

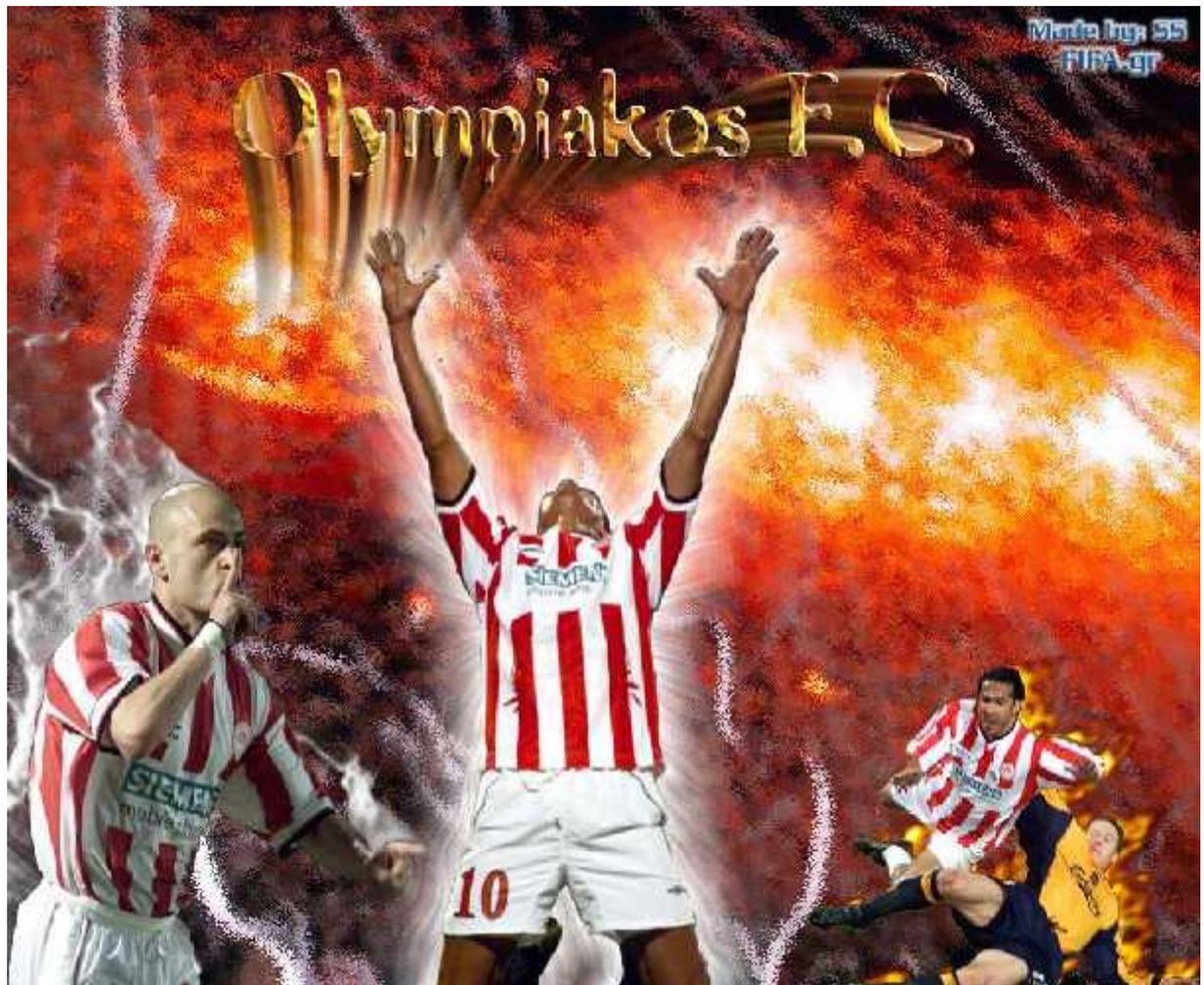
Association football



Association football, more commonly known as **football** or **soccer**, is a team sport played between two teams of eleven players using a spherical ball. Association football is the most popular football variant worldwide, and is widely considered to be the most popular sport in the world.

The game is played on a rectangular grass or artificial field, with a goal in the centre of each of the short ends. The object of the game is to score by driving the ball into the opposing goal. In general play, the goalkeepers are the only players allowed to use their hands or arms to propel the ball; the rest of the team usually use their feet to kick the ball into position, occasionally using their head to intercept a ball in midair. The team that scores the most goals by the end of the match wins. If the score is tied at the end of the game, either a draw is declared or the game goes into extra time and/or a penalty shootout, depending on the format of the competition.

The modern game was codified in England following the formation of The Football Association, whose 1863 Laws of the Game created the foundations for the way the sport is played today. Football is governed internationally by the International Federation of Association Football, commonly known by the acronym FIFA. The most prestigious international football competition is the FIFA World Cup, held every four years. This event, the most widely viewed in the world, boasts an audience twice that of the Summer Olympic Games.



After the World Cup, the most important international football competitions are the continental championships, which are organised by each continental confederation and contested between national teams. These are the European Championship (UEFA), the Copa América, African Cup of Nations, the Asian Cup, the Gold Cup,) and the Nations Cup.

The FIFA Confederations Cup is contested by the winners of all 6 continental championships, the current FIFA World Cup champions and the country which is hosting the Confederations Cup. This is generally regarded as a warm up tournament for the upcoming FIFA World Cup and does not carry the same prestige as the World Cup itself. The most prestigious competitions in club football are the respective continental championships, which are generally contested between national champions, for example the UEFA Champions League in Europe and the Copa Libertadores de América in South America. The winners of each continental competition contest the FIFA Club World Cup.



Today, football is played at a professional level all over the world. Millions of people regularly go to football stadiums to follow their favourite teams,^[17] while billions more watch the game on television.^[18] A very large number of people also play football at an amateur level. According to a survey conducted by FIFA published in 2001, over 240 million people from more than 200 countries regularly play football.^[19] Its simple rules and minimal equipment requirements have no doubt aided its spread and growth in popularity.