

Lula pays tribute to Pelé in crowded wake



President Lula pays tribute to Pelé. Photo: JIT.

Havana, January 3 (RHC)-- More than 150,000 people, including President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, paid their respects to former Brazilian soccer player Edson Arantes do Nascimento (Pele) in the coastal city of Santos, passing by the open casket at the Vila Belmiro Stadium.

The 24-hour funeral in memory of Pelé, who died last week at the age of 82 after a year-long battle with colon cancer, began at 1 p.m. Monday and ended Tuesday morning.

As reported by Santos Futebol Clube, people formed long lines in front of the stadium to pay tribute to Pelé, who lived much of his life in that city, and waited up to two hours to pay their respects even during the night.

"Long live the king," read a giant banner inside the stadium. Nicknamed the King of Soccer, Pelé played for Santos from 1956 to 1974 and scored more than 1,000 goals.

Newly inaugurated President Lula arrived Tuesday morning and stood next to Pele's coffin, draped with a Brazilian flag, in the center of the soccer field.

"Few Brazilians carried the name of our country as far as he did," Lula said last week after Pele's death.

Celebrities and authorities also paid their respects. FIFA president Gianni Infantino was among the first to attend the memorial on Monday and said he would ask the world's soccer associations to name a stadium after Pele.

A procession carrying Pele's coffin wound through the streets of Santos, passing through the neighborhood where his 100-year-old mother lives and ending at the Necropolis Ecumenical Memorial Cemetery, the world's tallest vertical cemetery, where the soccer star will be laid to rest.

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