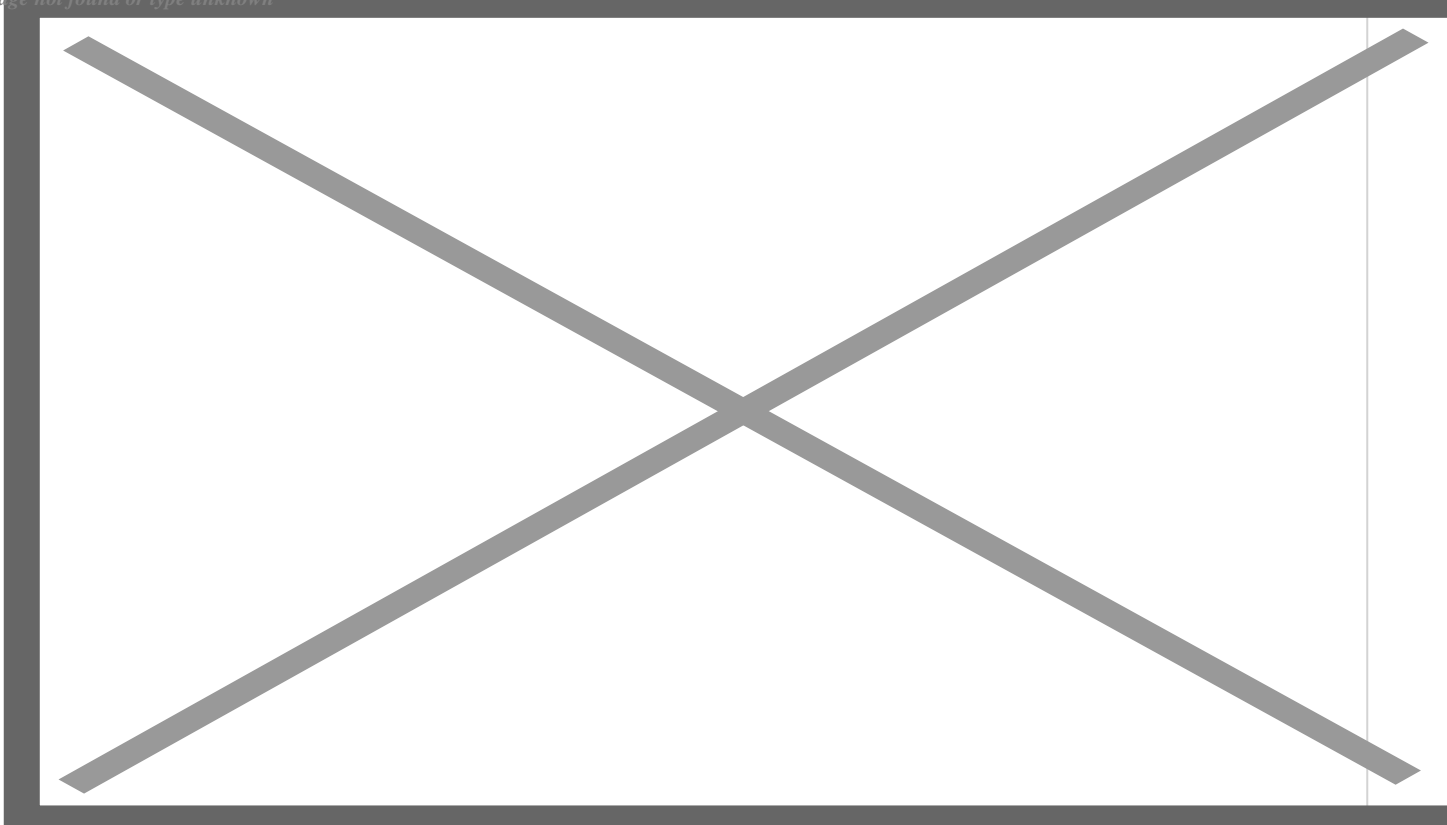


World pays tribute to Brazilian football/soccer star Pele

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Pele is the only football player to win three World Cups????

Havana, December 30 (RHC)-- Politicians, athletes, clubs and commentators have joined in the outpouring of tributes for the late Brazilian football legend Pele, lauding his contributions and stressing that his memory will live on as long as the game is played.

Pele, the only three-time World Cup winner in history, died on Thursday at age 82 after a long struggle with cancer.

Brazil's President-elect Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said he had a privilege many younger Brazilians did not get to experience: watching Pele play live. "Few Brazilians took the name of our country as far as he did... There has never been a number 10 like him. Thank you, Pele," Lula wrote in a social media post,

referencing Pele's jersey number.

Former United States President Barack Obama eulogised Pele as well, calling him one of the greatest to ever play the beautiful game. "As one of the most recognizable athletes in the world, he understood the power of sports to bring people together. Our thoughts are with his family and everyone who loved and admired him," Obama said in a tweet.

Pele was known as "The King", scoring hundreds of goals over his star-studded career. His trademark tricks and quicksilver speed helped revolutionise the game and increase the popularity of football/soccer globally.

In 2000, the world's football governing body, FIFA, named him player of the century jointly with Argentina's Diego Maradona, who died in 2020. "Forever a legend. Rest in peace, Pele," the Italian club AS Roma wrote on Twitter, while Manchester United expressed gratitude to the Brazilian footballer for bringing joy to fans across the world.

The London-based Chelsea FC on Thursday called Pele a "master of the beautiful game", and England defender Harry Maguire said Pele was a "role model on and off the pitch."

Pele had served since 1994 as "champion for sport" for the United Nations cultural organisation, UNESCO, helping promote physical education across the world.

On Thursday, UNESCO said Pele "worked relentlessly to promote sport as a tool for peace", adding that he will be greatly missed. "We are deeply saddened by the passing of Pelé. We extend our condolences to the Brazilian people and the football family," the organisation said in a tweet.

Pele's playing career spanned more than 20 years, ending with the now-dissolved New York Cosmos in 1977. But even for generations born long after he hung up his boots, Pele remained synonymous with football.

"The king of football has left us but his legacy will never be forgotten," said French football star Kylian Mbappe who, in 2018, became the first teenager to score in a World Cup final since Pele.

Manchester City forward Erling Haaland summed up Pele's influence on football by saying: "Everything you see any player doing, Pele did it first."

U.S. Congressman Adriano Espaillat also said Pele was a "transformative figure in 20th-century sports" with the level of global celebrity he achieved. "May his legacy continue to inspire generations and his talent be remembered forever. Rest in power," Espaillat said in a social media post.

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