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Long read: Cristiano Ronaldo's incredible journey to 100 Portugal goals – and the all-time international record still to come

By Chris Flanagan September 08, 2020

Soon, the world's most relentless footballer will finally be able to call himself No.1. This is the story of how Ronaldo moved to the brink of becoming the greatest international goalscorer of all time – by those who know him best

(Image credit: PA)

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100 INTERNATIONAL GOALS FOR @CRISTIANO 🇵🇹💯

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Dark had fallen on a late summer's evening in the far north of Portugal, just a

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few miles from the Spanish border. Only 8,000 people were inside the Estadio Municipal Engenheiro Manuel Branco Teixeira in Chaves. They were about to witness the beginning of greatness.

In one of Portuguese football's least celebrated outposts, the national team were labouring badly in a friendly at home to Kazakhstan. A year earlier, their 2002 World Cup campaign had ended in disgrace with an exit in the group stage via defeat to co-hosts South Korea, a match that Portugal finished with nine men. The forward, Joao Pinto, had even punched the referee. Afterwards, the would-be Euro 2004 hosts kicked off a series of meaningless friendlies in front of ever-dwindling attendances. Kazakhstan were the latest visitors.

At half-time, the score was an unimpressive 0-0. Then came a substitution. Off went Luis Figo, and on came an 18-year-old Cristiano Ronaldo for his international debut. "Stay calm," Figo told the teenager. "Just play as if you were at your club."

So Ronaldo did. Within two minutes, the spectators gawped as their fresh-faced winger intercepted a loose pass, dribbled half the length of the field and saw his shot tipped past a post. Three minutes later, he spun his marker and surged towards the penalty area once again. "Ro-nal-do! Ro-nal-do!" came the chant. He'd been a Portugal international for just five minutes.

By full-time, his country had won 1-0 and Ronaldo was named the man of the match. The man – the boy – who would go on to become the greatest footballer in Portugal's history, had made his entrance.

"He already had his sights on becoming great," explains Fernando Meira, who was part of the Portugal team that evening. "He wanted to be the fastest, the strongest, the top scorer. He wanted to be the best at everything."

In the 17 years that have followed, Ronaldo has become just that, for both club and country. A five-time Ballon d'Or winner; a five-time – and record – Champions League winner; a national hero, thanks to Portugal's victory at Euro 2016; the top scorer in Champions League history… and soon, the top scorer in international football history.

At that level, he has left a pantheon of legends trailing in his wake. Lionel Messi, Diego Maradona, the Brazilian Ronaldo, even the great Pele – none have scored as many goals for their country as CR7. As he closes in on 109 international goals, possibly the greatest milestone of them all is now within touching distance.

"Records are part of me," Cristiano Ronaldo once claimed. "I don't follow the records. The records follow me."

"Quaresma? No, the one who'll succeed is the boy from Madeira. He's more professional than the professionals"

Even before he reached Portugal's senior team, Ronaldo seemed destined for the very top. On a Friday night in March 2003, England Under-21s got a taste of just how good he was, during a European Championship qualifier in Rio Maior. England's starting XI featured prospects such as Joe Cole and Jermain Defoe, with Michael Carrick and Gareth Barry in midfield, yet the Three Lions were terrorised – not only by Ronaldo, but by Ricardo Quaresma as well. Portugal won 4-2 (despite Shola Ameobi's brace), and it was the teenage duo's sublime 90-minute showboat that grabbed attention.

"We didn't have players like Ronaldo and Quaresma – we struggled to compete," says David Prutton, who lined up for England that night. "We had been made aware of Ronaldo beforehand, and he lived up to the billing. He was very callow, but he had quick feet and his flashy approach stood out. You remember the cocky kids.

"There was a moment that stuck out. He was on the touchline, and me and a couple of other players had boxed him in. No way out. But I remember him getting out of it, and me not being able to work out how he managed it. In that moment, you knew you were up against something very, very special."

Portugal qualified for that U21s tournament at England's expense – a Tuncay-powered Turkey finished top of the pair's group.

In the summer of 2003, Ronaldo helped Portugal U20s to victory at the Toulon Tournament. Half of Europe sent scouts to watch him play. Having overcome issues with a racing heart that required laser surgery at 15, he had broken into Sporting's first team in 2002-03.

Arsenal had been courting him for some time – agent Jorge Mendes arranged for Ronaldo to secretly visit the Gunners' training ground that January and meet Arsene Wenger. "We were in a car and Jorge kept calling me to reiterate that I had to make sure nobody saw me," said Ronaldo. "We stopped at a service station and I had to have my face covered. Jorge was calling every five minutes, saying, 'Be careful, be careful around people!'"

But Arsenal failed to agree a fee with Sporting. Gerard Houllier also looked at taking him to Liverpool, only to baulk at Mendes' big salary demands. Barcelona were keen but instead went for Quaresma, who was slightly older and more experienced.

In those early days, some people regarded Quaresma as the better player. "I saw

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Quaresma in training the other day – he's going to be phenomenal," Portugal's press officer told Aurelio Pereira, Sporting's chief scout, after an U17s match. "Remember what I'm about to tell you," replied Pereira. "The one who'll succeed is the boy from Madeira: Cristiano Ronaldo. He's a professional. At 16, he's more professional than the professionals."

Quaresma's departure from Sporting coincided with the arrival of a new coach in the summer of 2003: Fernando Santos, the man who would later lead Portugal to victory at Euro 2016. He planned to make Ronaldo the focal point of his new Sporting team – but as it turned out, those plans didn't last very long.

Another admirer of Ronaldo's was the Manchester United assistant Carlos Queiroz, who persuaded the Red Devils to set up a partnership with Sporting. As part of the collaboration, United were invited to play in the first game at Sporting's new stadium, on August 6, 2003. The reigning Premier League champions arrived in Portugal straight from the US, where they had just beaten Juventus and Barcelona. But they were jetlagged, and Ronaldo made them pay.

"I had never heard of him before that game, so I knew absolutely nothing about him," Quinton Fortune, a member of the team beaten 3-1 that night, tells *FFT*. "He was outstanding. I just thought, 'Wow'. Luckily I was playing at left-back and John O'Shea was at right-back, on Ronaldo's side. I was just hoping he wouldn't come over.

"It was stepovers, assists, going past players like they weren't there – you name it. We were in the changing room afterwards, just looking at each other, going: 'What was that?'"

United had already been negotiating to sign Ronaldo, a deal which would have loaned the young wideman back to Sporting for the next 12 months. Before half-time, however, Alex Ferguson had changed his mind. Forget the loan agreement – he wanted Ronaldo in his side immediately. "Get Peter Kenyon down here," he told the kit man. "We are not leaving this ground until that boy is signed."

After the match, United's squad were left waiting on the team bus for more than an hour. Ferguson and Kenyon had gained Sporting's permission to talk with Ronaldo, and they were sat in a small coaches' dressing room, convincing him to join them. "We always joked that John O'Shea sealed the deal by playing like a f**king clown that night," Roy Keane later quipped.

Ronaldo's sale was a blow for Fernando Santos, who was forced to rejig his formation and game plan for the new season. "I was building the team around him," he sighed. "I hadn't seen an 18-year-old with such potential in ages." Sporting would finish a disappointing 3rd that term, and Santos was sacked.

Just 10 days after the friendly at the Estadio Jose Alvalade, Ronaldo made his debut for Manchester United. Despite appearing for only the final half-hour against Bolton, he was named man of the match. Four days later came his senior Portugal debut against Kazakhstan.

"We were all aware of his potential," says former Everton full-back Nuno Valente, a fellow substitute that night. "When I was at Uniao de Leiria, we had a home game against Sporting and arrived early, so we decided to check out the U19 game. The talk dominating the stands was, 'Who is this boy?' You could see that he stood out.

"Before Ronaldo's debut against Kazakhstan, I could sense that he was a bit anxious because he wanted to fight for a place at Euro 2004. He had butterflies in his stomach, looking to prove he could become an option for that tournament."

While there were nerves on the night, Ronaldo was full of confidence when he linked up with the squad. "When new players came into the team, we always had this moment during dinner on our first evening where they had to stand up and speak in front of everyone," Fernando Meira tells *FFT*. "He couldn't stop talking. We had to say, 'It's all right, kid, you can sit down now!'"

As Ronaldo became a regular member of the squad, his team-mates noticed his competitive spirit, too. "He was a sensational table tennis player," Meira says with a smile. "He told us that when he first arrived at Manchester United, he was mocked and booed by his colleagues because he'd lost a match to Rio Ferdinand. He didn't play again for months, but in the meantime, he bought a table and trained at home. It's just a small anecdote that shows what he's like. He never had to worry about that in the national team, though – he beat everyone..."

According to Maniche, he was the same with card games. "At the beginning, he spent a lot of time with Deco and me, having a laugh," says the former Chelsea midfielder, a Champions League winner that season with Porto. "No matter how late it was, if he was losing, he'd try to recover his money as much as he could."

Ronaldo's first goal for Portugal came in the opening game of Euro 2004, in only his eighth cap. Introduced at half-time with Luiz Felipe Scolari's men trailing 2-0 to Greece, the teenager's injury-time header was nothing more than a consolation. "At first it was Simao starting on the left during that tournament," says Valente. "But after a while, Ronaldo won. He had a strong personality and was able to impose himself, even though he was just a kid."

Another Ronaldo header – a carbon copy – against the Netherlands was far more significant, putting Portugal ahead in the semi-final. He would end the tournament in tears, however, as Greece stunned the hosts for a second time in the final.

Dart boards and witch doctors

From there, Ronaldo started when available. “He was full of energy – I’ve never seen anyone like him,” Deco told *FFT*. “He could play three games in a day. He always wanted things more than everyone else.”

Over the years, Ronaldo’s work rate has become legendary. “He’s an easy-going person,” reveals Valente, “but what distinguishes him from others is his mindset and his desire to be the best. He always had that goal. You’d find him in the gym 45 minutes before training because he wanted to improve even more.”

There were times, though, that Ronaldo needed to be encouraged to adapt his game around the team. “When he broke into the squad, sometimes he was a bit too individualistic,” says Valente. “His playing style didn’t always fit our game plan, and we talked a lot about it – we told him there was a right time to pass or dribble.”

The same conversations took place at Manchester United. Ronaldo was given some leeway as he established himself at Old Trafford, but by the third season, patience was wearing thin.

“At the beginning, it was all about embarrassing players, wanting to beat them and show his skills,” says Fortune. “What set Ronaldo apart from all the other young players was that he had so much belief in his own ability, like Muhammad Ali. The first day he walked into the club, his English wasn’t that good but he was basically saying to everyone, ‘I’m the best’. After training, he’d put ankle weights on, then go and do stepovers on his own so that when he took the weights off… well, you can imagine. Sometimes he had to be pulled out of the gym.

“But it took him a while to appreciate that he had to use his skills to create an end product; to put in a cross or score a goal. Players were slowly getting a bit fed up with him, thinking, ‘Yes, you’re doing all of these amazing stepovers, but we need something from this’.

“A few tackles came flying in from his own team-mates at training. Everyone had a little bite! It sent him a message: ‘You’re an amazing individual, but part of a team – you need to learn to play with us’. It gave him a wake-up call that he needed to play quicker: if he’d beaten his man, he didn’t need to come back and beat him again. Once the penny dropped... oh my goodness, it was all over.”

The 2006 World Cup was key. Nine months earlier, Ronaldo’s father had died. Luiz Felipe Scolari broke the devastating news in the team hotel while Portugal were in Moscow for a match against Russia. The winger had declined an offer to fly straight home, instead wanting to play in honour of his dad. That motivation remained at the World Cup.

After scoring against Iran in the group stage, he was kicked out of a bad-tempered second-round tie with the Netherlands – The Battle of Nuremberg – by Khalid Boulahrouz before half-time. He was fit to face England six days later and his role in Wayne Rooney’s red card became infamous: protesting to the referee, then winking at the bench after his Manchester United team-mate’s dismissal.

“Everyone made a fuss about it in England, but somebody from our bench said something to him, he gave the OK sign with his thumb and then naturally winked,” says Valente, insisting that the gesture was simply the acknowledgement of a tactical instruction.

In the penalty shootout it was Ronaldo who converted the winner, pointing to the sky in celebration, in memory of his father. However, the Rooney controversy led to boos throughout Portugal’s semi-final meeting with France. Undeterred, he produced a fine performance in a 1-0 defeat, although FIFA overlooked him for the tournament’s Best Young Player award, citing his behaviour against England, and handed the honour to Lukas Podolski.

Back in England, ‘I Hate Ronaldo’ jerseys and dart boards bearing his face were circulating, while jeers followed him at every away match. That fuelled Ronaldo. “They’re trying to make me lose focus, but they only do that with good players, right?” he smirked. He silenced them with goals. A new focus on end product earned him back-to-back PFA Player of the Year awards; 23 goals in 2006-07, then a freakish 42 in 2007-08 as Manchester United won the Champions League.

“The 2006 World Cup was a turning point for him,” says Valente. “In England, he was often criticised for being too individualistic, but I think it helped him a lot. As the years went on, he realised what was better for him. He had a clear purpose on the pitch: the goal.”

Ronaldo wasn’t scoring quite as often at international level, though. “Everybody in Portugal is aware that Ronaldo plays much better for Man United than he does for Portugal,” journalist Sergio Krithinas told *FFT* in 2008. “The mobility of United’s attack helps Ronaldo. Portugal’s system is very strict. He ends up doing things on his own.”

He was expected to win Portugal trophies on his own, too, while on course for his first Ballon d’Or. “Can the world’s best player win Euro 2008 single-handedly?” *FFT* asked on our pre-tournament cover. No, he couldn’t: after a single group-stage goal, he made little impact in a quarter-final defeat to Germany. Scolari felt that his performances were affected by the media circus surrounding a potential move to Real Madrid – stoked by enigmatic comments from Ronaldo himself.

If the arrival of Queiroz as Portugal’s manager seemed tailor-made for Ronaldo after their time together at Manchester United, it didn’t work out that way. He was made captain, but the team laboured for goals. Ronaldo didn’t score in qualifying for the 2010 World Cup, going 16 months without an international strike, then netted one at the tournament itself as Portugal lost to Spain in the last 16. “What went wrong?” Ronaldo was asked post-game. “Ask Queiroz,” he said. Soon, the boss was out.

At that point, a 25-year-old Ronaldo had scored 23 goals from his first 76 appearances for Portugal. A few months later, he furiously flung his captain's armband to the floor after being denied arguably his greatest-ever goal, in a friendly rematch with world champions Spain. Flying down the left wing, he bamboozled Gerard Pique with a neat turn, brilliantly rolled the ball past Xabi Alonso, then scooped it ingeniously over Iker Casillas' head – only for Nani to needlessly nod in his goalbound effort and be ruled offside. Not only had Nani actually been onside, Ronaldo felt the ball had already crossed the line when he made contact. "Even a blind man could see it was a goal – the ball was half a metre into the net," he protested.

Ronaldo's superlative non-goal was nonetheless a sign of things to come. In his first 11 games under new coach Paulo Bento, he scored nine times. As in 2006, the World Cup had driven him to a new level: that season, he netted 53 goals for Real Madrid.

At Euro 2012, he crucially bagged a brace as Portugal came from behind in their final group game against the Netherlands to grab second spot behind Germany. He headed home his country's winner in their quarter-final with the Czech Republic, then made a fateful decision to take the fifth penalty in the semi-final shootout against Spain. If he had hoped it would leave him with the glory of a winning spot-kick, like the one against England in 2006, that plan backfired: Joao Moutinho and Bruno Alves both missed, and the shootout was over before Ronaldo got the chance to step up.

He recovered emphatically, however. Ronaldo scored 10 goals in nine appearances for Portugal in 2013, hitting his first international hat-trick against Northern Ireland and then another in a dramatic World Cup play-off against Sweden, which became a personal duel with Zlatan Ibrahimovic. That night, Ronaldo reached 47 goals for Portugal, equalling the record set by Pauleta.

The Real Madrid forward travelled to the 2014 World Cup in Brazil as a Champions League winner and the reigning Ballon d'Or holder, but injury hampered him badly: he ended the tournament shouting at his knee in frustration as Portugal bowed out in the group stage. A witch doctor claimed that he had hexed the superstar by placing a special potion next to a picture of Ronaldo before the final group game with Ghana – but either way, Ronaldo had barely been fit to play. "If we had two or three Cristiano Ronaldos in the team, I'd feel more comfortable – but we don't," he said, explaining his decision to plough through the pain. "I never thought that we would be world champions. We aren't at the same level as the best."

"He punched me in the Euro 2016 Final. I didn't expect it"

When Portugal lost at home to Albania in the opening game of their Euro 2016 qualifying campaign, with Ronaldo injured, a change was made: Paulo Bento got the chop and Fernando Santos took charge. Eleven years after their brief spell together at Sporting, Santos finally had his chance to build a side around Ronaldo, and moved him from the left to a central striking position.

Ronaldo scored five goals in his first four competitive games for the new boss, as a well-organised team won all of their remaining qualifiers. For the first time since 2008, Portugal had topped their qualification group and reached a major tournament without the need for a play-off.

Again, Ronaldo arrived at a tournament as a Champions League winner, having scored the final penalty for Real Madrid against city rivals Atletico in Milan. But Euro 2016 started badly. He had a total of 20 shots without scoring, in draws with Iceland and Austria. In the latter he missed a penalty, on the day he surpassed Luis Figo as Portugal's record appearance-maker. After the opening stalemate, he had received media criticism for moaning about Iceland's 'small mentality'. "They just defend, defend, defend – they're not going to do anything in this competition," he said. If only...

His mood was such that, approached by a reporter during a team walk ahead of the final group game against Hungary, he grabbed the microphone and threw it into a lake. But Ronaldo responded, as he always does. Trailing 2-1 to Hungary, Portugal were on the verge of early elimination when Ronaldo scored a brilliant flicked equaliser. Visibly furious when that work was undone by a third Hungary goal, he responded once again, heading home his second of the game to secure a 3-3 draw and Portugal's narrow passage to the last 16. Somehow, despite their zero victories in a weak group, the captain had dragged his country through.

"You have players who are born leaders and Ronaldo is one of them," says Adrien Silva, who was in that Euro 2016 squad. "He's a leader on the pitch, but he's also a leader in the dressing room – even in Portugal's daily routine. When the players leave the hotel to go for a short walk, you see his role as captain. Ronaldo just needs to give the turnaround gesture and everybody follows him back.

"Before a match, when we looked at our opponents, you could always see how much they feared and respected him. You felt that you already had an advantage. Not many countries can say that."

In the last 16 against Croatia, Ronaldo's shot was saved for his old friend, Ricardo Quaresma, to convert an extra-time winner on the rebound. In the quarter-final against Poland, Ronaldo learned from his mistake of 2012 and took the first penalty in their shootout, as Portugal triumphed again. Against Wales, he headed from a corner to put his team ahead, just as he'd done in the semis at Euro 2004. That goal, in Portugal's only 90-minute win at the tournament, drew him level with Michel Platini as the top scorer in Euros history.

But his final lasted just 25 minutes. Injured by a tackle from West Ham's Dimitri Payet, he twice tried to carry on after treatment, but it was no good. As a giant moth landed on his forehead, the tears flowed. Unable to lead his team on the field, he passed the captain's armband to Nani. "Wear this," he said "and win this final."

Not that Ronaldo could be a mere bystander. For the remainder of the final, he prowled the touchline, barking instructions, providing encouragement. When he did sit down in the dugout, he was still living every moment on the field. Frustrated at one missed chance, and live on camera, he inadvertently whacked Adrien Silva on the knee, to the midfielder's obvious discomfort. "It may seem hilarious when you see it now, but at the time I was in so much pain!" laughs Silva, who had been substituted by that stage. "When he punched me, I was focused on the match and not expecting it. I remember telling him, 'Not that knee!' He was very apologetic."

When Eder was preparing to come on as Portugal's last substitute, Ronaldo had a word. "Be strong," he said. "You're going to score the winner." Eder did just that. On and off the pitch, Ronaldo had helped his nation to their first major trophy. "It's something that will last forever," says Silva. "No one can take that away from us."

Buoyed by that triumph, international goals started to flow faster than ever for Ronaldo. In his first six appearances during qualifying for the 2018 World Cup, he scored 14 times, putting Andorra, Latvia, Hungary and the Faroe Islands to the sword.

"It has been an honour to be his team-mate," admits Leicester's Ricardo Pereira. "At first, it was a bit weird to be in the same squad as a proper legend. My place at meal times was three or four seats away from him. At times, I was looking at him and wondering if this was really happening: am I really sharing a table with Ronaldo?

"But he's a normal, humble guy. He'd ask how things were going at my club, and told me to feel at home. It was a great experience."

At the 2018 World Cup, Ronaldo equalled Ferenc Puskas' record as the top European goalscorer in the history of international football. Typically, that 84th goal came in memorable style, with a brilliant late free-kick against Spain in the group opener sealing his hat-trick in a thrilling 3-3 draw. He broke Puskas' record five days later against Morocco, although Portugal would lose to Uruguay in the last 16.

Rising above the bar

He's 35 years old now, but Cristiano Ronaldo will still not relent. He showed that with a hat-trick against Switzerland in last year's UEFA Nations League Finals, which Portugal won on home soil.

"I was his coach in 2003 and I could see where he would go," said Fernando Santos after that Switzerland treble. "He's a genius. There is genius in paintings and sculpture, and he's a football genius."

Ronaldo has faced problems off the field. A rape investigation in the USA was eventually dropped last July with no charges filed. His Real Madrid departure, following the breakdown of his relationship with club president Florentino Perez, also surprised many.

He hasn't scored quite so prolifically at Juventus, although his first Scudetto-winning season in Italy produced 28 goals and he recently scored in 11 successive league appearances, equalling the Serie A record. During that run, he jumped an astonishing 2.56m – his head higher than the crossbar – to nod in a goal against Sampdoria (top).

"He's still an amazing athlete – he leaps like a basketball player," former Juventus and Italy forward Aldo Serena tells *FFT*. "He's the best player in Serie A, and even today he works hard like a teenager yet to play his first game. In Italy, you don't get five or six chances to score – not as many as you get in Spain, that's for sure. But he's still scoring. Goals are like a drug – an addiction. Once he started to score goals, he never wanted to stop. The more you score, the more popular you are, and you can't live without it.

"Even when he hasn't been completely fit because of injuries, he's always been the driving force; the leader of Juventus."

It is Ronaldo's longevity – his remarkable ability to remain at the top of the sport for so long – that has put him in a position to break the international goalscoring record. His continued athleticism is a product of his career-long fitness regime.

"The way that he works is unbelievable," Ruben Neves, his Portugal team-mate, tells *FFT*. "The guy is 35 years old, but it seems like he's 27. It's all about the way he takes care of himself: the way he works after training, the way he eats... everything is perfect."

Indeed, doctors recently told him that he had the fitness levels of a 28-year-old. "You know that when Cristiano is in the team, he will score," adds Neves. "If we can keep a clean sheet, we already know we're closer to winning, because we have the animal upfront who can score at any time."

In 2019, Ronaldo scored 14 times in 10 internationals – his most prolific year yet. It took him to 99 goals in 164 games for Portugal. Of those, 76 had come in his 88 most recent appearances; 44 in just the past four years.

In the history of European outfield players, only Sergio Ramos – who turned 34 in March – and Latvia's Vitalijs Astafjevs have picked up more caps. The overall appearance record of 184, currently held by former Egypt midfielder Ahmed Hassan, is well within reach. But it's the goalscoring record that will do more to enhance Ronaldo's greatness, as he approaches Ali Daei's tally of 109.

For 12 years after his retirement, the Iranian was a full 25 goals clear of any other player in history. Ronaldo has been drawing ever closer since moving past Puskas into second spot. "All records must be broken, and I will beat that record," he declared recently.

"The record will come sooner rather than later – I'm sure about it," Ricardo Pereira tells *FFT*. "He takes these things very naturally – he doesn't worry about it or put extra pressure on himself. That's why the records keep coming. It makes no sense at all to talk about his age if he keeps on doing what he does in every match."

In total, Ronaldo has scored against a record 41 different nations, and he won't want to remain international football's second-highest goalscorer for much longer. Asked recently what he would like to be written on his tombstone one day, his answer was simple. "Number one," he said. "Number two? I don't know this number. For me, I'm the number one in history."

Although he's unlikely to convince everyone of that opinion, his arguments are strengthening all the time. Already, Ronaldo has an international trophy that has eluded Lionel Messi to date. In time, he could even surpass Pele's tally of 784 goals in official games for club and country: by early March he had hit 725, from 1,002 outings. Soon, the international goalscoring record will add further weight to his viewpoint.

Whether or not he's the greatest player of all time, that record will cement his status as a true legend of international football – and of that, there can be no doubt.

It was an international career that started in front of just 8,000 fans at the Estadio Municipal Engenheiro Manuel Branco Teixeira. On that summer's evening in 2003, those 8,000 people witnessed the beginning of history.

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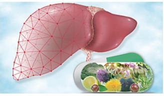

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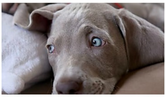

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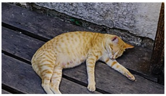

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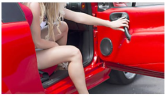

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