

My Story — Pelé:By Laith Hamed

My name is Edson Arantes do Nascimento, but most people know me as Pelé.

I was born on October 23, 1940, in a small town in Brazil called Três Corações, which means “Three Hearts.” I grew up in a poor family, but we were rich in love. My father, Dondinho, was a footballer too, and I learned almost everything from watching him. He used to tell me, “Never play just for yourself. Always play for the team.” That advice stayed with me forever.

When I was a little boy, we couldn’t afford a real football. So my friends and I made our own—using old socks, rags, and newspaper tied together with string. We played barefoot in the streets until it got dark. Those were simple times, but that’s where I fell in love with the game.

Becoming Pelé

Funny enough, I didn’t even like the name Pelé at first. It was just a nickname some kids gave me at school when I mispronounced a player’s name. I got angry when they called me that—but somehow, it stuck. And eventually, the whole world knew me by that name.

At 15, I joined Santos FC, and by 16, I was playing for the Brazilian national team. It all happened so fast. Then came 1958, the year that changed my life. I was only 17 when I played in my first World Cup, and I’ll never forget scoring in the final. Brazil won, and suddenly, I went from being a kid with big dreams to a world champion. It was unreal.

The King of Football

Over the years, I scored more than 1,000 goals and won three World Cups—in 1958, 1962, and 1970. But for me, football was never just about

winning. It was about bringing joy to people. I wanted to show that a boy from a small town could reach the biggest stages if he believed in himself and worked hard.

They started calling me “O Rei,” which means “The King.” But I never felt like a king—I was just Edson, a kid who loved football more than anything.

Life After Football

After I retired, I wanted to give back. I worked with the United Nations and supported education and children’s rights. I visited many countries and saw how football could bring people together, no matter their language or color.

I always believed that the real goal in life is to make others smile—not just on the field, but everywhere you go.

My Legacy

When I passed away in 2022, I hoped people wouldn’t just remember the goals or the trophies, but the joy I tried to share. Football gave me everything, and I tried my best to give something back.

I’m Pelé—the boy who kicked a ball made of rags and showed the world that dreams can come true.

Sources

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