The 100 greatest football moments of all time

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Introduction

When we look back over football history, or indeed our own history with the game, it's never truly the realities of matches or seasons that we remember. It's the individual moments. The last-minute winners. The touches of transcendent quality. The shock incidents.

They energise us, excite us and – of course – move us. In truth, such moments are what we follow football for. As Nick Hornby writes in Fever Pitch, real life doesn't usually provide last-minute winners.

Clearly, some moments are more important than others in the context of a match or season. Some mean more in the long-term. Some are more spectacular. Some more surprising. Some more symbolic. And then some are just unique.

So, in attempting to determine the greatest and most historic moments in football history, we looked to distil these qualities.

First of all, it must be said, we tried to give a global a spread as possible, to genuinely cover all of football history as opposed to just those in the western world or traditional power bases. However, since importance and effect on history was such a big consideration, it is only natural that many of the moments will come from the highest stages.

In order to get as great a variety as possible, too, we canvassed both readers and a series of respected football writers.

As regards defining a moment, also, we attempted to pin as many back to as pure and isolated an incident as possible. The ultimate example is probably a penalty kick. However, since some performances – or indeed six-minute periods – are hard to break up or differentiate, a few conformed to a more liberal interpretation of the word “moment”.

So, from a list of over 400 moments, then, we tried to sort them by applying the following general – and, it should be admitted, somewhat subjective – formula.

Initially, all of the moments were ranked out of five in each of the following five categories:

Importance – how significant the moment was in either the match or competition it took place in. For example, a winning goal or equaliser to play a key part in directing the destination of a trophy would score highly here. Michael Thomas's goal against Liverpool in May 1989 is a particular example in this case.

Effect on history – this is similar to importance but in a much broader sense. For example, if a goal or win leads to a period of dominance for either a specific team or a new tactical philosophy, then it will score high. In that sense, Hungary’s win over England in 1953 would do well here.

Quality – this is in order to properly acknowledge the kind of benchmark and pioneering moments. For example, Marco Van Basten’s volley against USSR, Pele’s dummy against
Uruguay or Barcelona’s 5-0 win over Real Madrid in 2010.

Nature – this is something of a catch-all title in that it attempts to evaluate the unique or spectacular nature of moments. For example, a particularly unlikely comeback or shock announcement or result would score highly here. Likewise something like Don Revie’s televised face-off with Brian Clough in 1974.

Symbolism – a slightly more esoteric category but one that attempts to evaluate how much a moment seemed to wrap up a few key strands from history. And sometimes, in effect, closed off a period of history. For example, Munich survivor Bobby Charlton’s goals in the 1968 European Cup final to win the title 10 years after the tragedy would score highly here. Likewise moments that seemed to encapsulate the essence or key qualities of a particularly important player, team, manager or competition.

We readily admit that such an approach is far from perfect. But it does just attempt to provide a starting point. As this website hopefully grows we hope to refine and improve such lists. So, if you don’t agree or just have a suggestion, make sure to email us at footballpantheon[at]gmail[dot]com or leave a comment below. We look forward to hearing from you and hope you enjoy the list.

Who is the greatest soccer player of all time? Fans, pundits and players have hotly debated the question since the game's inception, arranging and rearranging the hierarchies with every generation of exhausted talent... And now, in your correspondent's humble opinion, the 100 greatest players of all time. 100. Davor Suker. 1 of 100. David Cannon/Getty Images. 63. Steve Bloomer. 38 of 100. It takes a special person to organize a football match in the middle of a German internment camp. But that is exactly what “The Pride of Derby” did: When taken prisoner at the outbreak of WWI—Bloomer was coaching a German team—he set up a league among the 5,000 prisoners and guards that would attract up to 1,000 spectators.