How Pedro Neto became Cristiano Ronaldo's heir apparent - while being taken to training by his parents

Only 20, Portugese Neto has taken even Wolves staff by surprise with his direct play and trickery with the ball at his feet

By John Percy
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Shortly after he signed for Wolves in 2019, Pedro Neto used his first interview in his new home country to declare he was going to be the best player in the world.

At the time, it seemed a case of youthful exuberance getting the better of a talented but still largely unproven player. Two years on, and those words do not seem so misplaced.

In a difficult season, there is no doubt over who has been Wolves' stand-out player, with Neto's sublime performances in the absence of injured talisman Raul Jiménez not only helping keep his club clear of trouble, but also convincing onlookers in his native Portugal that he could be the heir apparent to Cristiano Ronaldo.

Neto is level with another player of his age in Manchester City's Phil Foden for goals and assists (nine), and ahead of Arsenal's Bukayo Saka, producing an exquisite individual winner at Southampton last weekend.

Capable of playing on the left or right of a forward-three, Neto plays as if the ball is attached to his boots with string, creating havoc in defences with his direct running and trickery.

He is still only 20, and still lives with his parents in the city, but has taken even Wolves staff by surprise with his progress over the last 12 months.

Rather ominously, Nuno insists there is still far more to come.

“Pedro is giving a good response but I truly believe that he still has a long way to go on improving a lot of aspects of his own game,” said the Wolves head coach.

“He’s very young, very talented and there are a lot of things that he can improve. He knows, and we know, and we are on the journey to do so.

“He is committed to the process of learning and improving, his dedication makes me very pleased.”

Signed from Lazio in the summer of 2019, Neto already had a decent reputation in Portugal after breaking Ronaldo’s record as the country’s youngest goalscorer, aged 17 years and 67 days, with Braga.

Pedro Neto has made a strong impression in his time at Wolves | CREDIT: Getty Images Europe /Sam Bagnall - AMA

His development with Wolves has been so quick that Nuno made the calculated gamble to sell Diogo Jota to Liverpool for £45 million in September, due to the confidence the club had in Neto and Daniel Podence.

It was that faith which led to Neto agreeing a new five-year contract in November, yet this season he has surpassed even Wolves’s expectations, rising to the responsibility in

Jiménez's prolonged absence.

Despite his growing reputation, he remains very grounded. He is dropped off and picked up from training every day by his parents, Pedro Senior and Cristina, while along with captain Conor Coady, he is renowned as one of the jokers in the squad and recently insisted in a TV interview that record signing Fabio Silva has the "worst haircut in history".

He is also particularly close with Joao Moutinho and Ruben Neves and that ultra-professionalism which radiates from the Portuguese contingent, which also includes Podence, Rui Patricio and Nelson Semedo, has clearly rubbed off on him.

Nuno admires his "total dedication" to training and all Neto's work in the gym on improving the physical aspect of his game is being rewarded.

He will face Leeds on Friday night as the form player in Wolves's attacking trident and, predictably, is already being linked with moves to perceived bigger clubs.

His mission to become the best player in the world will take some doing, but Neto is clearly on the right track.

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