

Brazilian Soccer Star Neymar Widely Condemned By Muslim Clerics for Arriving In Saudi Arabia Wearing Cross

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On August 18, 2023, Brazilian soccer star Neymar da Silva Santos Júnior arrived in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, following the signing of a lucrative two-year contract with Al-Hilal Saudi Football Club. As he stepped off the plane, Neymar was greeted by club officials amid the presence of a throng of reporters, all capturing the historic moment of this globally renowned player's arrival. However, the spotlight unexpectedly shifted from his arrival to the Saudi club to the diamond-studded cross pendant necklace he was wearing. This seemingly

innocuous accessory stirred a wave of reactions on social media and among Muslim clerics worldwide, who perceived it as a potentially offensive and disrespectful gesture toward the birthplace of Islam. There was also a significant subtext in the criticism, particularly by Islamists, criticizing not just the Brazilian soccer player but his Saudi sponsors.

Indeed, some critics have gone so far as to interpret Neymar's choice of jewelry as an intentional statement.

In his commentary on the incident in an August 21 video, [\[1\]](#) Moroccan Islamist cleric Abdellah Nhari emphasized the sanctity of the "Arabian Peninsula." He recited a hadith that states "two religions do not coexist in the Arabian Peninsula" and a verse from the Quran 9:28 that says: "Truly the Pagans are unclean; so, let them not, after this year of theirs, approach the Sacred Mosque. "He could have come like the other players who were presented to the public without bearing, God forbid, the trinity emblem on the land of monotheism. The emblem contradicts the Quran, as Christ was not killed or crucified, but rather God raised him to Himself." *Personally I'd say the koran contradicts the New Testament...*

Turkey-based YouTuber Samir Al-Ahmad leveled a similar accusation [\[3\]](#) in an August 19 video in which he said that Neymar's action amounts to "a provocation to Islam and a provocation to the most sacred place on the face of the earth." Al-Ahmad remarked, "By wearing the cross, this player is provoking all Muslims, and no one has done so before him, including Cristiano [Ronaldo]."

The London-based writer and translator Muhannad Al-Obaydi argued [\[4\]](#) that Neymar's act was intentional and accused those who disagree with him of being naive. "Neymar's action sends a message of provocation to the conservative Islamic community. He is essentially saying, 'My wealth and my ties to power are stronger than your religion, customs, and traditions.'"

Let's see how he gets on living, training and playing in Saudi Arabia. Whether the cross is merely bling and he substitutes another necklace or it. Or he keeps it because of what it signifies. And whether the furore affects his form on the pitch.