

Has late-career Ronaldo tarnished his once-golden reputation at Manchester United?



- Portuguese legend has put personal ambition ahead of club needs, and for the first time in his career it has backfired
- The Portuguese star is willing to take 30 percent cut to his salary, estimated to be \$30 million a year, in order to embrace a new challenge

Cristiano Ronaldo has returned to Manchester United for talks with club officials regarding his future after a three-week absence. Whether that means he will stay at Old Trafford for another season remains to be seen.



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Ronaldo had not joined the Red Devils' pre-season preparations, citing family reasons. But the cat was out of the bag. The Portuguese legend clearly wanted out of the club.

Problem is, there has been no serious takers.

After being linked with Naples, Roma, PSG, Bayern Munich and even Barcelona, Atletico Madrid became the latest possible destination, and perhaps the most credible due to the strong connections Jorge Mendes, Ronaldo's agent, has with the club.

In what has become the summer transfer window's hottest topic, Ronaldo remains the center of many rumors.

According to the international press, Mendes has already told clubs that the Portuguese star is willing to take 30 percent cut to his salary, estimated to be \$30 million a year, in order to embrace a new challenge.

The 37-year-old needs a quick resolution. He is looking for a club that will provide Champions League football as he looks forward to November's World Cup, a competition he has never won.

While this is understandable, satisfying professional ambition at the expense of his own club does not seem to be an attitude worthy of an athlete for so long regarded as exemplary.

Ronaldo has failed to show up for training, with little justification. Perhaps, thanks to his enduring brilliance and reliability, he has attained a status that allows him to be judged differently to fellow professionals. Until this summer, his professionalism was unquestioned.

Now, it seems, he has lost the attribute that set him apart: The humility of not acting superior to those around him.

It seems that some of the world's top players can become unaccountable due to their achievements. But in football, that is sacrilege. The team is always worth more than the individual.

This has come about because Ronaldo, it would seem, does not accept his part in his club's failure to reach the Champions League.

For a player whose ambition has always been to go down in history as the greatest of all time, being away from Europe's top competition is an embarrassment.

A season in the Europa League with Manchester United at this stage of his career is borderline unacceptable, and will not allow the 37-year-old another shot at the coveted Ballon d'Or.

Rightly or wrongly, Ronaldo believes he belongs only in the Champions League, where he has played for 19 consecutive years and is the competition's all-time top scorer with 140 goals, ahead of Lionel Messi on 125.

For the first time, it appears that his career is stagnating, and Mendes is trying to lift it at any cost, especially after seeing some of Europe's biggest clubs reject his client.

Nor have these rejections been just rumors, as was seen in the public statements of officials from Bayern Munich, PSG, Real Madrid and, more recently, in the direct words of Chelsea manager Thomas Tuchel.

Modesty and accepting failure are not virtues associated with Ronaldo. The Portuguese takes personal failure badly, and even when his team wins, has often shown anger and frustration at not scoring. Over the years, this self-centered trait has caused him as much distress as benefit.

The situation, and his anguish, is exacerbated by the fact that Atletico de Madrid is the club rumored to be most interested in Ronaldo's services.

Representing Atletico would anger supporters of bitter rivals Real Madrid, where Ronaldo spent the greatest years of his career. In all, he played 438 games wearing the merengue shirt, scoring 450 goals, and won 15 titles for the Spanish club.

Ronaldo has already tarnished his image with many Manchester United fans who previously idolized him.

Many hope he does not do the same with Real Madrid. So late in his career, it would be a catastrophic mistake.

