Twitter Thread by Mayukh Ghosh



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"He takes opportunities. I need an opportunist."
This is a thread about Paolo Rossi and Enzo Bearzot.
The astonishing journey from shame to fame during a week's time.
And why he will remain forever special.



April 28, 1982.
The World Cup in Spain is exactly 45 days away.
Paolo Rossi has not played competitive football for two years and no one expects him to be in the squad for the World Cup.
Match-fit and well prepared players are required for a tournament of such stature.

It all began in 1980.
While on loan to Perugia from Lanerossi Vicenza, Rossi had been accused of accepting money to influence the outcome of Perugia's game against Avellino.

The investigation found him guilty.
A three-year ban.
Later reduced to two.
Juventus bought the shamed striker. Got him rather on the cheap.
He was free to play again on April 29, 1982.

He appears in the final three games of Juventus' championship winning season.
He looks good but surely not good enough to go to Spain!
But Enzo Bearzot, Italy's pipe-chomping manager has other ideas.
"He takes opportunities. I need an opportunist."

Many laugh at the decision.
Denis Law says: " You can't be out of the game for two years and come back in a tournament like the World Cup!"
The first round proves that Law is right.
Italy score only two goals in three matches and reach round two on goal difference.

The Italian press and fans are furious. They want the manager and his 'opportunist striker' to be sacked.
Bearzot does nothing but stopping the players from talking to the journalists.

Then it all starts in round two.
Italy beat Argentina 2-1. Rossi doesn't score but there are flashes of the old brilliance.
Then the mega contest against Brazil.
In years to come, many would tout it as the best ever game in the history of the World Cup.

Italy win 3-2 against the tournament favourites.
The opportunist scores a hat-trick.
He scores two more against Poland in the semi-final.
And the first goal in the final against West Germany in the final.
Their sixth in a row scored by Rossi.

"Good old Bearzot. He had us fooled all along. How could we have doubted him? What a wily old fox he is!"
Golden Boot.
World Footballer of the Year.
And according to a magazine in France, European Footballer of the Year.

Wine growers from his native Tuscany present him with a thousand litres of their finest produce.
Enzo Bearzot takes many a satisfied puff of his pipe.
Denis Law was unavailable for comment.
No one bothers.
The 'prodigal son' is back and that's what matters.

No other 'shame to fame' journey was so quick.
Or, for that matter, so dramatic.

Rossi, in a week in July 1982, made sure that the dark days were behind him forever and also that no 'Hall of Fame' is complete without him.