



## THE ENDURING LEGACY OF *AYRTON SENNA*

*Remembering the legendary Formula 1 driver 23 years after his tragic death*

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In global sport, it's not always the winningest athlete who serves as a sport's spiritual and cultural ambassador. For all of Bill Russell's titles, or Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's scoring records, it is Michael Jordan who is basketball's most revered icon. Similarly, it's not Michael Schumacher and his seven world championships, or Lewis Hamilton and his global social media celebrity, who serve as Formula 1's biggest hero. It is the late Brazilian driver Ayrton Senna, still the sport's guiding light 23 years after the accident at the 1994 San Marino Grand Prix that took his life.

In his native Brazil, Senna was a driving god on the track and a national sensation off of it. He was beloved by his countrymen, even though soccer here is not just the most popular sport but a quasi-religion. He was revered across socioeconomic groups, despite his affluent upbringing. He was a national role model.

His on-track reputation was well-earned, but his impact was most strongly felt away from the track. His charitable foundation, originally inspired by Senna's stated desire to give back to his nation, was created by his sister Viviane six weeks after his untimely death, and has spent hundreds of millions of dollars to help educate some two million children and train 60,000 teachers each year. This is made possible by the continuing success of the Senna brand, which has earned close to \$320 million in the past half-decade alone.

His influence can also still be felt in the sport that made him famous. Following his death, FIA (Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile), the organization that oversees Formula 1, began a long and comprehensive shift away from prioritizing performance toward an emphasis on safety. New car designs included crash-protection monocoques, and existing circuits added safety barriers. The effort continues to this day, and the result has been a dramatic drop in the number of fatal Formula 1 accidents.

When Senna died, the government declared three days of national mourning, and an estimated three million people attended his funeral in São Paulo. They wanted to pay their final respects to their idol, but in truth, there was nothing final about Senna's passing. His impact on his nation and his sport continues well beyond his lifetime. As his sister told CNN last year: "All the Brazilians would sit in his car, would push his car; we would raise the flag with him on the podium. It was like we were as one. Ayrton and Brazil were as one." They still are.

*For his success on the track and philanthropy off of it, Senna was a national role model*