



Italy Pulls Off the Stunner

Bryan Solomon (June 29, 2016)



Italy pulled off the upset Monday, defeating the favored Spanish side 2-0. Italy moves on to face another difficult opponent, Germany, on Saturday, July 2nd.

Italy came into Paris for their knockout game against Spain on Monday with hopes to erase the dreadful memories of 2012 when Spain defeated Italy 4-0 in one of the most ruthless Euro Cup finals in recent memory. With a combination of determination, perfectly executed game plan, and a deteriorating Spanish side, Italy pulled off the upset that shocked all of Europe.

While Spain is no longer the team that strike instant fear and hold expectations of a certain and decisive loss against any opponent as they did four years ago, they are still a formidable team that



was heavily favored against the starless Italian squad.

But Andres Iniesta, Cesc Fabregas, Sergio Ramos, Gerard Pique, Sergio Busquets and the rest of that star-studded team was out-played by the up and coming Italians.

Italy - fresh off of their first loss of the tournament where they rested eight of their starters because they were already guaranteed a spot in the knock-out stage after their victories against Belgium and Sweden - looked younger, fresher, more energetic, and executed their game exactly how they wanted to. The rest against Ireland clearly paid off and was evident against Spain.

Italy's performance against powerhouse Spain was one reminiscent of the early 2000's, with their attack creating meaningful pressure on Spain's backline and Italy's defense playing like an impenetrable wall.

Giorgio Chiellini put Italy on the scoreboard first after poking home a rebound after an excellent save by Spanish goalkeeper David De Gea on Eder's free-kick. Italy continued to play a great game after scoring their first goal, with their backline once again proving to be one of the best in all of Europe. This shutout is Gianluigi Buffon's and Italy's defense's third in four games played.

In the final minute of stoppage time, Italy scored the dagger to send themselves to the next round and send Spain home early once again. Matteo Darmian streaked down the right side, sent a cross into the box that was deflected, and Pelle timed his run perfectly and ended up slamming the ball past De Gea and a Spanish backside that was short of numbers after they pushed for an unsuccessful equalizer.

Italy will face Germany in the next round on Saturday, July 2. Their next game should prove to be much more difficult, as Germany is regarded as the best team in the world right now and Italy will be missing two important pieces. Thiago Motta received another booking against Spain, making him ineligible for the game against Germany, and Daniel De Rossi has been ruled out due to a serious right thigh injury.

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