

Karim Benzema has emerged from Cristiano Ronaldo's shadow to become Real Madrid's top hunter

French striker has come into his own after taking responsibility for scoring goals



Real Madrid's Karim Benzema has been in top form since the departure of Cristiano Ronaldo. Reuters



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Karim Benzema was once Cristiano Ronaldo's main assistant. In 2021, the French striker has become the most decisive player of Real Madrid.

The French striker was signed from Lyon in 2009. He has since scored 264 goals in 538 games.

However, the difference in his contribution before and after the departure of the Portuguese star in 2018 is staggering. Benzema scored 19 goals in the 2016/17 season and 12 the following term. But in the 2018/19 season, he found the back of the net 30 times. The record was 27 in the 2019/20 season, while he has already scored 15 times in 24 games this season.

There was a time when Benzema did not do what was expected of Real Madrid's No 9 – namely, score goals.

There was also a time when the then manager Jose Mourinho trembled at the idea of a Ronaldo injury.

However, one can say Benzema put Ronaldo ahead of himself. A striker's inherent sense of selfishness was replaced by an altruism that harmed his own self-interests, in a way, while benefiting the group.

The French striker accepted that role at the Santiago Bernabeu. This included giving up goals, appearances in the media, and more. Empowering and supporting Ronaldo was the priority.

Benzema's movements aimed to make Ronaldo shine. If Ronaldo needed to occupy the No 9 zone, Benzema would make way.

A key member of the famed "BBC" alongside Ronaldo and Gareth Bale, Benzema has not always bothered with fattening his statistics.

The Portuguese star's departure changed everything. His exit changed the role Benzema had played until then.

The goal would become a collective task for which only Benzema would be responsible, while Bale, Marco Asensio and Isco would rally around him.

Pushed into the spotlight, Benzema found the scoring feet which had been in hibernation for much of his time at Real Madrid.

The feline has evolved to become a predator. Benzema continues to dance like no one in confined spaces. Now the goals are his responsibility and he is in charge of solving problems.

And just like that, Benzema became the best player at Real. And maybe beyond?

"For me, he is the best striker in the history of French football," said manager Zinedine Zidane recently.

His argument may have merit. Thierry Henry scored 360 goals in 794 games. An average of 0.45 goals per game.

Benzema, in 686 games between Lyon and Real Madrid, has 330 goals - an average of 0.48 per game. Stats don't lie, they say.

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