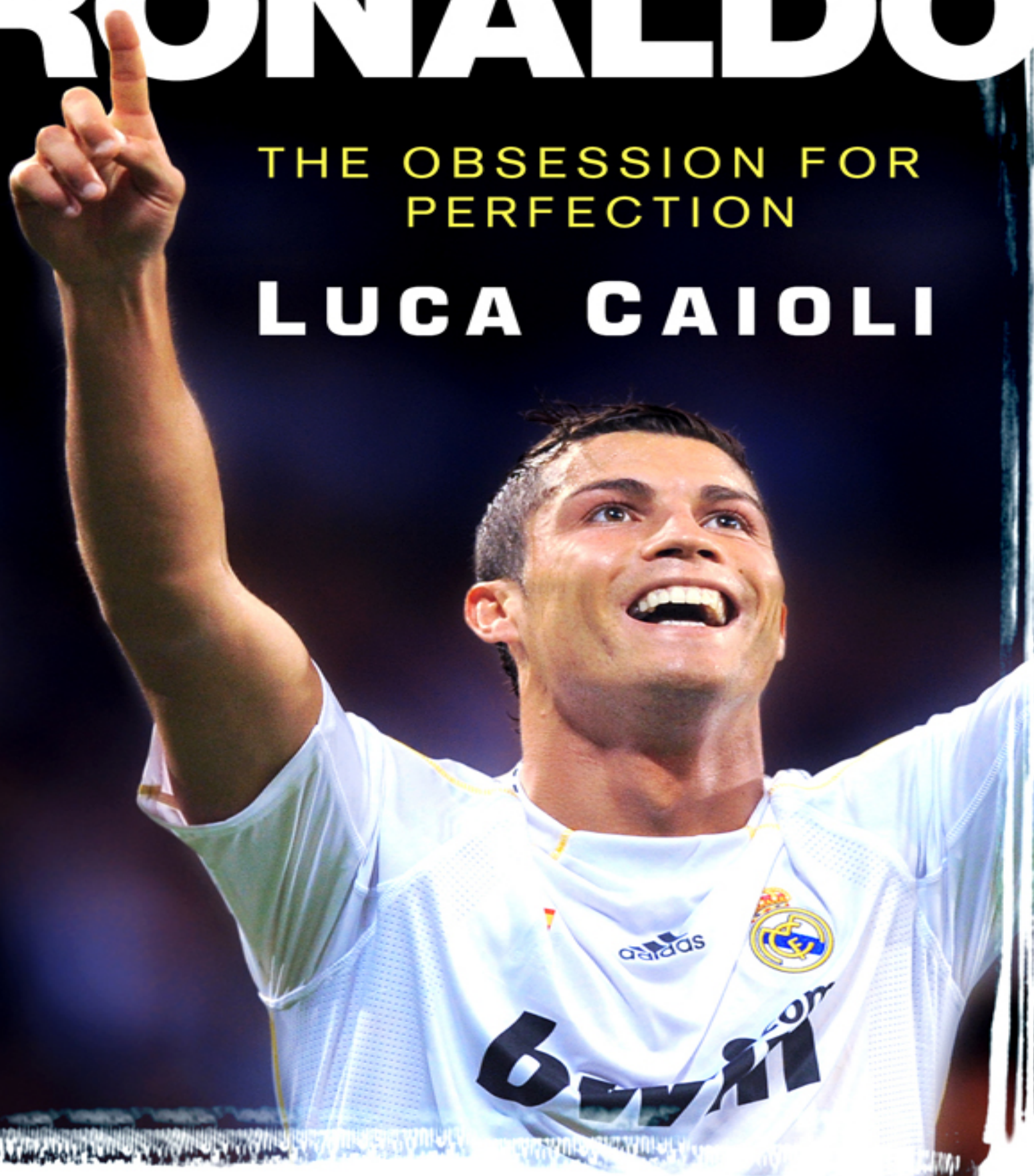


FROM THE AUTHOR OF THE BESTSELLING
TORRES AND MESSI

RONALDO

THE OBSESSION FOR
PERFECTION

LUCA CAIOLI



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CORINTHIAN BOOKS

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Chapter 1

Me

'I love being Cristiano Ronaldo.'

'I love what I do, I love my life, I'm happy.'

'I consider myself a winner. I win more often than I lose. I always try to stay focused. I know it's not easy, but nothing in life is easy. If it was, we wouldn't have been born crying.'

'I'm a competitive person and that's never going to change. Obviously I'm growing up and becoming more mature. But the way I think doesn't change.'

'I have faith in my abilities. I always have done.'

'I am who I am. The way I act, what others see - that's the real me.'

'I have never altered my behaviour for anyone. If they like me, great. If not ... they can stay away. They don't have to come to my games.'

'Those who know me know who I really am, my personality, my character.'

'I'm very close to my family. I was close to my dad and I'm still close to my mum and siblings. My family is my rock. They've been incredibly supportive; they're always there for me when I need them. They have helped me so much, and I try to be there for them as they have for me.'

'The people who know me well love me. The few people who live with me, the people I train with every day, those who work with me ... they think highly of me because they know what I'm like. Of course, other people have a very different opinion because they don't know me. I can understand that.'

'I always speak my mind. I tell it like it is. That might be what others don't like about me.'

'I don't pay any attention to what people say about me. I don't read the newspapers or magazines. Everyone's entitled to their opinion.'

'There have been lots of lies spread about me ... that's the price of fame.'

'I think people are jealous of me because I'm rich, good looking and a great footballer. There's no other explanation.'

'I'm always ready to learn, to hear different opinions.'

'I'm someone who is very easy to live with. And I feel very lucky because if I ever need to talk about anything, I have the best friends in the world.'

'I'm a normal guy and I have feelings just like anybody else.'

'I'm the kind of person who loves a challenge - I always have. My entire life is geared towards finding new challenges.'

'I'm generally quite a positive and well-balanced person.'

'To me, getting on with people is more important than money.'

'Having a good quality of life is more important than money.'

'I've had a great education. My parents taught me to be myself, not to change for anyone. If people like me, fine. If not, it doesn't bother me.'

'I like seeing the people around me happy, smiling, content.'

'You don't win anything in this life without overcoming the kinds of obstacles that I've encountered.'

'I used to cry every day when I was a little boy growing up in Lisbon. I still cry - I cry a lot of tears, both happy and sad. It's good to cry. Crying is just part of life.'

'I have no time for people who lie to me - to me lying is one of the worst traits. It makes me really angry.'

'Talking incessantly is not my style. Talking too much isn't good for your image.'

'I don't like talking about my private life. I don't like drawing attention to it but I don't hide anything either. Let

people gossip if they want to. If people want to sell their story, that's up to them. I'm not interested.'

'I'm a smart kid - but no one's perfect and that includes me.'

'There are days when it's not easy being Cristiano - days when I'd love to do something normal and I can't. But I know how to handle it and to be honest I'm not uncomfortable with this kind of life.'

Chapter 2

Football

'If you love football, then there's no doubt you'll love watching Cristiano Ronaldo.'

'I get to do the thing I love most in life - play football.'

'I've already won everything there is to win, but I'll never stop trying to win until the day I retire. That's just who I am. I believe in a bad run of form, but not in letting it get you down. Mental focus is paramount when it comes to achieving your goals. And the key is to keep setting those goals.'

'My aim, my ambition, is to be the best. Ultimately, if I come within reach of being the best, then great - although what I'd really love is to go down as one of the best players in history. I'm grateful to God that I've won the trophy for best player in the world, but I'd like to win it again, this year or next. I'm definitely going to get that Ballon d'Or again.'

'I believe I'm a well-rounded footballer, although there are always countless ways to improve. I'm not referring to specific elements of my game, I just mean generally. You have to grow as a complete player. You can't just focus on shooting or dribbling.'

'Dribbling and dodging is the way I play. I've played like that since I was little. I love dodging and feinting, getting past the opponent. I know that people get annoyed when I dodge past them, or when I bicycle kick or backheel the ball. But I'm not trying to make fun of my opponents, that's just my style. I didn't change it when I was in England and I'm not going to change it whether I'm in Spain or Brazil.'

'My goal-scoring technique is a secret I'll never divulge. I just think about which side I'm going to go for, I look at the goal, the goalie and the defenders, and I shoot. When I take the shot I say to myself "Make it a good one Cristiano".'

'I always try to score goals, play well and help the team. But I never think I have to score in every game. If you think that way you end up not scoring at all. Where there's talent, ability and technical quality, the goals come naturally. So I don't get too worried if I don't score. If I play well, if the team plays well, the goals will come.'

'It doesn't matter where we play or who we play, in every match I go out onto the field to give it my all, play the way I know how, and do everything possible to ensure we win.'

'When I get home after losing a game, I don't talk to my mum or any of my family. They know what I'm like and they know how I react. I've been known to cry after certain losses.'

'What's my biggest weakness? I don't know ... I like to be great on every level, not just physically but mentally too. There's no single aspect that I work on more than others. I just want to keep getting stronger.'

'Footballers are people too and naturally the things that happen in our lives affect us as much as the next person. But the higher level you are professionally, the stronger you have to be to ensure it doesn't affect your performance. That's what we're paid to do.'

'During the season, my life is quite calm and focused - it's all about football. Sometimes it's about enjoying life and on other occasions it's about working hard. During the holidays I might like to let off steam with my friends, but when I'm working, nobody can fault my attitude. I try to set an example as a professional, and that shines through when I play. If you go out partying every weekend, there's no way you can give it your all on the pitch.'

'I like to look after my body, it's an important part of my life and my profession. I don't have any particular routine, I just train. I eat whatever I want but in moderation. I have good genes so I don't put on weight, but I do have to work hard to maintain my fitness.'

‘When I’m on the pitch or training I’m happy because I love playing football. It’s my passion, it’s what I enjoy.’

‘I consider my team-mates to be friends because I’m with them every day. The team is my second family. Apart from the people I live with, they’re the people I spend the most time with.’

‘I love it when there’s a lively atmosphere in the changing room, when everyone’s enjoying themselves and feeling positive.’

‘When I step onto the pitch I’m fearless. The opposition defenders don’t bother me; they’re just out there to do their job. I don’t believe any player intends to cause injuries. Ninety-nine per cent of players are honest and just want to do the best they can for their team. Of course, some of them will try to stop me by fouling me – if they didn’t, they wouldn’t be able to stop me. But I try not to worry about it too much.’

‘I think the footballing industry should protect and nurture the players who try to make it fun and creative, who try to give the fans a fantastic show. That’s the most important thing, because there would be no football without the fans. It’s thanks to their fans that teams like Real Madrid, Man United and Barcelona are world renowned.’

‘I try to ignore provocation because there’s no place for it in football. People who try to stir things up are just looking for trouble. What people say really doesn’t bother me, I just ignore it.’

‘When people say bad things about me it falls on deaf ears. I only hear those who shout about how great that Portuguese boy is. I don’t need insults to motivate me.’

‘The ones who insult me are always the first to ask for my autograph when they see me in the street. I don’t understand why they’re so negative, I really don’t. I can understand if they’re afraid of me, but not if they’re rude. People love you in the airports and then they hate you on

the pitch – that’s what my team-mates always say, and it really rings true.’

‘I’m not the kind of person who spends the whole afternoon at home watching four or five matches. It’s not that I don’t like football, I just don’t like watching it on TV. I prefer to play. When I’m not on the pitch I only watch Real Madrid games, and the really big matches.’

‘If I weren’t a footballer, I would have liked to go back to studying. But I was training with the Sporting Lisbon first team from age sixteen so I couldn’t stay in school. I would have studied marketing or been a PE teacher.’

‘I’d like to be remembered as a role model, as a footballer who always gave a hundred per cent, who put on a good show – and who won absolutely everything.’

Author’s note

These quotations are extracted from interviews with the following media: RTVE, Antena 3, Telecinco, Intereconomía TV, Cadena SER, Cadena COPE, Real Madrid TV, Marca, As, A Bola.

Chapter 3

'Abelhinha'

'On the one hand I had a happy childhood; on the other hand it was unusual because I left my family and moved to Lisbon at the age of twelve.'

The three-bedroom concrete council house where Cristiano was born no longer exists. In 2007, the house at 27A Quinta do Falcão, in the Santo António neighbourhood of Funchal, capital of Madeira, was demolished to avoid problems with squatters.

The Aveiro family had long since moved on by this point. Cristiano's mother Dolores now lives in a big white house overlooking the Atlantic in São Gonçalo, at the other end of Funchal - a beautiful home bought for her by her son, near the homes of his brother Hugo and sister Katia.

The once impoverished Quinta do Falcão, with its cluster of council blocks on the mountain slope, has undergone a transformation in recent years thanks to investment from the European Union. New housing complexes have sprung up and the area has become acceptable to the Portuguese middle classes, many of whom have been horrified by the house prices on the coast.

At the end of a narrow little road where the footballer's house used to stand, there is now an empty patch of overgrown scrubland, a five-a-side football pitch, and a bar. But it's not unusual for fans to find their way down here, and for a few Euros the cabbies take them on a tour - his birthplace, where he grew up, his school, where he first played football ... in Portugal's collective imagination he has succeeded in eclipsing such illustrious visitors to Madeira as Winston Churchill, Empress Elizabeth 'Sissi' of Austria, Charles I of Austria, George Bernard Shaw, the poet Rilke, Christopher Columbus and Napoleon.

Madeira is an Atlantic archipelago some 860 kilometres from Lisbon, comprising two inhabited islands - Madeira and Porto Santo - and three minor, uninhabited islands. Hailed by the tourist guides as the 'garden of the Atlantic', Madeira island sits on a volcanic rock 57 kilometres long by 22 wide, a mountain range which rises up from beneath the sea to a summit of 1,862 metres at Pico Ruivo, its highest peak. The capital, Funchal, has a population of 110,000.

It was here that Cristiano was born, at 10.20am on Tuesday 5 February in the Cruz de Carvalho Hospital. He was 52 centimetres long at birth and weighed nearly nine pounds. A fourth child for Maria Dolores dos Santos and José Dinis Aveiro, younger brother to Hugo, Elma and Katia. It was an unplanned pregnancy, with just eighteen months between him and Katia, and now there was the issue of what to name him.

'My sister, who was working in an orphanage at the time, said that if it was a boy we could name him Cristiano,' recalls Dolores. 'I thought it was a good choice. And my husband and I both liked the name Ronaldo, after Ronald Reagan. My sister chose Cristiano and we chose Ronaldo.'

Cristiano Ronaldo dos Santos Aveiro is duly baptised in the Santo António church - a day which coincidentally is marked by football. In his spare time, José Dinis helps out as a kit man for amateur football club CF Andorinho in Santo António. He asks team captain Fernão Barros Sousa to take on the role of godfather to his new baby. The ceremony is booked for 6.00pm, but first there's a match at 4.00pm - Andorinha are playing Ribeiras Bravas.

Reverend António Rodríguez Rebola is getting nervous. He has already baptised the other children and there is still no sign of either father or godfather. Dolores and the godmother-to-be are following him around the church, baby in tow, trying to keep the priest calm. Eventually Fernão and Dinis arrive, half an hour late, and the ceremony can finally get underway.

The first photos in the family album show baby Cristiano, big eyes staring straight at the camera, dressed in a little blue and white outfit and white booties, with gold bracelets on both wrists, a gold ring, and a long chain with a crucifix around his neck. As he gets older, the photos show his hair forming into a little tuft of curls and his smile becomes gappy after losing his front teeth.

Dinis is the town hall gardener, while Dolores works hard as a cook so that she can put food on the table for her own children as well. Like thousands of Portuguese citizens, Dolores had emigrated to France at the age of twenty, where she spent three months cleaning houses. Her husband was going to join her, but when he wasn't able to she returned to Madeira. They already had two children.

Life isn't easy for the Aveiro family - it's difficult for anyone who lives far away from the luxury hotel industry which has colonised the coast. It's a small home for a family of six - and whenever there's a storm the house leaks in dozens of places. Dolores fetches bricks and mortar from the town hall to try to keep the problem under control.

But today, Cristiano remembers that time as a happy childhood. At two or three years old, playing in the yard or on Lombinho Street, he began to discover his best friend - the football.

'One Christmas I gave him a remote controlled car, thinking that would keep him busy,' recalls his godfather Fernão Sousa, 'but he preferred to play with a football. He slept with his ball, it never left his side. It was always under his arm - wherever he went, it went with him.'

Cristiano goes to nursery at the Externato de São João da Ribeira, a school run by Franciscan nuns. At six, he joins the local primary school. For secondary school he attends Gonçalves Zarco, better known as the Barreiros school because of its proximity to the Barreiros stadium, where renowned Portuguese team CS Marítimo play. Cristiano is

not the studious type. He doesn't fare too badly but he's no bookworm either - he is happy just to scrape a pass.

One of his class teachers, Maria dos Santos, remembers her former pupil as 'well behaved, fun and a good friend to his classmates'. When asked about his favourite pastime, she says: 'From the day he walked through the door, football was his favourite sport. He took part in other activities, learnt songs and did his work, but he liked to have time for himself, time for football. If there wasn't a real ball around - and often there wasn't - he would make one out of socks. He would always find a way of playing football in the playground. I don't know how he managed it.'

It was football in the playground and football in the street. 'When he got home from school, I used to tell him to go to his room and do his homework,' says Dolores. 'He always told me he didn't have any. So I would go and start the cooking and he would chance his luck. He would climb out the window, grab a yoghurt or some fruit, and run away with the ball under his arm. He'd be out playing until 9.30 at night.'

As if that wasn't enough, he began to skip classes to go out and play. 'His teachers told me I had to punish him, but I never did. He had to practise as much as possible to become a football star.' As her son would later acknowledge: 'I was always playing football with my friends, that's what I loved doing, that was how I spent my time.'

He plays in the street because there is no football pitch in the neighbourhood. One particular street, Quinta do Falcão, proves to be a challenge when buses, cars and motorbikes want to get through. They have to remove the stones marking out the goalposts each time and wait for the traffic to pass before resuming the game. The games they play are intense battles between households, between gangs of friends. They are games that never end. The only

hiccup is when the ball lands in one of the neighbours' gardens - and if it's old Mr Agostinho's garden he always threatens to puncture the ball and tell Dolores and the other mothers to keep their children in check.

There's a well where Cristiano spends hours on end kicking the ball against the wall alone. The well and the street are his first training grounds. It's here, between the pavement, the asphalt and the cars, playing against kids young and old, that Ronaldo learns the tricks and techniques which will make him great and become his signature style. 'He used to spend all day in the street, doing authentic tricks with the ball. It was as if it was attached to his foot,' recalls Adelino Andrade, who lived near the Aveiro family.

'When it came to football he was truly gifted,' maintains Cristiano's sister, Elma. 'But we never dreamed he would be where he is today.'

At six years of age, Cristiano has made his first foray into the footballing world. His cousin Nuno plays for Andorinha and Cristiano has been to the ground a number of times with his father. Nuno invites him to come and see him play, and asks him if he would like to join one of the teams. Cristiano joins the practice and decides to give it a go. Dolores and Dinis are happy with their youngest son's decision - they have always loved football. Dinis and his older son Hugo are Benfica fans, while Dolores adores Luís Figo and Sporting Lisbon.

In the 1994-95 season, nine-year-old Cristiano Ronaldo dos Santos Aveiro is awarded his first sporting licence, number 17,182, from the Funchal football association, and dons the light blue strip for Andorinha. It's a local club with a long history, founded on 6 May 1925. The name Andorinha is Portuguese for a swallow, which according to legend derives from one particular footballer's superb shot which was followed by the flight of a swallow.

Primary school teacher Francisco Afonso, who taught Cristiano's sister Katia, has dedicated 25 years to coaching in the Madeira junior leagues. He was Ronaldo's first coach and he has never forgotten the first time he saw him on the Andorinha pitch, age seven.

'Football was what Cristiano lived for,' he says. 'He was fast, he was technically brilliant and he played equally well with his left and right foot. He was skinny but he was a head taller than other kids his age. He was undoubtedly extremely gifted - he had a natural talent that was in the genes. He was always chasing the ball, he wanted to be the one to finish the game. He was very focused, he worked equally hard regardless of where he was on the pitch. And whenever he couldn't play or he missed a game he was devastated.'

Club president Rui Santos tells a juicy anecdote about a match during the 1993-94 season: Andorinha versus Camacha, who at that time were one of the strongest teams on the island. At half time Andorinha were losing 2-0 and 'Ronaldo was so distraught that he was sobbing like a child who's had his favourite toy confiscated. In the second half he came onto the pitch and scored two goals, leading the team to a 3-2 victory. He definitely did not like to lose. He wanted to win every time and when they lost he cried.'

'That's why he was nicknamed 'cry-baby' explains Dolores. He cried and got angry very easily - if a team-mate didn't pass him the ball, if he or someone else missed a goal or a pass, or if the team wasn't playing how he wanted. The other nickname he acquired was *abelhinha*, 'little bee', because he never stopped. Like a busy bee, he was always zigzagging across the pitch. Years later in Madrid, Cristiano would christen his Yorkshire Terrier with the same name.

'A footballer like Ronaldo doesn't come along every day,' adds Rui Santos. 'And suddenly when he does, you realise he's a superstar - different from all the other kids you've

seen play.’ Unfortunately Andorinha was one of the weakest teams in the league, and when they faced the likes of Marítimo, Camara de Lobos or Machico, the matches were something of a whitewash. Ronaldo didn’t want to play because he already knew they would lose. But his father would come home, cheer him up and persuade him to put his kit and boots on and join his team on the pitch. Only the weak give up, he would say – and it was a lesson that little Ronaldo would never forget.

In a few short years his name becomes known across the island. The two big island clubs, Nacional da Madeira and Marítimo, begin to take an interest in the little bee. Talk of a kid who knows how to play ball reaches the ears of Fernão Sousa, Cristiano’s godfather, who is coaching the young Nacional da Madeira team. ‘I was delighted to discover that they were talking about my godson,’ he says. ‘I knew he was playing football but I had no idea he was so good. He was streets ahead of the rest. He handled the ball beautifully and he definitely had a bright future ahead of him. I immediately realised that this kid could be a godsend to his family.’ Without the slightest hesitation, he decides to bring him to Nacional. ‘I talked to his mother. I told her it was the best thing for him, and we reached an agreement with Andorinha.’

But it wasn’t all as simple as Sousa makes out. Dinis would have preferred his son to go to Marítimo. The club’s historic Almirante Reis ground is close to the family home. Plus the kid bleeds green and red – his heart beats for Marítimo. No one can agree, so Rui Santos arranges a meeting with both clubs to discuss possible offers. The Marítimo youth team coach doesn’t turn up to the meeting with the Andorinha president, so Cristiano goes to Nacional in return for twenty balls and two sets of kit for the junior team.

It’s a deal which isn’t worth much at the time, but Andorinha will go down in history as the first club of a

Ballon d'Or winner, and will later receive funding from the municipality. Today, the old ground has been replaced with an artificial surface complete with floodlights. And that's not all. The deal with Nacional is sealed in Madeira's history books - just as Raúl's transition to Real Madrid from the Atlético Madrid youth team became legendary across Madrid, purely because (the story goes) the Red and Whites didn't want to pay the bus fare for the kid to get to training.

Cristiano is just ten years old when he arrives at Nacional - and his mother is more than a little concerned. 'My husband was always encouraging him to play with older kids. I was worried he could hurt himself or break a leg, but Dinis always said, "Don't worry, they can't catch him, he's too fast."'

The fact that he is somewhat skinny and bony doesn't escape the attention of the Nacional coaches, who are quick to recommend that he eats more to help him fill out a bit. But when it comes to assessing his credentials, they are in no doubt. 'We saw immediately that he was fantastic,' says António Mendonça, Cristiano's coach during his two seasons playing in black and white. 'His skills were already highly developed: speed, dribbling, shooting, lightning execution. Street football had taught him how to avoid getting hit, sidestep the opponent and face up to kids much bigger than he was. It had also strengthened his character - he was extremely courageous.'

Now it's up to Mendonça and the other coaches to help him understand that football is a team sport. Ronaldo is capable of getting hold of the ball in his own half and heading for the goal - without passing to anyone on his team. His opponents don't bother him. Losing isn't an option; he wants to win everything. He cries and gets angry with his team-mates when something goes wrong. 'They put up with it because he used to score so many goals,' says Mendonça. 'We won all our games nine- or ten-nil.' But his

individualism and pride are a problem. He behaves as if superior to the others and it's difficult to give him advice - it has to be in private, never in front of the staff.

In the 1995-96 season at Nacional, Cristiano wins his first regional title in the league for ten-to-twelve-year-olds. Clubs like Porto and Boavista, the big clubs in 'the rectangle' (as islanders call mainland Portugal), begin to take an interest in him.

Fernão Sousa thinks it's about time and only fair to let his godson take the plunge. For the second time, he contacts someone who will change the boy's future: João Marques Freitas, assistant to the district attorney and president of the Sporting Lisbon club in Funchal. He is the one who tells the powers that be at the Green and Whites about this incredible kid from Quinta do Falcão. Sporting send someone over to talk to the family. Before long, Ronaldo is saying goodbye to his childhood, his family, his friends and his island. It's time for him to make his way to the continent.

Chapter 4

Far from the island

'It was the most difficult time in my sporting career.'

He has never been on a plane - he has never even left the island. This is the toughest challenge he has ever faced and he is so nervous that he cannot sleep the night before.

His godfather Fernão Sousa is accompanying him to Lisbon. It's 1997, it's the Easter holidays and Cristiano is on his way to a trial at Sporting Lisbon. He would have preferred to go to Benfica, a team both his father and brother love. But his mum has always been a Sporting girl and she has a hunch her son will be as great as Luís Figo. Besides, you can't turn down one of the greatest clubs in the capital. Sporting has the best youth academy in Portugal, counting the likes of Paolo Futre, Figo and Simão among its alumni, while current players include João Pinto, Quaresma, Hugo Viana and Nani.

He's convinced he can do well there. He knows he's good and he thinks he can persuade the Green and White coaches that he's good enough. But he's only twelve years old, and when he finally arrives at the youth team training ground it's incredibly overwhelming.

Coaches Paulo Cardoso and Osvaldo Silva are there to observe him play. They are not particularly impressed by Ronaldo's physique - he's a scrawny little kid. But once they see him in action it's a whole different story. The boy from Quinta do Falcão gets hold of the ball and takes on two or three opponents. He's relentless - a one man show: feinting, dribbling and driving the ball up the pitch.

'I turned to Osvaldo and I said, "This one's different, he's something special,"' recalls Cardoso. 'And we weren't the only ones who thought so. At the end of the training session

all the other boys were crowding around him. They knew he was the best.'

The Sporting coaches are impressed by the trial. They want to see him play again the next day, on the training ground next to the old José Alvalade stadium. This time, youth academy director Aurélio Pereira will be there to observe him.

'He was talented, he could play with both feet, he was incredibly fast and when he played it was as if the ball was an extension of his body,' says Pereira. 'But what impressed me more was his determination. His strength of character shone through. He was courageous - mentally speaking he was indestructible. And he was fearless, unfazed by older players. He had the kind of leadership qualities that only the greatest players have. One of a kind. When they got back to the dressing room all the other boys were clamouring to talk to him and get to know him. He had it all, and it was clear he would only get better.'

On 17 April 1997, Paulo Cardoso and Osvaldo Silva sign Cristiano's player identification document. It reads: 'Player with exceptional talent and excellent technique. Of particular note is his ability to dodge and swerve, from stationary or while moving.' Next to 'enrol' there is a tick in the 'yes' box. He plays as a central midfielder, or 'in the hole' as the coaches say. Cristiano Ronaldo dos Santos Aveiro has passed the test - he can play at Sporting. But first they have to reach a deal with Nacional da Madeira.

After a week in Lisbon, Ronaldo returns home to life on the island. It's up to the coaches now to arrange the final details of the transfer. Nacional owes Sporting 4,500 Portuguese 'Contos' (22,500 Euros) for Franco, a young footballer who has transferred there from Sporting. Cristiano's signing could be an opportunity to waive the debt, but 22,500 Euros for a twelve-year-old kid is an exorbitant price. 'It was unheard of,' agrees Simões de