

Masour Ousmane Dembélé is considered one of the emerging talents in world football due to his exciting and skillful performances. He is an attacking player whose career began at Rennes prior to joining Dortmund in 2016. After only one year, he then made a record breaking transfer to Barcelona. In his first season he won the league and cup double. Dembélé also plays for the French national team, making his senior international debut in 2016 and was part of the 2018 World Cup winning squad.

In 2019 and 2020 he visited Aspetar as part of his rehabilitation following a series of hamstring injuries. In this interview, Dembélé opens up to discuss his experience in different countries, what he looks for in the club's medical staff, coping with injuries when they happen, the importance of prevention programmes, and effective strategies he uses in his off-field preparation to be able to complete in the modern game.

OUSMANE DEMBÉLÉ

Full name:	Masour Ousmane Dembélé
Date of birth:	15 May 1997 (age 22)
Place of birth:	Vernon, France
Playing position:	Forward
Current team:	Barcelona
Number:	11

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- 2018** **ORDERS**
Chevalier of the Légion d'honneur
- 2018** **FRANCE NATIONAL TEAM**
FIFA World Cup
- 2017-** **BARCELONA**
La Liga: 2017–18, 2018–19
Copa del Rey: 2017–18
Supercopa de España: 2018
- 2016-17** **BORUSSIA DORTMUND**
DFB-Pokal, (Man of the Match - Cup Final)
UEFA Champions League Breakthrough XI: 2016
Bundesliga Rookie of the Season: 2016–17
Bundesliga Team of the Season: 2016–17
- 2015-16** **RENNES**
UNFP Ligue 1 Young Player of the Year: 2015–16
UNFP Ligue 1 Player of the Month: March 2016

This is your second visit to Aspetar, have you had an enjoyable and worthwhile experience?

Yes, I am very satisfied with my time here. I have worked very hard and progressed well with my rehabilitation. There is still some way to go before I can return to play but I am getting closer every day.

That's great to hear. When did you start playing football?

I began playing football with friends in my local neighbourhood in Evreux, France. We would mess around a lot and play 1v1, 2v2 games. I loved football from the beginning and it quickly became my passion.



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At what age did you begin specialising in football and subsequently play your first professional match?

I became very serious at 13 years old. This is when I started attending the Rennes FC centre of excellence. It was a big adjustment for me and my family due to the 250km distance from our home town. In order to attend, we all moved in Rennes to be closer to the club. My routine then became school in the day and training in the evening. This was a big change as I was still very young.

After graduating from the youth team, I made my first team debut aged 18 years against Angers who are in the French 1st division. However, I only stayed at Rennes for a further 6 months before moving to Germany to play for Borussia Dortmund.



There is still some way to go before I can return to play



Did you also play other sports during your childhood?

No I just played football, it was my dream to be a professional football player and I was focused on that since the beginning. Also, being at the Rennes FC centre of excellence made it difficult to play other sports due to the time commitment and I also did not want to over train.

After your move to Dortmund – did you notice differences in their training methods and the way they approached the game? If yes, how did you adapt to this?

Yes, they are very different! In Germany, the training is very tough and the approach is quite strict. I really enjoyed my time in the German championship and the style of play was very attacking which was great. It was a very pleasurable year I spent there before moving to Barcelona.

Was it a tough progression to move from Rennes, to Dortmund and then Barcelona all in a relatively short period of time?

Yes, it was a big challenge to move between 3 countries and clubs in a short space of time but also very exciting. Each club has slightly different philosophies with respect to training approaches, workload requirements and style of play. For example, at Barcelona we place a lot of emphasis on technical work and small side games, whereas at Rennes and Dortmund, a greater amount of time was spent on physical preparation. It has been great experience for me to be exposed to such a diverse range of methodologies so young in my career as I believe this will aid in my development.

You have recently had a hamstring injury, the first serious injury of your career. Have you found this period difficult?

Obviously it is always disappointing and frustrating to be injured; however, I was optimistic as I knew that if I work hard then I will be back on the pitch quickly. I have been very focused during my rehab and can't wait to play again at the highest level.

Is it difficult for someone of your age to be an elite footballer in the modern age and someone who is constantly in the spotlight?

I am young yes, and my record transfer to Barcelona naturally brings some pressure, but to be honest it wasn't a problem for me. I have always dreamed of playing at the highest level and for a top club like Barcelona. Therefore, I have constantly been preparing myself for the pressure and I feel it gives me even more motivation to succeed.

I would encourage young people to work hard as that is essential if you want to succeed but also not to forget about their studies.

Ousmane Dembele
in action.
Barcelona, 2018.



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What advice would you give to young boys and girls dreaming of playing at the highest level?

I would encourage young people to work hard as that is essential if you want to succeed but also not to forget about their studies as you never know what can happen in life.

As a top professional football player, what qualities do you look for in the medical staff at the club?

First and foremost, to be experienced and knowledgeable which will ensure they can provide the first class treatment, rehabilitation and reconditioning. It is also important to build good relationships and try to understand the players needs. This shows that they care and helps build confidence and importantly, re-assurance. At Barcelona we have 3 doctors who I am in constant contact with and they have been especially helpful during the period of my recent injuries.

In light of your recent hamstring injuries, do you believe it is important to incorporate on-going injury prevention work into your regular routine?

Yes, I think it is very important and is now an integral part of my weekly training regime to ensure I give myself the best possible chance of staying fit, healthy and able to perform at the highest level. In the modern game, you have to be physically prepared and this is not only the responsibility of the club but also you as the player to ensure you remain professional in your approach.

Dembele vies with Unai Nunez during the Spanish league match between Athletic Club Bilbao and FC Barcelona in August 2019.

Is there anything else we haven't asked that you would like to mention for our readers?

Yes, I was surprised you didn't ask me about best practices for how to live your daily life and off-field preparation!

As well as physical preparation, you also have to pay attention to your nutrition and recovery. At Barcelona, the advice and guidance we receive is first class. I also think I am more aware now of what the right things are for my body. I now understand that I can't just eat anything I want or stay up late to play computer games and expect to perform at my best. I am much stricter in my approach these days. Specifically, with the help of the club I tailor my nutrition appropriately, focus on sleep to aid recovery and stick to a routine which ensures I am always ready to train or play.

*Nebojsa Popovic M.D. Ph.D
Interview taken on 18th January 2020.*



Dembele during his recovery in Aspetar – Qatar Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Hospital, Doha, 2019.