

# Better than a dream

Football

AFP, Madrid

Ronaldo's elevation as the first player to win the FIFA World Player of the Year Award three times here on Tuesday brings the curtain down on a momentous 12 months for the buck-toothed Brazilian.

A year ago few thought it was possible, apart from Ronaldo himself and Brazilian coach Luis Felipe Scolari, that the striker would recover his fitness and form after three injury-stricken years and score eight goals on the road to Brazil winning the World Cup.

"The turning point came on the day I came back in the Italian league, it felt like a turning point and made me realise that my career was not over," Ronaldo said recently.

"From our first match during the qualifiers I realised that he (Ronaldo) would be our surprise player, our best goal scorer," reflected Scolari after the World Cup.

"Everyone said that here was an average player because he wasn't well but I said it wasn't true. I said he could overcome anything but they just laughed at me," added Scolari, who stood firm in the face of considerable criticism over selecting Ronaldo for the World Cup finals.

Despite worries over his injury-prone knees, that thrilling performance in Japan and Korea secured a 45-million-euro (44.1-million-dollar) move from Inter Milan to Spain's European champions Real Madrid.

With Madrid he went on to score in the Intercontinental Cup, or world club championship, earlier this year in a 2-0 victory over Paraguay's Olimpia as he returned to the scene of his World Cup triumph in the Japanese city of Yokohama.

His two goalscoring feats to win world titles for both club and country have also earned him the prestigious European Footballer of the Year award, announced by France Football weekly magazine on Monday, as well as a myriad of other awards.

Technically perfect, perfectly balanced, strong, fast and with an innate goal-scoring sense most other players could only admire, Ronaldo has terrorised opposition defences and thrilled spectators wherever he goes.

His foot movement and dribbling skills are on occasions so mesmerising they have to be seen in slow motion for the perfection of their execution to be fully appreciated.

Ronaldo grew up in modest surroundings in Rio de Janeiro and played his early football with amateur clubs Social Ramos Club and

Sao Cristovao.

By the time he was 16 he had signed his first professional contract with Cruzeiro de Belo Horizonte where he excelled, scoring almost a goal a game and ending with a total of 58 goals in 60 matches.

He was still only 17 when he went to seek his fortune in the El Dorado of world football: the European leagues.

An immediate sensation at Dutch club PSV Eindhoven, Ronaldo scored 30 goals in 33 matches and was a member of the Brazilian squad that won the World Cup in the US in 1994, although he did not get to play a single minute in the United States.

However, he was soon being described as the new Pele.

His fame spread all over the world on the wings of lavish praise and bold headlines but the teenager from Brazil was suddenly feeling the heat of the public spotlight in a way he could never have imagined just 18 months previously.

He moved to Barcelona in 1996 before switching to Inter Milan on the back of another huge transfer deal the following summer.

He had quickly become the hottest property in football, becoming the first man to win the FIFA World Player of the Year award twice, in 1996 and 1997.

Lovers of the game were licking their lips with anticipation when he arrived in France with the Brazilian squad for the World Cup in 1998.

But he failed to impress in the early rounds, and was a mere shadow of himself in the final, which Brazil lost 3-0 to France.

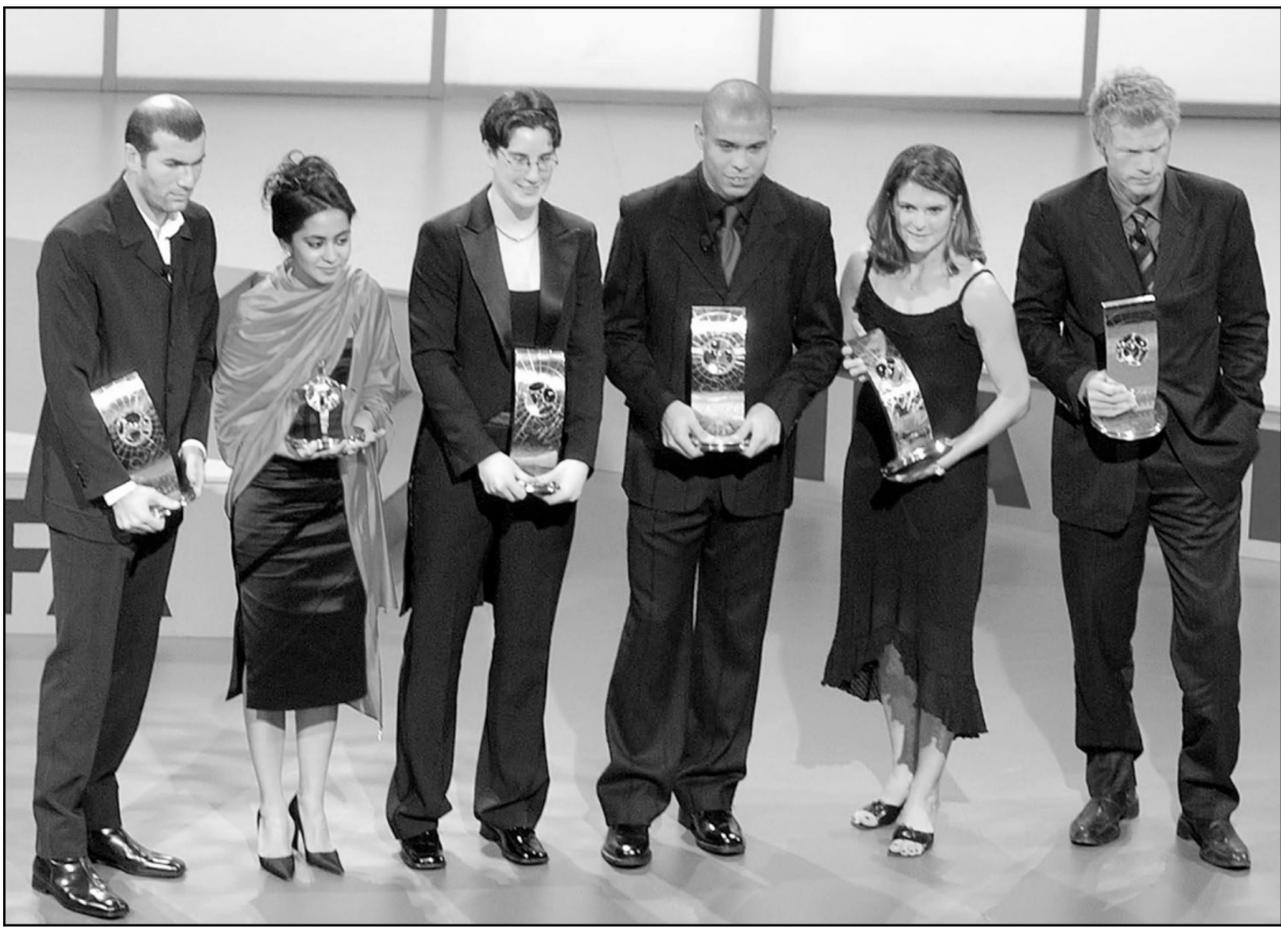
What really happened to Ronaldo before that match will perhaps never be known, but it is clear he had some sort of nervous breakdown.

In November of the same year the misery continued when he ruptured tendons in his right knee in an Italian League match, putting him out of action until 2000.

Recurring injuries combined with self-doubt cast a question mark over whether he would ever reach his old heights again but Ronaldo finally made it back to the national team in March 2002, three years after his last game for his country.

Ronaldo admitted on Tuesday that he has had to pinch himself recently to remember that his return to the top of his profession is reality not fantasy.

"I am just enjoying being here after the difficult two years I had with injuries but everything has turned out just like a dream," said the 2002 FIFA Player of the Year at the Palacio de Congressos in the Spanish capital, just a hefty kick away from Real's Santiago Bernabeu stadium.



THE BEST IN BUSINESS: (From L-R) French superstar Zinedine Zidane, Indian actress Parminder Nagra, German Birgit Prinz, Brazilian icon Ronaldo, USA's Mia Hamm and German Oliver Kahn with their trophies during the FIFA World Player Gala in Madrid on December 17.

## Nagra bends it like Beckham!

AFP, Madrid

British actress Parvinder Nagra was an unlikely winner at FIFA's World Player of the Year Gala on Tuesday, picking up an award for the film 'Bend it like Beckham.'

The star of the comedy about a teenaged girl of Indian origin who gets into trouble with her family for playing football rubbed shoulders with the likes of Ronaldo and Zinedine Zidane on a night when she received the 2002 presidential award from FIFA boss Sepp Blatter.

"I'm very nervous," she said on receiving the award. "It's really unusual to be at this event."

"I'm grateful that two professions that are about realising dreams have met."

### FIFA's BEST

The complete list of awards presented at the 2002 FIFA World Footballer of the Year Gala here on Tuesday:

**2002 FIFA World Player of the Year**

**1st** - Ronaldo (Real Madrid/Bra)

**2nd** - Oliver Kahn (Bayern Munich/Ger)

**3rd** - Zinedine Zidane (Real Madrid/Fra)

**2002 FIFA Women's World Player of the Year**

**1st** - Mia Hamm (Washington Freedom/USA)

**2nd** - Birgit Prinz (Carolina Courage/Ger)

**3rd** - Sun Wen (Atlanta Beat/Chn)

**FIFA Presidential award**

Permitter Nagra (for the film 'Bend it like Beckham')

**FIFA Centennial Trophy** - Real Madrid

**FIFA Fair Play Trophy** - South Korea and Japan

**FIFA Team of the Year - Brazil**

**FIFA Mover of the Year - Senegal**

**2002 World Cup Golden Ball (best player)** - Oliver Kahn (Bayern Munich/Ger)

**2002 World Cup Silver Ball** - Ronaldo (Real Madrid/Bra)

**2002 World Cup Bronze Ball** - Hong Myung-Bo (Pohang Steelers/Kor)

**2002 World Cup Golden Shoe (top scorer)** - Ronaldo (Real Madrid/Bra)

**2002 World Cup Silver Shoe** - Rivaldo (Milan/Bra) and Miroslav Klose (Kaiserslauten/Ger)

**2002 World Cup Best Goalkeeper (Lev Yashin award)** - Oliver Kahn (Bayern Munich/Ger)

**2002 World Cup Fair Play Award** - Belgium

**2002 World Cup Most Entertaining Team** - South Korea

### PAST WINNERS

**Brazil's Real Madrid striker Ronaldo won the 2002 FIFA Player of the Year award here on Tuesday. Previous winners are listed below:**

- 2001: Luis Figo (Por) Real Madrid
- 2000: Zinedine Zidane (Fra) Juventus
- 1999: Rivaldo (Bra) Barcelona
- 1998: Zinedine Zidane (Fra) Juventus
- 1997: Ronaldo (Bra) Inter Milan
- 1996: Ronaldo (Bra) Barcelona
- 1995: George Weah (Lbr) AC Milan
- 1994: Romario (Bra) Barcelona
- 1993: Roberto Baggio (Ita) Juventus
- 1992: Marco van Basten (Ned) AC Milan
- 1991: Lothar Matthaus (Ger) Bayern Munich

## Mama Mia!

Football

AFP, Madrid

Last year ended on a high note for American midfielder Mia Hamm as she won the inaugural FIFA Women's World Player of the Year award but 2002 started in the worst possible way as a knee injury meant she hardly kicked a ball for the first six months of the year.

However, on Tuesday she won her race against time by retaining her title as the best female player in the world, after only playing her first game for her club Washington Freedom in June.

"I'm just grateful and honoured to be here. This is a great step forward for women's football and this recognition will help it develop as a fully-fledged discipline," said the effervescent Hamm on Tuesday.

Hamm has endeared herself to many football fans around the world because of her modesty and she is well aware that women's football is

still considered by many to be the inferior little sister to the men's game.

"I'm a football player. I've not freed any slaves or changed the world. I just play football and enjoy my success," she commented recently.

She has had a lot of success to enjoy.

The Alabama-born player won 25 first place votes from the 77 national team coaches who voted and a total of 161 points. She comfortably fended off the opposition from Germany's second-placed Birgit Prinz while China's Sun Wen came a distant third.

Since making her debut for the US national team at the tender age of 15, she has notched up more than 220 caps and is still going strong regardless of her recent injury problems.

She has also scored 136 goals despite being more of a midfielder than an out-and-out striker, although she did get the winning strike in the CONCACAF Gold Cup

against Canada to ensure that the USA will be present at the Women's World Cup in China next year.

But Hamm is one of those rare players who can play anywhere, even in goal.

In an international against Denmark in 1995, she pulled on the gloves after the regular American goalie had been given her marching orders and all three substitutes had been used.

At the pre-Gala press conference, Hamm was asked whether she would like to be considered as the female Ronaldo, who won the men's award, or the female (Zinedine) Zidane.

In typically diplomatic fashion, Hamm glanced at the football legends alongside her but refused to choose between them.

"However, I have longer hair than both of them so I have that going for me," she quipped with an eye on the balding pate of the Frenchman and the shaven scalp of his Brazilian colleague at Real Madrid.

## Inspired by Ronaldo

AFP, Paris

France's World Cup-winning striker David Trezeguet, back from the worst injury of his career, said it was the example of award-winning yet injury-plagued Ronaldo which gave him hope.

The 25-year-old Juventus striker, a World Cup winner in 1998 and who scored the golden goal which earned France the 2000 European championship, saw his career nosedive after injuring his right knee in a pre-season match on July 31.

After some poor attempts at a return, he proved he was back to full fitness after scoring in Juventus' 4-0 thrashing of Champions League surprise packages Basel in the Champions League last Wednesday.

Trezeguet told Wednesday's 'Equipe' newspaper: "Ronaldo was an example to me. I thought about his ruptured tendon and his two operations but despite everything he came back. I told myself I can get through this too."

In November 1998, Ronaldo ruptured the tendon in his right knee, putting him out of action until 2000.

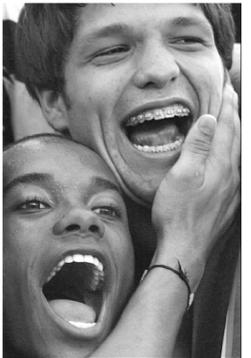
Recurring injuries combined with self-doubt cast a question mark over whether he would ever reach his old heights again but Ronaldo finally made it back to the national team in March 2002, three years after his last game for his country.

He scored both goals in the 2002 World Cup final against Germany and then found the net in Real Madrid's 2-0 victory in the Intercontinental Cup, or world club championship, over Paraguay's Olimpia earlier this month to earn his awards.

Trezeguet admitted he thought Real Madrid defender Roberto Carlos had won the European honour but was delighted that Ronaldo eventually claimed it.

Trezeguet added: "After his injury problems, Ronaldo deserved more than the Golden Ball (European Footballer of the Year trophy). All you can say is 'Well done.'"

## Hands off Diego, Robinho



ROBINHO (L) AND DIEGO

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian champions Santos' brilliant teenagers Diego and Robinho, rated as the club's hottest properties, are not for sale, the club said.

"Robinho and Diego have just completed the first years of five-year contracts," club spokesman Aldo Neto told Reuters. "You can say they are not for sale."

Eighteen-year-old Robinho agreed that it was too early for a move abroad. "I'm very young to leave Brazil. I don't think I'm ready for it," he told Globo television.

Brazilian media are predicting that the club will have a hard time fending off the multi-million dollar offers expected to arrive from European clubs, especially after Robinho's display on Sunday in the final of the Brazilian championship.

Robinho, who taunts and torments defenders with his precocious dribbling, won and converted a penalty, then set up two more goals as Santos beat Corinthians 3-2 to complete a 5-2 aggregate win.

His performance was given rave reviews and had commentators debating whether he bore more resemblance to Pele or Garrincha.

Seventeen-year-old Diego, who wears the Santos number ten shirt which once belonged to Pele, also had an outstanding championship despite hobbling off injured in the first minute of Sunday's final.

Neto said that Real Madrid made a \$2 million offer for Diego two years ago, when he was still in the club's youth divisions, but Santos turned it down. He could not put a figure on how much Diego or Robinho might be worth now.

"I don't know and, in any case, I'm not authorised to say," he said.

## RONALDO IN BRIEF

AFP, Madrid

Factfile of 2002 FIFA World Player of the Year Ronaldo:

- Position:** Centre-forward
- Shirt number:** 9 (Brazil), 11 (Real Madrid)
- Clubs:** Cruzeiro (Brazil/1993-94), PSV Eindhoven (Holland/1994-96), Barcelona (Spain/1996-97), Inter Milan (Italy/1997-August 2002), Real Madrid (Spain/since August 2002)
- International appearances:** 66
- International goals:** 47
- International debut:** 23/03/1994, Brazil-Argentina (2-0)
- Last international appearance:** 20/11/2002, South Korea - Brazil (2-3)
- First international goal:** 03/05/1994, Brazil-Iceland (3-0)
- Last international goal:** 20/11/2002, South Korea - Brazil (2-3), 2 goals

### WORLD CUP

Appearances: 3 (1994, 1998, 2002), 14 matches, 12 goals  
Winner (1994 although did not play in any match, 2002)  
Finalist (1998)  
Top scorer (2002, 8 goals in 7 games)

### COPA AMERICA

(South American championship for nations)  
Winner (1997, 1999)

### INTERCONTINENTAL CUP

(often known as world club championship)  
Winner with Real Madrid (2002)

### EUROPEAN CUP WINNERS' CUP

Winner with Barcelona (1997)

### UEFA CUP

Winner with Inter Milan (1998)

### DUTCH CUP

Winner with PSV Eindhoven (1996)

### SPANISH CUP

Winner with Barcelona (1997)

### OTHER HONOURS

European Footballer of the Year (Ballon d'Or) (1997, 2002)  
FIFA World Player of the Year (1996, 1997)  
BBC Overseas Sports Personality of the Year (2002)

### FASCINATING FACTS:

\* Born on September 22, 1976. Ronaldo's full name is Ronaldo Luiz Nazario da Lima.

\* Ronaldo scored two goals on his debut for Real Madrid, a 5-2 victory over Alaves on October 6, 2002.

\* Ronaldo's wife Milena Domingues is also a professional women's footballer, currently on loan to Spanish club Rayo Vallecano from Italian side Fiammamonza.

\* He got married on December 24, 1999, and his wife gave birth to their son Ronald Domingues Nazario da Lima on April 6, 2000. So far it is the couple's only child.

\* He became his family's main breadwinner early in life and at the age of 13, he was able to afford to buy a flat for his father and a house for his mother, who separated when he was young.

\* Ronaldo has been a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador since February 2000.

## Arena up to 2006

AP, New York

Now comes the hardest part for Bruce Arena: showing that the Americans' quarterfinal appearance at this year's World Cup wasn't a fluke.

Arena was given a new four-year contract Tuesday as coach of the U.S. soccer team, a deal that takes him through the 2006 World Cup in Germany.

In the six months since the end of this year's tournament, Arena thought about returning to a club team, but decided against it after consulting with his family.

"There's only going to be one goal the next four years, to qualify for Germany," Arena said during a telephone conference. "I sure learned a lot. I'm hopeful these experiences will benefit our team as we move forward. I'm much more prepared this time around."

Arena made \$605,630 in the year ending Aug. 31, 2001, according to the last tax filing made by the U.S. Soccer Federation. Neither side would divulge his salary under the new contract.

He is among just a few coaches to retain their jobs following the tournament, along with Sven Goran Eriksson (England), Rudi Voeller (Germany), Giovanni Trapattoni (Italy), Senol Gunes (Turkey) and Marcelo Bielsa (Argentina).

Arena, 51, has led the U.S. team to a 35-19-12 record, winning this year's North and Central American and Caribbean championship and helping the U.S. team post its best World Cup finish since the first tournament in 1930.

## Worthington Cup

# Forlan the hero again

Football

AFP, Manchester

Diego Forlan's growing knack of snatching crucial goals secured Manchester United's place the last four of the League (Worthington) Cup at Chelsea's expense here on Wednesday.

The little Uruguayan, whose two goals against Liverpool earlier this month kickstarted United's current run, secured his club's eighth win in a row with a cool finish ten minutes

from the end of a clash between the two form sides of English football.

Chelsea had enjoyed the better chances, particularly in an end-to-end opening period of a match they will feel unfortunate not to have at least forced into extra-time.

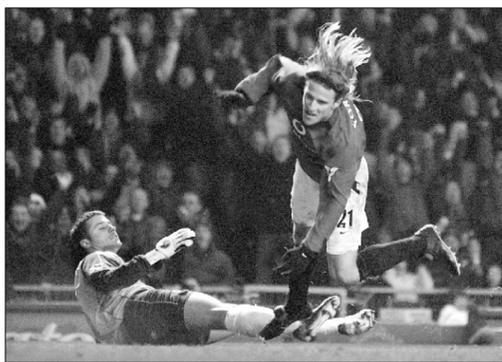
But ironically, it was Gianfranco Zola, the architect of most of their most creative work, who was to prove the instigator of their downfall when he was caught in possession by Gary Neville.

The England fullback quickly fed David Beckham on the right touchline and his first-time pass across the

edge of the penalty area gave Forlan the chance to burst into the box and fire a shot through the legs of Carlo Cudicini.

### OTHER RESULTS

**English League Cup results on Tuesday:**  
**Quarter-finals:**  
Manchester United 1 (Forlan 80)  
Chelsea 0  
Sheffield United 3 (Asaba 35, Peschisolido 86, 88)  
Crystal Palace 1 (Page 82-og)  
Wigan 0 Blackburn 2 (Cole 16, 80)



Diego Forlan (R) of Manchester United taking a fall after sneaking the ball past Chelsea goalkeeper Carlo Cudicini to score during the Worthington Cup clash at Old Trafford on December 17.