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Pelé's Beautiful Game

By Rachel Kehoe

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Rachel Kehoe is a writer and longtime soccer fan. In this text, she tells about the life of one of soccer's greatest players, Edson Arantes do Nascimento, or "Pelé." As you read, take notes on the words and phrases the author uses to describe Pelé's soccer playing.

[1] Brazil is "o País do Futebol" — "the Country of Soccer." It has one of the world's best teams, holds an unprecedented¹ five World Cup titles, and is the only country to have played in every World Cup tournament.

The game was introduced in 1894, when Thomas Donohue, a Scottish expatriate,² organized the first official match. However, it was Charles Miller who sparked the country's interest in the game when he brought the first equipment home after learning to play while he was studying in England. Known as the "Father of Soccer," Miller helped set up the first league in Brazil. Excitement for the game spread like wildfire, and soccer was soon the most popular sport in the country.



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Brazil takes great pride in its soccer culture,³ as the enthusiasm⁴ of the fans and the passion⁵ of the players shows. It has produced some of the world's most famous players, such as Garrincha, Ronaldinho, and Neymar. But any discussion of Brazil's soccer stars must begin with Pelé, a symbol for the sport itself.

Edson Arantes do Nascimento (nicknamed Pelé) was born on October 23, 1940. He grew up poor and worked as a shoeshine boy at the railroad station to help feed his family. However, as

1. something that has not happened before
2. a person who lives in a country that is not their home country
3. **Culture** (*noun*) the language, thoughts, and values of a group of people
4. **Enthusiasm** (*noun*) strong interest or excitement about something
5. **Passion** (*noun*) a strong feeling

a young boy, Pelé showed amazing talent in soccer. Although small for his age, he was fast and had an extraordinary⁶ command of the ball. Pelé was playing for a local club when he got his first break. Santos FC, a professional club in the city of Sao Paulo, invited him to join the team. At only 17, he was the youngest player in the league and one of the top scorers. Throughout the country, newspapers and radio stations announced his victories. Pelé had become a national superstar.

- [5] By 1958, Brazilians eagerly waited for the World Cup, the international championship of soccer that is played every four years. Pelé was selected to play on the national team, and the question on everyone's mind was: would this be the year of Brazil's first World Cup victory?

The 1958 World Cup was held in Sweden. Pelé's first game was against the Soviet Union. He felt a swell of pride standing in his bright yellow jersey, listening to Brazil's national anthem. "When the band plays that song, all of us Brazilians feel a strange force within us.... All of us were living in a dream, but none more so than me," he said. During the game, Pelé made several vital⁷ plays that helped put Brazil into the quarter-finals.

Against Wales, Pelé scored the game's only goal, making Brazil one of four teams left in the tournament. They met France in the semi-finals, where Pelé scored a spectacular⁸ hat trick, a term used when one person scores three goals in a game. Brazil's victory launched them into the World Cup final. They would play against the host nation, Sweden.

Sweden celebrated after scoring in the first four minutes of the championship game. Brazil quickly gained back control with two goals. In the second half, Pelé made one of the most extraordinary goals ever seen in World Cup history. After stopping a long pass with his chest, Pelé flicked the ball over the head of the Swedish defender and fired it past the goalkeeper before it hit the ground. Brazil had won the world championship. Pelé teammates lifted him onto their shoulders. They carried him around the field to the cheers of the crowd.

During his legendary career, Pelé accomplished⁹ everything a soccer player could imagine. In 1962, the Brazilian government declared him a national treasure. No other player has ever received such an honor. Pelé ended his career having scored 1,281 goals in 1,363 games, making him the most successful league goal-scorer of all time. He is the only three-time World Cup champion and has scored more goals for Brazil — 77 in 92 games — than any other player. In 1999, several organizations, including the International Federation of Football History and Statistics (IFFHS), named Pelé the best soccer player of the century.

- [10] In 1974, Pelé signed a two-year contract with the New York Cosmos to promote¹⁰ soccer in

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6. special or very good; better than others'
 7. **Vital** (*adjective*) necessary or important
 8. **Spectacular** (*adjective*) causing wonder and admiration
 9. **Accomplish** (*verb*) to achieve

North America. He won over the crowds and attracted millions of Americans to the “beautiful game” of soccer.

After retirement, Pelé used his fame to help others. He raised money for UNICEF and created a worldwide series of workshops to help young soccer players. In 1995, he was named Minister of Sport for the government of Brazil. He used his position to create the “Pelé Law,” which guaranteed¹¹ soccer players a fair wage and compensation if they got injured.

Pelé is hailed as a national hero for his achievements in soccer and for the positive¹² difference he made in Brazil. He remains the greatest soccer star of all time and an inspiration¹³ to players everywhere.

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10. **Promote** (*verb*) to support the growth of
 11. **Guarantee** (*verb*) to promise a positive result
 12. **Positive** (*adjective*) good or useful
 13. something or someone that makes someone want to do something

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. What is a main idea of "Pelé's Beautiful Game"?
 - A. Pelé helped bring together teammates who did not get along before.
 - B. Pelé became famous for doing things no other soccer player had done.
 - C. Pelé was popular in Brazil, but was not well-known elsewhere until now.
 - D. Pelé made soccer the most popular sport in Brazil by winning the World Cup.

2. Why was Pelé's 1958 World Cup Championship special?
 - A. Sweden and Brazil had been enemies in a war.
 - B. Pelé was the youngest player to ever play in a World Cup.
 - C. Brazil would not play in another World Cup for many years.
 - D. It was the first time Brazil won the World Cup Championship.

3. Paragraphs 1-2 relate to the rest of the text...
 - A. by showing how important soccer has been in Brazil so readers understand why Pelé matters.
 - B. by comparing the way soccer is played in Brazil to other countries so readers understand the sport.
 - C. by giving details about Brazil's geography so readers understand how soccer became popular there.
 - D. by explaining the history of soccer in Brazil so readers understand why the World Cup was invented.

4. What does the phrase "spread like wildfire" mean as it is used in paragraph 2?
 - A. Soccer became popular very quickly.
 - B. Soccer was a harmful and dangerous sport.
 - C. Soccer made people very hot when they played.
 - D. Soccer leagues started out small but became very large.

5. How does paragraph 8 contribute to the overall meaning of the text?
