



## Stars under the Desert Skies, Saudi's Allure for Football's Elite



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Al Nassr was right: Otávio was [FC Porto's little boy](#) and will be one of [the club's immortals](#) for his own right, and besides that, [CR7's new teammate](#) is an outstanding example of Saudi Arabia's astonishing relevance in the current football marketplace.

Otávio's move to Al Nassr (as [Ugarte's transfer to PSG](#)) is an exceptional illustration of Portugal's privileged space in current football economics as a hub to develop personal soft and hard skills, to adapt to more mature competitions and as a bridge from LATAM to European (and now Middle Eastern) markets.

Otávio started playing senior football in 2012 for [Sport Club Internacional](#) but moved to [FC Porto aged only 20](#). As several Portuguese teams, FC Porto is well known for bringing talented players from South America to Europe and breeding them into becoming top class players.

During his first season in Portugal Otávio played for FC Porto's B team and for Vitória SC (an historic club from Guimarães known for its vivid fans and for the recent purchase of a stake from [V Sports, the fund that owns Aston Villa FC](#)). Still aged 20, Otávio quickly became Vitória SC's most important player and the leader of its midfield.

Without surprise Otávio returned do FC Porto for the 2016/17 season where he stayed up to now, playing for 7 consecutive seasons, an average of 40 games, 10 assists and 4 goals per season, becoming its captain and biggest star, a symbol of what FC Porto stands for, and having won the Portuguese 1st Division's MVP award once, figuring in the League's team of the season for 3 times and winning 9 titles for FC Porto (including 3 League titles).



Apart being a formation and sporting outstanding success, **Otávio's transfer financial results** are also **outstanding**: he was **purchased for 2.5 million euros** and was now **sold for a whopping 60 million** to the **trendy Saudi League**, more precisely to Al Nassr. For FC Porto, **Otávio was the bogeys sale and capital gain, surpassing the transfer of fellow Brazilian Eder Militão**, when [Real Madrid snapped him up](#) from FC Porto **after paying the 50 million release clause**.

This type of **big transfers and profitability** is **not uncommon in Portuguese football**. Over the **last decade**, [no other club has sold more players to "Big-5" teams than SL Benfica](#). Additionally, [Sporting CP and FC Porto are the 3rd and 4th highest selling clubs in the world to Big-5 teams](#). **Sporting CP** specifically is the European club outside the "Big Five" to **launch more club-bred players to the five major leagues**, while SL Benfica and FC Porto also are in the top 10 of those teams. When focusing on the types of the players sold, aside from **excellent local players**, **the ones sold for the highest prices were mostly Latin American players** that did a career **stopover in Portugal** before moving to other European leagues.

The above illustrates **Portugal role as an ideal entry door and as a hub for young talent coming from South America and Africa**, making their debut in Europe before moving to big leagues or **being sold for dozens of millions**. In fact, **Otávio followed in the footsteps of many talented players before him**, such as Manuel Ugarte, Enzo Fernandez, Darwin Nuñez, Éder Militão, Luis Díaz, James Rodriguez, Ederson, Hulk, Radamel Falcao, Ángel Di María, Thiago Silva, as well as Pepe and Deco (together with Otávio three **Brazilian born players that made it to the Portuguese national team**).



Portugal's position as a **hub of young talent** does not arrive by chance and is **due to Portugal's friendly culture, and long lasting and strong ties with African and Latin American** countries. Thus, **young players** from these countries do not struggle to **adapt** to a new environment nearly as much as they might in other European countries. Specifically, there is a **significant number of Brazilian players** in the Portuguese league, because of the inexistence of a language barrier for these players. In fact, **more than 200 Brazilians play in the Portuguese leagues**, the most of any league in Europe. Furthermore, the **excellent football academies** and the **low cost of living** also facilitate adaptation, progression and investment. The **excellence of Portugal's youth academies** cannot be overstated, as a 2023 study found that [no country makes more from selling homegrown players than Portugal](#), far **outperforming** the **typical football powerhouse countries** like England.

FC Porto is even more particularly interesting as **one of the biggest hubs of South American players achieving stardom**, particularly with players born in Brazil: **Deco, Pepe and Otávio** have a lot in common, **all were born in Brazil, all became some of FC Porto's biggest stars and model players, all became Portuguese citizens and all play or played for the Portuguese National team.**

**Otávio's sale came at a much-needed timing for FC Porto**, allowing the club to **comply with Financial Fair Play regulations**, since the capital gains from this transaction will now be **paramount for FC Porto's balance sheet**. In the beginning of the summer, FC Porto's Vice President responsible for its finances alerted the [club was in desperate need for big sales this summer](#) transfer window to balance its accounts and to pay part of its relevant debt.



Thus, it is **unsurprising** that following the **gold rush to acquire English, French, Italian and Spanish clubs**, **Portugal** is seen as the **next hot place in the European football scene**. The **recent purchase** of a stake in Vitória Sport Clube (Guimarães) by VSports, the owners of **Aston Villa** (who acquired 46% of the club, and, although it was officially undisclosed, rumors state **the deal valued the club at around 70 million euros**), or the [purchase of a 21,67% stake by Qatari Sports Investment Fund](#), owners of **Paris St Germain**, in **Sporting Clube de Braga**, valuing the club at around 200 million euros, perfectly demonstrate **Portugal's relevance as a major exporter of talent in the greater football landscape**.

Furthermore, the **impact of Brexit should not be overlooked** when assessing the new-found popularity of these takeovers. Because **English Clubs are no longer allowed to sign young players from EU countries**, there has been **increased interest in clubs from EU countries**, like those from Belgium. In Belgium, like in **Portugal**, the country **offers a fast-track to EU Citizenship**, and the costs of running a team there are relatively low. Then, when players are mature enough, Belgian and Portuguese clubs can sell them to English (and now Saudi) clubs for massive fees.

In a nutshell, **Otávio's successful time in Portugal is just the latest example**, among hundreds of others, of **Portugal's place in this new economic era of football**. The **country's unique ability to scout** in the Southern Hemisphere, and subsequently **develop the talent** in a place where they feel **comfortable**, before **selling them at a massive profit** to the Big 5 (or Saudi) leagues, means that **they can stay competitive with the big sharks** (while also feeding them).

And now **Otávio became Al Nassr's (not so) littleboy** and CR7's teammate.

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