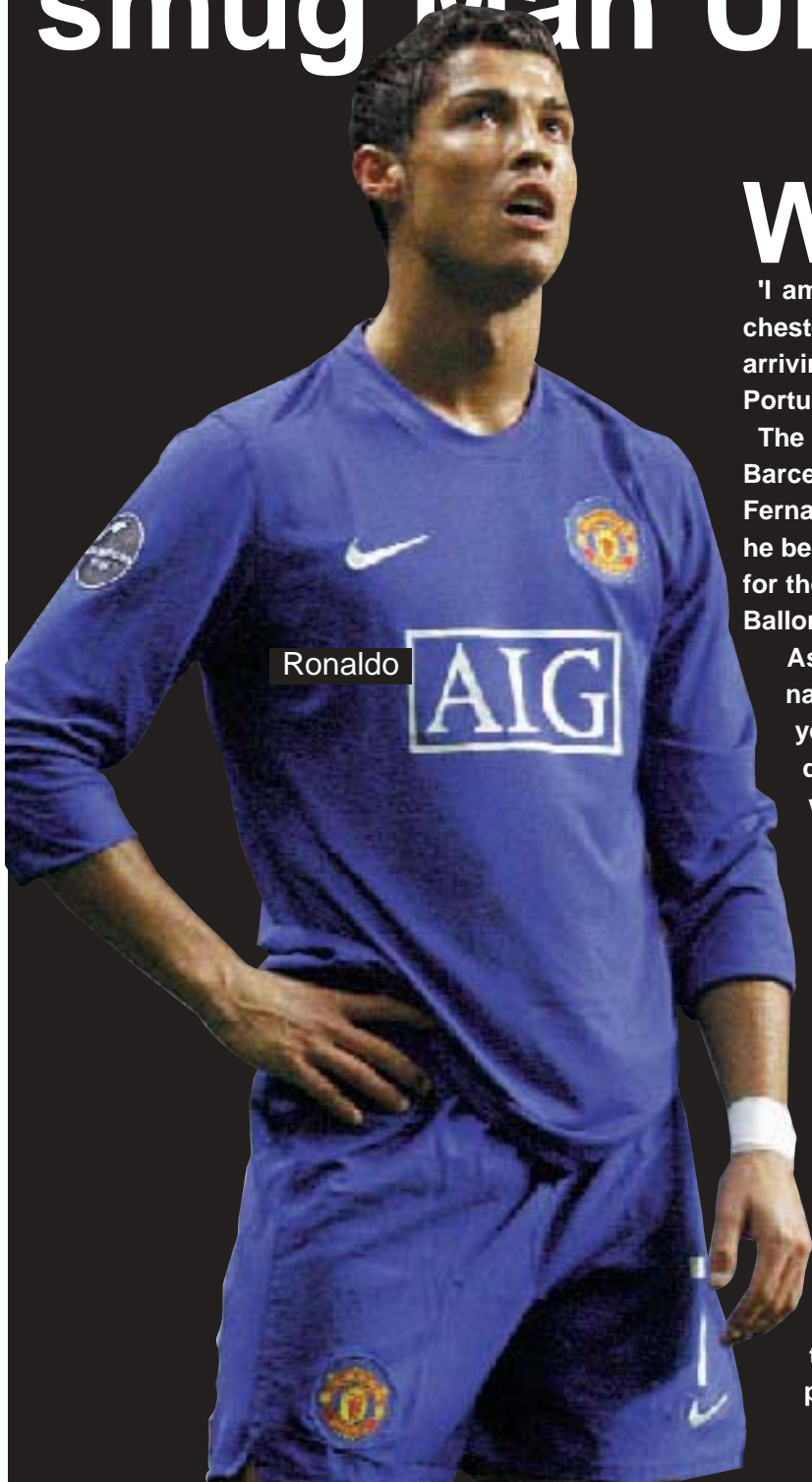


I'm the first, second and third best player in the world, says smug Man United star Ronaldo

By Ashley Gray



Ronaldo

Who are the three best players in the world? For Cristiano Ronaldo, there is only one candidate.

'I am the first, second and third,' the Manchester United star said with a smile after arriving in Brazil for international duty with Portugal.

The 23-year-old conceded AC Milan's Kaka, Barcelona's Lionel Messi and Liverpool's Fernando Torres were 'good candidates', but he believes he has surpassed all of his rivals for the FIFA World Footballer of the Year and Ballon d'Or awards.

Asked if he had done enough to be named the best player in the world this year, he told Brazilian newspaper O Estado de Sao Paulo: 'I think I did all that was needed and I want to keep doing more. My goal is to win everything that comes before me.'

In a typically confident interview, the former Sporting Lisbon ace said he was ready for plenty of attention from Brazilian women ahead of Wednesday night's friendly in Brasilia.

'Oh, I'm ready for harassment (from women), I'm used to that in Europe, and here it is the same,' he said. 'It is a friendly game here and a good opportunity to relax.'

'I have been [to Brazil] a few times, but never to play. I love holidays here, there are beautiful beaches and the people are nice.'

Despite consistently setting himself

targets to score more goals, the Old Trafford idol claims personal glory is not his main aim.

'My goal, frankly, has never been to score goals,' he said. 'I like to play for the team and what is most important is that we win games.'

'But if the goals appear, even better. I'm having the good fortune to score many goals and hope that things continue like this.'

Portugal arrive in Brazil after a poor start to their World Cup qualifying campaign, which has seen them win one, draw two and lose one since Carlos Queiroz replaced Luiz Felipe Scolari as the national team's coach.

A home draw against Albania last time out was particularly badly received but Ronaldo has asked for patience.

'Big Phil (Scolari) is a great friend. I'm sorry he has left the Portugal job, but it was an excellent move (to Chelsea). I loved working with him.'

'Queiroz has not had much time to develop his work. Two years ago, England also had problems and then they recovered. All the big national teams go through this. Let us recover.'

Recovery is also something that Ronaldo hopes for in the global economy, even if you would think his multi-million pound contract leaves him immune from the credit crunch.

'The situation has to worry everyone, yes,' he said. 'We are worried and feel a certain uncertainty (about the future). We talk about it - it is part of our reality - but we believe that things will improve.'

Tevez has to play

Maradona wants first-team football from Carlos

CARLOS TEVEZ has been told by Diego Maradona he must play regular first team football if he is to keep his place in the Argentina team.

And that has cranked up the uncertainty about the future of the striker at Manchester United.

Tevez met the new Argentine boss just over a week ago and Maradona's message contained a warning.

He told Tevez that he is concerned about his lack of regular

action as he prepares to revive Argentina's World Cup qualifying campaign.

Tevez has slipped down the pecking order since Dimitar Berbatov's arrival at Old Trafford and despite boss Sir Alex Ferguson's reassurances, he is still concerned about his future. Real Madrid have targeted him but are unlikely to get him during the January transfer window as a replacement for the injured Ruud van Nistelrooy.

Real have now made a move for Ajax striker Klaas-Jan Huntelaar.

Tevez looks certain to remain at United at least until next summer, with talks about turning his two-year loan into a £30-million permanent switch dragging on.

With Manchester City watching the situation, the striker will need to be convinced he figures in Fergie's plans to secure his international future.



Tevez