

The Hand of God

The Author

Jimmy Burns was born in Madrid in 1953 and educated at Stonyhurst College , Lancashire, and the London School of Economics . His early days in journalism were with Yorkshire Television and the BBC and as a correspondent for the Economist and the Observer . He has worked as a foreign correspondent for the Financial Times and on the newspaper's labour staff , winning the "**Industrial Reporter of the Year Award**" in 1990. He is currently social affairs and employment correspondent at the Financial Times. His previous books are "The Land That Lost Its Heroes" , winner of the Somerset Maugham prize for non – fiction ; "**Beyond the Silver River**"; "**Spain: A Literary Companion**"; and the internationally acclaimed "**Barca : A People's Passion**" .

Some Facts and Statistics about Diego Maradona

Name: Diego Armando Maradona

Position: Forward

Birthdate: 30/10/1960

Birthplace: Buenos Aires - Argentina

Height: 168cm

Weight: 78kg

CLUBS:

Cebollitas

Argentinos Juniors - Argentina (76/80) 166 matches (116 goals)

Boca Juniors - Argentina (81, 95/97) 71 matches (35 goals)

Barcelona - Spain (82/83) 58 matches (38 goals)

Napoli - Italy (84/91) 259 matches (115 goals)

Sevilla - Spain (92/93) 29 matches (7 goals)

Newell's Old Boys - Argentina (93) 5 matches

- * **1978:** Top Goalscorer of the Campeonato Metropolitano.
- * **1979:** Top Goalscorer of the Campeonato Metropolitano.
- * **1979:** Top Goalscorer of the Campeonato Nacional.
- * **1979:** World Champion with Argentina in the Youth World Cup.
- * **1979:** "Olimpia de Oro" to the Best Argentine Footballer of the year.
- * **1979:** Chosen by FIFA as the Best Player of the year in South America.
- * **1979:** Receives the Gold Ball as the best player of the moment.
- * **1980:** Top Goalscorer of the Campeonato Metropolitano.
- * **1980:** Top Goalscorer of the Campeonato Nacional.
- * **1980:** Chosen by FIFA as the Best Player of the year in South America.
- * **1981:** Top Goalscorer of the Campeonato Nacional.
- * **1981:** Receives the Trofeo Gandulla as Best Footballer of the year.
- * **1981:** Champion of Argentina with Boca Juniors.
- * **1983:** Wins the Copa del Rey with Barcelona.
- * **1985:** Named Ambassador of the UNICEF.
- * **1986:** World Champion with Argentina.
- * **1986:** Wins his second "Olimpia de Oro" to the Best Argentine Footballer of the year.

- * **1986:** Named "Distinguished Citizen" by the City of Buenos Aires.
- * **1986:** Receives the Golden Shoe assigned by Adidas to the Best Footballer of the year.
- * **1986:** Gets the Golden Pen as Best Player in Europe.
- * **1987:** Italian Serie A Champion with Napoli.
- * **1987:** Wins the Italian Cup with Napoli.
- * **1988:** Top goalscorer of the Serie A with Napoli.
- * **1989:** Wins the UEFA Cup with Napoli.
- * **1990:** Italian Serie A Champion with Napoli.
- * **1990:** Receives the Premio Konex di Brillante for his sport skill.
- * **1990:** Second place in the World Cup.
- * **1990:** Named "Ambassador of Sport" by the President of Argentina.
- * **1990:** Wins the Supercoppa Italiana with Napoli.
- * **1993:** Awarded as Best Argentine Footballer of all time.
- * **1993:** Wins the Artemio Franchi Cup with Argentina.
- * **1995:** Receives the Golden Ball for his career.
- * **1995:** Awarded as "Master Inspirer of Dreams" by the University of Oxford.
- * **1999:** "Olimpia de Platino" as Best Footballer of the century.
- * **1999:** Receives from the AFA the award as best sportsman of the century in Argentina.
- * **1999:** His goal of 1986 against England is chosen as the best goal ever in the history of football.
- * **2000:** Elected "FIFA best football player of the century" in a gala ceremony in Rome after a worldwide poll on the internet.

The life of Diego Armando Maradona

The early steps of his Career

Diego Armando Maradona was born in Buenos Aires in 1960. He was the fifth of the eight children of Diego Maradona, who is his father and a native Indian, and Dalma Salvadora Franco. He was nicknamed "El pibe de oro" (the golden boy). Diego lived in Villa Fiorito, a small village outside Buenos Aires. His uncle Cirilo gave him his first football at the age of three! The story says that Diego slept with the football next to him in the bed and you could notice his skills early.

At the age of eight was he the big star in Estrella Roja Red Star (Cebollitas). In this team, Argentina Juniors scout, Francisco Cornejo discovered him. He said that Diego came from another planet, that he could do anything he wanted with the ball and that he had better skills than the others. He could also keep the ball still on his head or on the left foot as long as he wanted to! It wasn't only Cornejo who had seen the art that Diego could do. The media started to record his tricks when he was ten. During the half time in the matches in the Argentinean League, was Diego the Half Time attraction.

At the age of nine Diego and his friends founded the team Little Onions which was soon taken over by Argentinos Juniors because of the fact they played so well. Ten days before his sixteenth birthday Diego played his first match as a professional for Argentinos Juniors. He was the youngest player in the premier division and Scored his first goal against Lucangioli, goalkeeper of San Lorenzo de Mar del Plata.

The timing of this momentous occasion seemed to have exceeded even his ambitions as years on he was to say *'I always knew I would become great one day, but not so quickly.....'*!

The first experience with the National Team and Boca Juniors

By now Maradona's reputation is growing rapidly, and in February of 1977 he plays his first match for Argentina against Hungary. However, despite his enormous talent, Argentine coach Cesar Menotti does not include him in his final squad of 22 players for the 1978 World Cup in Argentina - saying that Maradona is too young to handle the pressures of the world's greatest soccer tournament. A decision that was to be a wise one as Argentina lift the famous trophy after beating Holland in the final, with Mario Kempes being the hero of the Argentine fans - but Maradona was to have his day.

In June of 1979, he scores his first goal for his country, in Glasgow against Scotland, and in September that year he leads the Argentine youth side to victory in the Youth World Cup in Japan - beating the USSR 3-1 in the final. In February 1981 he joins Boca Juniors.

To avoid mistakes, let's make something clear from the beginning: Boca is Maradona, Maradona is Boca. That story that came out from its main character, about his sympathy to Independiente is supported by his own words: his fascination for the skills of Bochini and Bertoni. But the truth is that in his humble house at Azamor and Mario Bravo, in Villa Fiorito, in his family's heart and in his own, there was only one flag that flapped coloured blue and gold. He was raised up loving Boca, he felt, since he was young that something special was growing between him and the people that supported Boca. They were the first ones who made an ovation to him at a field, crying out "Let him stay! / Let him stay!" as an anthem during the recess between the two halves of a match in First Division between Argentinos and... Boca. He was only 12 years old. Years later (not many, though), with Argentinos t-shirt on, he "hit" a symbol of Boca, Hugo Orlando Gatti, scoring four goals. In a single match, four moments that caused other unanimous ovations: that of Argentinos supporters, of course... but also, that of the people of Boca.

That's why he insisted so much until he finally got to wear that t-shirt. He was so involved that he himself helped deal the pass. It was as follows: River Plate was very interested in counting on Maradona for its team, giving away whatever was needed. He only had to mention that Boca was just as enthusiast about him (...when this was not true... Boca was not interested, and had no money at all) to change the upcoming story.

His dream definitely came true, in an economic deal, which could easily be considered as a legend of world economics. Millions of dollars, bank guarantees, chilling fees.

But nothing of that was enough to pay for what he did, ever since his debut against Talleres de Córdoba, the 22nd February, 1981. Two penalty goals inside Boca's crowded Stadium (La Bombonera) that helped him become more self-assured regarding his body, cause he knew he couldn't give everything he could straight away. You could say his Boca debut with a 4-1 was brilliant. Boca go on to win the Argentine championship later that year.

At the beginning of the match he let Miguel Angel Brindisi, his ideal partner, be the center of attention. All the same, so that no one could doubt it, he showed his distinction in the different games. It is the case of a match against River, in Boca's Stadium during a rainy night the 10th of April. When the tournament was coming to an end, the best Maradona showed up. He defeated Ferro, a team that directed by Carlos Timoteo Griguol, wisely managed to shift between football, basketball and chess, being a big rival. But Boca, with Silvio Marzolini as a guide struggled, fought. He then faced the National Tournament, with lots of trips and friendly matches. All the teams were so tired that the way was free for the team of Kempes in River Plate.

It was never going to be long before the world sat up and took notice of the diminutive genius, and Barcelona were the team that got their man - signing Maradona in June 1982. So Diego left Boca the summer of 1982, almost a year had past since he had arrived. But he didn't leave forever.

His time in Barcelona

At the young age of 22 in 1982 to be worth \$7.2 million, Diego left at last, his destiny being Spain. Firstly, to play in World Cup '82 and secondly, to stay in one of the wealthiest football clubs of the world: Barcelona Football Club. It was not simple for him. They did not make it simple indeed.

Apart from Catalan being the official language of that beautiful Spanish region called Catalunya, outside the stadium... everyone spoke the same dialect. Inside the field, Diego found out that for the great majority of his team partners, running was more important than playing. More rage, less talent. And although the rest could not learn what he knew since he was born, he sensed that he should incorporate what everyone considered a virtue- "Put everything inside the field", according to the ironic definition of César Luis Menotti- in order to transmit some of his intact magic.

It was of no help the presence of his first manager, the German Udo Lattek. This man was more worried about the players to carry huge medicine balls than playing with the real ones - football ones- in the matches. Nevertheless, he succeeded. He again lighted up the spark of a fantastic and positive discussion: many people say that what Maradona made with a ball -the real football- in Barcelona, could never be repeated. For example, that marvelous goal against the Real Madrid, forever lasting: with a dribble he managed to crack the opposing defense, that was pressing in the midfield; he ran and ran with the ball stuck to his left foot, till he faced the goalkeeper, who looked for him far from the goal line; with another dribble he did not let the goalkeeper touch them, nor him nor the ball; he therefore headed towards the empty goal, his foot and the ball being friends forever. When he was about to reach the goal line, and the posts made shadows over him, he looked through one of the eyes he had on his neck, just when Juan José, a long haired, heavily bearded defender of the Real Madrid was decided to terminate with all the parts involved in that relationship. Then, the magic: he made a sudden stop, took his foot... and his ball out of reach for the rival and let him pass by, like a torero with a bull. Poor Juan José he crashed against the post; and great Diego finally pushed the ball towards the goal.

No man on earth could stop such a football player, but a terrible illness would. Hepatitis caught him by surprise, just when he had been showing off his magic for about three months.

He played for the first time on September 4th, 1982, being defeated by Valencia, at Mestalla Stadium, by 2-1. He had played 13 games and had conquered 6 goals when he had to keep absolute rest. He returned to the fields three months later, on March 12th, against the Betis. The team manager had changed, as well as his possibilities to have dreams: Menotti and the League were waiting with open arms. They could not go for all, but they got something as a reward: the mostly desired King's Cup.

It was just a matter of starting all over again, for there was no one who could break such a strong determination.

Yes, there was one. And it had name and surname: Andoni Goikoetxea, the executioner of the best left foot in football history. Many people thought that his career had come to an end on that September 24th of 1983, while some thought that it was going to take a long time to see him again inside a football field. Both were wrong, as his prompt return in just 106 days can be considered as the last miracle that took place in Spain.

One thing was for sure: to keep a good relationship with president Joseph Luis Núñez, who pretended more starrng than he should, much more than divine help was needed. And that had no possible solution. At the end of season, in the middle of a royal battle that took place during the final match of the King's Cup, against archrival Athletic Bilbao, on May 5th of 1984 in Madrid, everything reached to an end. After two seasons playing for Barca, Diego Maradona joined the Italian Club Napoli which was one of the worst in the Serie A.

The number 10 became a legend

What indeed caught his attention from that populous, southern region he had arrived to, was the discrimination it suffered from the rest of Italy. He felt that since the beginning. When he traveled north with his team to play his first game in Italian League, in the wealthy calcio, against Verona. That took place in September 16th, 1984; the adverse 3-1 score, along with the flags showed by the rival fans, caused the mixture of both pain and eagerness inside Maradona's blood. "Lavatevi!", have a shower, could be read on them.

Along Diego's hand, promotion was now an insult even in southern Italy's dialect.

Change of mentality was so evident that, in the second season, in 1985/86, and in association with Bruno Giordano, a forward he himself recommended, Maradona's Napoli threatened and scared the powerful northern teams: it ended in the third position, and between the new number nine and Diego conquered 21 goals. Juventus, who that year resulted the winner of the Scudetto trophy, trembled...

The final explosion occurred in the third season, in 1986/87. After being made an ambassador by UNICEF, Maradona leads Argentina to victory in the 1986 World Cup in Mexico, beating West Germany 3-2 in the final, but not before scoring one of the most talked about 'goals' in the history of the game: the famous 'Hand of God' goal against England(He scored the goal with his hand, but the referee did not notice; After the match a journalist interviewed him and he just said that was the hand of god which scored the goal).

But no one can argue with the sheer brilliance that followed it. If his first goal was questionable, his second was the greatest goal ever scored - without question. After collecting the ball on the halfway line, Maradona then proceeded to dance around the entire England team, before slotting the ball past England 'keeper Peter Shilton. A moment of magic, from a player with a magical left foot. A factor rarely considered when talking about this goal is the state of the playing surface in this match; to say it was uneven is an understatement - yet Maradona had the ball under perfect control throughout his mazy run towards the England goal. His dream became reality and he was the World Champion with the Argentinean A-National team .

With the help of Diego, Napoli won his first Scudetto after a long wait that lasted for 60 years, leaving the powerful Milan behind, and setting the carnival in Napoles free. Consecration took place in the San Paolo Stadium, on May 10th, 1987: a tie in the result was enough for it: 1-1. Since that same day, and having no fear of heresy, the people of Napoles enthroned a new Saint: along with San Gennaro patron saint of the city, now there was Diego. Or even better, Diec6.

Napoles, city of extremes, lived joy and frustration with a unique passion in Maradona's fourth season, the one of 1987/88. That was probably the best start of Diego and of the team as a whole in its lifetime. But everything collapsed in the end, in such a way that no one could believe it. The thing was that the Napoli started like an unstoppable machine, breaking all sorts of records and statistics, things that Italians are very fond of, but when the final goal appeared at hand, the engine broke down. The Ma-Gi-Ca formula, composed by Maradona, Giordano and Careca, the Brazilian that had just joined the club, was not enough to avoid disaster: from the last seven matches, Napoli lost five and ended in a tie in two. The key game that was lost was the one against Milan, with a result of 3-2, on May 1st, and in the very own San Paolo. The reputation of an exceptional group was soon darkened. While many of the players were removed from the team, Maradona- upset by the suspicion- doubled his bet.

During his fifth season, in 1988/89, the Napoli demonstrated that its good performance was not casual. Although it lost the battle against the great Inter, Napoli went beyond Italian frontiers: with Maradona, they won the first UEFA Cup in its history, making an extraordinary campaign and defeating the German team Stuttgart. The game of his final return was played in Germany, on May 17th, 1989. A tie in three awarded Napoli. The championship.

At that point, Diego thought that his time in the club had reached to an end. Nevertheless, none of the team managers dared to open the door for him to fly away. That is why he faced his sixth season in Napoli during 1989/90 with great resentment. It is known that many times this resentment has been Maradona's fuel. And this was not precisely the exception. Head to head with Milan, they made the decisive difference in the end. When everyone talked about that great Napoli of Maradona, the great Maradona of Napoli answered in his own way: winning the second scudetto in the history of the club. Consecration took place once again in San Paolo stadium, after defeating the Lazio by a score of 1-0, on April 29th, 1990. From that time on the career of Diego Maradona had a change...

He led Argentina to the 1990 World Cup final but Argentina lose 1-0 to West Germany, with Andreas Brehme scoring from the spot late on. Loosing the World Cup- Italy 90 was like the end of the world for Maradona, he cried inside the field when everything was over. The people in the stadium did not understand his sadness and booed him. He said about that, I would have never imagined that there could be so many people happy with my own sadness! .

Dark days were to follow this for Maradona, when in 1991, he was proved positive in a dope test, and is banned from football for 15 months.

Upon completion of his ban in 1992, he refused to return to Napoli, and asked for a transfer - and joined Spanish side Sevilla.

Nevertheless, Diego's history in Napoli is so great, that still continues nowadays. And will continue forever.

Sevilla , a new start?

He was suspended, it was like an Italian vendetta that forbid him to play football for fifteen months. It was too much time for such a talent. He needed to run, he needed to shout a goal, he needed to be happy.

World Champion with Argentina, he won everything down in Italy. He had reached the top, heaven. He was God. He tried to become earthly again. Sevilla was the ideal destiny for that. The idea was to play and have fun.

The 28th September, 1992 he stepped on a field again. Sevilla welcomed him with a party. Thirty thousand people expected him at Ramón Sánchez Pizjuán Stadium. The guest, the partenaire was Bayern Munich, with his friend Lotthar Matthaus. A free shoot to the crossbeam showed his talent remained untouched.

His debut in the Spanish League he made with Sevilla, losing 2-1 against Athletic Bilbao. After about a year of Depressions he left Sevilla in October 1993 and joins Newell's old boys in Argentina.

Back to the roots and the end

He leaves Sevilla in October 1993 and joins Newell's old boys in Argentina, losing 3-1 in his first appearance against Independiente. Later that month he makes his international comeback, playing in Sydney against Australia in the playoffs to qualify for the USA 1994-world cup. The match is a 1-1 draw, with the Argentine goal being credited to inspirational play by Maradona. In November that same year, Argentina - captained by Maradona - win 1-0 against Australia and qualify for the USA World Cup.

The idea belonged to Gringo Giusti, but anyone could have come up with it. With his manager suit on, this Diego's former national team-mate was in the stadium watching a Newell's match. The game was boring and not at all transcendental, when he looked at Tota Rodriguez and said: "This club needs an effective strike and I know the only person capable of doing it." That same person was, of course, football's very own surname: Maradona. That seemed to be the best destiny. A city that breaths and lives for football was waiting for him. Everyone in Rosario was following his steps, even the fans of Rosario Central, Newell's archrival, forgave him for playing in that team. "Let's save Maradona, leprosy can heal", they would say ironically.

Enthusiastic as a beginner, he began one of the most strict diets in his life. He lost 12 kilograms, thanks to a Chinese man whose name is very hard to remember: Liu Guo Cheng.

On Monday September 13th, 1993, Independence Park burst with life. Anxiety was everywhere. It was an unrepeatable evening.

Thirty thousand people were about to witness a miracle. Maradona dressed in red and black. His small body appeared in the field, and he felt that he could not coordinate his movements. He received an incredible ovation that encouraged him to shyly raise up his arms. A ball slid towards him, inviting him to do with it what no one else could imitate. Not even that made him react. His team-mates approached him with great admiration and threw him up high in the sky. His smile was everlasting, like that time, nearly a decade ago in the San Paolo. People had gone just to see him juggling with the ball.

Indio Solari gave him all the comforts he needed. Eight years, ten months and eight days had passed for his return to Argentina to play for an Argentine team. That took place on October 10th, 1993 at Independiente's Stadium, the very same place where he had watched his first matches and had been delighted with players such as Bochini and Bertoni.

He showed his enthusiasm and quality in some of his trade marked plays. No one will forget that marvelous kick that the goalkeeper Islas saved miraculously. That one won't be his last.

Even when his time in the club was very short and that the story seemed to be unfinished, not a single Newell's fan could ever regret having him amongst them, even though it was for just five games.

In 1994, when after playing well in two of Argentina's World Cup matches - scoring a great goal against Greece in one of them - he receives a ban for using ephedrine, a substance not allowed by FIFA. In October 1994 he takes up his first coaching job with Deportivo Mandiyú of Corrientes, resigning just two months later.

In May 1995 he takes up his second coaching position, this time with Racing - resigning four months later!! Obviously not content with sitting on the sidelines, he comes back to play for Boca Juniors, with the fans of Boca preparing a special party for him - complete with firework display - which was held in the stadium of the "Bombonera". He continues to play for Boca until August 1997, when he started the 1997/98 season in great shape, but was once again found to be positive after yet another dope test, but there are suspicions of a plot against him.

In October 1997 he plays his last match for Boca, winning 1-2 away against River Plate. Then later that month he decides to retire from football on the day of his 37th birthday. In 1998 he does not play in the World Cup, but travels to France to commentate on the match for an Argentine TV channel. In November 1998 he goes back to Italy after more than 7 years. Then in 1999 he agrees to a movie about his life and takes part in the Italian movie "Tifosi". Also in 1999, he received an award from the Argentine Football Association naming him 'Best sportsman of the century in Argentina'; his goal against England was chosen as the best goal ever in the history of football, and the following year he was named as: 'FIFA best footballer of the century' at a gala ceremony in Rome, after a worldwide poll on the internet.

In May 2000, Maradona was released from a Cuban hospital after undergoing treatment for heart complications, as a result of drug and alcohol abuse. This highlighted the sad fact, which as is usually the case, where there is genius, there is always a flaw - and Diego Armando Maradona was no different. Fortunately for him, he just happened to be one of the greatest players of all time. This website is all about footballing talent, and Maradona had it in abundance. If you forget about his flaws, and concentrate on what this man did on the pitch, you are left with the one redeeming quality that set him apart from most of his peers - GENIUS.

Personal Opinion

Usually I hate reading, but this book was a book I really enjoyed because of the fact that it is written about soccer. It shows very well how Maradona lived and what he felt and I can absolutely recommend that book. At certain times it was difficult to read but all in all it was very good to understand. About Diego Maradona, I have to say that his life was like a roller coaster ride but what is clear is that his addiction is that of football. In a country like Argentina a poor kid who made it from the slums is more representative than the president as he put it. His originating from the slums was what shaped his life and aspirations and his main criticism has always been that many famous footballers did not speak enough for or represented the poor. In fact many of them like him had risen from the slums. Many hope that he recovers so that the world does not miss its greatest footballer. For me he is one of the best !!!

