delgado and Carlos Tenorio to keep them as fresh as possible for the second round. Klinsmann was perhaps trying to avoid a potentially tricky match-up against England and only made the single change, bringing Chelsea's Premier League-winning defender Robert Huth into the centre of defence in place of Christoph Metzelder.

In keeping with the new attacking mentality being instilled into the German national team, *Die Mannschaft* began on the front foot and scored after just four minutes. Having remained up from a corner, Per Mertesacker controlled the ball in the penalty area and played a hopeful cross too far across the box. Bastian

Schweinsteiger did brilliantly to keep the ball alive, knocking it back into the path of Klose, who, having been left completely unmarked, drilled a low shot into the far corner.

Much like in 1982, both teams were seemingly content to see the match out from this point. Germany had the lead that would see them top the group and Ecuador had already secured their passage to the knockout phase, so the intensity all but disappeared from the match. Played amid sweltering temperatures during the heatwave that was enveloping Germany during the summer, both teams taking it easy ahead of the key fixtures they had coming up was understandable. While Germany mainly kept the ball among themselves, shortly before half-time Ballack collected it in space in the attacking third, dinking a delightful ball over the top of the defence for Klose, who took the ball round the outrushing keeper and had the simple task of tapping home a second and clinching goal. It was the first truly outstanding moment from Ballack during the tournament, as he was slowly working his way back to full fitness, a worrying sign for any future opponents.

The second half continued in the same vein, although Antonio Valencia was perhaps a bit fortunate to escape with just a yellow card for a lunging challenge on Ballack. In the days of VAR, it is likely that it would have been a red card rather than yellow. As Ecuador began to show some positive intent, with Méndez testing Lehmann from distance, the Germans hit on the counter. From the corner resulting from Méndez's effort, Schweinsteiger picked the ball up in midfield, freed Schneider down the right, and his cross was gratefully converted by Lukas Podolski for his first of the tournament. The youngster had impressed with his work-rate in the opening matches but had yet to get the goal that his performances deserved. The unity within the German camp was clear to see as he celebrated with the substitutes on the bench and with assistant coach Joachim Löw.