

# Sócrates - midfielder and anti-dictatorship resister



Brazil and Corinthians midfielder, doctor of medicine and philosophy, Sócrates also organised demonstrations of opposition to Brazil's military dictatorship.

Born Sócrates Brasileiro Sampaio de Souza Vieira de Oliveira, Sócrates captained Brazil at both the 1982 and 1986 World Cups.

Sócrates has his father to thank for his unusual name. His father was from a poor family from the Amazon who taught himself to read. With no education he still built himself a huge library (which the young Sócrates would go and read from). Interested in ancient Greek philosophy he called his son Sócrates.

Sócrates also had a prolific club career, spending six years at the historically left-wing Corinthians. The first working class team in Brazil, Corinthians was set up by immigrant labourers in São Paulo in a time when football in Brazil was an elitist sport, played only by the descendents of British ex-patriots or people working for British companies.

More than football, however, Sócrates was interested in social issues:

Quote:

"In 1964 there was a military coup. I was 10 and remember my father burning his book on the Bolsheviks. That started my interest in politics. The football came by accident. I was a child of the dictatorship. I always had my eyes turned to the social injustices in the country and I had colleagues who had to hide and run away. I just happened to be good at football."

When he transferred to Corinthians in 1978, he soon tired of the way players were treated by the management, an authoritarian regime which he saw as an extension of the unjust politics of Brazil.

It was while playing for Corinthians that Sócrates co-founded the Corinthians Democracy movement to take on Brazil's brutal dictatorship. It aimed at ending the regime's authoritarian treatment of football players and in support of the wider democratisation movement:

Quote:

"The clubs wanted to have complete control, whereas we felt that the players should be consulted and not treated like children. We did not just object to the simple problems, but the bigger political picture."

Corinthians won the state championship in 1982 with "Democracia" printed on their shirts.

Quote:

"That was the greatest team I ever played in because it was more than sport. My political victories are more important than my victories as a professional player. A match finishes in 90 minutes, but life goes on."

In 1984, Sòcrates spoke in front of 1.5 million people at a political rally. The crowd cheered as he said that if congress passed a constitutional amendment to re-establish free elections, he would turn down an offer to play in Italy and stay in Brazil. The vote did not get through, however, and Sòcrates went to play with Fiorentina for a season.

When in Italy, he stated unequivocally that rather than cars and luxury houses, he wanted to learn from Italy's books. When asked which Italian he respected the most, Mazzola or Rivera (football players of Inter and AC Milan, respectively), he responded:

Quote:

I don't know them. I'm here to read Gramsci in original language and to study the history of the workers' movement.

In later years, Sócrates rejected the idea of, like Pele, becoming an ambassador for football because of his dislike for "commercialism and all that rubbish". He also dismissed the proposal of Colonel Gaddafi(!) to run for president of Brazil. "I am political", he said instead.

Sócrates practiced sports medicine in his hometown and died of an intestinal infection in December 2011, aged 57.