

# The Curious Case of Neymar Jr.

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Reports from Marcelo Bechler today state that Neymar Jr. has agreed a deal with PSG who are willing to pay his 222 million release clause.

"Future Ballon d'Or winner", "The greatest Brazilian player", "Barca's best winger"

Ask some fans and you'll get those "obvious" replies above. Ask some others and you'll be explained why Neymar Jr. will never be the David Villa or the Thierry Henry we used to watch week in, week out on the left wing years back. You'll be told, quite to your surprise, why Neymar should be sold for another winger or left-sided forward, someone more disciplined. You'll be shocked to hear that because Neymar Jr. is one of those players who can easily walk into any starting eleven in the world.

But those people aren't wrong at all. And to understand that we need to go a bit into Neymar's playing style.

He's comfortable on the ball and penetrating in his movement. That comfort on the ball is shown and characterized by his willingness to take on players and being one of the best players in the world, he obviously has the confidence to bamboozle those players and create a chance or score himself. And he does.

Although Neymar isn't the best of finishers, his trickery and one-twos place him in gaps between defenders and he has time to put the matter to bed. This season he hasn't been clinical in front of goal (13 goals in 30 league appearances may seem decent but statistics are deceptive sometimes) and he has missed a lot of chances. That was made up for in terms of creation (23 assists in total this year). He's had more creation this year than this previous seasons (28 chances created in the box alone in 2016/17) at Barcelona, personally calling it his best season at the club. He's been an absolute nightmare for defences this season, completing the most successful dribbles and takes on (168 take ons this season – the most in Europe's top 5 leagues) in the league and rightbacks and centrebacks clearly have a hard time picking up his movement as he's suffered the most fouls (over 100) this season.

He was exceptional for Barcelona in that historical 'remontada' (comeback) over PSG. His man of the match award for that game and his statistics don't do justice to his overall performance that day. Picked up the attack minute after minute and ran circles around Silva, Kurzawa, Marquinhos, and Meunier. He pestered that defence the whole 95 minutes of the match and in a game where all eyes were on Leo Messi to lead a comeback, Neymar took over the mantle and gave life to a club battered in the first leg. We saw the reason why Neymar was brought to Barca on full display that night. The name meant to strike the same terror into opposition hearts as Messi does.

That may have been his greatest performance in his career, but it's been used to paper over the cracks. Neymar missed a lot of clear-cut chances in the league this season and there have been many glaring issues surrounding him. While a dip in goalscoring is acceptable (which can be due to a number of reasons), the lack of discipline isn't. That's discipline regarding Neymar's gameplay and himself as a player. We see him getting riled up and into petty fights on the pitch, recalling that red card (unfair to some extent but mostly Neymar's fault) versus Malaga where Neymar let a personal issue with a player get to his head and leave the team one man down and without a chance of a comeback. That was the game where Barcelona essentially handed Real Madrid the La Liga title. Acting childish and petty over things that happen on a football pitch shouldn't be a characteristic of a world-class player like him especially when a lot of people already see him as a play-actor.

As of his gameplay, the lack of discipline translates to composure and recklessness. Rather than laying off and playing simple balls to a teammate, Neymar will try to go the extra mile and dribble through 3 other players. The result: lost possession. Neymar lost the ball a staggering 46 times during the game versus Juventus, 41 times versus Monchengladbach and 38 times versus PSG. These sort of reckless take-ons and poor judgment left the team susceptible to counter-attacks and wasted good opportunities to create space and score. This excessive need to take on players and get past them is a result of Luis Enrique's direct way of playing football, bypassing his midfield at times and subsequently creating an over-reliance on MSN. While there was a stable midfield in Enrique's first two seasons, the lack of one in the third just highlighted the need for proper creators in the middle of the park to prevent other players from losing the ball and their composure as Neymar does so often.

Thierry Henry and David Villa were essentially poetry in motion for Barcelona in the previous seasons. The cool, calm Henry and the lethal David Villa making their diagonal runs and finishing chances with their striker instinct and ability were some of the highlights of the Barcelona of old. The decision making of these two legends is something Neymar Jr. will have to emulate. They hardly set a foot wrong and that's part of why they're revered as such legendary players. Their discipline and ability to contribute positively to team build-up despite both being strikers previously and moved to the left-wing is a testament to their genius. Both were feared by many, as is Neymar, but as long as he remains wasteful, he'll be helping no-one but the opposition.

He is one of best players in the world ability-wise but football is just so much more than raw ability. While no-one doubts his influence on the pitch, his influence off of it is a sign of worry. Recent reports have told us that it was Neymar's suggestion to Josep Bartomeu to sign Lucas Lima, a player who is good but not a player Barcelona need exactly. Neymar's poor decision making and judgment reflect here as well with him trying to get a friend moved to his club just for the sake of it. It's an action that has annoyed many fans and has shown Bartomeu's quick reactions to appease star players to not face the risk of making them unhappy. The state of the club is quite clear as we can see it's become a marketing organization and not a sports organization anymore. Therefore, the Brazilian still has a long, long, long way to go and much to improve and add to his overall game and character before he makes it to the Ballon d'Or worthy heights he's destined to reach.

The apparent deal he has agreed with PSG could be good for Barcelona as we'll be getting an unbelievable 222 million out of it and that could be useful in improving squad depth, given the club's recent finances. Secondly, we might be able to leverage a deal with PSG for Marco Verratti (or we may not because with Neymar's addition PSG will start to think they're serious contenders in Europe) who we need now more than ever. And thirdly, club president, Bartomeu will not have any Brazilian avenue for marketing and corruption with Neymar gone. No shady deals in and out of Brazil and no more having to listen to Neymar's transfer suggestions just to keep him appeased at the club.

Personally I want him to stay because I'm certain that under the right manager and in the right system he can become an all-time great. Proper guidance really allows

you to add a lot to your game and I'd like to believe Neymar will go only go upward from here as a player at Barca. I certainly hope so.