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History of Soccer – Greatest FIFA World Cup Teams

Uruguay – 1930

Winners of the inaugural World Cup competition, Uruguay earn their place in the countdown of World Cup teams due to the manner of their victory. Lead by their inspirational captain Jose Nasazzi, the host nation powered their way to a final match up with Argentina and came from behind to claim the Jules Rimet trophy in front of 80,000 fans.

Uruguay's counterparts in Group 3 were Peru and Romania. In their opener, Hector Castro scored Uruguay's first-ever World Cup goal, and his 65th minute strike was enough to see Uruguay past Peru 1-0. Their meeting with Romania would decide the group, and Uruguay would roll 4-0, with all four goals coming in the first half.

The group win advanced Uruguay into a semi-final meeting with Group 2 winners Yugoslavia, and after falling behind in the fourth minute, Uruguay scored six unanswered goals to book a berth in the final against Argentina.

The final will forever be remembered for its action-packed 90 minutes, played amongst a cauldron of noise made by 80,000 fans at the Centenario Stadium. Play got under way and Argentina battled for a 2-1 advantage before the half-time whistle. After the break, Uruguay gradually became ascendant. Shortly after Monti (a player who received death threats the night prior) missed a chance to make the score 3-1, Uruguay attacked in numbers, and Pedro Cea scored an equaliser. Ten minutes later a goal by Santos Iriarte gave Uruguay the lead, and just before full-time Castro made it 4-2 to seal the win and secure a memorable victory for the host nations.

The following day was made a national holiday in celebration of their success and Nasazzi was hailed as a hero for the talismanic leadership he had ordained throughout the competition.

Hungary – 1954

The "Magnificent Magyars" sported the likes of Ferenc Puskas, Sandor Kocsis, Nandor Hidegkuti, Zoltan Czibor and Jozsef Bozsik, every one of them of true world-class. This great team failed to win the cup, but had all the qualities to do so. Hungary scored an incredible 27 goals in the 1954 cup beating both Brazil and defending champions

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Uruguay 4-2, but despite being heavy favorites to lift the cup, lost 3-2 in the final to West Germany. Hungary had played 50 games in six years across Europe, winning 42, drawing seven and losing just one. Unfortunately, that one loss cost them the title of world champions.

On July 4, 1954, 60,000 people packed the Wankdorf Stadium in Berne, Germany, for the World Cup final between the amateur West Germany side and the Mighty Magyars. Given next to no chance before the match, West Germany seemed all but out of the contest when Hungary took a 2-0 lead after just eight minutes. But the Germans fought back and goals in the 10th and 18th minutes drew them level.

Hungary, with captain Puskas carrying an injury, squandered several great chances to snatch the lead back before West Germany striker Helmut Rahn completed the remarkable comeback with the winner six minutes from time.

Dubbed "The Miracle of Berne", the 1954 World Cup final is one of the most famous victories in German football history, and it was the subject of the 2003 film *Das Wunder von Bern*.

The 1954 final effectively signaled the end of the Mighty Magyars, with the 1956 revolution having a diabolical effect on football in Hungary.

Brazil – 1970

With Pelé in his last World Cup final, captain Carlos Alberto, Jairzinho, Tostão, Gérson and Rivelino leading the way, Brazil steamrolled through the competition to hoist the trophy. Considered the best World Cup winning team by many, Brazil won every game on the way to being crowned champions, as well as winning all six of their qualifying games on the way to Mexico.

Pele had threatened not to return after his bitter experience in England - where he was literally kicked out of the 1966 tournament - but he returned and took his place in a team rich in forward talent. The front five of Jairzinho, Pele, Gerson, Tostao and Rivelino were all No10s in their own right and together they created an irresistible attacking momentum. Nothing captured the beauty of their football better than their fourth goal in the Final versus Italy at the cavernous Azteca Stadium, Pele teeing up his captain Carlos Alberto to conclude a seven-man move by arrowing a first-time shot past Enrico Albertosi and into the far corner.

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Brazil, winning their third title, secured ownership of the Jules Rimet trophy and with it the admiration of the global soccer audience. Pele, who had wowed the world with his sparkling skills throughout the tournament, set an individual record that may never be broken with his third World Cup triumph, 12 years after arriving on the world stage as a precocious 17-year-old in Sweden.

Netherlands – 1974

For the incomparable Johan Cruyff, with a creative cast that included Johan Neeskens, Johnny Rep, Rob Rensenbrink, Wim van Hanegem and Ruud Krol, "Total Football" added up to total enjoyment, until the final. In the very attacking system, every player was able to play in every possible position. However, it led to a bitter end, when the Dutch failed to get their deserved reward in the final against the host nation.

The Dutch had been incredible the entire tournament, winning their first round group ahead of Sweden, Bulgaria and Uruguay, and in the second round cruising through Argentina, East Germany, and finally defeating the defending world champions of Brazil 2-0.

The final ended in disappointment against West Germany, despite having gone 1–0 up through Johan Neeskens' early penalty kick before any German had even touched the ball. The Dutch were trying to embarrass the Germans at home while they were only up 1–0. This would prove their undoing. Supported by the crowd, a converted penalty by Paul Breitner and the winner from Gerd Müller led to a victory for the Germans.

Together with the Hungarian team of Ferenc Puskas in 1954, the Dutch team of 1974 was probably the best team never to have won a World Cup. The 'totaalvoetbal' will, however, remain forever in the minds of football lovers

France – 1998

The home of Jules Rimet, the father of the FIFA World Cup, France finally claimed the crown for itself in the summer of 1998. If an unforgettable summer for the new champions – who had tasted semi-final defeat twice a decade before – it was also a memorable one for the old tournament which was now bigger than ever before.

Most Soccer fans were stunned when France was crowned World Champion in 1998. As France became the seventh nation to ever win the trophy, many questioned how much home advantage had to do with their success. Few unbiased pundits dared to

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acknowledge the superb defensive and midfield work, which the French displayed. Even their keeper Barthez made almost no mistakes allowing an astonishing total of two goals in seven matches. Zidane, Petit, Djorkaeff, and Lizarazu were all World-class soccer players, deserving of a World Cup win.

France dominated Group C, while many critics questioned the poor opposition which the host nation was selected to face. The French almost effortlessly earned the maximum of nine points from their three matches scoring 9 goals along the way and only conceding once. Midfielder Zinedine Zidane was in the spotlight creating spontaneous and exciting plays.

After beating Paraguay in a closely fought game, France also eliminated Italy, probably the top defensive team at France '98. The decisive moment was Dino Bagio's miss in the penalty shootout. Ironically, Roberto Baggio choked in the very same manner four years earlier at the final match of World Cup 1994. France dispatched Croatia in the semi final before lining up against pre tournament favorites, Brazil, in the Final.

The final saw home side France faced sleeping Brazil in a one-sided match. Young forward Ronaldo was hyped to be Brazil's main offensive threat but was denied by the physical French defence. After the final, it was reported that the Brazilian might have been sick during the match. In reality, Rivaldo was much more effective throughout the tournament but remained in the shadow of his young teammate. The entire Brazilian midfield line looked asleep as the French led by Zinedine Zidane outperformed them in every way. Zidane himself headed in two nearly identical goals. Emanuel Petit contributed too, ensuring the final 3-0 victory for France. Although some fans viewed the game as "Brazil's loss" rather than "France's victory", the team still deserve their place in this list for their tactical brilliance.

Other Great Teams

It is difficult to complete a definitive list of great FIFA World Cup nations without mentioning a handful of other teams.

Brazil (1958) invented the famous 4-2-4 system. It also saw Pelé emerge as a 17 year old having started the tournament on the bench. Garrincha, Vava, Didi and Zagallo were other famous names in Brazil's first ever World Cup triumph.

England (1966) can also not be denied a place with Geoff Hurst scoring possibly the greatest ever world cup hat-trick in the Final against bitter rivals, West Germany.

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West Germany (1974), the eventual winners of the trophy were somewhat overshadowed by the 'Total Football' of the Dutch. Beckenbauer as leader in defence and behind him was Sepp Maier, one of the best goalkeepers of all time. Overath and Bonhof also were quality players and of course the notorious Gerd Müller up front, who averaged more than a goal a game for the Germans, and scored the winning goal in the final itself.

Argentina (1986) of course had Maradona and that made them automatically a great team. But other players contributed as well, among them were Burruchaga, Valdano and the great centerback Ruggeri. They helped Argentina win the cup in 1986. This team was also the last team so far to become champions without needing extra-time or penalty shoot-outs on their way.

Brazil (2002) with Rivaldo, Ronaldinho, Rivaldo and Roberto Carlos, had creative play in abundance. Two goals from Ronaldo in the final were enough to see Brazil crowned world champions for the fifth time and Germany made runners-up for the fourth time.

Conclusion

With so many teams and so many varied styles it is near on impossible to declare one of these ten teams to be *the* greatest. Perhaps Brazil, making this list on three occasions and having claimed World Cup glory on 4 occasions, deserve the plaudits. Each team certainly deserves the place in history and we can only hope that future tournaments produce similar results.

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