

The new King of Paris: Neymar Jr.

It was the news everybody was waiting in the football: Neymar Jr. is no longer a player of FC Barcelona and he'll soon be wearing Paris Saint Germain's jersey for a staggering amount of 222 million Euros.

And while this news has provided a lot of divided opinions (some believe PSG's not up to Neymar's standards; some think he's leaving Barcelona for money and others think he's doing the right by leaving Lionel Messi's shadow), it's certainly the most important of the summer in football and quite probably in the entire world of sports. Overselling? Not quite.

To talk about Neymar's talents and what he can provide to the French club is not necessary; we all know about his qualities and his potential to become the successor to Messi and Ronaldo's throne. This is why it's important to know how this world-class player came into prominence and turned into what he is today: the most expensive footballer of all time.

Known for his outstanding dribbling, goalscoring prowess and sheer talent that has amazed the world, how this Brazilian was built into what he is today? Let's see.

His beginnings and the Santos years.

Like the vast majority of Brazilian footballers, Neymar was born as Neymar da Silva Santos Júnior in Mogi das Cruzes, Brazil, back in 1992. A young kid in a very humble home, it was thanks to his own footballing skills that his family managed to escape from poverty as he was signed back in 2003, while only being 11 years old,

by youth side Portuguesa Santista and didn't take very long for a big club, the legendary Santos, to sign in that very year a couple of months later.

Since his very beginnings at Santos, Neymar was something of a prodigy, gathering marvelous opinions and statements from all kinds of football experts and fans who witnessed his skills in the club's youth sides. He was often compared to one of the clubs' most important players in this century, Robinho, and when he got his first professional contract when he was 17, back in 2009, he was widely considered as Brazil's greatest hope in years.

Each season was an improvement from the last one; a trait that would be common in his career. We can safely say that 2011 was a breakthrough year for him, scoring six goals in Santos' Copa Libertadores winning campaign—their first since 1963, with Pelé commanding the club. Another important moment in Neymar's career that year was his goal against Flamengo where he bypassed several defenders to score quite probably his best one since then, earning him the Puzkas Award for best goal of the year in the process.

In December he would his future club, FC Barcelona, in the FIFA Club World Cup Final. Barcelona would win with ease 4-0 in a match where Neymar was completely overshadowed by one of the Catalonian club's greatest ever performances. One of the peak moments of the competition was the picture the Brazilian took with Lionel Messi, when Neymar's future was in the air and he seemed more likely to join Real Madrid than Barcelona.

His last couples of seasons weren't as successful as this one on a team level, but he managed to score more than 100 goals before turning 21 and was widely

considering as South America's best footballer and the world's biggest prospect. It didn't take a lot more time for Europe to call him and it did.

The Barcelona years.

Back in 2013, Neymar agreed a fee of €57.1 million and a five-year deal to play for FC Barcelona. There are still legal discussions about how real the fee is because there's a lot of evidence of being a lot higher than that—despite that, Neymar would be joining Paris Saint Germain without having this issue fixed.

Neymar's first season in Europe was a bit of a disappointment, considering the hype around his signing and the fact the Spanish press was eager to watch this South American talent live. His body wasn't 100% ready to deal with La Liga's physicality and the club's doctors ordered him to gain weight to cope with that. It also didn't help matters that Barcelona's then new manager, Gerardo Martino, was really suited to the club's demands and the club finished without titles, with Neymar only scoring nine goals in more than forty matches.

The next season, 2015-16, was probably Neymar's greatest in terms of club achievements. Under Luis Enrique's tutelage, he managed to score more than thirty goals and established a monumental triumvirate with Lionel Messi and their new signing at the time, Luis Suárez. They won the Treble in the process: La Liga, Copa del Rey and the UEFA Champions League, with Neymar scoring in the final against Juventus.

The following season saw him playing on a similar fashion while having a bit of a dry spell in the last months of said season. But it was in the 2016-17 season, against Paris Saint Germain, of all teams, where he scored two goals and was Man

of the Match for an epic comeback which ended 6-1 in the second leg. It was widely regarded as Neymar's crowning moment in Barcelona and even he claimed it was the best match of his career.

Neymar won at Barcelona two La Liga titles, three Copa del Rey titles, a UEFA Champions, a FIFA Club World Cup, three Spanish Super Cup and an European Super Cup. He was also shortlisted for the 2015 FIFA Ballon d'Or while playing for Barcelona, only behind Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi.

And now he's joining Paris Saint Germain for a world-record sum, leaving behind a feeling of being overshadowed by Lionel Messi.

With Brazil's National Team.

Neymar's record with Brazil's National Team is a highly successful one and he has been a star performer since joining their senior team back in 2010, shortly after South Africa's World Cup.

He has been ever-present since being called-up for the first time in that year and after a somewhat tepid performance in 2011's Copa América at Argentina. He also was part of the team in the 2012 Olympics and a paramount element for Brazil's victory over Spain home soil to win the 2013 Confederations Cup.

2014 was coming and so the World Cup at Brazil where the weight of the pressure was on Neymar's shoulders to carry on the National Team to win the title. He was certainly the best player in a truly underwhelming squad but he missed the

memorable 7-1 defeat against Germany because of an injury he got against Colombia in the quarter finals.

During the 2015 Copa América, due to a Thiago Silva injury that ruled him out of the tournament, then coach Dunga named Neymar as the team's captain for the first time and he gave extraordinary performances in the group phase but missed the remainder of the competition because of a physical confrontation against Camilo Zúñiga, the very same player who injured him in the World Cup a year before.

But his greatest moment was definitely the 2016 Olympics in his own country where he commanded an Under-23 Brazilian team to win the tournament against all odds and playing a very pragmatic brand of football. Neymar himself was paramount in the final, scoring a marvelous free-kick against Germany and the winning penalty in the shoot-out, thus achieving an accomplishment for his country for the first time ever.

No one can deny he has been Brazil's finest player since the crop of footballers such as Kaká, Ronaldinho and such left the spotlight. And since his arrival, he has been the National Team's most important performer and he has lived up to the demands of the role—now it's time to see if he's going to do the same at Paris.