

## **Italy beats Spain: third European title for Cesare Maldini**

After the 4-0 win against Hungary in the friendly match, Italy goes to the quarterfinals of the European Championships with two straight titles and renewed ambitions of winning another title. But on March 13th in Lisbon, Italy loses 1-0 against Portugal.

After 15 days, however, in Palermo thanks to a goal by Vieri and an own-goal by Peixe, the team reaches three objectives: the win against Portugal, access to the semifinals of the European Championships and qualification for the Olympic Games in Atlanta. In the semifinals the Under 21 team faces France, after having won against the team two years before with a series of penalty kicks: but this time, against the team made up of Candela, Vieira, Dacourt and Wilthord, at the end of a difficult match, Totti scores the goal that sparks up the stadium in Barcelona and Italy advances to the finals against Spain. May 31st: the match is full of emotions and young stars destined to become future champions, such as Morientes, De la Pena, Raul and Morientes. On 12' Italy goes ahead with a free kick by Ametrano that is deviated into the net by Idiaguez. Spain ties the score on 42' with a free kick by Raul that goes into the net defended by Pagotto. Overtime with some problems for Italy after the red-carded Amoroso has to leave the field, followed by Ametrano on 104' (second yellow-card). The teams have to face each other in the series of penalty kicks: after the bad shot by Panucci, Pagotto blocks the shots by De la Pena and Raul. The winning goal is then scored by Morfeo. The third straight title for the Under 21 team, the third medal for Cesare Maldini as coach of the Under 21.

Just enough to celebrate and the Olympic Games in Atlanta are around the corner, but Italy does not repeat its success: they lose the first match 1-0 against Mexico and 3-2 against Ghana, leaving behind their dreams and ambitions of an Olympic title. The 2-0 win (two goals by Branca) against South Korea is worthless. In the next two years, as Maldini went on to coach the major National team and Giampaglia takes his place, the Under 21 team records one of its worst moments of its history after being eliminated in the qualifying match losing 2-0 against Georgia.