

## **PUSKÁS, THE WORLD BRAND: CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENTS, BRAND EXPANSIONS AND OTHER CURIOUS PHENOMENA**

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According to various surveys, „Puskás” is the most well-known Hungarian word. This „brand” is not just known around the world, but respected and loved. Puskás became a world star in a time when there was no Internet and television had just started gaining popularity.

But why did he become so great, not only as a player but as a brand too? The article looks for the marketing aspects of this brilliant story. It covers his celebrity endorsements/sponsors, and the products/brands which used or use his (brand) name. The possible future of the Puskás brand is also discussed.

**Keywords:** Ferenc Puskás, football, personal branding, celebrity endorsement, merchandising

### **1. Introduction: the greatest Hungarian football player**

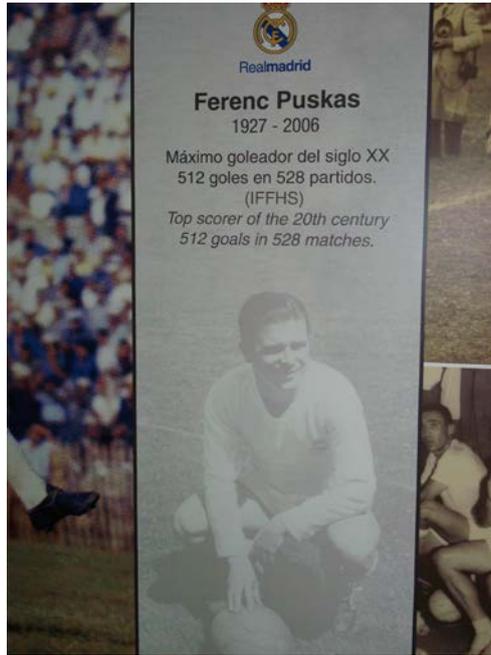
Ferenc Puskás (1927-2006), without a doubt is the greatest Hungarian football player of all times. Even though it was not him, who wore the Hungarian national shirt the most times, having scored 84 times in 85 matches is still an outstanding performance.

This is especially true since he did not return after the 1956 revolution, thus only played a little more than ten years for the national team (and appeared four times in the Spanish national team).

His most memorable move is probably the “drag-back” goal against England, when Hungary won for 6:3. It is not a coincidence that in 2009 FIFA established the Puskás award for the most beautiful goal. That year the award went to Cristiano Ronaldo, who is a great admirer of Puskás the “Galloping Major” as he was called. Their careers are very similar as both began playing in the adult league at 16 (Puskás in Kispest, while Ronaldo in Sporting Lisbon), drafted into their national teams at 18 and became captains at 22.

Although Puskas did not become the most expensive player of the world, but he certainly could have been when Juventus offered a sum of 100 thousand US dollars for him, which in 1947 was an outstanding amount. And Puskás was only 20 years old that time!

But he decided to stay in Hungary and felt no regrets. At this time the regime in Hungary established one of the best teams, if not the best in all over the world, called Budapest Honvéd. And Puskás was able to score the most goals for four seasons for this team, just as he did later for Real Madrid. He led the latter team to becoming a Champions League winner in 1961, scoring four goals in the final against Eintracht Frankfurt resulting in a 7:3 victory. Alex Ferguson, the manager of Manchester says: “No one has done such a thing.” (ALMÁSI 2009, SZÖLLŐSI 2005, PUSKAS.COM 2012)



1. The best goal scorer of the 20th Century - As can be seen at the Real Madrid Stadium  
(Source: photo of the author)

He also scored against the Yugoslav team in the 1952 Olympic finals which ended with 2:0. Just one year later, in the predecessor of European Championship, the Central-European Cup final against the Italian team, Puskás scored two of three winning goals. The 1954 World Cup final also began with a Puskás goal; although in the end Hungary lost 3:2 to Germany.

This result was nevertheless not up to Puskás, as in the last seconds he managed to score another, but unfortunately due to an offside offence the referee decided to overrule the goal. And although the Germans won, Puskás was nominated the best player of the world cup.

In 1999 he was also chosen as a forward for FIFA's "world cup team of the century" alongside Garrincha and Pelé.



2. The Match of the Century, 6-3 against England – became a stamp  
(Source: Hungarian Post)

## 2. Bred for Football

Puskás could do thing with his left foot, which up to this date cannot be imitated. During one of the practices with his Spanish national teammates he made a bet with them that out of ten kicks he would hit the upper goalpost ten times. The stunt was a success and his teammates had to dig deep into their pockets (ALMÁSI, 2009).

They did not know that his father made him practice this for hours when he was a child – as did half a century later Ted Beckham with his son David (MILLIGAN 2004, PAPP-VÁRY 2009). The elder Puskás also knew how to motivate his son. The father would tell him on the field that he was lazy and in return he began running to wherever he was going, even racing with the tram. And of course he would run to the football field – although it was quite close: their window was facing the tribune of the field (ALMÁSI, 2009).

We could think he was merely talented, however according to László Bozsik, childhood friend, he was “bred for this sport” by his father, just as David was with his father Ted Beckham.

And although in his career during the second half of the 50’s in Hungary, Puskás would spend his money on food and beer – upon arriving to Madrid he became a true “professional” in terms of mentality. However, they would not have allowed it any other way: once the president of Real held back his monthly pay, because it had come to his attention that Puskás was seen ordering a beer. The story is true, but the beer was for his wife... (ALMÁSI, 2009).

### **3. Puskás brand names**

The admired and loved football players are often called by their first names or given nicknames by their managers and fans as well. (DESBORDES 2007) Beckham is often called Becks, but he is also known as Goldenballs (MILLIGAN 2004, PAPP-VÁRY 2009). The best player of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century vote went to the Argentinian football player Maradona, who is not simply Diego Maradona, but “Diego, the God”. . In a tie with Maradona, the other best player, whose name may be unheard of is Edison Arantes do Nascimento. He is best known for his nickname Pelé. The Portuguese Eusebio, known as the “Black Panther” and sometimes the “Black Diamond” scored goals among others to Puskás’s team, Real Madrid in the European Champions League in 1962. But the Hungarians also had their “Black Panther”: the goalkeeper of the Golden team, Gyula Grosics.

The world record in nicknames – or brand names if you will – goes to Puskás (ALMÁSI, 2009). To start with his real name was not Puskás, but Purczeld. During his childhood many called him: the “Kraut”. Also the nickname “Öcsi” (Little Brother) was used by his elder team mates to distinguish him from his father Ferenc Puskás, who served as a manager at Kispest in the 40s’ (WIKIPEDIA 2012). When the communists turned Kispest into Honvéd, the players were also labeled by their army ranks. But the real labeling was by their fans, who called Puskás the “Galloping Major” based on his speed. Later, during the second half of the 50s’ the fans renamed him the “Barrel-chested major” or the “Little fat chap” due to his beer drinking. During this period he gained a lot of weight. For a while the Spanish fans also referred to him this way, but when he lost weight and proved himself with goals, then they began calling him, just as his team mates “Pancho”. The name comes from the Spanish equivalent of Ferenc, nickname of Francesco. The other was “Paco”, but that was related to General Franco and this would not have been fortunate at the time. In Spain, Puskás also received the name “Booming canon”, because as soon as he was within 35 meters he would fire (ALMÁSI, 2009).

Later, during the years spent in Greece they used his first name, he was known as “Ferenc” then. In Australia he was referred to as the “Boss”. Finally, when he returned to Hungary, he again became everyone’s little brother (“Öcsi”).

### **4. Business without success**

Football players being businessmen did not evolve in the present (DESBORDES 2007). Although in the 40s, 50s and 60s we did not have such brands as the Beckham perfume or CR7, the fashion brand of Ronaldo, players of that era did have their own businesses. Even though there was professional football in Hungary, players could not be paid high wages. Other forms of compensation had to be

used. The government, for example opened a Puskás-Bozsik hardware store, where the actual players were behind the counter – but in reality most of time they just played cards. And when the team began to take international trips the government told the players that they would be unable to pay them more money, however their luggage will not be scrutinized. Therefore, they were allowed “trading” (smuggling) (ALMÁSI, 2009).

Later in Madrid Puskás took up some real legitimate businesses. Not far from the stadium he opened a Puskás Pancho restaurant where often he would be the chef. He also established a salami factory; however he had a far too big heart for a businessman. The restaurant guests in many cases were not allowed to pay and he would give away his home made “kolbász” (Hungarian salami) for free. That led to an unprofitable business (ALMÁSI 2009).

Upon his final return to Hungary, he gave his name to his favorite drink “Puskás beer”, which also did not become a big hit. He also took part in a few companies’ advertising campaigns, which today we call celebrity endorsement. The most famous of all is perhaps for the Skála Coop department store, which in the 80s in Hungary was a leading “western” store in Socialism. In the ad a cartoon figure asks Puskás on the escalator: “My little brother, since you are here, why don’t you advertise Skála Coop?” He replies: “No, no, advertising is out of the question.” But when he turns around we can see a giant Skála Coop logo on the back of his shirt.

### **5. The Antarctic was probably the only place where he did not work as a trainer**

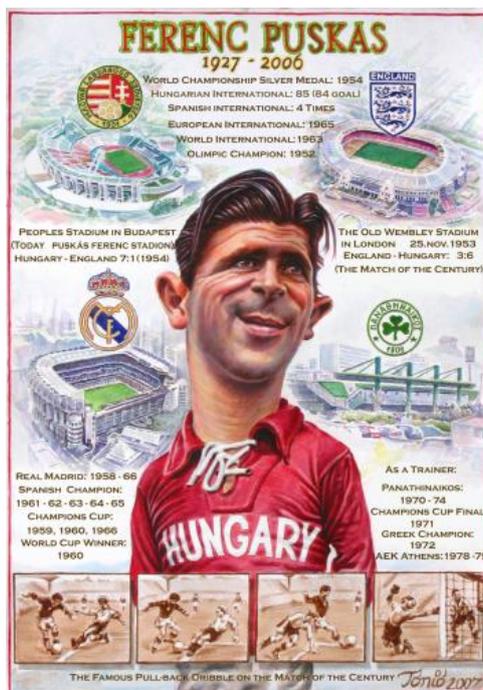
It is strange, but Puskás became a multilingual trainer working on every populated continent in the world, even though at the age of 26, in an interview following the famous 6:3 match he did not know one word of English (ALMÁSI, 2009).

He was staying in Austria after the revolution in Hungary, when the opportunity to be hired by Manchester United came up, because MU lost almost all the members of its first team after the 1958 Munich air crash. The deciding factor against Puskás was that he did not speak English.

Therefore when he got the opportunity at Real Madrid he threw himself into learning languages. He started reading dime-novels and when he did not understand a word he would ask his fellow players. Soon he knew not only Spanish, but Italian and then came the other languages. (ALMÁSI, 2009)

Only a few know that he had been a trainer on every inhabited continent (SZÖLLŐSI 2005). The United States, Canada in North America, and in South America taking on Paraguayan and Chilean teams, among them the famous Colo-Colo. On the African continent he trained the Egyptian Al Masri team for five years, and in Asia he was the captain of the Saudi national team. Within Europe, naturally he worked in Spain: he was the manager of Alaves and Murcia. (PUSKAS.COM 2012, WIKIPEDIA 2012)

However his biggest success was in Athens, Greece. Supposedly, at the time when Panathiaikos was considering his position he asked them the following: “How much will you pay me if the team gets into the European Champions League? How about if we make it to the best 16? And best 8? And best 4? And what if we make it to the final?” Then he went on winning the Greek championship, then later in 1971 taking the team all the way to Wembley for the final, where they lost to Ajax. No Greek football club had ever made it thus far. (ALMÁSI, 2009)



3. The most important foreign club Real Madrid as a player, and Panathinaikos as a manager  
(Source: toonpool.com/cartoons)

His other great achievement was in Australia managing a Greek team called the South Melbourne Hellas. Of course, by this time he was fluent in English. The team first won the cup, then the championship as well and this led to the multiplication of spectators for this sport. Experts say that this was the time when amateur Australian football became professional – since then the Australian national team has made it to the World Cup more than once. (ALMÁSI, 2009)

Unlike the Hungarian team, where Puskás had only one condition: he asked for five years to clean up Hungarian football and the Hungarian team. Instead, he only got four matches in 1993.

### 6. He would be a star even on the Moon

It was an unlucky era for Puskás who was born in 1927: he could have had 5, but taking into account that he quit at the age of 40, even 6 world cup participations. Unfortunately it came down to only two.

One year after the World War ended in 1946 there was no world cup held. And in 1950 Hungary did not qualify for the Brazilian World Cup. In 1958 he was unable to participate due to the aftermath of the Revolution and by that time he had lived abroad. And which World Cup was he able to participate in besides the 1954? He was there in the 1962 Chilean World Cup, at this time playing for Spain. This was the only instance that his goal-kicking shoes had deserted him. He could not score any goals in the three games he played.

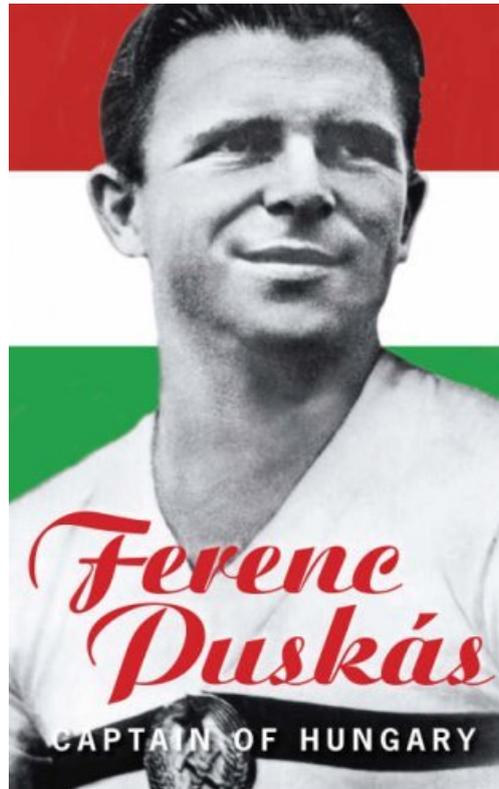


4. Born in 1927 – introduced to the national team at 18  
Could have participated in five or six World Cups – a historically unlucky period only left two opportunities

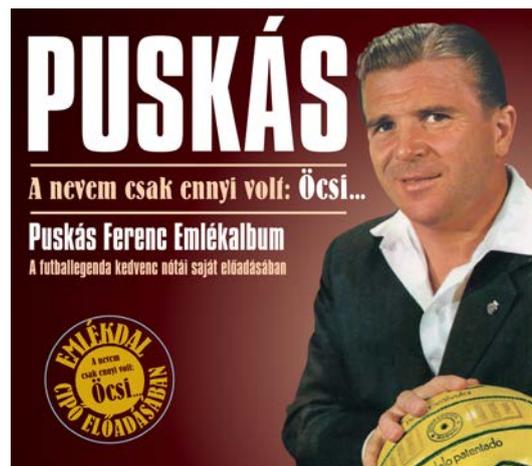
Dictatorship had accompanied Puskás to many places: at home it was Rákosi, in Spain it was Franco in power. His time spent as a manager in Paraguay, Chile, Egypt or Saud-Arabia was not at all spent in peaceful democracy. Moreover, in Greece there were military generals, who wanted a say in how the players of Panathinaikos were assembled (ALMÁSI 2009).

This “unlucky” era was not just true for the above: In his time there was no Internet and television had just started gaining popularity. Although, he was given a short role in the 1956 film titled “Csodacsatár”. However, when he did not return after the Revolution, his scenes were re-shot with Hidegkuti, a mate from the Hungarian Golden Team. So the public could not have seen his performance in the film. (ALMÁSI 2009)

Instead he became the first football player to have his autobiography published first in England in 1955. (PUSKÁS 1955, 2007) Moreover, a record of his singing Hungarian folk song was produced in Spain.



5. One of the first football players to have his autobiography as an active player – published in England in 1955  
(Source: PUSKÁS 1955, 2007)



6. Not many football players have their own CD of their own singing  
(Source: flagmagazin.hu)

He was a star. Wherever he went, people wanted a photo with him and he was always very happy to comply with these requests. His goddaughter says: “His heart was the size of his belly.” The Greeks, whose teams had not ever since made it to the European Cup finals, believe Puskás to have united two of the greatest Greeks: Ulysses, who travelled around the world before returning home and Zorba who loved life. (ALMÁSI 2009)

So Puskás, in an era fifty years ago, could become a respected and loved global personal brand. From his recollection we know that he always wanted to win and never for one moment did he forget that football is for the entertainment of the public.

According to another legend, Pelé: “If Puskás had lived in this world, the world of television and the Internet, he could have been the best player, even on the Moon.” (ALMÁSI 2009)

## 7. The brand lives on

But how can we benefit from the brand value of Puskás, after his passing in 2006 to the heavenly football fields? How can we uphold the myth of the Puskás brand and at the same time profit for both his family, for Hungary and for all those wanting to use his name as a brand?

First and foremost he must remain a living legend for the football world; however the steps below are intended for a wider audience:

The “People’s Stadium was renamed after him as Ferenc Puskás Stadium, while he was alive. Although this facility opened to the public in 1953 is in deteriorating condition, it is still the sanctuary of Hungarian football. It gives home to the greatest number of visitors and the Hungarian national team plays its most important matches here.

It is our current Prime Minister, who was one of the founders of the Ferenc Puskás Football Academy. This is situated in Felcsút, very close to Székesfehérvár. This is not just a home for one of the top Hungarian teams, Videoton FC’s youth team, but also hosts international games. Almost every year youth teams of Real Madrid, AC Milan and Panathiaikos visit the academy.

Numerous awards have been named after the Galloping Major. The most important was established in 2009 by FIFA for the most beautiful goal. So far two players, the Portuguese Cristiano Ronaldo and the Turkish Hamit Altintop received this honour.



7. Football academy and FIFA most beautiful goal of the year named after Ferenc Puskás in the picture: Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary, Joseph S. Blatter, President of FIFA, and Mrs. Puskás  
(Source: Puskás Football Academy)

Not surprising that due to the years spent at Real and because of the leading goal scorer titles they erected his statue and named a street after him in Madrid.

In Cairo, where he managed the local team, the Egyptian Football Association inaugurated a plaque at their headquarters in his honour.

There are many Facebook profiles under the name Ferenc Puskás. The most popular had more than 80 thousand like-s dating March 2011.



8. Facebook supporting the brand: the most popular profile had 80 thousand fans in 2011.  
(Source: Facebook)

Tamás Almási directed a documentary film about his life, which also served as a credible source for this article. (ALMÁSI 2009)

György Szöllösi, a journalist, has written many books about the Galloping Major (SZÖLLÖSI 2005). He is also professionally involved with the summer course, to be held at the University of Debrecen, called: “Puskás and the Magical Magyars: Hungary and the Danube School in Global Football”. Thus Puskás became a required material in higher education.

Last, but not least: Since 2006 he is to be found in the sky as the small planet under the designation 82656 was named after him by Hungarian explorers searching the skies.

## 8. Conclusion: The business opportunities of the Puskás brand

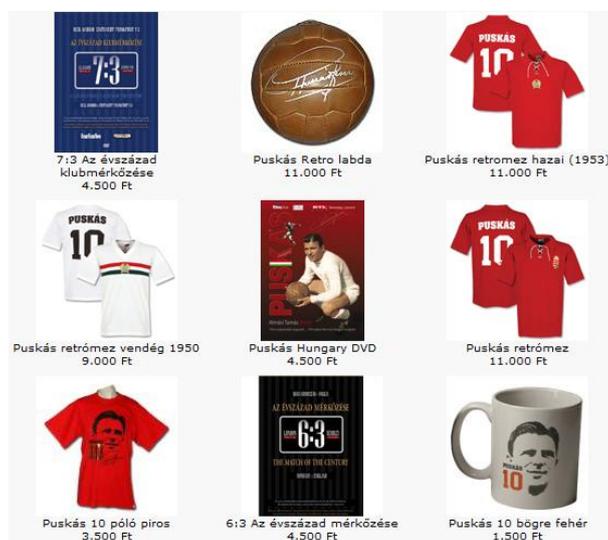
When talking about brands we must not forget that brands are out there to make revenue and profit. At the end of the article it is worthwhile to review the various options hidden behind the Puskás brand.

The first such opportunity is merchandising. It has to be of high quality and following a uniform image (DESBORDES 2007). This would entail the general products such as mugs and t-shirts, but would also include items more related to football, such as retro ball, retro shirt. Of course we would need DVDs of legendary matches, like the 6:3 match between Hungary and England, or the Real Madrid – Eintracht Frankfurt European Champions Cup final. Also we must not forget the book and DVD about his life along with the record on which he sings Hungarian folk songs.



9. Puskás brand lives on in the form of merchandising  
(Source: Official Puskás Merchising)

These special souvenirs would be attractive for Hungarians, visiting tourists, and of course foreign fans of Puskás, moreover there is a Puskas.com site, where visitors can already purchase these items. (PUSKAS.com 2012) Nevertheless these Puskás relics can also be found on Hungariansouvenirs.com and at the airport souvenir shop called Memories of Hungary.



10. Memorabilia from Puskas.com – products related to Puskás (mug, t-shirt) related to football (retro ball, shirt, DVD of legendary matches, books, etc.)  
(SOURCE: puskas.com)

As mentioned before, Puskás loved good food and drinks. No wonder that in Budapest the restaurant called Symbol hosts a special place called Puskás Pancho Sport Pub. Here we find relics of the legendary player, along with photos and other souvenirs, but we can also watch one of the 12 plazma televisions showing the current matches.



11. Sport pub named after Puskás, where specials are often served in his honour.  
(Source: Pancho Sport Pub)

Although the Puskás beer failed, wine in his name appear every once in a while. Last it was Ferenc Csutorás a winemaker from Eger, who made a series of wines in the honour of the Golden team.



12. Puskás beer was not a success in his life, yet Puskás wine may still be  
(Source: Ferenc Csutorás)

The most exciting ad campaign reaching a great number of people was of the Szentkirályi mineral water (SZENTKIRALYI.HU 2012) The market leader of mineral water in Hungary in its previous ads used the Portuguese Luis Figo who was the Ballon d'or (Golden Ball) award winner in 2000. For their new campaign it was possible to guess who the next character in their ads would be. Not many expected that with special effects and technology Puskás would get the part in the commercial and also appear on the bottles. Thus we can say that Hungary's most famous is advertising the country's most famous mineral water.

Similarly great Hungarian brands may opt to use the Puskás brand in the future. Thus they would be building their own brands and Hungary's as well. We will see what the future holds.



13. Hungary's most famous face advertising  
the market leader of mineral waters – Szentkirályi  
(Source: szentkiralyi.hu)

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