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For The Love Of The Game: Football Ads That Scored With Audiences

Before UEFA's Euro 2024 kicks off, we've hand-selected 15 G.O.A.T. footy ads from over the years

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Every four years, Europe's finest footballing nations compete, and this year, the tournament will take place in Germany. While it brings together football fans

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The UK will be represented by England, who have been drawn against the likes of Serbia, Denmark and Slovenia, while Scotland take on hosts Germany, as well as Switzerland and Hungary.

Ahead of the first whistle being blown, we've rounded up the indisputable champions of the footy-ad-world from over the years.

From humour and cameos to - wait until you hear this: they even have close ups of legs doing keepie-uppies (shock horror) - these particular ads have all that you would expect and more - including first-rate scripts, craft production values and even apt acting performances that put them in a league above the rest.

Here is our own best starting 11 (plus four subs) beginning with the oldest.

Nike 'Parklife' by TBWA Simons Palmer - 1997

This Sunday League kick-about for Nike, featuring the likes of 90s football legends Eric Cantona, Robbie Fowler, David Seaman and Ian Wright, will forever be a classic. Not only was it set to one of the defining songs of the era 'Parklife' by Blur, but it was also directed by Jonathan Glazer, known for his directorial part in the iconic **Guinness 'Surfer' ad** and his subsequent feature film career, directing critically acclaimed features such as; *Sexy Beast*, *Under the Skin* and most recently *The Zone of Interest*.

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Nike ‘Airport’ by Wieden & Kennedy - 1998

‘A game-changer’ ... ‘the greatest ad ever’ - these are but a few of the comments made about this ad from Nike for the 1998 Brazil World Cup. Tricks, flicks and nutmegs from Ronaldo and the rest of the Brazilian national team, this ad was a first of its kind in terms of its high-paced football action and many footy campaigns would go on to mimic it. Director of *Face/Off* John Woo, and Wieden & Kennedy creatives John Boiler and Glenn Cole, nailed the execution of a simple idea: what would footballers do when they’re trapped in a boring place?



Pepsi ‘David Beckham vs Juventus Fan’ - 2001

Perhaps the most famous name in football, and potentially also the player that has made the most cash from footballer/brand collaborations over the years. But in this ad for Pepsi, of which he was playing for Manchester United at the time, Beckham ceases to pout and pose and even makes a little jibe at himself. And it seems this would become a theme for the celebrity moving forward - in his latest ad for Uber Eats, he plays upon the perception that footballers do not have a lot going on upstairs.

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John Smith's 'Ball Skills' by TBWA\London - 2002

“‘Ave it! Oh, yes.” And that’s all that needs to be said for this absolute gem of an ad from Peter Kay and John Smiths.

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Adidas 'Footballitis' - 2002

Launching ahead of the Japan and Korea 2002 World Cup, this piece of football advertising from Adidas satirised the educational videos of the 70s. David Beckham, Zinedine Zidane and Alessandro Del Piero all show signs of 'Footballitis', a disease spreading across the sporting world - 22 years on we're not sure they've found a cure. The ad also gave viewers at the time a glimpse of the Adidas match ball for the tournament, aptly titled 'Fevernova'.

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Nike ‘Secret Tournament’ - 2002

This also aired around the Japan and Korea 2002 World Cup, portraying Nike’s hidden football tournament held on a cargo ship. A whopping 24 players, including the likes of Thierry Henry, Paul Scholes, Luis Figo and Ronaldinho, went head-to-head in an epic indoor match filled with skills, flicks and kicks. Also whopping was the estimated \$100 million marketing budget, with the film directed by film director and *Monty Python* member Terry Gilliam. Brand ambassador extraordinaire Eric Cantona also played a part no one could predict - the referee.

Carling ‘Love Football’ by Leith London - 2004

Another absolute belter of a footy ad is Carling’s ‘Love Football’ set in Glasgow to the highly-catchy tune ‘Woo Hoo’ by Japanese girl band The 5.6.7.8’s - a song which would later go on to feature in Quentin Tarantino’s *Kill Bill Volume 1*. In the early 2000s people loved the sight of a never-ending street game of football, in which every man is topless and a woman in a suit clatters a bloke on the slightly larger side. In 2014, readers of *Campaign* also voted it as the best football ad of all time.

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Pepsi ‘Medieval Fight’ - 2004

What do you do when a gang of raiders steal all the Pepsi cans from your Mediaeval town? Recruit footballers clad in leather tunics of course! David Beckham (him again), Ronaldinho, Roberto Carlos and Francesco Totti all featured in the £3 million spot that aired ahead of the Portugal Euros in 2004.



Carlsberg 'Old Lions' by Saatchi & Saatchi - 2006

If you ask anyone in the industry (or the public) what they think the best footy ad is - nine times out of 10 they will say 'Old Lions'. The national treasure of an ad saw Carlsberg round up a host of former England football legends to all play in a game against a *real* pub team - (they apparently had no idea who they were to face). Launched in the run-up to the 2006 Germany World Cup, the ad was filmed in Dagenham in East London and featured the following players who collectively have 796 international caps between them: Peter Shilton, Des Walker, Terry Butcher, Jack Charlton, Stuart Pearce, Peter Reid, Bryan Robson, Alan Ball, Bobby Charlton, Peter Beardsley, and Chris Waddle, with Bobby Robson as coach.

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Adidas 'Jose+10' by 180 Amsterdam - 2006

We all remember the days of picking teams for a 'friendly' game of football down at the park. But perhaps few of us were able to pick the likes of Kaka, Zidane and Lampard like these two young chaps could in Adidas' 2006 ad. The still for the campaign in which Jose faced the footballing stars of the 2000s was later **recreated** by the brand in 2024, with women taking centre stage to showcase the role models and icons of the women's game.

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Carlsberg 'Team Talk' by Saatchi & Saatchi - 2010

It is my personal opinion that this ad should be watched by every single England fan ahead of every single England match at the Euros this summer. Goosebumps, misty eyes and adrenaline - this spot really does get the emotional juices flowing. A topless Jeff Stelling bossing a painted St George's flag is a highlight of this 2010 South Africa World Cup ad, as are the visual tributes to two legendary Bobby's - Bobby Robson and Bobby Moore.



Nike 'Write the Future' by Wieden & Kennedy Amsterdam - 2010

Another 2010 South Africa World Cup spot - and another undoubted classic - Nike's 'Write the Future'. The likes of Didier Drogba, Wayne Rooney, Ronaldinho and Cristiano Ronaldo all feature in the epic three-minute ad which explores the possible futures attached to the players scoring and missing those vital goal opportunities. Homer Simpson even makes an appearance! Doh!



Kronenbourg 1664 ‘Farmers of Alsace’ by Ogilvy & Mather - 2013

A name mentioned more than once in this article already, Eric Cantona, somewhat surprised the footballing world with his ‘Farmers of Alsace’ ad for Kronenbourg 1664, 11 years ago. The spot claimed in the French region that borders Germany and Switzerland hops farmers are as celebrated and ‘revered’ as football players. Cantona’s charm and surprisingly good acting skills shine through on this one.

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Nike 'Winner Stays' by Wieden & Kennedy - 2014

Nike's 'Winner Stays' 2014 Brazil World Cup ad, and my personal favourite, saw Cristiano Ronaldo, Neymar, Wayne Rooney and many more come to life to play a classic territorial game of 'Winner Stays On'. Not only did I watch and rewatch this ad when I was younger, but to this day I still remember the feeling of imagining myself as a professional player when I was playing. For me, it was Carlton Cole scoring the winner for West Ham in the Champions League final - (fat chance).



Nike ‘The Last Game’ by Wieden+Kennedy Portland - 2015

This ad, part of the same ‘Risk Everything’ campaign as the aforementioned ‘Winner Stays’, was also one of the classic footy ads of the 2010s. The animated ‘Last Game’ film starred the biggest footballing names on the international stage who were all on a mission to save the beautiful game from the hands of a villainous mastermind called ‘The Scientist’. According to Passion Pictures, the ad, which quickly went viral, took over seven months to complete and involved over 300 people, including 101 artists and 25 animators.



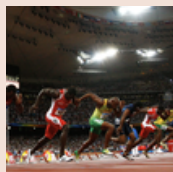
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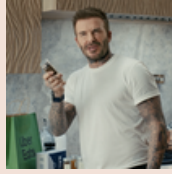
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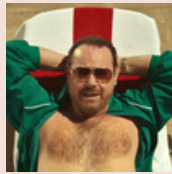
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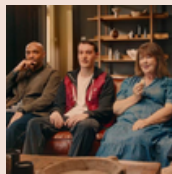
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