

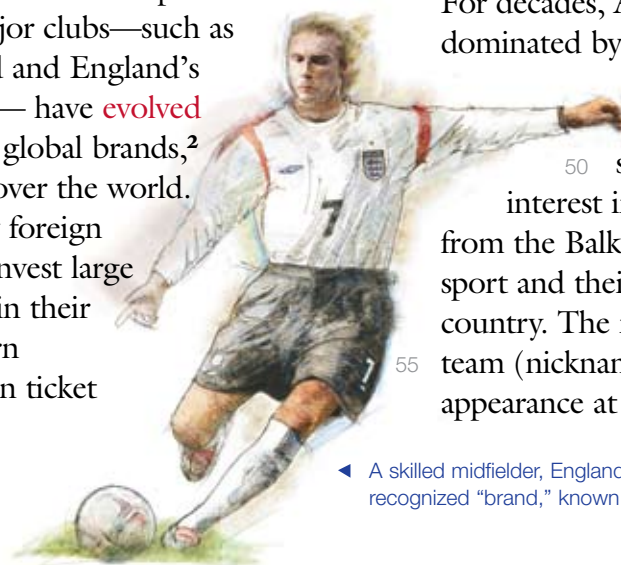
# Planet Football

▲ Widely considered the greatest soccer player of all time, Brazilian star Pelé is the only person to have won three World Cup tournaments as a player.

- 1 Throughout history, people have played some **version** of a kicking game. What the world now calls football, or soccer in the U.S., began as far back as 2500 B.C. with the Chinese game of tsu chu. The sport we're familiar with today originated in Britain; by the 1840s, England's Football Association<sup>1</sup> had established a set of rules, and the modern game was born. Today more than 120 million regular players from all over the globe participate in the game annually, truly making soccer the world's sport.

## Europe: Home of the Rich and Famous

- 15 Europe has the largest number of soccer players on Earth and is also home to the world's richest and best-known professional teams. Europe's major clubs—such as Spain's Real Madrid and England's Manchester United— have **evolved** from local teams to global brands,<sup>2</sup> with supporters all over the world. Some are owned by foreign businessmen, who invest large amounts of money in their clubs, hoping to earn significant returns on ticket sales, television and advertising deals.



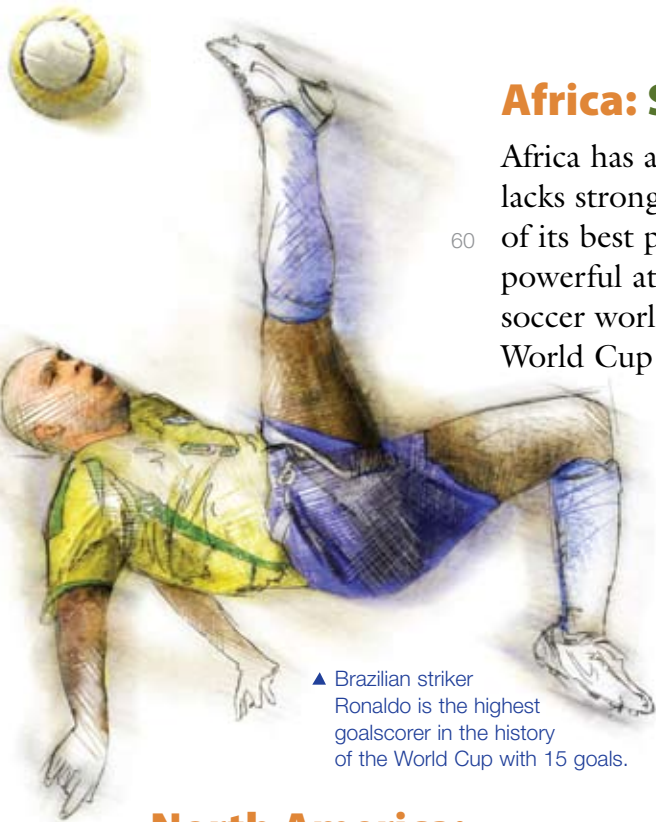
◀ A skilled midfielder, England's David Beckham is also a globally recognized "brand," known for his celebrity lifestyle.

## Asia: A Growing Passion

- 30 Over the past two **decades**, an **intense** soccer competition among Japan, China, and South Korea has helped to increase **enthusiasm** for the sport across Asia. In China, for example, recent **data** suggest that soccer is now more popular than traditional Chinese favorites such as table tennis and basketball. This enthusiasm has also helped to bridge differences and bring people together. The 2002 World Cup, co-hosted by South Korea and Japan, was a victory for cooperation and friendship, and in the Middle East, youth soccer teams have also helped to promote peace.

## Australia and Oceania: Soccer Down Under

- 45 For decades, Australian sports have been dominated by cricket, rugby, and Australian Rules football. Today this region still has the fewest number of soccer players and teams. But interest in soccer is growing, as immigrants<sup>3</sup> from the Balkans<sup>4</sup> and other countries bring the sport and their enthusiasm for it to their new country. The result: in 2006, Australia's national team (nicknamed the "Socceroos") made its first appearance at the World Cup Finals in 32 years.



▲ Brazilian striker Ronaldo is the highest goalscorer in the history of the World Cup with 15 goals.

## Africa: Soccer's New Frontier

Africa has a number of talented players; however, the continent lacks strong domestic teams and faces the **prospect** of losing many of its best players to the European clubs. Several national teams have powerful athletes, though, and Africa's more prominent<sup>5</sup> role in the soccer world was established in 2004 when FIFA<sup>6</sup> **awarded** the 2010 World Cup tournament to South Africa.

## South America: Unbeatable Talent

South America produces some of the most exciting soccer on Earth, and many of the most admired players. Brazil has won the most World Cup finals ever and is the only team to have participated in every World Cup to date. Youth soccer is also an **enormous** business in South America (third after Europe and North America), but as with Africa and Asia, many of the best players join the wealthy European teams for the chance to earn big money and international recognition.

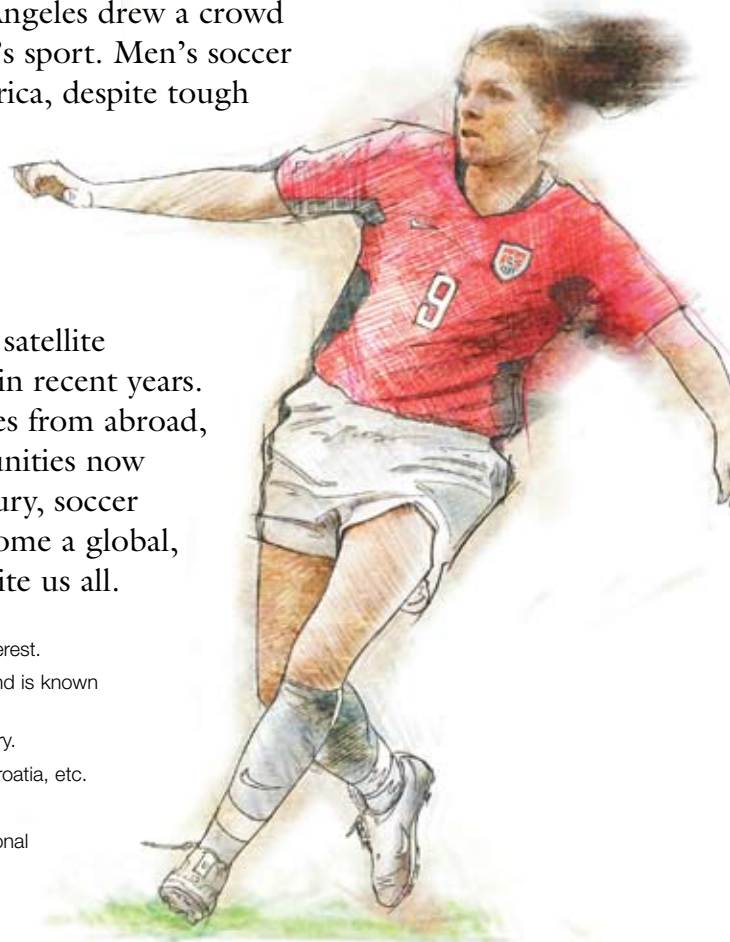
▼ U.S. star Mia Hamm scored more goals for her country than any other player in history.

## North America: A Sport for Everyone

In North America, almost 28 percent of the professional players are women—the largest number in the world. The women's World Cup finals are a hugely popular event; one match held in Los Angeles drew a crowd of over 90,000, one of the largest ever for a women's sport. Men's soccer is also gaining in popularity throughout North America, despite tough competition from other popular team sports, such as baseball, American football, and (especially in Canada) ice hockey.

## Soccer: A Global Force

Thanks to its worldwide popularity and the reach of satellite television, soccer has experienced a major evolution in recent years. Today's major teams import both players and coaches from abroad, and clubs once supported only by their local communities now have fans all over the world. In the last quarter century, soccer has succeeded in cutting across national lines to become a global, interconnected sport—one that has the power to unite us all.



<sup>1</sup> An **association** is an official group of people who have the same job, aim, or interest.

<sup>2</sup> A **brand** usually refers to a type of product that is made by a certain company and is known by many people.

<sup>3</sup> An **immigrant** is a person who has come to live in a country from another country.

<sup>4</sup> The **Balkans** is a region in southeastern Europe that includes Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Someone or something that is **prominent** is important and well-known.

<sup>6</sup> **FIFA** is the *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* (French for International Federation of Association Football). It is the international governing organization of professional soccer.