

## Interview

# Brazilian footballer learning English in



One English language school has been blessed with a bit of samba this summer. **Scott Grech** catches up with **WILLIAM**, who captained an undefeated Corinthians side to win the Brazilian league and cup double in 2009, and who is now in Malta learning English with EC.

Photographs: GloboEsporte.com and the player's personal archive

After a glittering career, one of the first intentions after retiring from football of 34-year-old Brazilian William Machado de Oliveira, known simply as William, was to study English in Australia.

Now, however, after studying English with EC in London for eight weeks, he is improving his knowledge of the language with the same language school here in Malta, where he has temporarily resided for the past five weeks.

"I knew a bit about Malta before I came here, but to be honest, I wasn't expecting it to be such a nice island," he comments with a typical Brazilian smile as he sits in his flat in Paceville.

Though uncapped by the Brazilian national team, William's honours include winning the Brazilian Cup in 2000 and again in 2009, the Minas Gerais State League in 2005, the Rio Grande do Sul State League in 2006 and 2007, the Campeonato Brasileiro Serie B in 2008 and the Campeonato Paulista in 2009, with Corinthians, whom he captained in their undefeated campaign.

William is taking a sabbatical from the game, and plans to open up a financial advisory firm with two other partners next year, although he still harbours hopes of being involved in football in one capacity or another in the future. "Not as a manager though. It's too stressful," he beams.

He has studied English for eight weeks in London and for five weeks in Malta. Which country does he prefer? "To be honest, and I'm not saying this just because you're in front of me, but I have actually enjoyed my time in Malta more, since I feel that the lifestyle here is quite similar, to a certain extent, to that in Brazil.

"I feel more comfortable here. One reason why, for instance, which might sound a bit bizarre, is that I can wear flip-flops every day in Malta. I feel that flip-flops allow me to roam about very easily, and Malta's fantastic weather gives me the opportunity to wear flip-flops wherever I want.

"Another major difference which I have noticed is that Malta is much cheaper than London too.

"Of course, I've only sampled Malta in summer, and I don't have much of

an idea of what it's like in winter. From what I've heard, however, Malta enjoys warm weather from April till October, so it mustn't be that bad living here," he muses.

Despite enjoying a successful career, it was always one of William's ambitions to improve his English, which he stopped learning when he signed professional terms with his first club, Sete de Setembro, at the age of 19.

One incident in particular, which took place early last year, fuelled this ambition even further.

"Together with a group of other football players, I went to watch the multi-award winning rock band Coldplay play live in concert in Rio de Janeiro. Fortunately, we also had the opportunity of meeting the band backstage once the concert ended.

"Because of my poor English, however, while guys such as (three time world footballer of the year) Ronaldo and (former Arsenal stalwart) Edu enjoyed a free flowing conversation with the band, in English, I held back from talking too much, even though Coldplay are one of my favourite music bands. I was afraid that my English would let me down.

"The concert also happened to coincide with the birthday of Chris Martin (Coldplay's lead singer), who threw a small party after the concert and kindly invited us all to stay behind for, which we did. That day I realised how important it is to know English, for you might have to use it when you least expect it," William says.

Brazil's golden era is right round the corner, with its sport-obsessed population gearing up to pay hosts to the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro in 2016.

Because of these two competitions, more Brazilians, especially those involved in the tourism industry, have started to learn English.

"Brazilians speak Portuguese and many know Spanish quite well. However, English is not well-spoken by Brazilians, and the government has repeatedly outlined this as cause for concern. Many tourists visit Brazil annually, many of whom are, unfortunately put off by the difficulty in holding a conversation in English".

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Sitting next to William is Noel Borg, English EC's regional sales director, who travels regularly to Brazil to promote the language school and who played a major part in convincing William to try out Malta as a destination to visit to improve his English.

"The William I met 18 months ago is different to the William I know today. Before, William was shy, almost embarrassed, when conversing in English. Now he is way more confident," he remarks.

Up to three years ago, the number of Brazilians who travelled to Malta to study with EC were few.

"Since then, however, there has been a lot of promotion and awareness in Brazil about what EC and Malta have to offer potential students, to the extent that our intake of Brazilian students has increased by 100% over the past 12 months.

"As William mentioned, I think a lot of the Maltese way of living is similar to that of Brazilians, which many find very important when they choose to



come here. Another very appealing factor is that Brazilians need not apply for a visa if they visit Malta for less than 12 weeks.

"As a financial advisor with his firm, William will have to interact with different people, and not necessarily with people from Brazil only, so the stronger his English is, the better.

"EC's goal is to send William back to Brazil having acquired the confidence and the capability of sharing a conversation with anyone in English, and I think we can both say we are on the right track," Mr Borg comments.

#### Footballing career

Hardly anyone spoke English at Corinthians, one of Brazil's most decorated clubs, which William played for and captained in the twilight of his career.

He joined the club in 2008, at the age of 32, and went on to play 160 matches.

A few years earlier, however, he was about to turn his back on his career as a footballer.

"Although I have always loved



William (right) with former Brazil President Luis Inacio Lula da Silva and top star Ronaldo

# Champion William in Malta



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Ronaldo (is the best player ever). They didn't nickname him *Il fenomeno* for nothing. He was just amazing, so direct, so quick, so hungry for goal, and his love for the game never subsided, despite all the injuries he had to deal with.

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up, who was, believe it or not, Kaka, who ended up having the game of his life in this friendly, which propelled his rise to stardom. It just goes to show how lucky you have to be sometimes,” William comments.

#### Future

After three more weeks in Malta, William will head back to London, where he will spend a few more weeks further improving his English. “I'm delighted with the progress I have made so far. Before I go back to London though, I must try to visit more places in Malta. I haven't managed to do a lot of sightseeing so far, although I have enjoyed walking round Sliema, and the blue lagoon was simply beautiful”.

After London, he intends to spend three months around Europe, where he intends to put what he has learnt into practice.

“And then back to Brazil. I'll be more recognizable over there,” he laughs. “Who knows, I might visit Malta again someday. My stay so far has been nothing short of enjoyable, and I definitely recommend Malta to anyone considering a visit to the island,” he says.



#### Profile



- **Born 24 August 1976**
- **Playing Position: Central back**
- **Represented Brazil at under 17 level.**
- **Honours – Campeonato Mineiro in 2005 with Ipatinga, Campeonato Gaucho in 2006 and 2007 with Grêmio and the Campeonato Brasileiro Serie B in 2008 and the Campeonato Paulista and Copa do Brasil in 2009 with Corinthians.**

playing football, my enjoyment of the game dwindled somewhat when I reached 29. I was about to retire, when family and friends persuaded me to play on for at least one more season.

“It took a lot of persuasion, but they managed to convince me, and it turned out to be my best season. Eventually, I was signed by Grêmio, for whom I played for one season, and then by Corinthians. The rest, as they say, is history,” he says as he smiles again.

When Corinthians won the championship in 2009, they were only the second team in Brazil's football history to do so without losing a game.

“The last team to have done so was in 1975. It was a great achievement”.

When the final whistle blew on the last match of the season, however, the immediate celebrations turned out to be rather muted than expected.

William explains: “We played the last game of the season against Sport Club Internacional, a team based in the south of Brazil.

“We didn't celebrate a lot, because

we were in a different state to Sao Paulo and the environment was different. Had we rubbed our victory in, the chances were high that we would have sparked a riot among the fans.

“In Brazil, people are obsessed with football; they are fanatical over it. Sometimes, perhaps, it is a bit too much,” says William, who travels around in a bullet proof car in his hometown.

“You've got to understand that most Brazilians have a love/hate relationship with their favourite team. They would die for their team to win but, on the other hand, when results do not go their way, they can turn violent against the team in a split of a second”.

How did it feel to captain a team followed by approximately 30 million fans?

“I was honoured, but to be honest, I didn't enjoy being made captain at first. It's too much responsibility to have on your shoulders. When I was first appointed, I did my best to mediate between the players and then manager Mano Menezes, who has since been made manager of Brazil.

“However, I soon figured out that it's impossible to please both. I remember on one occasion, some players urged me to ask Menezes whether they were allowed to visit a nightclub to celebrate winning a very important match.

“I knew the manager would never allow this, but I still made the request, which he then turned down. Later, I was told by someone that some players thought that I had not tried hard enough to persuade Menezes.”

Asked for his view on who he thinks was the best player he ever played with, William replies, almost instantly, “Ronaldo. They didn't nickname him *Il fenomeno* for nothing. He was just amazing, so direct, so quick, so hungry for goal, and his love for the game never subsided, despite all the injuries he had to deal with.

“Ronaldo was my nightmare. Some of the defenders he played against got off lightly. He only terrorised them for 90 minutes, whereas I, as a defender, had to face and try and stop him from scoring in training every day,” he chuckles.

For William, becoming a profes-

sional footballer in Brazil depends on three factors: skill, a good agent and luck.

“Besides knowing how to play very well, it is fundamentally important in this day and age to have a good agent. Moreover, everyone in Brazil wants to be a footballer, so your chances depend on luck.

“For instance, (Real Madrid playmaker) Kaka, couldn't even make the first 11 when he played for the under 19 São Paulo side.

“On one particular day, the manager of the São Paulo first-team asked the manager of the under-19 side to borrow his three best players to play in an upcoming friendly match the first team had. He asked for one attacker, one midfielder and one defender.

“The reserve coach found no problem in giving him the attacker and defender. But when it came to the midfielder, he hesitated, because not only was this midfielder the best player of his team, but he was also the captain, and he was scared that he might return from the game injured.

“So he sent this midfielder's back-