

WORDS Don Mullan

PELÉ'S GOALS FOR LIFE AND THE 'GOAL' HE NEVER SCORED

On July 12, 2008, prior to unveiling, with Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a statue to England's greatest goalkeeper, Gordon Banks, Edson Arantes do Nascimento, the legendary Pelé, spoke to a packed press conference:

"In my life I have scored over one thousand goals. But the goal that people remember is the one I never scored!" He was referring to an iconic World Cup moment during the clash of the World Champions, England and Brazil, in the 1970 Mexico tournament.

It occurred shortly after midday on Sunday, June 7th as tens of millions of fanatical fans crowded around their television sets in Brazil and the UK.

In the British and Irish Isles we are used to the measured excitement of our television football commentators. But the incident Pelé is referring to was accompanied back home in Brazil by near hysteria in the voice of a Brazilian commentator. It can be appreciated at the following YouTube link:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pTBnrclFKc>

The commentator's voice undulates as a pass from Brazil's captain, Carlos Alberto, is struck with supreme accuracy, long and hard, into the path of Jairzinho. From England's back-line Jairzinho lifts the ball over four English defenders and onto the head of Pelé who delivers an unstoppable downward projectile from the edge of

Pelé with admirer and (inset) with Gordon Banks



the six yard box. By now the commentator's voice is sounding like a Gatling-gun, spewing out Portuguese adjectives with hardly time for a breath. His tone reaches a frenzied crescendo as the partisan crowd in the packed Guadalajara Stadium rise in unison to celebrate Brazil's first goal against the World Champions.

Instantaneously the commentator's voice becomes a prolonged pain-filled gasp of disbelief. Somehow, Gordon Banks has raced from the far post

and, with a gravity defying lunge, manages to harness the power of Pelé's header to safely steer the ball over the bar. The cheering gives way to a thunderous applause of respect for Banks and a real friendship between Banks and Pelé is born.

Thirty-eight years after 'That Save' and two-weeks after Pelé's story to the Press, Banks is standing in Stoke City FC's Britannia Stadium and apologising to Pelé for having made it:

"People all around the world are still amazed by that save. If only I had known how important that goal would be today – I wouldn't have saved

it. It's still in the back of my mind today... I just don't know how or why that happened. Sorry Pelé. Sorry!"

On the YouTube link, the reader will realise that Banks, of course, is speaking to camera with tongue-in-cheek. For any goalkeeper – especially one of history's greatest – to lament not having allowed an adversary to score against him would be a blasphemy.

It's all part of a clever marketing ploy to help promote a campaign spearheaded by Pelé called Gols pela Vida – Goals for Life.

The origin of the campaign goes back to an evening almost 40 years ago in Rio de Janeiro's Maracanã Stadium, when – literally – all of Brazil stopped to watch a moment of history.

It was November 19, 1969. The world's biggest stadium was packed

The walls of the hospital celebrate Pelé's career



to capacity for a game featuring Santos and Vasco da Gama. Pelé entered the game having already scored 999 goals in his career. 'O Milesimo' – The Thousandth – was eagerly anticipated. When Santos was awarded a penalty and it became clear that Pelé was going to take it, Brazilian television stations interrupted their transmissions and immediately took a live-feed from Maracanã Stadium.

On cue, as the ball hit the back of the net, firecrackers exploded around the stadium and a spontaneous fiesta, as only Brazilians know how to do, erupted across the nation.

Decades later Pelé recalled:

"I ran straight to the back of the net and picked up the ball and kissed it. The stadium was erupting with firecrackers and cheers. All of a

sudden I was surrounded by a huge crowd of journalists and reporters. They put their microphones in my face and I dedicated the goal to the children of Brazil. I said we needed to look after the 'criancinhas', the little children. Then I cried. I was put on someone's shoulders and I held the ball up high. Play stopped for twenty minutes as I did a lap of the pitch"

In 2005 Pelé's dedication of his 1000th goal to the children of Brazil reached another dimension. That year he teamed up with the biggest children's hospital in Latin America, Hospital Pequeno Príncipe (Little Prince Hospital), in the Brazilian city of Curitiba.

The Hospital was established in 1919 and its services grew and expanded with each successive decade. At first it was primarily dedicated to treating sick and injured children who were carried to its doors. Later it established itself as one of Brazil's top teaching hospitals, enabling it to grow its services to outpatient care and preventative medicine. Incredibly, the hospital today reaches over quarter of a million children per year, 70% of whom are amongst Brazil's poorest.

As the new millennium approached, the hospital recognised the need for a dedicated on-site research centre where advanced diagnostic care would be assisted by persistent medical research aimed at finding cures.

Learning of the hospital's ambitions and needs, Pelé agreed to assist. With his enthusiastic support, in



Above, left: Banks with medals
Left: A mother with her child.
Parents are encouraged to spend time with their children to aid a speedy recovery.



September 2005, the Little Prince Hospital established the Pelé Pequeno Príncipe Research Institute. “It is,” Pelé declared at its opening, “the accomplishment of a dream that started in 1969”.

With Pelé’s name and prestige, the research institute is set to grow and has the ambition of becoming one of the world’s leading research centres in combating children’s diseases. The research institute, however, must find an annual income of £1 million.

The partnership between the Little Prince Hospital and Pelé was given a major lift in 2007 with the assistance of the Brazilian Mint. Using pioneering laser technology they devised and launched a campaign called ‘Gols pela Vida’ – Goals for Life. Their aim is to commemorate each of the 1283 goals scored by Pelé in his career with a gold silver and bronze medal, and in doing so, help create a financial life-line for the Hospital’s work of bringing health, healing and hope to the thousands of Brazilian children it serves daily.

The campaign is a simple but brilliant concept and despite the harsh economic times, could, in addition to helping a good cause, prove to be a worthwhile investment for owners. Quite apart from being a limited edition of 1283 sets, each coin, and set of coins, are unique in that they each carry an individual number, associated with a specific and verifiable goal scored by Pelé during his illustrious football career.



The medals can be purchased individually or as a set. Each medal costs £900 (gold); £550 (silver) and £350 (bronze). A full set costs £1650 (all prices include delivery). As to be expected, medals numbered 1, 10, 100 and 1000 are not for sale as they are for auction.

The purchaser, in addition to the medal(s) will also receive a Certificate of Authenticity which will bear his or her name, or the name of a designated person who may receive them as a gift. The certificate also carries details of the opposition Pelé scored the goal against, as well as the date of the game.

Pelé’s decision to partner with the Little Prince Hospital was explained at the launch of the research institute in 2005. “I only play in a winning team,” he declared, and cited the hospital’s technical-scientific excellence allied to its compassionate assistance to Brazil’s children.

José Álvaro Carneiro, a member of the hospital’s board, states: “In this team

there is always space for new solidarity partners. Individuals and companies can become supporters of the projects of the Little Prince Hospital, which works to guarantee to all the children in our care their primary Human Rights: life and health.”

Anyone interested in helping Pelé with his campaign to assist the Pelé Little Prince Research Institute can contact the author of this article for further details at the following address, giving their name and an address to which information can be sent:

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In recognition of that moment of magic, between Pelé and Banks in Mexico 1970, the Brazilian Mint agreed to add one more set of medals to its Goals for Life collection. It is numbered 1284 and represents Gordon Banks’ wonder save. So the great Banksy need not worry for his miracle save is doing more good today than the goal that Pelé “never scored”.

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Don Mullan is the author of the boyhood memoir ‘Gordon Banks: A Hero Who Could Fly’ (a little book company 2006). On Thursday 26 March 2009 at a dinner in Curitiba, Brazil, Mullan was presented to Pelé as the first European Ambassador of the Little Prince Hospital. “I am happy you are part of the team,” Pele told the Irish author. “As they say in football – ‘Keep the ball rolling’.”

All photos in this piece were taken by Don Mullan using the Nokia N95 Mobile Phone