



# Brazil's Newest Pacesetter

A profile of Arthur Melo



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Back in December, when Barcelona were hosting Celta Vigo at the Camp Nou in the league, a photo emerged of Grêmio's star midfielder Arthur Melo with the then Barcelona technical secretary Robert Fernandez.



Photographs are a medium that can stir up a lot of trouble and controversy and this one certainly did so. While Grêmio were aware of the fact that Arthur would be attending the game at the Camp Nou, they considered this a breach of ethics where a club approached a player they were reportedly interested in, without the permission of the club - similar to the mess Liverpool had made in their initial pursuit of Virgil Van Dijk.

While a lot of fans were exasperated with our club's new and more specifically, Pep Segura's new (business) interests in Brazilian players, Arthur Melo is finally a step in the right direction - not the Paulinho or Lucas Lima direction. He's the type of midfielder who can control a game and serve as a carrier in unlocking defenses, qualities of Xavi and Iniesta respectively. This a player whose love for Iniesta is endless, even declaring him "a football god".

"I'd hoped to be able to share a dressing room with him [Iniesta]. It was a dream to be on the same team. But, God willing, we'll meet one day, whether playing or not, and I'll be able to give him a hug."

Brazil is not exactly the place you look for players like Arthur, but for a nation where football was developed in rebellion of the British way of playing, Arthur's belief in self-expression with the ball, just like any other Brazilian, will be a vital quality in Spain. He'll be the system himself alongside Busquets and Messi.

That's the wonderful thing with players like Arthur Melo. They don't need certain types of players around them to thrive but they are the players around which managers like to build. Players like Paulinho need service and players like Gomes need a certain role/position. Arthur just needs the ball and the rest is up to him on how to circulate and dictate. Even though he's not the best possible option for Barcelona, as many of us would prefer Thiago over him, he's a promising talent and has shown his quality this year in Brazil. After a very long time, the club has signed a player whose sole condition is having the ball and there's a lot of optimism around his arrival due to the fact that he's the profile of player we desperately need and with players like Messi, Coutinho, Busquets, Dembélé, and Rakitić directly around him, it doesn't seem like much can go wrong.

“I wanted to call this press conference to express the love I have for Grêmio.”

With those words a few days back, Arthur bade farewell to Grêmio. He led them to a Copa Libertadores title this year and in a season where he played 50 games, he was able to complete 2961 passes (95% completion) and made about 113 interceptions. He's no Xavi and no Iniesta and most probably, will never be. However, he's talented and essential and he makes the right choices. His excellent use of his body helps him hide the ball and make sharp turns, subsequently granting him time and space to distribute possession.

Arthur isn't just talented. He's showcased that he can take responsibility for a team and alongside Luan this season, he helped pull the strings for Grêmio in order to win the Copa Libertadores. He has the ability and patience to draw in defenders, possibly getting fouled, and pushing teammates into space. With his positional fluidity, he's able to help Grêmio build superiority in whichever part of the pitch it's required and he's dynamic enough to initiate changes of pace in the game's tempo after slowing it down himself. His world-class displays against Botafogo and Lanus in the semifinal and final of the cup were the games where he won Barcelona's heart and literally had to be fouled off the pitch to be stopped.

Although he may not be able to play with his idol Iniesta anymore, Arthur is expected to fit right into a team that's in desperate need of his abilities and remind the ones at the top of the fact that not every problem can be solved

by skills and flair, but rather technicality and control. With unnecessary players like Mina, Paulinho, and Gomes on the verge of leaving, Arthur's arrival may be the first step on the route towards recreating the Barcelona that would dominate day in, day out by getting the best out of the players.

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