

His family name is Edson Arantes do Nascimento, but people call him “Pelé.” He is the number one player in the story of soccer. In 1,363 games, he scored 1,264 goals. With Brazil, he won the World Cup★ three times. He visited eighty-eight countries, and his picture was in every newspaper.

But Pelé is not only a famous soccer player. He knows Spanish, Italian, English, and French. He writes music, and he works for the Brazilian government.

Today, Pelé is famous. In 1950, he was a boy of ten with no shoes. This is his story.

Early Years

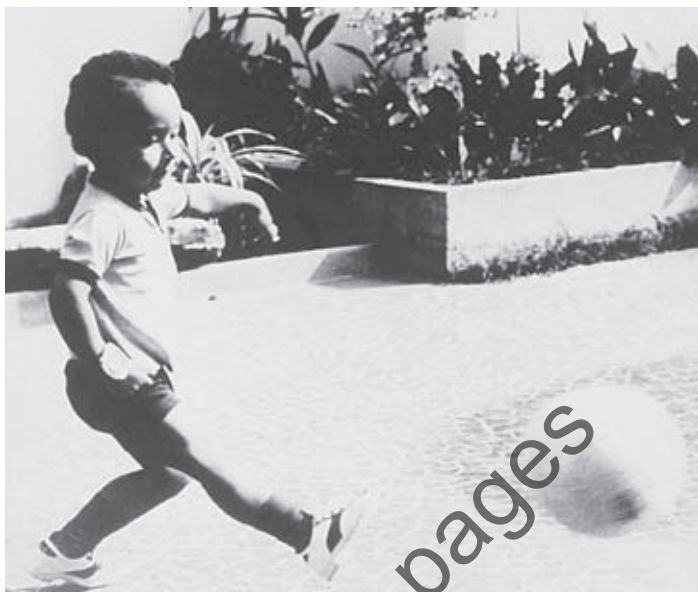
Edson Arantes do Nascimento came into the world on the night of October 23, 1940. His family called him Dico. They lived in a small house in Trêz Corações, Brazil.

“Dico has soccer player’s legs,” his father said.

“He’s going to be a doctor, not a soccer player,” Dico’s mother, Celeste, said. Celeste was angry. Dondinho, Dico’s father, was a soccer player, but he didn’t make much money.

Dondinho smiled. There were problems in the

★ World Cup: A lot of countries play soccer games in the World Cup championship every four years.



"Dico has soccer player's legs."

family about soccer, but there was a lot of love in the house, too.

In 1944 the manager of *Bauru Atlético*, a big soccer club, talked to Dondinho. "We want a good soccer player," the man said. "It's not much money, but there's work in the town, too. Do you want the job?"

Dondinho said yes, and the family moved to Bauru.

The manager was wrong about one thing. There was no work for Dondinho in the town. He only played soccer, and the family had the same money problems.

But Dico was happy in Bauru with his new friends. They played their first game of soccer in *Rua Rubens Arruda*, a street near Dico's house. Their "football" was an old newspaper.

Little Dico played a lot of soccer. Celeste wasn't happy about this. "There's no money in the game," she said.

Dico smiled. His mother was right. He loved soccer, but he didn't want to be a soccer player. He wanted to work at the airport. He often went there and looked at the airplanes.

But Dico's first job wasn't in a soccer stadium or an airport. It was at Bauru station, in 1948. He cleaned shoes. In that year, things were difficult for the family. But then, Dondinho started work in a doctor's office. He cleaned the building and answered the telephone. In the afternoons, Dico often visited his father.

"In ten years, you're going to be a young man," Dondinho said one day. "What do you want to do?"

"I want to work with airplanes," Dico said.

"OK. But school is important for that," said his father.

Later that year, Dico started school. He wasn't a good student. He only stayed in school because he wanted a job at the airport. But one day, an airplane came down near the school. Dico and his friends went to the doctor's office and looked in one of the windows. The man from the airplane was dead. Dico never talked about a job with airplanes again.

A New Name

The important thing for Dico now was soccer. Evenings and weekends, he played with his friends. In the afternoons, he was with Dondinho. Dondinho was his soccer teacher, and Dico was a very good student.

After two years, Dico was the number one young player in Bauru. His friends started to call him “Pelé.”

“Where does the name come from?” people often ask. Pelé doesn’t know.

In 1951, Pelé started a club, *September 7*, with his friends. People called them “the team with no shoes.” They wanted to play in *Bauru Atlético’s* championship for young teams, but the shoes were a problem.

One day, a father of one of the players came with shoes for the team. “Today, I’m giving you a new name—*Ameriquinho*,” he said. “Now, they can’t call you ‘the team with no shoes.’”

Ameriquinho played very well and won the championship. After the final, Dondinho looked at his son and smiled “You played a beautiful game, Dico,” he said.

Valdemar de Brito

Bauru Atlético liked Pelé’s “beautiful game,” too. They wanted him for the club’s new team of young

players, *Baquinho*. The team manager was Valdemar de Brito, a famous man in Brazilian soccer. Pelé was very happy.

Valdemar was a good manager and a good teacher. In 1953, *Baquinho* won the Bauru young team championship. After this, Valdemar moved away. Pelé was very sorry.

One year later, Pelé finished school and started to work in a shoe factory. At weekends, he played for *Baquinho*, but he didn't like the new manager. 1954 was a bad year.

In the winter of the new year, Valdemar came to Pelé's house. He wanted to talk to the family.

"Your son is fifteen now," he said. "He's a very good soccer player. He can try for a job with *Santos*."

Dondinho and Pelé were happy. *Santos* was a very famous club in Brazil. Celeste didn't like it, but she said yes. Some days later, Dondinho and Pelé went to Santos on the train.

"The *Santos* players aren't going to like me," Pelé said.

But there was no problem. Pelé played well, and the club was happy with its new player. Pelé was happy, too. After some weeks, he had a good friend on the team. His name was Zito.

Pelé wasn't in the first team. But one day, a first team player, Vasconcelos, had an injury.