

## CHAPTER 1

# GEOFF HURST, 1966 WORLD CUP

### *Learning from the bench*

When Geoff Hurst joined his England teammates for their first practice before the 1966 World Cup, he could never have guessed what lay ahead in the few weeks that followed. His life was about to change in a major way.

He was still one of the newer faces in the squad, having made his debut earlier that year after good form for West Ham. England had Jimmy Greaves and Roger Hunt as their first-choice strikers, so Geoff would be the supersub. He was fine with that. It was just a thrill to be there, sharing the dressing room with legends like Bobby Charlton and Bobby Moore.



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As the 1966 hosts, England would get the advantage of loud home crowds, and Geoff could see the excitement on his friends' faces whenever they talked about the tournament.

'It doesn't get much better than this!' he told them. 'I'm afraid to wake up and find out it's all a dream!'

Everyone seemed to be counting down the days until the action began, and World Cup fever was sweeping across the country.

'This is our year!' one of his neighbours told him every morning.

Geoff smiled and waved. Would he have to move if England were eliminated early?!

Thankfully, they sailed through the group stage with two wins and a draw, and the buzz around the country became deafening. The England team seemed like real contenders, and stadiums were sold out in no time while fans were scrambling to get their hands on tickets.

Geoff tried to make the most of the experience and learn more about international football. That meant he was often glued to the action from his view on the



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bench. In the match against France, he was so focused on watching the game that he forgot he wasn't just there as a fan. Luckily, one of the other subs nudged him in the ribs and reminded him to go for a warm-up jog on the touchline.

But things could change so fast in the unpredictable football world. By the time England walked out for their next game, Geoff wasn't on the bench with the substitutes anymore. He was on the pitch!

A chance to shine.

Alf Ramsey, the England manager, always reminded Geoff to stay ready – and those words looked even wiser when Jimmy Greaves was ruled out of the quarter-final against Argentina with a leg injury.

'That means you're starting up front,' Coach Ramsey explained, giving Geoff a pat on the back. 'You wouldn't be here if we didn't believe in you, so get out there and score some goals.'

Geoff's head was spinning so fast that he could barely put together a sentence to reply. But his big grin said it all. It wouldn't be an easy task to replace Greaves, but what an opportunity!





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The two players' West Ham connection made all the difference. Geoff had seen Martin whip in hundreds of crosses – in training and in matches – and together they had unlocked the Argentina defence.

That goal was enough to send England through, and Geoff soaked up the congratulations from his teammates in the dressing room.

'Not bad for a West Ham player!' joked Greaves, a proud Tottenham man.

When Bobby Charlton scored twice to clinch a win in the semi-final, it was impossible not to imagine the scenes in London if England lifted the trophy. Geoff was fired up just thinking about it.

With the World Cup final only a few days away, the one big question for Coach Ramsey was whether to go back to Greaves, who had recovered from his injury, or stick with Geoff in the starting 11. The safe choice would have been Greaves, a proven goalscorer for years, but Coach Ramsey trusted what he had seen in the last two games, and Geoff would keep his place for the biggest match in the country's history.

'They think it's all over... it is now!'









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Geoff's childhood wishes rolled into one. Best of all, England had won the World Cup for the first time. At the final whistle, there were people everywhere – teammates, coaches, fans, police. The joy spread all around Wembley.

Then it was time to walk up the steps, shake his hands with the Queen and get a close-up look at the World Cup trophy. Geoff tried to remember every detail of the occasion. He had a feeling that he was going to be telling stories about this day for a long time!

The England players had become legends that summer, and Geoff's goals had delivered the perfect ending.



## CHAPTER 2

# PELÉ, 1970 WORLD CUP

### *One last World Cup ride*

Pelé loved the World Cup, and he loved his country. Those were the main reasons that he was about to put on the Brazil shirt again for one final World Cup run. He already had winners' medals from 1958 and 1962, but he had withdrawn from international football after the disappointment of the 1966 tournament, when Brazil failed to make it past group stage.

During the late 1960s, Brazilians were going through hard times. Violence and fear were becoming more common, and the people needed something to bring them together and forget their troubles. The



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calls for Pelé to boost morale and return to the Brazil team grew louder and louder.

*‘The 1970 World Cup is just months away and we need Pelé.’*

*‘He’s the greatest player the world has ever seen, and we’ll win the tournament if he plays.’*

*‘His Brazil career can’t end with that horrible 1966 World Cup.’*

Pelé gave it a lot of thought, discussed his options with friends and family, and eventually agreed to rejoin the Brazil squad. But could he still dominate like he had in 1958 as a teenager? Did he still have the same talent that had driven Santos, his club in Brazil, to claim trophy after trophy?

The answers to those questions would have to remain a mystery until Pelé and Brazil were on the pitch at Mexico 1970 for their first game, but his teammates were thrilled to have him there.

‘We can beat anyone now!’ Jairzinho said excitedly. ‘The King is back!’

‘I wish I was a striker!’ defender Carlos Alberto added. ‘We’re going to be scoring a lot of goals!’



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Soon Pelé was putting on his boots for practice and feeling the familiar buzz of playing football for Brazil. He was 29 years old now, but he remained as excited as when he had made his debut. He couldn't wait to remind the world what he could do.

At half-time in the first group game, against Czechoslovakia, Pelé feared he had made the wrong decision. Brazil were drawing 1–1, and looked rusty. Was his comeback a big mistake?

Pelé shook his head. He hadn't got this far by doubting himself, and there was still time to turn things around.

'Forget about the first half,' he told his teammates. 'We're going to be better in the second half.'

He said it with such confidence that the whole dressing room seemed to absorb a spark of energy. If Pelé still believed they could win, they believed it too.

As if he had flipped a switch, Pelé was soon dribbling with his old flair, gliding past defenders and charging towards the goal. No one could get near him. Brazil launched attack after attack, cruising to a 4–1 win.



Maybe they just needed that early test. Once they had their swagger back, the flicks and tricks came out, and Pelé was at the centre of it all. Brazil rolled on with three more victories, setting up a tasty semi-final against Uruguay.

### ***Taking down the rivals***

Uruguay had a strong history at the World Cup, winning the first-ever tournament in 1930 and lifting the trophy again in 1950 with a win over Brazil. That had created a bruising rivalry, and now, 20 years on, they were battling it out in the 1970 World Cup semi-final.

When Uruguay took the lead, Pelé didn't panic. If anything, it nudged him into a more ruthless mode. This was his chance to sprinkle a little more Pelé magic on a big game. He called for the ball, shrugged off physical Uruguayan defenders and turned the match in Brazil's favour.

From 1–0 down, Brazil surged into a 3–1 lead, with Pelé helping to set up goals for Jairzinho and Rivellino. Uruguay had planned to mark Pelé tightly,



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but that plan had been abandoned. He was just too good at finding space, and he dribbled away from defenders before they could get close enough to stop him. The fact that a grinning Pelé seemed to be having the time of his life just added to the Uruguayans' frustration.

Then another through-ball sent Pelé behind the defence and he saw the keeper running off his line towards him. With an outrageous dummy, Pelé let the ball run past the keeper and skipped round to get to it first, but his shot went just wide.

'That would have been the goal of the tournament!' Jairzinho shouted, with a stunned look on his face.

Pelé smiled. Another goal would have been nice, but Brazil could now look forward to the final. He was so close to finishing his farewell World Cup in style.

### *King Pelé*

Pelé couldn't sleep. There were too many thoughts flying through his head. Tomorrow was the World Cup final – Brazil vs Italy – and it might just be the biggest day of his life. Fans across the globe would be



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watching, and millions of Brazilians would be counting on him to deliver another trophy. Yes, that kind of pressure and excitement was keeping him awake.

Pelé finally drifted off to sleep and woke up in the morning with a burst of energy and determination flowing through his body. He took a deep breath and opened the curtains to let in the morning sunshine.

‘It looks like the perfect day to win a World Cup,’ he said to himself, smiling.

He would always remember the bus journey to the Azteca Stadium on that day of the final. Looking out of the window, he saw Brazil flags everywhere – a sea of yellow and green. Feeling the love from the fans but also feeling the sadness of playing in his last World Cup game, tears trickled down Pelé’s cheeks.

Walking into the dressing room, he tried to replace the tears with a calming grin, and he shook hands with Rivellino and Jairzinho, who had been alongside him through all the battles at this tournament.

‘We’re following your lead, King,’ Rivellino said, patting Pelé on the shoulder. ‘Let’s bring this trophy home.’





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A defensive mistake gifted Italy an equaliser, and suddenly it was 1–1.

‘It’s okay!’ Pelé called, reassuring the nervous faces among his team’s defenders, and encouraging them with the words: ‘We’ll get another goal.’

Brazil pushed forward again. Pelé went close with a chance at the back post, then Gérson thumped a shot into the net from the edge of the penalty area. 2–1.

When Gérson floated the ball over the Italian defence, Pelé was a step ahead. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Jairzinho sprinting into the box, and he cushioned a header towards him. Jairzinho was almost running too fast and he scuffed his shot a little, but it was enough to wrong-foot the goalkeeper. The ball trickled into the net. 3–1.

### *The perfect goodbye*

Pelé could see some of the Italy players holding their heads or hunched over with their hands on their knees. It was a long way back for them now. He knew that Brazil just had to let the minutes tick away.

They moved forward from the back again, passing



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down the left wing. Jairzinho collected a long pass, cut inside and laid the ball off to Pelé. Again, Pelé knew exactly what he wanted to do even before the ball reached him. He could sense Carlos Alberto racing forward from right-back and he calmly rolled a pass to him. It was the perfect speed – not too fast, not too slow – and Carlos Alberto hit his shot the first time, arrowing it into the bottom corner. 4–1.

Now the party could really start!

At the final whistle, fans poured onto the pitch. Before he even had a chance to raise his arms in celebration, Pelé was surrounded by fans, teammates and even a few of the Italy players. People congratulated him with hugs and handshakes, and some wanted his shirt, his shorts and his boots. His shirt was the first to go, and then his teammates lifted him onto their shoulders and carried him on a lap of the stadium. They all knew what it meant to him to be on top of the world again.

At last, after an eight-year gap, Pelé had the World Cup trophy in his hands again. He just stared at it, with the biggest smile on his face.



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‘I’ve missed you!’ he said quietly.

He had previously allowed himself to imagine this moment, to be reunited with the greatest prize of all, but none of that came close to the pride and happiness he really felt now.

The football world had begged for one more special Pelé tournament – and he had delivered. The crowd was chanting his name again, with Brazil flags everywhere, and he knew he was leaving behind a really special World Cup legacy.

‘Pelé! Pelé! Pelé!’

