



Ricardo, »penalty killer« by habit, also second-guessed the correct corner in the semifinal. But no matter how perfectly he jumped for Zinedine Zidane's ball, he could not hold it.

France beats Portugal 1:0 after penalty

Advantage Zidane

There can only be the one, that much was clear before the start of the game. Only one of the great old masters of world football would reach the final: Luis Figo or Zinedine Zidane, both long-time »Compañeros« at Real Madrid. »Zizou« decided the semifinal against Portugal in France's favour, by scoring a penalty after a foul of Ricardo Carvalho against Thierry Henry (33rd minute). Figo could have tied the game, but his header during the second half flew over the goal that Barthez was watching over.

The match before 66,000 visitors in the sold-out FIFA World Cup Stadium in Munich was more open than the first semifinal between Germany and Italy, but without reaching the same quality of play. It was one of those games that can be boiled down to their result in the final analysis. It was decided by one goal, »and we were lucky enough to score this goal, while our opponent did not,« said coach Raymond Domenech.

Once again, the winning team built on the occasional flash of genius of its captain Zidane and another compact defence centred around the outstanding Thuram. From the Portuguese team's perspective, another interpretation would also hold true: As so often, the opportunities that arose were not exploited – a problem that is just as well known as the Iberian players' football

skills. During injury time, Portugal's keeper Ricardo even joined his team in the French penalty area. That, however, helped no more than the many attacks launched via Cristiano Ronaldo, in particular because Pauleta was a complete failure.

The game in Munich underscored the trend noticed at the 2006 FIFA World Cup™, whereby nearly all teams played almost at the same level from the quarterfinal, meaning that alleged details – a foul, a red card, a bad pass – ended up deciding the games in the end. Close outcomes were the order of the day; spectacular games with high scores, let alone »games of the century« that could leave their mark on the collective memory, were few and far between.

The name of the adidas ball ended up being the true motto of this tournament: »Teamgeist,« team spirit. After the

game against Portugal, Thierry Henry, only one of several great individualists on the French team alongside Zidane, Thuram, Makelele and Vieira, declared: »There is no recipe for success in football. One or two or three people can't decide a game. We fight for one another, only the team counts.«

Yet Henry, too, was surprised to be playing in the final: »Back home they had already proclaimed us dead after two games – rightly or not, I don't know.« Coach Domenech also faced severe criticism: »We knew what we are capable of. The media and the public don't always have to agree with everything we do and the route we choose to take.«

That rings a bell. His predecessor and mentor Aimé Jacquet, who watched the game in Munich, also took a sceptical view towards the media – and became world champion in 1998. ■