

Italia '90 Revisited



David O'Leary rejoices after he scored Ireland's fifth penalty against Romania at Italia '90.

Watching Costa Rica march to the quarter finals of the World evoked happy memories for me, and I suspect for many fans of the glory days of 1990 and Ireland's progress to the same stage of the tournament.

Not that the group stages were similar in any way. Costa Rica were supposed to be the whipping boys of Group D but amazing opening wins against Uruguay and Italy sent them through to the last 16 before they held England to a scoreless draw. Ireland had reached the last 16 thanks to three draws against England, Egypt and The Netherlands although they did manage to finish second in Group F behind England but ahead of the Dutch with three teams advancing to the round of 16.

After a draw with Greece, any thoughts that Costa Rica would be found wanting once the penalty shoot-out began were quickly dispelled. The CONCACAF nation had obviously practised their spot kicks and dispatched them to the net with power and confidence.

Then came the 'Timofte against Bonner' moment as Theofanis Gekas stepped up to the spot for Greece, the joy of Costa Rican keeper Keylor Navas as he saved the unfortunate Greek's penalty and finally the 'I don't believe it's O'Leary is it' finale as Michael Umana prepared to take Costa Rica's fifth penalty.

But just as David O'Leary had managed in Genoa 24 years ago Umana made no mistake as he blasted the ball to the net as a small Central American nation of just under five million people erupted in nationalistic pride as was experienced all over Ireland in 1990.

Like Italia '90, there would be no fairytale end to Costa Rica's campaign but they did give the Dutch a mighty scare before

bowing out just like Ireland managed against Italy in the Olympic Stadium in Rome 24 years ago.