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In Praise of the Dodge

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Pelé, Ronaldinho: their virtuosic agility takes our breath away. An impassioned essay on the art of the soccer dribble.

It's no accident dribbling was born in Brazil. The first black players started dribbling past white players on defense to avoid roughhousing during matches. It evolved on beaches and empty lots, with a ball made of old socks or rubber. It recruits the hips, as in samba or capoeira. Playful, acrobatic, it is the style of the greatest players, from Leonidas to Pelé to Neymar, whose motto was "boldness and joy." Emblems of an entire nation, they were tightrope walkers who turned soccer into a whimsical dance. In recounting its origins and development, its legends and greatest practitioners, this paean to dribbling paints a portrait of Brazilian culture and society.

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