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FOOTBALL

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BARCELONA



Soccer Football - La Liga Santander - FC Barcelona v Osasuna - Camp Nou, Barcelona, Spain - November 29, 2020 FC Barcelona's Lionel Messi celebrates scoring their fourth goal wearing a Newell's Old Boys shirt in reference to former player Diego Maradona REUTERS/Albert Gea(REUTERS)

With his country and the world of soccer in mourning for Diego Maradona, Lionel Messi found his own way to mark the passing of the only Argentine player to rival his own greatness on the field. Messi paid tribute on Sunday, when he stripped off his Barcelona top to reveal a shirt honoring Maradona after he scored the final goal in a 4-0 rout of Osasuna.

Messi celebrated his powerful strike from outside the box by taking off Barcelona’s blue-and-burgundy to reveal the red-and-black of Maradona’s jersey from his stint at Newell’s Old Boys. Messi then blew a kiss with both hands to the sky as he looked upward.

After the game, Messi posted a photo of his tribute alongside an older image of Maradona in the same shirt, adding the message “Farewell, Diego” in Spanish.

“It was a great moment,” said Barcelona manager Ronald Koeman. “First, for the goal that Leo scored and then for the gesture he had for the death of Diego Maradona. He had surely been thinking of what he would do. For me, it was a great moment in every way.”

Messi played for Newell’s before he joined Barcelona at age 13. Maradona played five matches for Newell’s near the end of his playing career that made him a legend in his home country. In an interview with Argentine television TyC in 2013, Messi said that when he was a young boy he went to the stadium for Maradona’s debut for

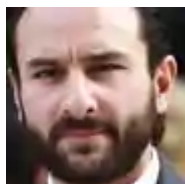


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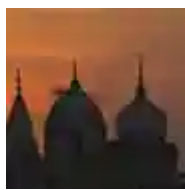
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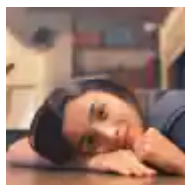
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Empty Camp No. 10 for Maradona, who died of a heart attack on Wednesday at age 60. Maradona played for Barcelona from 1982-84.

“We have lost Diego, a world idol,” Barcelona’s Brazil forward Philippe Coutinho said. “Everyone admired him and we will all miss him. (Messi’s) tribute was beautiful.”

Coutinho also scored for Barcelona, along with Martin Braithwaite and Antoine Griezmann.

Considered by many as the best player in his generation — and one of the greatest ever — Messi has been judged, especially back home, by how his career compares to that of Maradona.

Messi shares the lower center of gravity, the supreme dribbling skills and the ability to score eye-popping goals as Argentina’s other great No. 10. But while his life focused on football and family has kept him well clear of the addictions that ruined Maradona’s health, Messi has never been able to reproduce the 1986 World Cup trophy Maradona led his country to, coming closest in 2014 when a Messi-led Argentina lost in the final to Germany.

The win was only Barcelona’s second in seven league matches. It left the team in seventh place with two games in hand. Second-place Atlético Madrid is nine points ahead of Barcelona.

STALEMATE AT TOP

Surprise leader Real Sociedad was held 1-1 at home by Villarreal, another upstart side to have impressed in the league this season.

Gerard Moreno gave Villarreal the lead in San Sebastian by converting a penalty kick in the sixth minute after Aritz Elustondo fouled Pervis Estupiñán.

Mikel Oyarzabal leveled from the spot in the 33rd after Pau Torres fouled Robin Le Normand.

Oyarzabal and Moreno, both Spain forwards, lead the league with seven and six goals, respectively.

The draw ended Sociedad’s six-round winning streak. It is one point ahead of Atlético but has played two games more. Villarreal remained in third place — four points behind Sociedad — after an eighth consecutive round without a loss.

DEPLETED DEFENSE

The victory for Barcelona may have come at the price of losing yet another defender.

Clement Lenglet hurt his lower right leg after an unintentional knock by an Osasuna player in the second half. He had to be helped off by two team doctors. Barcelona was already without three other central defenders due to injury and right back Sergi Roberto.

Barcelona finished the match with midfielder Frenkie de Jong in the center of its defense alongside reserve team player Óscar Mingueza in his second game for the senior squad.

Koeman said it appears the injury to Lenglet is “not serious” but that he would undergo a medical exam on Monday.

Sergio Busquets returned for Barcelona from a knee injury that had sidelined him for two games.

GRIEZMANN LEADS VICTORY

Messi’s tribute to Maradona overshadowed a fine performance by Griezmann, the France forward who has been criticized for not reaching his potential at Barcelona.

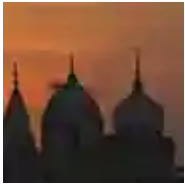
Braithwaite scrambled in a rebound to open the scoring on the half-hour mark.

Griezmann doubled the lead three minutes before halftime when he volleyed a blistering strike from outside the area that left goalkeeper Sergio Herrera flat-footed and with no chance of stopping it.

Griezmann then assisted Coutinho to tap in the hosts’ third goal in the 57th. Messi rounded it off with his strike from long range in the 73rd.

“It was important to get this win because those at the top of table keep winning and we couldn’t slip again,” Griezmann said. “We did not know what Messi had planned to honor Maradona. It was a nice surprise.”

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