

LEVELED BOOK • P



Written by Dave Ord

World Cup Soccer



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U.S. player Landon Donovan tries for a goal against Algeria during the 2010 World Cup.

The People's Game

Some people call soccer “the people’s game” because soccer is the world’s most popular sport. About three hundred million people play soccer (also known as “football” in many countries) all around the world. Almost a billion people watched the 2006 World Cup **championship** on television. That means one out of every seven people on Earth was watching!

Matches Around the World

The World Cup is the most important event in soccer, maybe even in all sports. Every four years, the planet's best players come together to compete in the World Cup. It takes one month and sixty-four games to decide the winning team. Fans from all over the world come to watch their teams play. The fans wear crazy hats, paint their faces, bring drums to bang, and cheer on the players.



Fans of the Netherlands team show their support.

Africa Makes History

Although soccer is popular all over the world, a World Cup **tournament** was never held on the continent of Africa until 2010. That's why it was big news when South Africa was chosen to host the nineteenth World Cup. Over two hundred countries competed for the chance to send teams to the tournament. Johannesburg, the largest city in the country, was chosen to host the final match of the 2010 World Cup.



The Soccer City stadium in Johannesburg, South Africa

Do You Know?

The first World Cup was held in 1930 in Uruguay. Only thirteen teams played in that tournament. It took teams from Europe almost three weeks to reach Uruguay by ship. There were seventeen games, with Uruguay defeating Argentina 4-2 in the final.



The captains of the Italian and Hungarian teams shake hands before the 1938 finals match in Paris, France.



Brazil's Lucio kicks the ball over his head.

Great Teams

The world's most successful team is Brazil. The Brazilian team that beat Italy 4-1 in the 1970 final is often called "the greatest team ever" by soccer fans. Brazilians are known for their "banana kicks," which curve like the bend in a banana and sail into the goal. Brazil is also known for having some of soccer's most lively and colorful fans.

Italy's team is second on the list of most World Cup wins. In the 2006 final, Italy defeated France 5-3 in a penalty shootout. A penalty shootout happens if a game is tied after overtime. Five players from each team take turns kicking the ball from a spot twelve yards from the goal line. Only the **goalkeeper**, or "goalie," stands between them and the goal. The team that makes the most penalty goals is the winner.



Italy's Daniele De Rossi scores a goal during the penalty shootout in the first 2006 final.



Colombian defender Andrés Escobar lies on the ground after kicking the ball past his own goalkeeper by mistake.

The United States and the World Cup

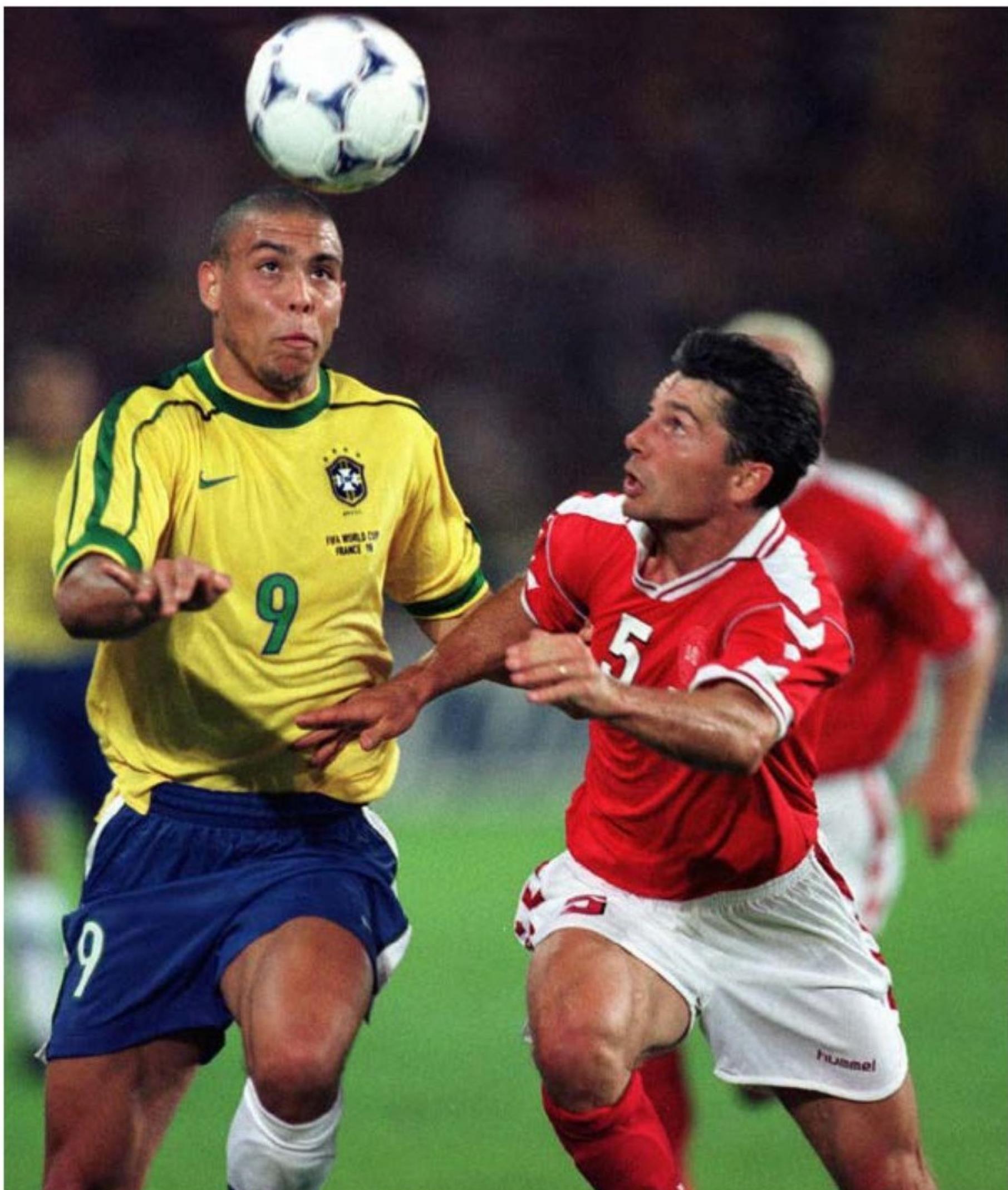
While the United States has never won a World Cup, it has played some exciting games. The U.S. team had one of the greatest **upsets** ever when it beat England 1-0 in Brazil in 1950. When people heard the score, many thought it was a joke and did not believe it. In another famous game, the United States defeated Colombia in 1994 when a Colombian player **accidentally** knocked the ball into his own goal.

Great Players

Three of the biggest soccer **legends** are Pele (PAY-lay), Ronaldo, and Zinedine Zidane (zee-nuh-DEEN zih-DAHN). Most people consider Pele to be the greatest soccer player of all time. This Brazilian is the only man to have played on three winning World Cup teams. Pele scored twelve World Cup goals during his career.



Brazil soccer legend Pele stands next to a photograph of himself doing his famous "bicycle kick."



Ronaldo heads the ball during a quarter-final match against Denmark in the 1998 World Cup.

The World Cup's greatest goal scorer is another Brazilian, named Ronaldo. He scored fifteen goals during his World Cup career. He was the leading scorer in the 2002 World Cup with eight goals. That year, he helped Brazil win the title.

Zinedine Zidane, also known as “Zizou” (ZEE-zoo), helped France win the 1998 title. He scored two goals to help France beat Brazil 3-0. He also scored for France in the 2006 final. Many people think of him as one of the sport’s greatest players.



France's Zinedine Zidane celebrates a goal against Portugal in a 2006 semi-final match.



Zinedine Zidane scores a penalty kick against Italy in the 2006 World Cup final.

What's Your Number?

There are eleven players on a soccer team, and you can often tell what a player's job is by looking at his **uniform** number. The player who wears number 10 is often the player who scores and helps others to score. Pele and Zidane both wore number 10. Watch for that number whenever you're at a game. The goalkeeper often wears number 1.



Chile fans support their team as it attempts to earn a spot in the 2010 World Cup.

Conclusion

It's easy to see why the World Cup is so successful. At each World Cup, fans from many nations visit the host country. They sing, chant, and cheer their teams at the stadium. Each host country adds new traditions and new memories to one of the world's greatest sporting events.

Glossary

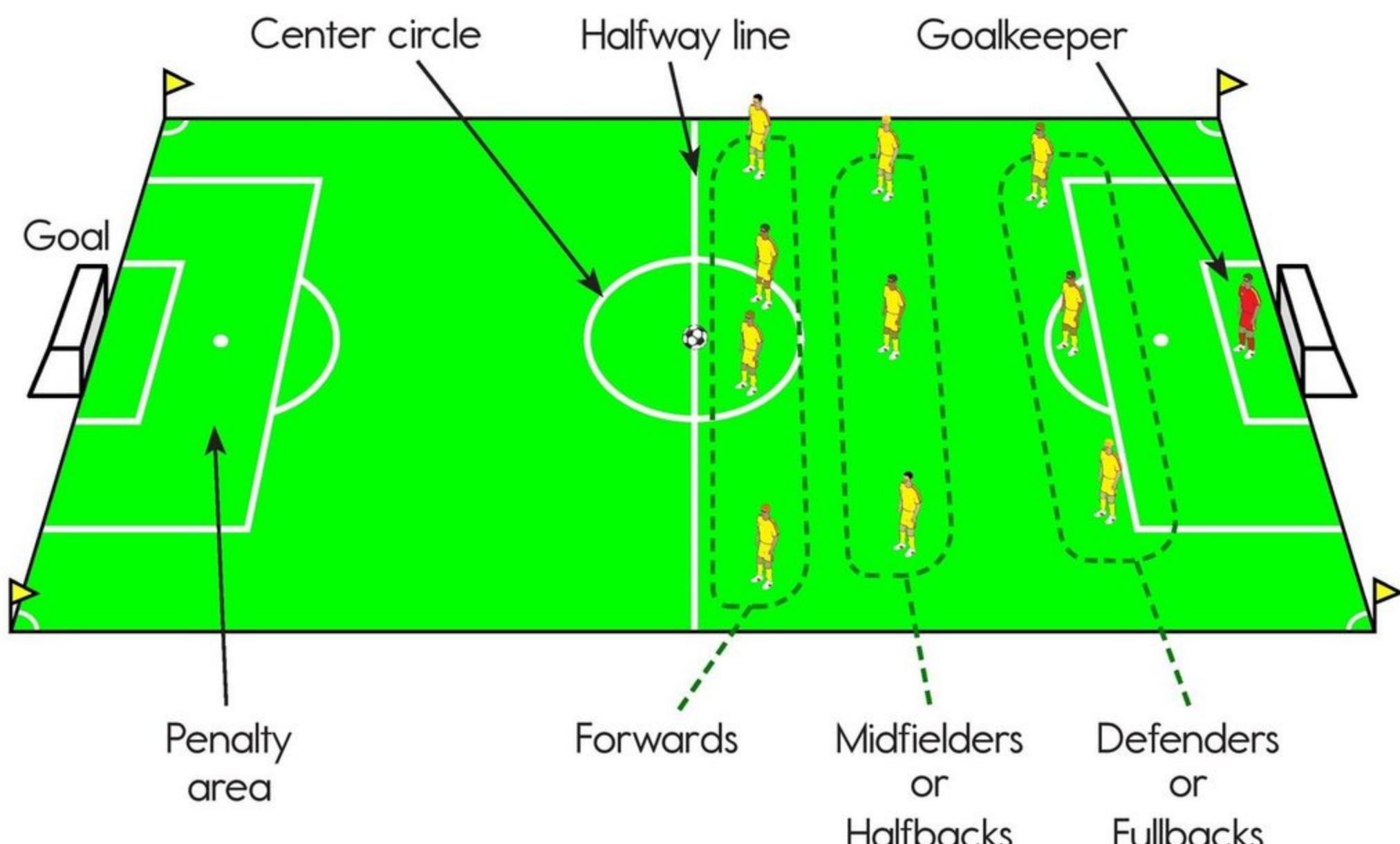
accidentally (<i>adv.</i>)	by mistake; without meaning to (p. 10)
championship (<i>n.</i>)	a contest to decide a winner, or champion (p. 4)
goalkeeper (<i>n.</i>)	a player whose job is to keep the ball from entering the scoring zone, or goal (p. 9)
legends (<i>n.</i>)	famous people who are respected for their particular talents (p. 11)
lively (<i>adj.</i>)	active and energetic (p. 8)
tournament (<i>n.</i>)	a series of games or competitions to determine a final champion (p. 6)
uniform (<i>n.</i>)	matching clothing worn by members of a team (p. 14)
upsets (<i>n.</i>)	unexpected defeats (p. 10)

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Front cover: Robin van Persie of the Netherlands heads the ball in the 2010 World Cup.

Back cover: Giants Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey, was the site of World Cup matches in 1994.



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