

# Why are Brazil so good?

[Interview: Brazil manager Carlos Alberto Parreira](#)

[Interview: Carlos Alberto](#)

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By [Andrew Benson](#) and [John Sinnott](#)

## **Brazil. That single word has come to sum up the very best of football.**

It stands for artistry, inspiration and genius, for the combination of sublime individual skill and collective fluidity to create a whole that is both beautiful to watch and devastatingly successful.

The country has produced 50 years' worth of great players - Garrincha, Pele, Jairzinho, Tostao, Socrates and Zico to name but a few.

Having won the World Cup a record five times, not surprisingly Brazil head into the 2006 tournament as the hot favourites to lift the trophy this summer.

More than that, though, with outstanding individual talents such as Ronaldo, Ronaldinho and Kaka orchestrating the team, there are also high expectations they will produce more moments that will live on in football legend.

But how does Brazil produce so many great teams and wonderful players?

With the help of some of the country's biggest football names, BBC Sport finds out what makes Brazil so good.

## **A NATIONAL OBSESSION**

The story of Brazil's domination of world football starts with the sport's uniquely important position in national life.

"The national football team," says its coach Carlos Alberto Parreira, "is the symbol of national identity, the only time the nation gets together."

"Football in Brazil is like a religion," adds Carlos Alberto Torres, captain of the side that won the 1970 World Cup.

"Everybody talks about it all the time - not only now we are close to the World Cup.

"This is the difference between Europe and Brazil. After the World Cup, people in Europe start to think about life, business. Here in Brazil, we breathe football 24 hours a day."

According to Parreira, no-one is quite sure why.

"Sociologists, psychologists have tried to explain, but nobody can find one reason," he says.

"Maybe because we didn't have to fight for independence, we don't have earthquakes or things like that. We didn't go to war."

Journalist Alex Bellos, author of *Futebol - A Brazilian Way of Life*, believes it was also due to the relatively late abolition of slavery at the end of the 19th century, and a lack of positive symbols.

Whatever the reason, Brazil very early "recognised football in our future and tradition and (as) our opportunity to communicate to the world that we are powerful," says 1994 World Cup winner Leonardo.

"In the 1930s, we started to organise a team to be competitive in the World Cup, and the 1950s were the beginning of this big dream to make Brazil the best international team in the world," he added.

Losing the final to Uruguay in 1950 was viewed as a national tragedy, but it only heightened the desire to win.

And it led to a little-known aspect of Brazilian football. Believing they had let themselves down through personal weakness and a lack of research, the national side came to see comprehensive preparation and innovative tactics as crucial to success.

Contrary to the popular belief that Brazilian teams are defensively naive, the idea of the modern back four originated in the 1958 World Cup-winning team.

Through a careful evolution of the way they played, Brazil continued to have a tactical lead until 1970.

Allied to detailed planning and a concentration on physical training beyond that in Europe - not to forget the sheer quality of players - Brazil's plan met with unprecedented success. They won three of the four World Cups between 1958 and 1970.

## **A UNIQUE COUNTRY**

Having an entire nation obsessed with football and, by extension, winning the World Cup, has developed a degree of self-fulfilment.

Brazil is a big country - 183m people - and that is a lot of potential footballers, especially when, as Parreira says, "the whole of Brazil" is playing the game.

But for some in Brazil football is more than just a game.

It is, says journalist Lito Cavalcanti, a "life solution".

Many of Brazil's greatest footballers grew up in *favelas* - the shanty towns in its sprawling cities. Here, life is hard, and football offers an escape from the crippling poverty.

"It's the only way out of misery," says Cavalcanti. "The lower classes have no effective schooling. They live in *favelas* where drug dealers control their lives. Sport is the only way out, and in Brazil football is the only sport people care about.

"What makes them so good? Necessity. It's the only life they have ahead of them. That is their drive."

## **A DIFFERENT GAME**

Carlos Alberto Torres recently received a Fifa award for the most beautiful goal to have been scored in World Cup history - his thunderbolt in Brazil's 4-1 win over Italy in the 1970 World Cup final.

Nine Brazilians were involved in the move, with Rivelino, Jairzinho and Pele providing memorable cameos before the coup de grace - Alberto's unstoppable shot.

"Now I realise how beautiful and how important that goal was," said Alberto.

Alberto was just 25 when he scored that goal, but his artistry had been honed day-by-day, week-by-week, year-by-year as a young child.

In Brazil children learn football in a very different way from their European counterparts.

There are no leagues or competitive matches for young children - such a concept is seen as likely to hinder a player's creative impulses.

"The children play a lot but it's always very free," says Leonardo.

"We don't tell eight-year-olds you have to play right-back."

Parreira agrees: "We don't put them in a cage, say 'you have to be like this'. We give them some freedom until they are ready to be coached."

And that sense of creativity is never lost.

"In Europe if you are dancing in the team bus before a World Cup final match it would be viewed as not concentrating," says Leonardo.

"But in Brazil if you are not speaking and laughing on the bus that is seen as being afraid.

"It is a different mentality. The idea of the system and the collective is different. The system is more important in Europe than it is in Brazil, even if we know it is important."

Brazil's success, though, stems from more than talent and the freedom to express it - behind Ronaldinho's gleaming smile lies hours of hard work.

"The English academy system is one where players are training for just four hours a week," says Brazilian football expert Simon Clifford.

"Compare that to Ronaldinho when he was a 16-year-old with Gremio, where he would have been training for up to 20 hours a week. "

Parreira adds: "In Brazil players are fabricated, they are produced.

"They come to the clubs when they are 10-12 and then they start in categories according to age.

"There are no more players from the beach or from the street. This is a myth, a legend. They are built, grown in the clubs."

Tactically, too, Brazil remain to this day very different from other international sides.

Former Republic of Ireland coach Brian Kerr says Brazil are unique in international football.

"The only two players who are really defenders are the centre-backs," says Kerr. "The shape of the team is 2-2-2-2, with the full-backs playing high up the pitch.

"That is how they would line up, but after that anything could happen that might lead them to have three wide players on the left.

"It was different from anything I had seen and it was the quality of the players that allowed them to do that."

Brazil's football production-line has its fair share of casualties - Ronaldo was the only player from the under-17 Brazilian team who went on to become a professional.

Only the very best make it through to Brazil's starting 11 to display their extravagant skills on the world's stage.

As Brazilian journalist Emerson Vicente points out, Lyon midfielder Juninho would be an automatic choice for most international sides, but he is unlikely to start for Brazil in the World Cup.

In Ronaldinho, Adriano, Kaka, Ronaldo and Robinho, Brazil have five potential match winners - most teams are happy to have just one such player in their side.

And success has bred success for more than half a century.

"You go to the schools here," says Carlos Alberto Torres, "and you see the kids saying I want to be like Ronaldo or Pele or Zico.

"They are examples to the kids - and we have lots of them, not only one or two.

"We say in Brazil that a great player is born every day."

That might well be so. But just as important is that Brazil's unique environment ensures they actually become one.

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Published: 2006/05/23 06:48:04 GMT