

The boy who wants to be a **grandfather**

Teofilo Cubillas is without doubt the best Peruvian player of all time. Cubillas, who is now 56, played in three World Cups and scored ten goals. For the last 26 years, “Nene” [Ed: little boy] has been living in the USA. Nowadays, nothing would make him happier than becoming a grandfather.

BY ANDREAS WERZ

Around 28 million people live in Peru, with over a quarter of that number in Lima alone. Most people can stroll around the streets of the capital without a care in the world. The city is a bustling metropolis. You can live anonymously.

Unless you happen to be Teofilo Cubillas, that is.

Whenever Cubillas visits his home town – generally once a month – he leaves behind the peace and quiet to which he has grown accustomed in Florida, where he settled 26 years ago. In Lima, crowds of people descend upon him, asking him to pose for photographs or to sign autographs. A sea of hands swells to pat him on the shoulders. Even children who are too young to have seen him play and know of him only through their fathers shout “Nene!” – Cubillas’ nickname.



Teofilo Cubillas times two: then as Peruvian international playmaker, now as a member of the FIFA technical study group (TSG).

PHOTOS: ALFIERI (2)/IMAGO

He may have called time on his playing career nearly 20 years ago, but his star has not dimmed in the slightest. Peruvians idolise and adore Cubillas because he was their best ever player, a man who could do anything with a ball and a man who took Peruvian football to the top. Yet Cubillas has never forgotten his roots. He is still the same friendly and helpful man with a sincere word of encouragement and a kind gesture for anyone who crosses his path. He seemingly never grows tired of answering the same questions, or of smiling and scribbling his name on scraps of paper.

QUIET LIFE

In September and October 2005, Cubillas spent four consecutive weeks in Peru as part of the FIFA Technical Study Group (TSG) analysing the U-17 World Championship. Spending such a long period of time in Peru was unusual for the 56-year-old, who now lives in Coral Springs, Florida, with his wife Betty. "I live in the USA now," he says. "But even though I've been in Florida for so long, and even though my two sons and my daughter also live there, deep down I am still 100% Peruvian."

For the last few years, Cubillas has been working as a "flying" independent football coach. Clubs and schools ask him to travel around the USA to teach children and youngsters the secrets of the game. "If a club or a school has at least 50 football-playing girls or boys and wants me to coach the 7- to 16-year-olds, they can book me," he explains. "Sometimes one of my sons comes with me."

Cubillas likes his job and the quiet life. He has no desire to return to professional football, and unlike many former professionals, even a position as club or national coach holds no interest for him, which is a shame, because he





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TEOFILO
CUBILLAS

Full name: Teofilo Cubillas Arizaga
Nickname: Nene (little boy)
Born: 8 March 1949 in Puente Piedra (Lima province), Peru
Clubs: 1964–1973: Alianza Lima. 1973: FC Basel (Switzerland). 1973–1977: Porto (Portugal). 1977–1978: Alianza Lima. 1979–1983: Fort Lauderdale Strikers (USA). 1984–1985: South Florida Sun Fort Lauderdale (USA). 1984: Alianza Lima. 1987: Alianza Lima.
Honours: Peruvian league champion (1977, 1978); Portuguese cup winner (1977); top goalscorer in Peruvian league (1966, 1971); Copa America winner (1975); South American Footballer of the Year (1972). Played in three World Cups (1970, 1978, 1982), 13 matches, 10 goals (seventh in all-time World Cup goal-scoring list). 81 international appearances for Peru, 26 goals (Peruvian record). 295 goals for Alianza Lima.
Miscellaneous: He is married to Betty and has two sons (Cristian (30) and Teofilo Junior (28)) and one daughter (Cyntia (26)). He has been living with his family in Florida, USA, for the last 26 years and he now works as an independent football coach and as a FIFA consultant. In September 1999, Peruvian president Alberto Fujimori appointed Cubillas as the Peruvian Minister for Sport. Cubillas has also worked as a TV commentator.

As at 31 October 2005

► would undoubtedly have so much to teach today's players. After all, he took part in three World Cups, scoring ten goals in thirteen matches. In 2004, Pele also named Cubillas as one of the top 100 players of all time.

RESPECTED

"Nene" made his professional debut at the tender age of 16 and broke into the national team when he was 19. Two years later, in 1970, Cubillas' brilliant and deadly performances in front of goal led Peru to their first FIFA World Cup™ finals since 1930. In Mexico, Cubillas finished as the third highest goalscorer behind world champions Pele and Jairzinho, and eight years later, he went one better by claiming second place in the goalscoring ranks behind Argentina's local hero, Mario Kempes.

Cubillas only ever played for one Peruvian club, Alianza Lima, a club that is still close to his heart. Whenever he is in Peru, he invariably tries to fit in an Alianza home game, but he is never happy with what he sees. Peruvian football – at both club and international level – is in crisis, with Peru suffering an early exit in the race to qualify for the 2006 FIFA World Cup Germany™. "There is so much wrong," laments Cubillas. "We just can't keep up with the competition."

It was all so different when "Nene" played alongside Hector Chumpitaz, Hugo Sotil and Carlos Oblitas at a time when Peru, and Cubillas in

particular, were respected all over the football world. Cubillas was voted South American Player of the Year in 1972, and just 12 months later, he made a shock move to Switzerland, a country that was a footballing backwater. A loyal and generous FC Basel fan stumped up the cash for his transfer, which at USD 300,000 was a very substantial fee at the time.

BITTERLY COLD

Cubillas never found his feet in Switzerland. "I was young, I had no experience of life and I was far away from my family," he recalls. "I went to Basle alone, I didn't speak the language and I never learnt it. I felt alone, I was homesick and on top of that, it was bitterly cold in Switzerland. I was always freezing, even though I trained in a pullover and a woolly hat with liniment on my face. I only wanted one thing. To leave Switzerland, and as quickly as possible."

His nightmare stay in Switzerland lasted only six months. Porto offered USD 400,000 and the deal was done without further ado. From that point on, Cubillas never looked back.

The Swiss club made a USD 100,000 profit on the deal, but Cubillas actually received half of that himself. The club's patron, who had paid for the Peruvian's transfer from Alianza, placed USD 50,000 in a blocked account and told Cubillas that he would receive the money, which was to be used for his

children's education, as soon as he had started a family. The Swiss man was true to his word. Cubillas did receive the money and as agreed, he used it for the education of his three children. All three are now grown up, and two got married in the USA in November. "My biggest wish now," smiles Cubillas "is to be a grandfather. I just can't wait!"

In a few years' time, maybe he will even be able to teach his grandchildren how to play football. They could hardly wish for a better tutor.

Cubillas still displays his talents in the odd exhibition match, most recently during the U-17 World Championship when a FIFA XI twice defeated a Local Organising Committee team. Cubillas scored three goals in those two games and every time the ball hit the back of the net, he beamed like a "Nene"...like a little boy. ■