

A SPLIT-SECOND

Playing soccer taught me to make split-second decisions. Then in one moment, I had to decide between my dream and the Lord's.

BY HUGO DA CUNHA SILVANTOS RODRIGUES

As long as I can remember, I have had a soccer ball at my side and a dream to be a professional player. My parents supported me as I pursued this dream. They also encouraged me to go to church. But as I got older I was at church only when I didn't have a game. I knew that the gospel, Church activities, and my friends would help me a lot in life, but what I was really looking for was to fulfill my dream of playing soccer.

As I trained I began to have important friends inside the great soccer clubs. I had opportunities to play and even train with some of these clubs. I traveled throughout various countries to participate in tournaments, and I was very excited and happy with the possibility of living the life of a professional soccer player. On one of these trips to Asia, my dream was about to come true. A large club liked what they saw when they watched me play and wanted me to join the team. But my agent found some obstacles during the negotiation, and we ultimately didn't close the contract.

At home my friends were filling

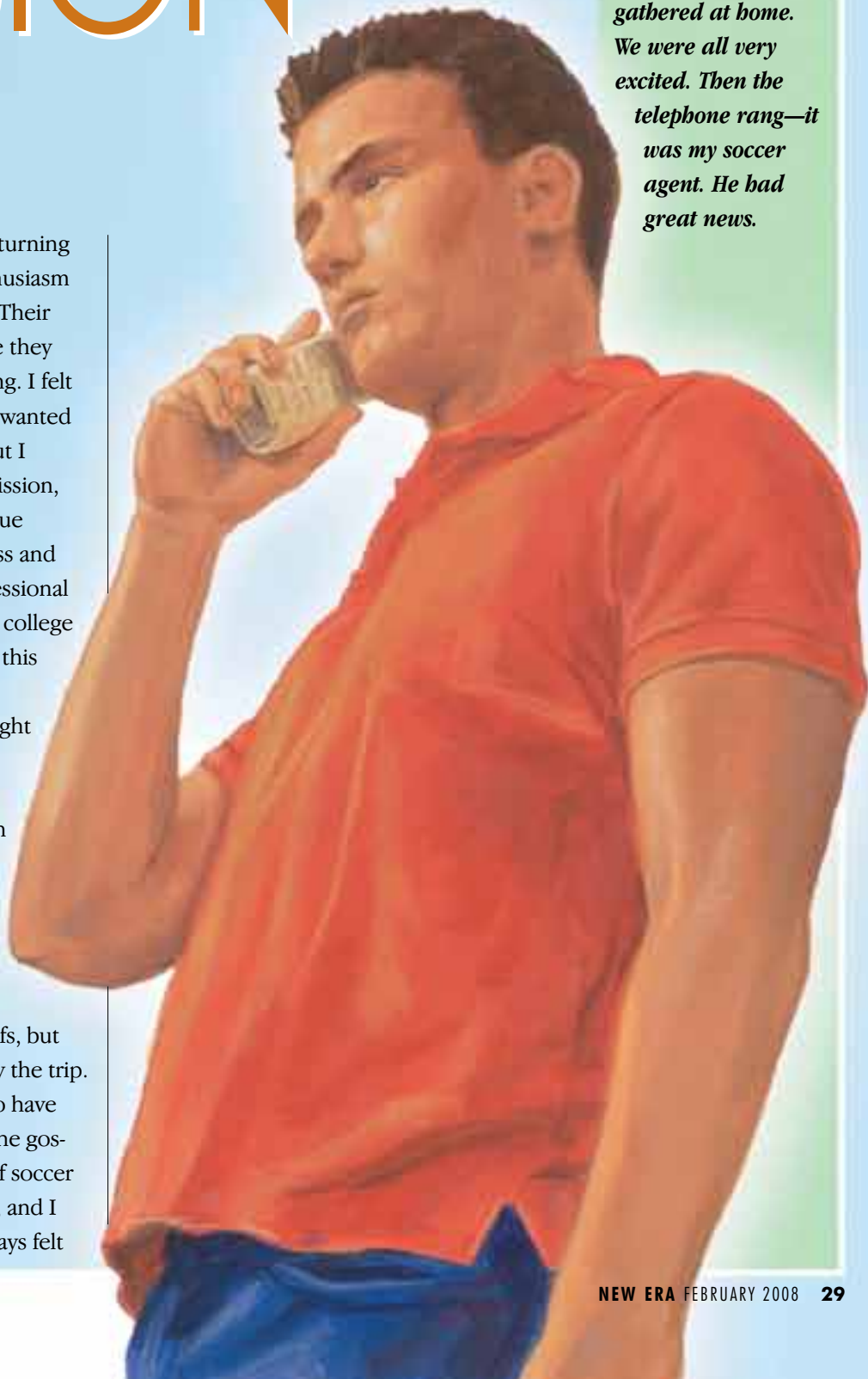



DECISION

out mission papers; others were returning from missions and telling with enthusiasm what it was like to be a missionary. Their eyes shone with emotion each time they spoke, and the Spirit was very strong. I felt the desire to serve a mission too; I wanted to have these same experiences. But I worried that if I chose to serve a mission, my soccer dream wouldn't come true because I would lose physical fitness and agility. My desire to become a professional player was enormous; I had put off college and worked and lived only to fulfill this dream.

On my soccer trips I always brought a copy of the Book of Mormon. I loved the words of the prophets, their way of life, their determination to obey the commandments, and their good example for their people. I felt ashamed of not being an example for the other players and not putting the things of God first. Sometimes I tried to share my beliefs, but what I always heard was "Let's enjoy the trip. Forget about this nonsense. Let's go have fun!" I started to get irritated with the gossip, dishonesty, and other aspects of soccer life. Many times I felt alone and sad, and I knew there was a place where I always felt

When my mission call arrived, my family gathered at home. We were all very excited. Then the telephone rang—it was my soccer agent. He had great news.



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happy and had friends who cared about me—friends who were together at activities and dances, in seminary and institute classes—celestial friends. I missed these things very much.

One Sunday when I wasn't traveling, I went to church in my home ward in Brazil. At the end of the meetings, the bishop called me into his office to talk. I knew that we were going to talk about a mission because everyone my age was returning home. The bishop challenged me to serve a mission, and I tried to change the subject, saying that I wasn't prepared. I tried to put off the bishop in every possible way, but he persevered and convinced me of the value of a mission. We ended the conversation with a goal for my preparation.

Some months later I turned in my papers, and I also continued with my training. For the moment, I had managed to reconcile soccer and the Church in my mind. But little did I know that it couldn't last for long. I would have to choose.

When my call arrived, my family gathered at home. We were all very excited. Then the telephone rang.

On the other end of the line, my soccer agent told me that he had obtained a good contract with a European club. My imagination soared! I could see the stadium full of people coming to watch the games. I thought of the beautiful house and car and salary I could have. My dream was about to be fulfilled. It was within my grasp—and then I

looked at the envelope with the call sitting beside the phone.

My eyes began to fill with tears. For a moment my life passed as if it were a movie. On the phone, my agent asked me what I thought of the news. I was silent. I couldn't talk, and my legs were shaking. I didn't want this moment to be real, but it was! I had to make a decision, the most difficult of any decision in my life.

With my voice shaking, I finally told him that I had already obtained a better contract. I would be a missionary for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for two years. I thanked the agent for the opportunity and for his work and effort on my behalf. Then I hung up the phone and went to my room, where I cried for a long time. I knew that the opportunity wouldn't wait for two years, and my soccer dream would not be realized.

I knelt and prayed to Heavenly Father, asking for comfort. I felt a quiet and sweet voice respond, comforting my heart by saying, "My son, you are already part of the best team in the world." I reflected on these words and still reflect on them today.

Today, home from serving in the Brazil Fortaleza Mission, I don't regret my choice in any way. The true Church of Jesus Christ is available to anyone who wants to be happy. And on my mission I learned that the best way to be happy is doing what Heavenly Father wants us to do. My mission was the best choice I have ever made in my life. It taught me that all who seek first the kingdom of God will have a place on the Lord's team (see Matthew 6:33). **NE**

