

SPORTING LEGENDS: PELE

SPORT: FOOTBALL

COMPETITIVE ERA: 1957 - 1977

Edson Arantes do Nascimento, KBE (born October 23, 1940), nicknamed Pelé, a Brazilian, is a former football player and thought by many to be the finest player of all time. Often considered the complete attacking player, he was completely two-footed, a prolific finisher, exceptional at dribbling and passing, and was a remarkably good tackler for a forward.

He was also famed for his speed and strength on the ball. Over the course of his career, Pelé scored over a thousand goals and won three World Cups. Since his full retirement in 1977 he has served as an ambassador for the sport.



At the age of eleven, Pelé was scouted by Brazilian legend Waldemar de Brito and was invited to join de Brito's amateur team, Clube Atlético Bauru. In 1956, Pele's mentor took him to the city of São Paulo, to try out for professional club Santos. De Brito told the directors at Santos that the 15-year-old would be "the greatest football player in the world".

Pelé was offered professional terms and scored four goals in his first league game. When the new season started, Pelé was given a starting place in the first team and, at the age of just sixteen, became the top scorer in the league. Just ten months after signing professionally, the teenager was called up to the Brazilian national team.

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Pelé's success at the 1970 World Cup is generally regarded as his finest moment.

In 1958, Pelé became the youngest ever World Cup winner in Sweden at 17, scoring two goals in the final as Brazil crushed Sweden 5-2 in Stockholm. He played in three more Brazilian World Cup teams in 1962, 1966 and 1970, two of which Brazil won (1962 and 1970).

Although his contributions were limited in the 1962 and 1966 campaigns because of injuries inflicted by the dirty play of opposition players, the 1970 tournament in Mexico was to be Pelé's last. The 1970 team, featuring famous players like Rivelino, Jairzinho, and Tostão, is often considered to be the greatest team ever. Brazil defeated Italy 4-1 in the final, with Pelé scoring one and gloriously setting up Jairzinho for another in what some still consider to be the finest ever World Cup.

Pelé's sublime technique and deft touch combined with his phenomenal dribbling skills and incredible scoring ability cannot be overstated. His immense haul of over twelve hundred career goals in all competitions has not even come close to being matched by any other man in the history of the professional game. His unrivalled talent in by far the world's most popular sport has led many to consider him to have been the finest sportsman in the history of the world.

After his retirement from Brazilian football on October 3, 1974, he joined the New York Cosmos of the North American Soccer League. He played his last game as a professional on October 1, 1977 in front of a capacity crowd at Giants Stadium against his old club, Santos; he played the first half with the Cosmos and the second half with Santos. The exhibition game was sold out six weeks beforehand. He also played in a friendly match with the Lebanese club Nejme in 1974 (see Football in Lebanon).

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Pelé was more than just a footballer - he was a symbol of pride for Brazil.

In 1995, President Cardoso appointed Pelé to the position of Minister of Sports.

Pelé is certainly one of the most famous men in football, with his nickname being recognized even by those unfamiliar with the sport.

Pelé is in third place in the list of all-time top goalscorers in World Cup play, with 12 goals, and is the only player who won three World Cups with his team.

He ended his career with a total of 1281 goals in 1363 matches, becoming the highest goalscorer in professional football ever. In his 92 appearances for the Brazilian team, he scored 77 goals.

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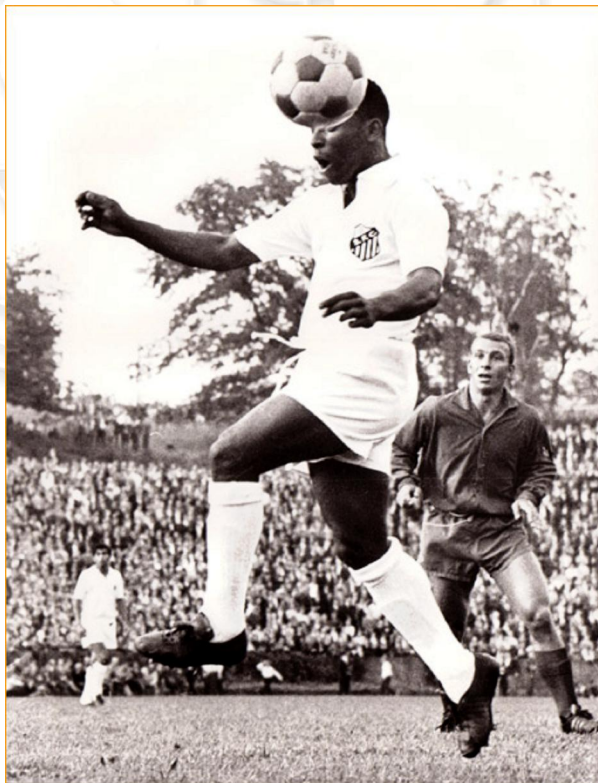
Scott Burton's Final Thought

Pele was an inspirational footballer, and his influence on the sport is still felt to this day, more than 30 years after he retired. He had it all; speed, skills, strength and stamina.

In today's modern game, he would've flourished just as much. His devotion to the Brazil national team is well-recknowledged, and he remains a hero to many current stars.

He always conducted himself extremely well, and was a fitting captain for Brazil. He was, more often than not, always on the winning team. However, whenever a team outshone or outwitted his own, he was always the first to congratulate his opponents.

A true giant of the game, and a class act.



Pele was the true master of ball control!