

SPORTING LEGENDS: DIEGO MARADONA

SPORT: FOOTBALL

COMPETITIVE ERA: 1975 - 1997

Diego Armando Maradona, nicknamed El Diez, Pelusa, El Diego and Dios (born October 30, 1960), is a former Argentine football player. He is regarded as one of the best (and most controversial) players in the history of the game.



At age 15, Maradona made his debut with Argentinos Juniors, where he played between 1976 and 1981 before his transfer to the club that he supported, Boca Juniors, where he played during the remainder of the 1981 season and 1982 and secured his first league title.

He debuted with the Argentina national football team ("la selección"), at age 16, against Hungary. At age 18, he played the Football World Youth Championship for Argentina, and was the star of the tournament, shining in their 3-1 final win over the USSR team.

In 1982, Maradona played his first World Cup tournament. In the first round, Argentina as defending champions, lost to Belgium 0-1. Although the team convincingly beat Hungary and El Salvador to progress to the second round, they were defeated in the second round by Italy (1-2), the side which eventually won the cup and Brazil (1-3) during which game Maradona was sent off for kicking an opponent.

Later in the year, Maradona was transferred to FC Barcelona. In 1983, under coach César Luis Menotti, Barcelona and Maradona won the Copa del Rey (Spain's annual national cup competition), beating Real Madrid.

However, Maradona had an unhappy tenure in Barcelona: first a bout with hepatitis, and then an ill-timed tackle by Athletic Bilbao's Andoni Goikoetxea that put Maradona's career on the line; Diego's physical strength and willpower made it possible for him to be back on the pitch after only 14 weeks.

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Maradona always wore the Argentina shirt with pride.

Barcelona's management was not satisfied with Maradona, and in 1984 transferred him to SSC Napoli, where he became an adored star, lifting the team to its most successful era. Napoli won their only Italian Championships (1986/87 and 1989/1990), a Coppa Italia (1987), a UEFA Cup (1989) and an Italian Supercup (1990). Napoli were also runners-up in the Italian Championship twice.

Maradona led the Argentine national team to victory in the World Cup in 1986, the team winning 3-2 in the final against West Germany. Throughout the 1986 World Cup, Maradona asserted his dominance and was widely regarded as the best player of the tournament. However, it was the two goals he scored in the Quarter-Final game against England which cemented his legend.

Action replay footage showed that the first goal was scored with the aid of his hand. He later claimed it was the "Hand of God" and described it as "A little of the hand of God, and a little of the head of Maradona," implying that God was ultimately responsible for the goal, because the referee had missed the handball offense.

In contrast, however, Maradona's second goal was an uncontroversial and impressive display of footballing skill. He ran half the length of the pitch, passing five English players (Glenn Hoddle, Peter Reid, Kenny Sansom, Terry Butcher, and Terry Fenwick) as well as goalkeeper Peter Shilton. This goal was voted Goal of the Century in a 2002 online poll conducted by FIFA. Argentina went on to defeat England 2-1 in that game.

Maradona also captained Argentina in the 1990 World Cup, leading his team to the final, where they lost 1-0 to West Germany. He arrived at the 1994 World Cup and played two games (scoring one goal) before being sent home after failing a drug test for ephedrine doping.

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The 1986 World Cup victory was Maradona's greatest success.

On this matter, he has suggested that he had an agreement, on which FIFA later reneged, to allow him to use the drug for weight loss before the competition in order to be able to play, so that the World Cup would not lose prestige because of his absence.

Maradona left Napoli in 1992, after serving a 15-month ban for failing the drug test for cocaine, and played for Sevilla FC (1992-93), Newell's Old Boys (1993) and Boca Juniors (1995-97). He also attempted to work as a coach on two short stints, leading Mandiyú of Corrientes (1994) and Racing Club (1995) without much success. He retired from football on October 30, 1997.

He has been Head Coach for the Argentina National Football Team since October, 2008, and is aiming to become only the second man in history (after Franz Beckenbauer) to win the World Cup, both as a player and manager.

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Scott Burton's Final Thought

Diego Maradona deserves to be considered as one of the greatest footballers of all time.

Certainly controversial, he has always been one of the game's most colourful characters.

His skill, speed and strength at his peak were a joy to behold, dancing around his opposition and shrugging them off with ease.

I remember watching the 1986 World Cup Quarter Final against England, which proved to be a fascinating match in many ways. After watching his first goal, I remember shouting at the TV set "You Little Fat Fart!" Like all other watching Englishmen, I was not amused by his blatant cheating antics.

But his second goal was totally sublime - you have to admit that. He was a fat fart, and you have to admit that too! Certainly a sporting legend, it will be interesting to see if his football management career reaches the same heights as his playing career. I doubt it, but I would never bet against it.



Maradona entered his name in the Fat Fart Hall Of Fame with his cheating exploits!