

Robinho defends his City record

Brazilian insists he is 'playing well' despite lack of goals this calendar year

By Ian Herbert



Robinho

Robinho has done little to pacify those who have come to question his £160,000-a-week wages at Manchester City by declaring that the superior form he has been displaying for the Brazilian national team is attributable to the superior players he has around him in Dunga's side.

"I truly dedicate myself to my club," Robinho said ahead of Brazil's match with Ecuador. "Sometimes I am questioned [as to] why I play better for the national squad than my club Manchester City. I have the same will at both places, but Manchester City is one team and the national squad at Brazil is another. No disrespect to the players at Manchester City, who are very good, but here I play with Kaka, Ronaldinho, and it is totally different."

Sceptics will point to the extraordinary contribution at Eastlands this year of Stephen Ireland, an outside contender for player of the year, while Shaun Wright-Phillips has certainly offered a consistency lacking in Ronaldinho over the past few years. Robinho's insipid afternoon for City against Sunderland last weekend, including a missed penalty, seemed more attributable to a lack of self-confidence. But Robinho defended his contribution which, despite public comments to the contrary, has left Mark Hughes nursing doubts about whether the 25-year-old should feature in his plans for next season.

"Here I play well, but I believe I am playing well at Manchester City. I have scored 11 goals," Robinho said. But none of that number has come in this calendar year and there has been little these past four months to match the player's strike against Italy at the Emirates Stadium which underlined his undoubted class, Robinho dispossessing Andrea Pirlo on the edge of the Italian area and jinking around Gianluca Zambrotta before firing home Brazil's second goal in a 2-0 win.

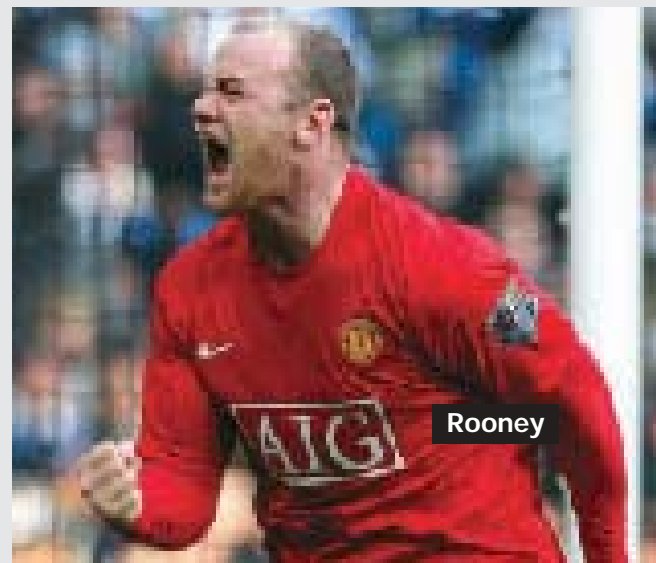
Robinho certainly looked considerably more at home back in Brazil yesterday. Given time off ahead of Brazil's away fixture 48 hours from now and the home tie with Peru on Wednesday, he was photographed surfing and playing the tambourine with musician Dudu Nobre and friends on the seafront at Barra da Tijuca in Rio de Janeiro.

Mark Hughes indicated last week that he is prepared to drop Robinho if he must and the big question facing the Manchester City manager when City resume business at Arsenal a week tomorrow is whether to relegate Elano, far more impressive against Sunderland, to the bench, with Ireland likely to return. Robinho has scored only twice away from east Manchester all season – and one of those was a penalty at Newcastle. Martin Petrov's return from a long lay-off also provides more competition. For many City fans, a mere sense that the Brazilian is interested in contributing to the club's drive for a possible seventh place at the end of the season would make all the difference.

Robinho sought to draw a line under the comments from Pele, who had been quoted as saying the City player had taken drugs in the past. "This thing with Pele has got out of control. He said he was misunderstood," the player said.

Hughes has provided an insight into his relationship with the Arabs whose riches brought Robinho to England. In a Radio 5 Live documentary he revealed that he speaks to his chairman Khaldoon al-Mubarak two or three times a week and disclosed that Khaldoon has eaten at Hughes' home and calls Hughes before games, from Abu Dhabi. The chairman does not telephone when City have lost because he "very much understands" how Hughes feels. Robinho's antennae do not seem quite so well attuned.

Why Manchester United and England need Wayne Rooney to man-up – and fast



Rooney

"There's no point talking about the referee," said Sir Alex Ferguson in the aftermath of Manchester United's disastrous defeat to Fulham at the weekend, immediately after he'd taken a moment to, yes, talk about the referee.

"The ball was thrown to where the free kick was being taken," he'd said, with reference to the instinctive act of petulance that had earned Wayne Rooney his second yellow card.

"Did it hit the referee? No."

Frankly, if that's what Fergie considers a solid defence, then it's no wonder his side have started shipping goals at an alarming rate.

Or perhaps the Manchester United boss has grown so weary with having to defend his star striker's childish temperament that even he can't be bothered to take it seriously.

And therein lies the problem: until Wayne learns to tame the infernal rage that so visibly boils and bubbles within him, he will always be a liability.

Yes, he's arguably the most naturally talented English footballer of his generation.

But it's of absolutely no use to anybody when the most naturally talented English footballer of his generation is letting off steam in an early bath following a needless moment of indiscipline.

Or sitting suspended in the stands, unable to play any part whatsoever in vital games of a title race run-in.

Assuming England qualify for the 2010 World Cup, then Wayne Rooney will be under more pressure than he has ever known.

The striker will have to bear forty years of dashed dreams and unrealistic expectations on his ox-like shoulders.

He will become the prime target for opposing teams, whose enforcers and hard-men will take turns to kick, shove and elbow Wayne's buttons in an attempt to ignite that volcano within.

Wayne Rooney is no longer a kid. He's 23; a husband and a man.

So it's about time he man-ed up on the pitch.

Because if he doesn't learn from his numerous lessons, if he can't restrain that rage, then we might as well not bother boarding the plane to South Africa in the first place.

Liverpool line up summer move for £25m Silva

David Silva could be sold by Valencia this summer as the Spanish club seeks to reduce their debts

Rafael Benitez is considering a summer move for Valencia's David Silva and may be ready to spend close to £25m to bring him to Anfield as a playmaker capable of leading Liverpool's onward development.

Liverpool's chief scout Eduardo Macia, who took a teenage Silva to Valencia, has been in Spain to view the attacking playmaker for whom Manchester City placed a bid in January. The most significant source of encouragement to Liverpool is the fact that Valencia's parlous financial

position may force a fire sale both of Silva and David Villa, though the latter seems a more likely candidate for Real Madrid.

Valencia have a recent history of making unrealistic demands where Silva and Villa are concerned – such as the £130m City were quoted in a joint bid for both players. But Valencia, in debt to the tune of around £500m at a time when they are attempting to build the Nou Mestalla, may be more constrained come the summer and an offer greater than the £20.2m Liverpool paid for Fernando Torres may result.

Real Madrid may compete for the player's services – and may indeed bid for Xabi Alonso. But Benitez's Spanish connections and the presence of Alonso, Pepe Reina and Alvaro Arbeloa at Anfield would help swing such a deal for a player who played behind Torres and Villa in a left flank role during last summer's European Championships.

An ankle injury has limited his starts for Valencia this season but he returned to action in January.



Silva