

Diego Armando Maradona: Globalization's First Sports Superstar

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Abstract

Maradona is important because he was the first superstar of an increasingly globalized world and in retirement his reputation only grew as we were able to follow the life and tribulations of the great man in real time—something that was not possible in a pre-globalized era. This paper examines the link between globalization and the status of Maradona as a global icon and argues that a combination of talent, a globally integrated economy, and a public persona that was larger than life, made Maradona the international star he was. This is in contrast to the overwhelming majority of sportsmen and women who lose their public prominence after retirement.

Keywords: Globalization; Sports; Media; Political Controversies.

Introduction

Many sportsmen and women have dominated their sports but Diego Armando Maradona captured the imagination of the world. Thus, Pete Sampras and Roger Federer have dominated tennis, Floyd Merriweather may have been the most complete boxer, Mia Hamm the best woman football player, Michael Phelps is the greatest swimmer ever, and Usain Bolt's records may never be beaten. But while famous, they do not compare with the superstar status that was accorded to Maradona in his lifetime. Diego Armando Maradona is important because he was the first superstar of an increasingly globalized world and in retirement his reputation only grew as we were able to follow the life and tribulations of the great man in real time - something that was not possible in a pre-globalized era. Thus, apart from Maradona's great performances in the world cup, his flamboyant life-style, his political affiliations, his illnesses, his term as coach of Argentina, and finally the world-wide outpouring of grief about his death, all indicate that we ended up with the world's first truly globalized sport star. Maradona is special because while Michael Jordan, Lionel Messi, Usain Bolt, and Michael Phelps could all lay claim to the title of world-famous athlete, Maradona stood head and shoulders over the rest of them. This paper examines the link between globalization and the status of Maradona as a global icon and argues that a combination of

talent, a globally integrated economy, and a public persona that was larger than life, made Maradona the international star he was.

Sports Personalities in the Pre-Globalization Era

We have always had international sports stars although their fame and reputation were due to a small internationalized elite that followed global sports and many of these athletes became famous in retirement as their stories were spread through books, articles, and grainy film. The fact is that in a pre-globalized world the technology was not readily available, nor were the sporting networks, that would have made the players in various sports more famous across the world. Further, in most of the non-western world, economic standards were not high enough to allow for the spread of televisions which would have made universal viewership of sports a possibility.

It was only in the 1960s and 1970s that income levels rose globally and international consumer demand saw television sales boom across the world. The 1980s saw the creation of satellite broadcasting companies like ESPN, Sky, and STAR TV which were broadcasting across continents, in the case of ESPN globally, and these networks required 24 hour-7 days a week programming to remain commercially viable. This need led to sports like Rugby, Australian Rules, Sumo wrestling, and even the fake sport of professional wrestling got international viewership. By the 1990s, teams and individuals in the sporting world were able to gain international fan bases. Thus, with the spread of satellite TV, European football leagues were broadcast around the world and teams like Real Madrid, Barcelona, Manchester United, and Chelsea had followers on every continent and in the 2000s the English Premier League, among other factors thanks to its global audience, became the richest league in the world. In a pre-globalized world, however, most sportsmen and sportswomen did not get the international fan base that sports stars in the globalized era were to acquire because their achievements on the sporting field were not seen in real time by global audiences.

Thus, Jesse Owens, perhaps the most complete athlete to participate in the Olympics, only became an international figure after the Second World War when his achievements were broadcast on television and he was mistakenly used to promote the mythology that he single-handedly punctured Adolf Hitler's myth of Aryan superiority.

Similarly, Pele was only seen by the world in the 1970 World Cup because the world's most popular sport reached a global audience for the first time with the 1970 final although, even then, both China and India were excluded from this audience (nor was Pele seen in the European leagues unlike his successors from South America - Messi, Ronaldo, and Ronaldinho). Other players like the swimmer Mark Spitz, the tennis player Rod Laver, the cricketer Don Bradman, and the sprinter Tommie Smith while famous and having remarkable sporting records never reached the fame of Maradona because at the time they played, there was no global communications network - of television, cable, satellites, internet,

and social media - to broadcast and highlight their achievements around the world. Further, with the exception of Tommie Smith, who along with John Carlos, gave a black power salute at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, no one brought political or social issues to the fore in the way Maradona was to.

The one exception, of course, was the boxer Mohammed Ali who, in the era of pre-globalization, became an international icon because of his sporting prowess, his struggle against racial injustice, his principled stand on the Vietnam war, and eventually his individual courage facing a debilitating disease like Parkinson's. Ali's career began in a segregated America when he won the light-heavyweight gold medal at the Rome Olympics and he won the world heavyweight boxing crown in February of 1964 before the civil rights act that ended segregation was passed. Ali went on to convert to Islam, and to reject the slave roots of his original name, which further raised the ire of angry white sports fans who were keen to have a white Christian boxing champion - the idea of the "so called" great white hope.

Ali was to go on to refuse being drafted to serve in the Vietnam war even though he had been assured that he would be given a cushy assignment, much in the way Elvis Presley had, and would not be put in harm's way. Ali's principled opposition to the war led to his being stripped of his boxing license, vilified by sections of the American public, and being threatened with jail time. Yet, at a time when the Vietnam war had inflamed public opinion around the world, Ali gained global fame for the stand he took against America's participation in the war. Later in life, when debilitated by Parkinson's, he was to be fondly remembered when he lit the flame at the 1996 Olympics thereby reigniting memories of his fame and career. Yet, despite such global fame, Ali's impact waned as he grew older to the point that by the mid-1980s he had disappeared from the public view and in retirement was not the focus of media that Maradona remained till the day he died. There were several reasons for this.

After Ali retired, boxing became a pay for view sport (in fact Ali's "thriller in Manila" against Joe Frazier was the first pay-per-view fight in the United States) seen by gamblers and die-hard sports fans on big screens in restaurants, bars, and the casinos of Las Vegas. The shift to the pay-per-view format, however, led to the sport being removed from the purview of the common man and it increasingly lost its viewership to the point that most people in the world today no longer know who the world heavyweight boxing champion is.

Ali's ill-health also contributed to his not being a public persona in the way Maradona was since the boxer was diagnosed with Parkinson's in the 1980s and, thus, was unable to have a public image or to comment on the important political and racial issues that America faced in the last thirty years of his life - he died in 2016. In contrast, Maradona stopped playing internationally in 1994 and professionally in 1997, but he remained in the limelight as a true celebrity. What then was the reason Maradona continued to receive such global adulation?

First, like many other athletes, Maradona's story was one of rags to riches that saw him emerge from the slums of Buenos Aires to become an international superstar and like other players from a humble background he had trouble handling wealth and fame—leading in

part to heavy drug use. Yet, while exhibiting such behavior, he was more like Elvis Presley in that he never forgot his humble roots and, instead, remained connected to the people of Argentina. In contrast, Lionel Messi, Argentina's other superstar, has always been more connected to Spain where he has lived since being a teenager and now has dual nationality, a move that was taken so he would count as a Spanish player and allow Barcelona to play three other foreigners in the team.

Secondly, while football is a team game, Maradona was the one who repeatedly took his teams to the pinnacle of glory through his individual efforts. If one looks at the two world cups where Pele played an important role in achieving Brazilian victory, 1958 and 1970 (in 1962, Pele played in two games and it was Garrincha who single handedly took Brazil to the final by scoring two goals each in the quarter and semi-finals), the Brazilian great was surrounded by a cast of truly impressive players. In 1958, Pele scored 6 goals while his fellow forward Vava got 5. Moreover, Pele was not the player of the tournament with that honor going instead to the Brazilian mid-field playmaker, Didi (Didi was the originator of the *folha seca*, a bending and curving free kick which later commentators prosaically labeled banana kicks). Similarly, in 1970, Jairzinho scored 7 goals, Pele got 4, while Rivellino got 3, and Tostao 2. Three other Brazilians scored in the tournament making it a true team effort and in the final, it is generally recognized that Gerson, the Brazilian playmaker brought about the downfall of the Italian side (Smith and Murray, 2016). Maradona's greatest triumphs, however, were solo efforts.

As Simon Kuper (2020) has written, Maradona used individual brilliance to take mediocre teams to glory both at the World Cup and in domestic leagues. In the Brazilian or German cases, since these are the two teams that have played the most World Cup finals, when one studies their World Cup winning teams one can always name a group of players who were influential in the victorious sides. Brazil, in 1958, had Pele, Vava, Didi, and Garrincha while in 1970, they had Jairzinho, Rivellino, Gerson, and Clodoaldo alongside Pele. The Germans in 1974 had talent all over the field: Beckenbauer, Brietner, and Gerd Muller being the most notable—while the 2014 German team had an embarrassment of riches in Thomas Muller, Andre Schurrle, Miroslav Klose, and Mario Goetze.

Argentina, however, won the world cup in 1986 because of the individual efforts of Maradona. It was his two goals each against England and Belgium that led to Argentina dominating the quarter and semi-finals and in the final, while playing a more subdued role, it was Maradona's clever through pass that saw Burruchaga score the winner. As the Harvard scholar Mariano Siskind (cit. in Mineo, 2020, Internet Citation) put it:

When Pelé played for the Brazilian national team in the World Cup in 1970, arguably the best team in the history of all World Cups, he played with five or six of the best players of the world next to him. Messi, as much as I love Messi ... his greatest accomplishments in Barcelona were surrounded by Xavi, Iniesta, Busquets and other incredible players. But Maradona in 1986 won the World Cup by himself. Argentina's team had effective role players, but that's it. In Mexico '86, Maradona performed the

most remarkable individual performance in the history of the World Cup. Many people said that whichever team Maradona played for in 1986 was going to win the World Cup.

In the 1990 World Cup, Maradona was hobbling on one leg and the Argentinians, once again with an unexceptional team, got through to the finals by surviving two penalty shootouts in the quarter and semi-finals although both were a tribute to the goalkeeping skills of Sergio Goyocochea. But it was in the round of 16 match against a Brazil, who were dominating Argentina on the field, that the genius of Maradona came through. Running at the goal, Maradona drew away three Brazilian defenders thus leaving Cannigia unmarked and a precise pass from Maradona with his rarely used right foot saw his teammate score the winning goal.

Similarly, when Maradona moved to the Italian league, he did not go to one of the fashionable Italian teams in Milan, Torino, or Rome but, instead, went to Napoli which was at that time an unfashionable club in the south of the country. While Milan and Juventus had bought some of the best players in the world, Maradona had the Brazilians Alemao and Careca along with a group of competent but not brilliant Italian players - unlike Milan and Torino where the bulk of the Italian team played. Such was his individual ability that in the years that he played for the club it won the Italian Serie A title twice and Maradona even won Napoli a UEFA cup in 1988-89. No player before or since Maradona has had such an individual impact on a team's fortunes and it is a testament to his phenomenal skills as a player.

Alfredo di Stefano is considered one of the greatest players of the 20th century but he never made an impact at the world cup and at Real Madrid his glory years were when he formed a partnership with the Hungarian Ferenc Puskas and a star-studded team of Spanish players (although such was the power of di Stefano over the team that when the Brazilian Didi, who was the best midfielder of his generation, joined Real Madrid, he was largely consigned to the bench by the Argentinean). Maradona, on the other hand, was the player that inspired mediocre teams to greatness and, in doing so, was to make his image and legend grow across the world.

Maradona's career ended in ignominy when he tested positive for illegal drugs at the 1994 World Cup but not before he had whipped up a world-wide frenzy with his reappearance at the highest level of international football. In fact, to protest his expulsion, thousands of Bangladeshis took to the streets to demand that FIFA reverse its decision because by then the legend of Maradona resonated in a country as distant from Argentina as Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi scholar Tohweed Feroze (2020, Internet citation given) explains why Maradona became a phenomenon in Bangladesh and traces it to the 1986 World Cup:

Football is war, and Maradona knew how to use the skill of the perfect feint to get maximum points. The Hand of God goal triggered ferocious debate here too, though most decided to overlook it because the memory of the Falklands War was still vivid in the minds of Bangladeshis...As Brazil was eliminated, there was only one team to

support – Argentina...Even in football, memories of the imperial past play a crucial role in cementing loyalty. As a “third-world” country, Bangladeshis could relate well with the Latin Americans, who had also faced the same economic hardships and exploitation by the West. Once the final came, there was complete support for Argentina, and after the game, Bangladeshis found a new hero in Diego.

Siskind makes a similar point when he points out the significance of the Hand of God goal in 1986 where, he argues, that the view of the goal is based on a North-South divide coming from the legacy of colonialism and breaks along geopolitical lines:

The typical U.S., British moralistic view said that was cheating, but across Latin America, Africa, and the Third World, they view it as a form of humiliating a former colonial power and the ultimate expression of cunning or shrewdness, which is central to a ludic conception of the game (and of life) that stands outside of the realm of morality.

For non-western nations, who had followed the Falklands war and equated it with a clash between the colonized and their colonial oppressors laying unjust imperial claims to territory, the hand of God goal was justifiable revenge especially since Maradona was to make the explicit connection between the game as a form of retribution against the Falklands war and the killing of young conscripted Argentineans.

The Falklands war was viewed in the non-western world as an attempt by a former imperial power to reimpose its colonial policies in an era when the world had by and large moved beyond colonialism and, instead, there was a growing international consensus on dismantling apartheid which was viewed as a vestige of colonialism. Paradoxically, the Argentinean junta, which had murdered thousands of dissidents, was able to garner support for its decision to wage war even though a large chunk of the international public opinion that supported the Argentine position, opposed its brutal domestic policies.

Maradona’s international career ended with his ejection from the 1994 World Cup and this was around the time of the emergence of the internet. Further, sporting networks with global audiences like ESPN, Sky Sports, and STAR, were creating 24 hour-7 days a week sports channels that needed content and they started scouring the world for programming to fill network hours and to attract eyeballs. These networks were to air sports as diverse as Sumo and Australian Rules Football and, amusingly, the fake sport of professional wrestling that gained a global fan base (Gupta, 2009).

As part of this search for programming, the football leagues of lesser-known countries were shown on these sporting networks and seemed to attract an audience. Thus, the Dutch league, which could not compete with the major leagues of Europe both in terms of wealth and players star quality, was to attract a global audience. In the case of South America, the

¹ cit. in Mineo, 2020, Available at, Harvard professor explains why Diego Maradona matters – Harvard Gazette. Accessed on February 8, 2022.

Argentinian league benefitted from such global exposure as did the Copa America which, till the advent of global television, had an audience that was restricted to South America. How did this impact on the image of Maradona?

The fact is that not only did Maradona find a global platform to espouse his views on subjects ranging from sports to politics, but this globalized sporting media required someone as interesting, divisive, and controversial as Maradona. While Maradona may not have been the most insightful of commentators on football, his views, life-style, and flamboyance, made him an ideal person for the media to quote and to pursue. To understand why, one has to go with James Hoberman's (1997) analysis of what makes sportsmen and sportswomen popular. Part of it is athletic ability but, as noted above, once the sportsman retires that sporting aura rapidly disintegrates and we rarely hear from such people or seek out their opinions on issues, either sporting or societal. Hoberman argued in the 1990s that the stereotypical black male style had become a combination of athlete, rapper, and criminal and was thus severely damaging to the African-American community. It was also what drew fans to such stereotypical figures.

Maradona was an immensely talented bad boy and the coming together of a globally integrated economy gave Maradona a continuing presence on the global stage. Thus, his infidelities, his homophobia, and his belligerence would have brought down any other public figure but in the case of Maradona, it only served to feed the legend. In contrast, Michael Jordan was a phenomenal basketball player who decades after having retired from the game still has the most popular Nike shoes named after himself. But, Jordan's influence on society is minimal and he has become another boring, rich, golf-playing millionaire.

What makes a sportsman a legend past their sporting years is the whether they are able to create and maintain a public persona that is larger than life. And Maradona was very good at that. In his lifetime, Maradona stood up for political issues but unlike other sportsmen, particularly in America, he was not to pay the price for his ideological positions. In contrast, athletes like Tommie Smith, Mohammed Ali, and more recently, Colin Kaepernick, all of whom perhaps have done far more to raise political awareness on social and political issues faced a backlash that hurt their careers. Smith came back from the 1968 Mexico City Olympics with a world record breaking gold medal run in the 200 meters yet he was vilified by the American public and only rehabilitated decades later. Today, a statue of Smith and Carlos stands on the campus of San Jose State University, Smith's alma mater. At the time, Smith and Carlos were ejected from the Olympic Village and the racial abuse and public vitriol against them was palpable. They were called "treasonable black rats" and faced a barrage of criticism from the American public where

It was commonly held that they had disgraced the Olympics and disgraced the American flag. Chicago columnist Brent Musburger went even further than most of their detractors and anointed Smith and Carlos, who had explicitly taken an anti-racist stance, 'black-skinned stormtroopers'. (Siquig, 2018)

Ali has been discussed already, but the case of Colin Kaepernick shows that the French are right - *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. Kaepernick's stand was made to publicize a major crisis in American society which was the killing of black men by police officials. The response to Kaepernick's protest ranged from anger and abuse to his being effectively boycotted by America's National Football League. The League to head off expensive litigation reached a settlement with Kaepernick and another player (Perez, 2019). Interestingly, other famous black sportsmen like LeBron James and Kobe Bryant only jumped on the issue after Kaepernick's position made it difficult for renowned black athletes to sit on the fence on such an emotional issue.

Maradona's political leanings were to the left and he did stand up on issues or make political statements that were seen as contradicting the trends in the world, particularly a United States led international system. He was to be the friend of Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez even though both were considered *persona non grata* in many capitals around the world. His leftist politics were perhaps best on display when he met Hugo Chavez wearing a T-Shirt with a photo of George W. Bush and the words "war criminal" emblazoned across it. Domestically, he called for the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo - who have campaigned to both recover the bodies of their dead children who had died in Argentina's dirty war and to bring the criminals who killed them to justice - be awarded a Nobel Peace Prize.

The symbolism of his politics was perhaps more important than their actual impact as witnessed by the fact that he tattooed the face of Che Guevara on his shoulder saying it was time the two greatest Argentines were united in one body (Kuper, 2020). To people in the global South, Maradona's symbolic politics were hugely important since he represented, however unconsciously, the aspirations and struggles of the people of the Southern countries in their battle against the western world. In that sense Maradona inherited the mantle of Mohammed Ali as a champion of the nonwestern world. Moreover, Maradona stood in sharp contrast to the prevailing economic, social, and political thinking that had pervaded the world in the era of globalization.

The new era of globalization began with the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 because it led to the end of two competing economic systems at the global level and the emergence of one security provider for the entire international system. Until 1991, there was a competition between the capitalist and communist economic systems and there were not large amounts of trade between the two politico-military blocs. With the demise of the Soviet Union, no alternative economic ideology could compete with the free-market philosophies of the United States. The Soviet Union disintegrated into multiple nation-states, most of which went through major economic crises in the 1990s. China, while keeping its communist political order in place, brought about market reforms which permitted the influx of foreign capital and thus led to the phenomenal growth of the Chinese economy to the point that it is now a near peer economic competition of the United States.

Militarily, America's position as the remaining superpower and the overwhelming technological superiority of its weaponry meant that there was only one security provider left around the world. It was this role of the sole security guarantor that facilitated the creation of a single global market since no other country could create a market system that could shut off American influence.

Politically, Yoshihiro Francis Fukuyama (1989, p. 18) wrote about the end of history because, according to him, in the history of ideas, liberal-democracy had triumphed over other ideologies in their attempt to shape national societies. He argued

The passing of Marxism-Leninism first from China from the Soviet Union will mean its death as a living ideology of world historical significance...And the death of this ideology means the growing "Common Marketization" of international relations, and the diminution of the likelihood of large-scale conflict between states.

The orthodoxy about the End of History continued for over a decade as the goal of spreading liberal-democracy and free-markets became an integral part of the United States' and the western world's foreign and economic policies. It was the events of September 11, 2001 that brought home the fact that globalization had not led to the end of history and, instead, deep political divides existed within the international community of nations.

By the early to mid-2000s it was becoming clear around the world that globalization and free-markets were not providing the economic benefits that were expected by the global population or lifting large sections of most nonwestern societies out of poverty and, instead, were leading to the growing disparities between the wealthy and the poor within societies. It was with this in mind that the Filipino sociologist Walden Bello (Bello 2014) coined the term 'deglobalization'. He argued that the creation of a single global market had spawned even greater levels of inequality within societies and what was needed was for governments to take a step back from the process of what Friedman called a Flat World where all national economies were interconnected. Bello (2014, p.1) suggested a process of Deglobalization which he described as:

...not a synonym for withdrawing from the world economy. It means a process of restructuring the world economic and political system so that the latter builds the capacity of local and national economies instead of degrading it. Deglobalization means the transformation of a global economy from one integrated around the needs of transnational corporations to one integrated around the needs of peoples, nations, and communities.

Ironically, Bello's call for deglobalization was seen as the nonwestern world's inability to compete in a globalized economic setting but, after the economic collapse of 2008, this demand was also taken up in Western Europe and later by economic populists like Bernie Sanders and Donald John Trump in the United States.

But when globalization was at its peak in the early to mid-2000s, a series of leftist regimes took over in Latin America calling for economic justice and they gained some legitimacy from their ties to Maradona. Thus, Maradona was to befriend Hugo Chavez and his successor Nicholas Maduro as well as the leftist Bolivian president Evo Morales. Added to these friendships was his support for Fidel Castro and the Cuban Communist movement and the fact that he was a staunch supporter of Palestine at a time when even in the Arab world support for the Palestinians had fallen in national governmental circles.

Maradona's political views reinforced his credentials as a globalized superstar because in a global economy dominated by transnational corporations, to succeed, sportsmen and sportswomen had to toe the line of their teams and their commercial sponsors and not raise political controversies. Being anti-globalist or raising the cause of unpopular issues was not going to get the endorsements that modern sportsmen seek to augment their personal fortunes. Instead, sportsmen were expected to have bland squeaky-clean images because that helped sell the goods and services they endorsed. Tiger Woods, for example, was the darling of advertisers as long as he had a clean, uncontroversial image but once the messy details of his infidelities emerged, his sponsors quickly canceled their contracts with him. Other sportsmen like Michael Vick, Mike Tyson, Wayne Rooney, and Maria Sharпова lost endorsements due to transgressions as varied as animal abuse, rape, infidelity, and failing a drug test. Thus, common wisdom was that to get lucrative endorsements you had to take an apolitical stance on controversial issues however just the cause was.

Conclusion

Where players have taken political stands, as in Brazil, it has been in national elections with Romario supporting former president Lula while Ronaldinho endorsed current president Jair Bolsonaro. But neither was to take a stand on international issues and even if they had they lacked the charisma of Maradona and would, therefore, have had little public impact. In more recent times, when taking a knee to support Black Lives Matter or to support the fight against racial injustice became controversial, the most courageous display by sportsmen was, in fact, by the United State Women's National Team (football) where Megan Rapinoe and most other players took a knee to express support for Black Lives Matter. They also wore black warm-ups with Black Lives Matter printed on them. They faced the wrath of American conservative commentators and United States Soccer (the sport's governing body) stipulated that players would have to stand during the national anthem. But, by February 2021, US Soccer repealed its ruling and said standing was not required. This was an obvious response to the nation-wide outcry against police violence against African-Americans and the need to permit public protest. The courage of the women's team - who are also fighting for equal pay with the men - stood in stark contrast to the extreme caution expressed by the overwhelming majority of male players and the owners of men's teams they played for.

Not surprisingly, in an age of globalization, taking a knee for racial justice caught on elsewhere around the world when, in 2017, the players on the German football team Hertha Berlin took a knee to call for “an open-minded world”. Yet in a world of transnational corporations such protests are few and far between and this makes Maradona’s stand on political issues all the more impressive for if he had adopted less-controversial political views he would most likely have enjoyed financially lucrative endorsements from multinationals. For, even twenty years after playing his last game for the Argentinian national team, his image was more recognizable than any player on the national team except Messi and even there, he was always far more popular around the world than his successor to the national captaincy. No other player in retirement could have commanded such endorsements if he wanted them. Pele, Ronaldo, Pete Sampras, Chris Evert, Jurgen Klinsmann, and Zinedine Zidane were never at the same popularity level as Maradona but they all adopted non-controversial political positions in their careers.

Lastly, globalization helped perpetuate the legend of Maradona since he was able to combine extreme footballing talent with a larger-than-life personality which appealed to both fans and the global paparazzi. At the time of his death there were over 67 million google web pages that covered Maradona and it is unlikely that any other sportsmen will achieve such fame in their lifetime. Maradona was the world’s first globalized sport star due to a combination of talent, lifestyle, political stances, and the fact that his rise to international fame coincided with the development of a global integrated media. Other players will certainly make more money, some may live larger than life and even take controversial political positions, but only Maradona was able to combine all of these factors to create a unique international image.

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