



Sissi A Perfect 10!



By Rich Fernandez: Bay Area Sports Drive

The number 10 is often associated with perfection in our society. Contestants in the hit television show *Dancing With The Stars* sweat and work hard for a perfect score of 10 from each of the three judges. The struggle and hard work put in by Olympic competing gymnasts to score that perfect 10 from the panel of judges is another attempt at perfection and a Gold Medal. Although it doesn't pertain to a judge's score, in soccer the number 10 is associated with some of the greatest players of all time like Pele, Diego

Maradona, Zinedine Zidane, Ronaldinho and Sissi -all who have sported the number on their jerseys. However, simply wearing the number 10 doesn't automatically make you a great player or signify perfection. But Sisleide Lima do Amor, who's known to the soccer world as "Sissi", it seems to me, is as close as one can get to a perfect 10 in women's soccer! And perhaps in life.

Sissi was born in Esplanada, Brazil, and life wasn't one of luxury and leisure growing up.

"I grew up without running water in our house. I used to have to carry water to the house and walk a very long way to make sure we had water to wash, cook and drink" explained Sissi. "My mother used to tell me that she wasn't going to be here forever and that I needed to learn how to take care of myself" she continued.

For Sissi that meant learning how to cook, clean, do laundry and other of life's basic necessities early on in her formative years. "Kids today are spoiled; I cannot believe that some can't even do simple things for themselves. Parents do way too much for their kids. My mother taught me how to take care of myself early on in my life" she went on to say.

Sissi's passion for soccer started at the young age of 6 years old. The luxury to buy the latest soccer gear wasn't one she enjoyed as a youth.

"Back in Brazil, we really couldn't afford too much at the time, so I used to make soccer balls out of anything I could get my hands on. I'd use paper, balls of tape and even the heads of mine and my sister's dolls. I wouldn't touch the porcelain headed dolls, but every other doll was fair game" said Sissi as she broke out laughing.

Soccer in Brazil is a man's sport, a prejudice that wouldn't stop Sissi. "My father and brother used to tell me 'Oh Sissi soccer is for men and not women' but I wouldn't listen." Even her mother didn't understand her daughter's obsession with the game. "My mother thought there was something wrong with my head, but I told her and my father that this was my passion."

At the age of 11 Sissi discovered that there were women playing soccer on a team in a near by town. Wanting to see for herself, she took a bus ride over to the town to get a closer look. "When I got there I couldn't believe there were women like me playing soccer. I went and talked to a woman who was the team manager, coach and a player on the team. Before I could sign up or play she wanted to talk to my parents first" said Sissi. After her parents gave the ok to play, there was still the issue of money needed for the bus ride back and forth from her home to the next town where the team was. "Well my mother and father started to save money here and there so I could go, it wasn't easy but we managed to do it" explained Sissi.

When Sissi was 14 years she joined her first organized soccer club and started getting paid. At the age of 16 years old she was selected to join the Brazilian National Team and in 1991 played in her first Women's World Cup in China. In 1995 and '98 she helped win the South American Championship.

At the 1995 World Cup in Sweden, Brazil was eliminated at the preliminary group stage but rebounded to win the Bronze Medal in the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta. With this, Brazil was now looked at as the most improved women's team in the world. With this on their side, Sissi and her Brazilian teammates didn't disappoint anyone during the 1999 World Cup. At the 1999 Women's World Cup, Sissi and China's Sun Wen were the co-scoring leaders with seven goals each. Sissi, known for her dangerous left foot, was and still is particularly effective scoring on free kicks. At that World Cup she twice scored off of free kicks. She opened the tournament with a hat-trick (scoring three goals) against Mexico, and in the



Sissi and Elane at the 1999 World Cup. (Photos submitted by Sissi)

2-0 victory over Italy, Sissi scored both of those goals. In what some say was the most entertaining game of the entire '99 World Cup, Brazil was losing to Nigeria 3-0 at the half but Sissi came through to score a golden goal in the 104th minute to beat the Nigerian team in extra time 4-3. This victory sent Brazil to the semifinals to play the eventual Tournament Champions the United States. Brazil lost 2-0 and then played Norway in the third place match. Brazil won on PKs (Penalty Kicks) 5-4 and secured third place in the 1999 Women's World Cup!

In an interview with Tom Timmermann of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch back in 1999, Sissi received high praise from her Brazilian coach Wilson



Brazilian star player Rivaldo (left) and Sissi at the 1999 FIFA awards ceremony. (Photos submitted by Sissi)

Oliveira Rica saying that "For Brazil, Sissi is the best in the world. For us, Sissi is the Queen of Soccer!" Another person Sissi and her Brazilian teammates impressed was the world famous Brazilian player Rivaldo. In an interview posted on www.lacancha.com, Rivaldo said that the level of play at the tournament was very impressive and how proud he was of all of the members of the Brazilian Women's National Team and referred to Sissi as brilliant!

What is Sissi's greatest memory while playing on the Brazilian National Team? "Receiving the Golden Boot and Silver Ball in the 1999 Women's World Cup!" she answered.

The Golden Boot Award also known as the Golden Shoe Award goes to the top goalscorer of the FIFA World Cup. The award was introduced at the 1930 World Cup for the first time. The 2006 World Cup in Germany was the first time that the Silver and Bronze shoe awards were added to reward the second and third top scorers in the tournament. If there is more than one player with the same amount of goals, the tie-breaker goes to the player who has contributed the most number of assists. If

there is still more than one player, the tie-breaker goes to the player who has played the least amount of minutes.



Sissi (left) and Sun Wen receive their 1999 FIFA Golden Ball and Boot awards. (Photo provided by Sissi)

The Silver Ball Award is awarded to those who finish as runners-up in the media voting for the Golden Ball Award. The Golden Ball award is presented to the most valuable player at each FIFA World Cup finals, with a shortlist drawn up by the FIFA technical committee and the winner voted for by representatives of the media. Those who finish as runners-up in media voting receive the adidas Silver Ball and Bronze Ball awards as the 2nd and 3rd most outstanding players in the tournament respectively.

Another aspect of Sissi that stood out at the tournament was her trademark shaved head prior to the 1999 Women's World Cup. Her shaved head was a result of a promise she made to God to provide housing for her family in Brazil.

That promise was realized in June 2001! When the Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA) was formed in 2001, after all of the buzz surrounding the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup, the Foreign Allocation Draft sent Sissi to the San Jose CyberRays.

While Sissi was still going to be playing the game she loved, she now found herself in unfamiliar waters with many different and difficult challenges.

"The language was the hardest by far!" Sissi said. "I almost went back home three weeks into my stay because I missed home so much," Sissi went on to explain. "I walked off the plane and didn't speak a word of English. Slowly I learned, but I was homesick for quite some time."

In the 2001 season with the CyberRays, she led the team and tied for the league lead in assists with 10. She was third on the team in scoring with 1 goal and 10 assists for 12 points. Her best game came that season came against the Boston Breakers where she assisted on both goals in a 2-0 victory. There were only four occasions during the 2001 season in

which a player put together three consecutive games with an assist, and Sissi was credited with two of them!

Brandi Chastain, a member of the US Women's National Team and former opponent of Sissi, was now a teammate of hers on the CyberRays. Could this have posed a difficult situation for Sissi and the CyberRays?

"No, Brandi is my idol, so it was an adjustment being a fan of hers to being a teammate," Sissi explained. "She is my mentor and continues to be to this day. I am so excited to speak English now, so I can talk with her and text her when something exciting happens! She is an awesome woman both on and off the field!"

In that inaugural 2001 season Sissi, Brandi, and the CyberRays won the Founders Cup Championship in their first year together. This capped off a very difficult year for Sissi that was filled with many changes. Here was a girl from Esplanada, Brazil who grew up with no running water and had to resort to playing soccer with the heads of her dolls to now being in the United States, winning the WUSA's first Founders Cup Championship and getting paid to play a game that she loves so dearly!

In the 2002 season her mother Vanilda came to the United States to watch Sissi play against the Washington Freedom. In that game Sissi scored her only goal of the season, and being able to score with her mother in the stands made the goal even more memorable. This was her mother's first trip out of Brazil and first time on a plane, and Sissi made it a memorable game for her! For the second year in a row Sissi was named to the All-WUSA first team and she was named WUSA Humanitarian of the Year for a relationship she developed and maintained with a young, terminally ill cancer patient.

Unfortunately, after just three full seasons, the WUSA closed its doors and left Sissi without a job and team to play for. Currently, Sissi is the Head Coach for the Las Positas College Women's Soccer team in Livermore, CA. She also has been a coach for the Diablo Valley Soccer Club (DVSC) for three years, just taking over the DVSC Fusion U-13 Girls team this past season and is helping coach at Clayton Valley High School as well. Sissi continues to give to the community and is currently an active volunteer and foster parent. She is also currently an FIFA Ambassador and part of the Organizing Committee for the U-17 and U-20 Women's World Cup.

For the 2007 FIFA Women's World Cup Finals between Germany and Brazil, Sissi was at a Soccer Tournament in Tulare, CA. True to her roots and former team, Sissi was glued to the television set rooting on Brazil. The outcome of the game wasn't what she wanted since Germany had beaten Brazil, what were her feels were on the way Brazil played in that Championship game? "Brazil showed a great deal of passion and heart through the entire World Cup, but Germany just outplayed them and

Brazil got frustrated and lost it psychologically. I think Brazil deserved to win since they worked so hard to get to that championship game, but it just wasn't meant to be," Sissi explained. What does Sissi think now that Marta the brilliant young Brazilian star wears her old number 10? "Yes Marta does wear number 10. She has great skills, passion and speed. I think she will help the game get to a different level of play" she went on to say.

With the signs of a new North American women's professional soccer league set for 2009, the question on everyone's mind is will Sissi play professional soccer again?

"I would LOVE to play again, but I don't know if they want an old lady running around on the field!" Sissi explained while laughing. "I would consider it an honor to play one more year and retire at that level and move into coaching for the league after that. I've been training to stay in shape while playing for the Sacramento Storm of the WPSL and I know I can still play with the best in the world. I know I'm getting older and maybe can't play like I did when I was twenty years old and run up and down the field during an entire 90 minute match, so I use my soccer smarts and pick my spots. I feel with age I've become a much smarter player, using my mind more than just my body." With no team for the new league in 2009 currently allocated for the Bay Area, Sissi isn't sure what's going to happen for her in terms of playing. The passion, love and drive to play the game for her is still there, but she's going to have to weigh her options once the time comes and the opportunity presents itself.



Sissi (Left) and Pretinha at the 1999 World Cup. (Photo provided by Sissi).

Sissi also has her family to consider when making a decision. Being an active volunteer and foster parent for the Contra Costa County Adoptions and Homefind Unit, sometimes balancing her schedule isn't easy. "Being a parent has been the best thing that has ever happened to me," Sissi explained. "I wish I would have done it sooner. I have to juggle my current schedule like all the other parents do. I am very organized, so that

helps. When I was younger and playing soccer in Brazil I was very arrogant and thought I was everything. When I came to the United States and started getting older I became humble and started to understand that life wasn't always about me," she explained. "I realized that I could help and reach out to people via soccer, and that is important to me" she went on to say. You can read more about Sissi and her adopted children in an article **BASD** recently did:

<http://www.bayareasportsdrive.com/soccer/sissi.htm>

In 2006 Sissi's father, Antonio, passed away. Being back in Brazil with her family and having to cope with losing her father was a very difficult time in her life. This was a great loss for Sissi, so great that confusion and some very strong emotions made her seriously consider not returning to the United States and staying in Brazil. She eventually did decide to return to the United States, the pain of losing her father was still weighing heavy on her. When Sissi got involved with foster children and the Contra Costa County Adoptions and Homefind Unit she started to realize that life is precious and the adoption of her children allowed her to focus on something other than her father. "I came to terms with the fact that my father passed away, and was now focusing on talking care of my family here in the United States. My children really helped me put life back into perspective and they certainly helped in the healing process" Sissi reflected.

"You know I still have an apartment back in Brazil. Most of my stuff is still over there but I did bring back my Golden Boot Award, Silver Ball Award and a few other awards. When I brought the large awards through Customs, they were really checking to make sure they were real and that I wasn't trying to sneak anything into the US. I told them to go ahead and take their time to do their jobs, and that I wasn't trying to sneak anything in them" she said with a laugh. Sissi added "All of by photos except for this small photo album I have here are back in Brazil. "

What message would Sissi like to say to all of the young girls/women out there playing soccer who have dreams of playing in the World Cup and Olympics? "BELIVE, BELIEVE, BELIEVE and NEVER GIVE UP!"

So what makes a person a perfect 10 in life? Is it someone who has mastered their career and is one of the best in the world at what they do? Or is it the person who is so giving of themselves to others, always willing to help those in need and carries with them a kind heart and genuine care for their fellow man? Is it also someone who puts their own personal lives aside or on hold to help others? Well quite frankly on my scorecard it's all three of these. Sisleide Lima do Amor, a young lady who grew up not having a lot, in my estimation is a perfect 10 in life. She's mastered

her profession and is considered one of the best female soccer players in the world. Her heart and genuine care for others is bigger and kinder than most. Her care for others and willingness to give of herself to assist others has many times pushed and pulled her in many different directions but she continues to be there for others. Not only is she a perfect 10, a fantastic soccer player and a magnificent human being but a great role model to us all!

PLAYING EXPERIENCE

CLUBS: Saad Campinas (1996), São Paulo (1997-1998), Se Palmerias (1999), Vasco da Gama (Rio de Janeiro, 2000), WUSA (San Jose CyberRays 2001-2004), WPSL (California Storm 2005-2007)

WORLD CUPS: China 1991, Sweden 1995, USA 1999

OLYMPICS: Atlanta 1996, Sydney 2000

AWARDS

1999 - FIFA Golden Boot Award, FIFA Silver Ball Award, Voted Second Best Player in the World, Voted First Best Female Player in South America

2001 - All WUSA First Team

2002 - All WUSA First Team, WUSA Humanitarian of the Year Award

2003 - All WUSA First Team

2005 - MVP for the WPSL League

Current - FIFA Ambassador, Part of the Organizing Committee for the U-17 and U-20 Women's World Cup

Note: -Information on the Gold Boot and Silver Ball Awards taken from Wikipedia, the free Enclyopedia

-Some information on Sissi taken from the San Jose CyberRays 2002 Media Guide, www.lacancha.com, St. Louis Post-Disptach article by Tom Timmermann and FIFA.com

-Most information on Sissi obtained via an interview with Sissi



Sissi (Left back row in hat), Brandi Chastain and the champion CyberRays with the 2001 WUSA Founders Cup Championship. (Photo provided by Sissi)