

WHAT MAKES HIM SPECIAL

Cristiano Ronaldo is England's Player of the Year. Now, the stage is set for him to shine at Euro 2008 with Portugal. Carlos Queiroz, the Manchester United assistant manager, said: "Think about Luis Figo the winger, Ronaldo the Brazilian striker, Zinedine Zidane the playmaker – add the strength of Fernando Morientes in the air. Then you have Cristiano. I have never seen such a creation."

His indiscriminate use of step-overs and back-heels in his early days saw him being labelled a show pony.

With experience, he has learnt when to employ them and has become a more efficient player.

He has also transformed from a whining diva into a man with the stomach for a fight. He has changed his attitude to tackles and refereeing decisions that go against him.

Nine goals this season were headers. Heading used to be his weakness, but not anymore.

Since joining the Premier League, he has added a lot more muscle to his frame.

He weighs nearly 75kg, is able to spring up in the air, and hammer balls in with his bulging neck muscles.

The winger wears smaller boots than his size 9 feet should take.

He believes it improves his touch.

His boots are light and thin, giving him extra feel.

His physical strength makes it hard for defenders to knock him off the ball.

His willingness to go past opponents makes him a formidable all-round proposition.

Ronaldo has honed his free kicks – he scored five this season – to near-perfection. He uses a secret technique that sees the ball change direction more than once in the air.

According to Leonel Pontes, his youth coach at Sporting Lisbon, it's a technique derived from table tennis.

"He'd say, 'Look boss, if you hit it this way with the bat, the ball gains this effect ... He could see if you touch the ball in a certain way, it would go in that direction.'"

His ball control while running at speed is remarkable. He has been rated the fastest player in the Premier League.

Said Italy defender Christian Panucci: "If you give me an engine, maybe I could keep up with him. Otherwise, it's hopeless."

Ronaldo's speed and coordination – he is equally deft with both feet – are even more remarkable given that he is 1.85m, unusually tall for a winger.

