

Athletes to Watch at the Beijing Olympics: Marta

Marta is a Brazilian soccer player who is one of the most exciting athletes on the planet today. She is known in the world football community as a female version of Pele (widely regarded as the greatest football player of all time), and has led her Brazilian compatriots to success already. She will be gunning for the gold in the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and you won't want to miss it.

Marta, whose full name is Marta Vieira da Dilva, was born in February of 1986. At only 1.52 meters tall, she is often one of the smaller players on the field, but she is never intimidated by larger players, and uses her quickness and speed to her advantage. She's also known as one of the most creative football players in the world, male or female. She is especially dangerous to play against, because other teams never know exactly what she is going to do. This, of course, also makes her exhilarating to watch.

She has led the Brazilian national team to an Olympic silver medal at the 2004 Sydney Olympics, as well as a second place finish in the 2007 Women's World Cup, where she was the tournament's top scorer and most outstanding player. She also helped her home country defeat the United States team in the Pan American Games in 2007. Afterwards, Pele himself called to congratulate her, and she was honored by having the imprint of her feet cast in cement outside of the stadium. No other woman has received the honor, which is usually reserved for male stars.

Amazingly, Marta displayed maturity at a very young age, leading Brazil to a gold medal at the Pan-American Games in Santo Domingo in 2003, at only 17 years old. Almost immediately after, she began playing professional football in Sweden for one of Europe's top clubs (Umeå). She was also the UEFA Women's Cup leading scorer a year later, as she scored 22 goals.

Marta has led her Swedish club team, Umeå, to new heights as well. In 2004, she took Umeå to their first Swedish Premier League championship. Just two years later, she led Umeå to yet another league championship, cementing her reputation as a winner who would help teammates elevate their game to meet any goals.

Already, at age 22, Marta has achieved much individual success to go along with the success she has led Brazil to. In 2005, she was named runner up for the prestigious FIFA World Player of the Year award, and she would go on to win the award in 2006, then again in 2007. Marta's play has inspired awestruck responses among fellow players, male and female, as well as longtime football experts and fans alike.

It's not just the results, but the method in which Marta achieves her greatness

that makes her special and revered by football enthusiasts everywhere. Marta frequently pulls off moves that would seem impossible to others. In fact, many of the maneuvers that Marta performs in games are the type that other competitors would not even think to try, let alone be able to do themselves.

Marta has set the stage for a return to the Olympics this year in Beijing, as she was instrumental in helping Brazil defeat Ghana 5-1 to claim a position in the Olympic Games. Brazil is definitely one of the favorites to take home the gold medal in Beijing, and with Marta leading the way, it wouldn't be smart to bet against them.

When the Summer Olympics begin this year in Beijing, make sure to keep an eye on Marta and the Brazilian women's national football team. A talent like Marta only comes along once in a great while, and with a stage like the 2008 Beijing Olympics for her to perform on, it's impossible to predict how great of a performance she will come up with.

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