

CLASSIC FOOTBALL

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PLAYERS

The King of football

PELÉ



Edson Arantes do Nascimento. Pele. *O Rei*. Whatever the name, the memory is the same: of a world-beating superstar, a record-breaking football icon. Above and beyond his unequalled achievement in winning three FIFA World Cups™, Pele was a genius who was constantly reinventing the game of football.

With every touch of the ball, every pass, every dribble, Pele was capable of coming up with something new - something the fans had never seen before. With a killer instinct in front of goal, an eye for the perfect pass and supreme athleticism, the Brazilian was just about the perfect footballer. And if the *Seleção* came to incarnate the 'beautiful game' in the eyes of so many observers around the world, this can largely be credited to the breathtaking skills of their most celebrated No10.

First spotted at the age of 11 by former Brazilian international Waldemar de Brito, he joined Santos at the age of 15 and had not yet turned 16 when he scored on his first team debut in a friendly against Corinthians of Santo Andre in September 1956, rising from the bench to net his side's sixth goal in a 7-1 win. A legend was born.

Emphatic introduction to the world

The world first set eyes on Pele in Sweden in 1958. He was just 17 when he played in his first FIFA World Cup, a slight teenager who emerged from nowhere to light up the tournament with his dazzling skills. It is often said that it was player power that earned Pele a place in the starting line-up for [Brazil](#)'s third match of the finals against the Soviet Union. He had been sidelined by a knee injury but on his return from the treatment room, his colleagues closed ranks and insisted upon his selection in attack alongside Vava.

The prodigy repaid his team-mates with the only goal against Wales in the quarter-finals - and in doing so established a record as the youngest scorer in FIFA World Cup history, aged 17 years and 239 days. Having found his range, he then struck a second-half hat-trick inside 23 minutes in [Brazil](#)'s 5-2 defeat of France in the semi-finals.

By now, Pele was unstoppable, allying perfect technique with lightning speed, intelligence and opportunism, and he rounded off his first FIFA World Cup with two splendid goals against Sweden in the Final. For the first, he had the audacity to pull off a *sombrero*, lifting the ball over the last defender before smashing the ball home on the volley. His second, in the final minute, was a looping header over the keeper. Sweden player Sigge Parling later confessed that "after the fifth goal, I felt like applauding."

At the final whistle, *Seleção* keeper Gilmar had to console the boy wonder, who was carried off the field in tears on his team-mates' shoulders. "I felt like I was living in a dream," remembered Pele, and in many ways he was, a player set apart by his extraordinary talent. In the years that followed he only got better. He scored 127 goals in 1959, 110 in 1961, and inspired Santos to consecutive Copa Libertadores triumphs in 1962 and 1963; conquests which preceded back-to-back Intercontinental Cup successes.

Pele arrived at the 1962 FIFA World Cup in Chile ready to set the world alight again. It was the perfect stage to showcase his talents but, sadly, he aggravated a groin injury in [Brazil](#)'s second outing against Czechoslovakia and did not reappear. Instead, he watched from the sidelines as his team-mates regained their world title. Pele was, by now, a marked man and the same unhappy fate awaited him in 1966 in England, where he again exited the finals on a stretcher, the victim of some fierce tackling in games against Bulgaria and Portugal. This time, though, [Brazil](#) joined him in departing the scene early, falling at the first hurdle.

The King is crowned

Pele would have to wait until Mexico 1970 before reminding the world of his exceptional talents. In the first FIFA World Cup to be broadcast around the world in colour, 'The King' shone in all his glory, ably assisted by team-mates Jairzinho, Tostao, Rivelino, Gerson and Carlos Alberto. Highlights included his attempted lob from the halfway line against Czechoslovakia, a stunning header that brought an even more stunning save from England goalkeeper Gordon Banks, and the unforgettably cheeky moment when he stepped over the ball, letting it run past Uruguay keeper Ladislao Mazurkiewicz, before shooting narrowly wide.

Fittingly, it was Pele who scored [Brazil](#)'s 100th FIFA World Cup goal in the 4-1 Final win over Italy - a header after a typically athletic leap. "It was a special feeling to score with my head. My father once scored five headers in one match - that's one record I've never been able to beat." It was his 12th goal in 14 FIFA World Cup appearances and he remains one of only two footballers to have netted in four separate tournaments.

Besides scoring, he provided the sublime lay-off for Carlos Alberto to conclude a nine-pass move with the spectacular final goal against Italy. Tarcisio Burgnich, the *Azzurri* defender given the unenviable task of marking Pele, was later quoted as saying: "I told myself before the game, 'he's made of skin and bones just like everyone else'. But I was wrong".

[Brazil](#) earned the right to keep the Jules Rimet trophy after winning it for a third time with arguably the greatest team ever. Pele had become a living legend. The day after the final Britain's Sunday Times newspaper summed it up: "How do you spell Pele? G-O-D."

Eternal greatness

Throughout his career, Pele was a record breaker. His 1,000th goal, a penalty, came in 1969 in front of a delirious crowd at the Maracana. He scored five goals in a game on no fewer than six occasions, managed 30 four-goal hauls and netted 92 hat-tricks. In one match against Botafogo in 1964, he hit the back of the net eight times. In total, the great man struck 1,281 goals in 1,363 games.

Pele quit what he called *o jogo bonito* (the beautiful game) in 1974, before returning the following year to play for the New York Cosmos in order "to bring the world's game to the American public". He would hang up his boots for the last time in 1977.

J.B. Pinheiro, the Brazilian ambassador to the United Nations, was quoted as saying: "Pele played football for 22 years, and in that time he did more to promote world friendship and fraternity than any other ambassador anywhere". And who could contradict him? In warring Nigeria a ceasefire was declared when Pele played in Lagos in 1969. The President of [Brazil](#) declared him a "national treasure" to thwart any potential transfer to a European club. And in the port city of Santos, 19 November is forever 'Pele Day', to celebrate the anniversary of his 1,000th goal.

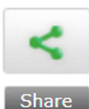
Since his playing career ended, Pele has used his ambassador's status to promote his country, the UN and UNICEF. "Every kid in the world who plays football wants to be Pele," he said, "which means I have the responsibility of showing them how to be a footballer but also how to be a man." But that is what Gods are for, isn't it?

Photos



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I Was There...

It's too bad we never got along, but he was an awesome player. That said, I must repeat that I don't like to compare myself to him.
Diego Maradona

More »

Playing Career

Name: Edson Arantes do Nascimento
Date of Birth: 23 October 1940
Place of Birth: Tres Coracoes (Brazil)
Position: Forward

International career
Brazil: 1957 - 1971
91 caps, 77 goals (Brazil's record scorer)
66 wins; 14 draws; 11 losses

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Honours
1958 FIFA World Cup winner
1962 FIFA World Cup winner
1970 FIFA World Cup winner

Individual
1970 FIFA World Cup Golden Ball
1958 FIFA World Cup Silver Ball
Copa America top scorer: 1959

FIFA World Cup appearances
14 caps, 12 goals
12 wins; 1 draw; 1 loss

Sweden 1958
Brazil 2-0 USSR
Brazil 1-0 Wales (1 goal)
Brazil 5-2 France (3)
Brazil 5-2 Sweden (2)

Chile 1962
Brazil 2-0 Mexico (1)
Brazil 0-0 Czechoslovakia

England 1966
Brazil 2-0 Bulgaria (1)
Portugal 3-1 Brazil

Mexico 1970
Brazil 4-1 Czechoslovakia (1)
Brazil 1-0 England
Brazil 3-2 Romania (2)
Brazil 4-2 Peru
Brazil 3-1 Uruguay
Brazil 4-1 Italy (1)

Club career
1956 - 1974 Santos
1975 - 1977 New York Cosmos (USA)

Honours
World and continental
Copa Libertadores winner: 1962, 1963
Intercontinental Cup winner: 1962, 1963

National
Taca Brasil winner: 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965
Robertao Tournament winner: 1968
North American Soccer League winner: 1977

Regional
Campeonato Paulista winner: 1956, 1958, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1973
Rio-Sao Paulo Tournament winner: 1959, 1963, 1964, 1966

Individual
FIFA Player of the Century
FIFA Order of Merit: awarded in 2004
MasterCard Team of the Century inductee
International Olympic Committee's Athlete of the Century
FIFA 100 inductee
South American Footballer of the Year: 1973
North American Soccer League MVP: 1976
Copa Libertadores top scorer: 1965
Taca Brasil top scorer: 1961, 1963, 1964
Rio-Sao Paulo Tournament top scorer: 1963
Paulista State Championship top scorer: 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1973
Scored 1,281 goals in his career, a world record

Did You Know?

Pele scored five goals over two legs as Santos beat Benfica in the 1962 Club World Championship by an 8-4 aggregate margin of victory.



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