



Lionel Messi

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Lionel Andrés Messi Cuccittini^[note 1] (Spanish pronunciation: [lio'nel an'drez 'mesi] ; [A] born 24 June 1987) is an Argentine professional footballer who plays as a forward for Spanish club Barcelona and the Argentine national team. Often considered the best player in the world and regarded by many as the greatest of all time,^[9] Messi has a record-tying five Ballon d'Or awards,^[note 2] four of which he won consecutively, and a record five European Golden Shoes. He has spent his entire professional career with Barcelona, where he has won 32 trophies, including nine La Liga titles, four UEFA Champions League titles, and six Copas del Rey. Both a prolific goalscorer and a creative playmaker, Messi holds the records for most official goals scored in La Liga (383), a La Liga season (50), a club football season in Europe (73), a calendar year (91), El Clásico (26), as well as those for most assists in La Liga (149) and the Copa América (11). He has scored over 600 senior career goals for club and country.

Born and raised in central Argentina, Messi was diagnosed with a growth hormone deficiency as a child. At age 13, he relocated to Spain to join Barcelona, who agreed to pay for his medical treatment. After a fast progression through Barcelona's youth academy, Messi made his competitive debut aged 17 in October 2004. Despite being injury-prone during his early career, he established himself as an integral player for the club within the next three years, finishing 2007 as a finalist for both the Ballon d'Or and FIFA World Player of the Year award, a feat he repeated the following year. His first uninterrupted campaign came in the 2008–09 season, during which he helped Barcelona achieve the first treble in Spanish football. At 22 years old, Messi won the Ballon d'Or and FIFA World Player of the Year award by record voting margins.

Lionel Messi



Messi with Argentina in November 2017

Personal information

Full name	Lionel Andrés Messi Cuccittini ^[1]
Date of birth	24 June 1987 ^[2]
Place of birth	Rosario, Argentina
Height	1.70 m (5 ft 7 in) ^[3]

Position(s)	Forward
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Team information

Current team	Barcelona
Number	10

Youth career

1994–2000	Newell's Old Boys
2001–2004	Barcelona

Senior career*

Years	Team	Apps (Gls)
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Three successful seasons followed, with Messi winning three consecutive FIFA Ballons d'Or, including an unprecedented fourth. His best campaign statistically to date was the 2011–12 season, in which he set the La Liga and European records for most goals scored in a single season, while establishing himself as Barcelona's all-time top scorer in official competitions in March 2012. The following two seasons, Messi finished twice second for the Ballon d'Or behind Cristiano Ronaldo, his perceived career rival. Messi regained his best form during the 2014–15 campaign, breaking the all-time goalscoring records in both La Liga and the Champions League in November 2014,^[note 3] and led Barcelona to a historic second treble.

Messi is Argentina's all-time leading goalscorer. At youth level, he won the 2005 FIFA World Youth Championship, finishing the tournament with both the Golden Ball and Golden Shoe, and an Olympic gold medal at the 2008 Summer Olympics. His style of play as a diminutive, left-footed dribbler drew comparisons with compatriot Diego Maradona, who declared the teenager his successor. After making his senior debut in August 2005, Messi became the youngest Argentine to play and score in a FIFA World Cup during the 2006 edition, and reached the final of the 2007 Copa América, where he was named young player of the tournament. As the squad's captain from August 2011, he led Argentina to three consecutive finals: the 2014 World Cup, for which he won the Golden Ball, and the 2015 and 2016 Copas América. After announcing his international retirement in 2016, he reversed his decision and led his country to qualification for the 2018 World Cup.

Early life

File: Messi trofeo infantil
1992.jpg

5-year-old Lionel Messi with Club Abanderado Grandoli of Rosario, where he started to play football

Lionel Andrés Messi was born on 24 June 1987 in Rosario, the third of four children of Jorge Messi, a steel factory manager, and his wife Celia Cuccittini, who worked in a magnet manufacturing workshop. On his father's side, he is of Italian and Spanish descent, the great-grandson of immigrants from the northcentral Adriatic Marche region of Italy and Catalonia, and on his mother's side, he has primarily Italian ancestry.^[4] Growing up in a tight-knit, football-loving family, "Leo" developed a passion for the sport from an early age, playing constantly with his older brothers, Rodrigo and Matías, and his cousins, Maximiliano and Emanuel Biancucchi, both of whom became professional footballers.^[12] At the age of four he joined local club Grandoli, where he was coached by his father, though his earliest influence as a player came from his maternal grandmother, Celia, who accompanied him to training and matches.^[13] He was greatly affected by her death, shortly before his eleventh birthday; since then, as a devout Catholic, he has celebrated his goals by looking up and pointing to the sky in tribute of his grandmother.^{[14][15]}

2003–2004	<u>Barcelona C</u>	10	(5)		
2004–2005	<u>Barcelona B</u>	22	(6)		
2005–	<u>Barcelona</u>	418	(383)		
International career[‡]					
2004–2005	<u>Argentina U20</u>	18	(14)		
2008	<u>Argentina U23</u>	5	(2)		
2005–	<u>Argentina</u>	124	(64)		
Medal record		[show]			
Representing  Argentina					
Olympic Games					
(G)	2008 Beijing				
FIFA World Cup					
(2)	2014 Brazil				
Copa América					
(2)	2007 Venezuela				
(2)	2015 Chile				
(2)	2016 United States				
South American U-20 Championship					
(3)	2005 Colombia				
FIFA U-20 World Cup					
(1)	2005 Netherlands				

*Club domestic league appearances and goals, correct as of 29 May 2018

† National team caps and goals, correct as of 16 June 2018

A lifelong supporter of Newell's Old Boys, Messi joined the Rosario club when he was six years old. During the six years he played for Newell's, he scored almost 500 goals as a member of "The Machine of '87", the near-unbeatable youth side named for the year of their birth, and regularly entertained crowds by performing ball tricks during half-time of the first team's home games.^{[17][18]} However, his future as a professional player was threatened when, at age 10, he was diagnosed with a growth hormone deficiency. As his father's health insurance covered only two years of growth hormone treatment, which cost at least \$1,000 per month, Newell's agreed to contribute, but later reneged on their promise.^[19] He was scouted by Buenos Aires club River Plate, whose playmaker, Pablo Aimar, he idolised, but they were also unable to pay for his treatment due to the country's economic collapse.^{[20][21]}



Messi enrolled at Barcelona's youth academy, La Masia, at age 13

As the Messi family had relatives in Catalonia, they sought to arrange a trial with Barcelona in September 2000. First team director Charly Rexach immediately wanted to sign him, but the board of directors hesitated; at the time it was highly unusual for European clubs to sign foreign players of such a young age. On 14 December, an ultimatum was issued for Barcelona to prove their commitment, and Rexach, with no other paper at hand, offered a contract on a paper napkin.^{[20][22]} In February 2001, the family relocated to Barcelona, where they moved into an apartment near the club's stadium, Camp Nou. During his first year in Spain, Messi rarely played with the *Infantiles* due to a transfer conflict with Newell's; as a foreigner, he could only be fielded in friendlies and the Catalan league. Without football, he struggled to integrate into the team; already reserved by nature, he was so quiet that his teammates initially believed he was mute. At home, he suffered from homesickness after his mother moved back to Rosario with his brothers and little sister, María Sol, while he stayed in Barcelona with his father.^{[17][22][23]}

After a year at Barcelona's youth academy, La Masia, Messi was finally enrolled in the Royal Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) in February 2002. Now playing in all competitions, he befriended his teammates, among whom were Cesc Fàbregas and Gerard Piqué.^[24] After completing his growth hormone treatment aged 14,^[25] Messi became an integral part of the "Baby Dream Team", Barcelona's greatest-ever youth side. During his first full season (2002–03), he was top scorer with 36 goals in 30 games for the Cadetes A, who won an unprecedented treble of the league and both the Spanish and Catalan cups.^{[24][26]} The Copa Catalunya final, a 4–1 victory over Espanyol, became known in club lore as the *partido de la máscara*, the final of the mask. A week after suffering a broken cheekbone during a league match, Messi was allowed to start the game on the condition

"When you saw him you would think: this kid can't play ball. He's a dwarf, he's too fragile, too small. But immediately you'd realise that he was born different, that he was a phenomenon and that he was going to be something impressive."

—Newell's Old Boys

youth coach Adrián Coria shares his first impression of the 12-year-old Messi.^[16]

that he wear a plastic protector; soon hindered by the mask, he took it off and scored two goals in 10 minutes before his substitution.^[27] At the close of the season, he received an offer to join Arsenal, his first from a foreign club, but while Fàbregas and Piqué soon left for England, he chose to remain in Barcelona.^{[22][28][29]}

Club career

Barcelona

2003–05: Rise to the first team

During the 2003–04 season, his fourth with Barcelona, Messi rapidly progressed through the club's ranks, debuting for a record five teams in a single campaign. After being named player of the tournament in four international pre-season competitions with the *Juveniles* B, he played only one official match with the team before being promoted to the *Juveniles* A, where he scored 18 goals in 11 league games.^{[31][32]} Messi was then one of several youth players called up to strengthen a depleted first team during the international break. French Winger Ludovic Giuly explained how a teenage Leo caught the eye in a training session with Frank Rijkaard's first team: "He destroyed us all... They were kicking him all over the place to avoid being ridiculed by this kid, he just got up and kept on playing. He would dribble past four players and score a goal. Even the team's starting centre-backs were nervous. He was an alien."^[33] At 16 years, four months, and 23 days old, he made his first team debut when he came on in the 75th minute during a friendly against José Mourinho's Porto on 16 November 2003.^{[22][34]} His performance, creating two chances and a shot on goal, impressed the technical staff, and he subsequently began training daily with the club's reserve side, Barcelona B, as well as weekly with the first team.^[35] After his first training session with the senior squad, Barça's new star player, Ronaldinho, told his teammates that he believed the 16-year-old would become an even better player than himself.^[36] Ronaldinho soon befriended Messi, whom he called "little brother", which greatly eased his transition into the first team.^{[37][38]}

"It seemed as if he had been playing with us all his life."

—Barcelona's then assistant coach Henk Ten Cate on Messi's first-team debut.^[30]



Messi, at age 18, playing against Málaga in 2005

To gain further match experience, Messi joined Barcelona C in addition to the *Juveniles* A, playing his first game for the third team on 29 November. He helped save them from the relegation zone of the Tercera División, scoring five goals in ten games, including a hat-trick in eight minutes during a Copa del Rey match while man-marked by Sevilla's Sergio Ramos.^{[31][39]} His progress was reflected in his first professional contract, signed on 4 February 2004, which lasted until 2012 and contained an initial buyout clause of €30 million. A month later, on 6 March, he made his debut for Barcelona B in the Segunda División B, and his buyout clause automatically increased to €80 million.^{[31][40]} He played five games with the B team that season but did not score.^[41] Physically he was weaker than his opponents, who were often much older and taller, and in training he worked on increasing his muscle mass and overall strength in order to be able to shake off defenders. Towards the end of the season, he returned to both youth

teams, helping the *Juveniles* B win the league. He finished the campaign having scored for four of his five teams with a total of 36 goals in all official competitions.^{[31][39]}

During the 2004–05 season, Messi was a guaranteed starter for the B team, playing 17 games throughout the campaign and scoring on six occasions.^{[36][42]} Since his debut the previous November, he had not been called up to the first team again, but in October 2004, the senior players asked manager Frank Rijkaard to promote him.^[36] Since Ronaldinho already played on the left wing, Rijkaard moved Messi from his usual position onto the right flank (though initially against the player's wishes), allowing him to cut into the centre of the pitch and shoot with his dominant left foot.^{[43][44]} Messi made his league debut during the next match on 16 October, against Espanyol, coming on in the 82nd minute.^[22] At 17 years, three months, and 22 days old, he was at the time the youngest player to represent Barcelona in an official competition.^[38] As a substitute player, he played only 77 minutes in nine matches for the first team that season, including his debut in the UEFA Champions League against Shakhtar Donetsk.^{[42][45]} He scored his first senior goal on 1 May 2005, against Albacete, from an assist by Ronaldinho, becoming – at that time – the youngest-ever scorer for the club.^{[43][46]} Barcelona, in their second season under Rijkaard, won the league for the first time in six years.^[47]

2005–08: Making the starting eleven

On 24 June 2005, his 18th birthday, Messi signed his first contract as a senior team player. It made him a Barcelona player until 2010, two years less than his previous contract, but his buyout clause increased to €150 million.^[40] His breakthrough came two months later, on 24 August, during the Joan Gamper Trophy, Barcelona's pre-season competition. A starter for the first time, he gave a well-received performance against Fabio Capello's Juventus, receiving an ovation from the Camp Nou.^[48] While Capello requested to loan Messi, a bid to buy him came from Inter Milan, who were willing to pay his €150 million buyout clause and triple his wages.^[49] According to then-president Joan Laporta, it was the only time the club faced a real risk of losing Messi, but he ultimately decided to stay.^[50] On 16 September, his contract was updated for the second time in three months and extended to 2014.^{[40][51]}

"In my entire life I have never seen a player of such quality and personality at such a young age, particularly wearing the 'heavy' shirt of one of the world's great clubs."

—Fabio Capello praises the 18-year-old Messi following the Joan Gamper trophy in August 2005.^[48]

Due to issues regarding his legal status in the Royal Spanish Football Federation, Messi missed the start of La Liga, but on 26 September, he acquired Spanish citizenship and became eligible to play.^{[51][52]} Wearing the number 19 shirt, he gradually established himself as the first-choice right winger, forming an attacking trio with Ronaldinho and striker Samuel Eto'o.^{[29][53][54]} He was in the starting line-up in major matches like his first Clásico against rivals Real Madrid on 19 November, as well as Barcelona's away victory over Chelsea in the last 16 round of the Champions League, where he played his best match to that point.^{[55][53]} After he had scored 8 goals in 25 games, including his first in the Champions League,^[56] his season ended prematurely during the return leg against Chelsea on 7 March 2006, when he suffered a torn hamstring.



Messi during a training session with Barça in August 2006

Messi worked to regain fitness in time for the Champions League final, but on 17 May, the day of the final, he was eventually ruled out. He was so disappointed that he did not celebrate his team's victory over Arsenal in Paris, something he later came to regret.^{[47][53]}

While Barcelona began a gradual decline, the 19-year-old Messi established himself as one of the best players in the world during the 2006–07 campaign.^{[57][58]} Already an idol to the *culés*, the club's supporters, he scored 17 goals in 36 games across all competitions.^{[58][59]} However, he continued to be plagued by major injuries; a metatarsal fracture sustained on 12 November 2006 kept him out of action for three months.^{[60][61]} He recovered in time for the last 16 round of the Champions League against Liverpool, but was effectively marked out of the game; Barcelona, the reigning champions, were out of the competition.^[62] In the league, his goal contribution increased towards the end of the season; 11 of his 14 goals came from the last 13 games.^[59] On 10 March 2007, he scored his first hat-trick in a Clásico, the first player to do so in 12 years, equalising after each goal by Real Madrid to end the match in a 3–3 draw in extra time.^[63] His growing importance to the club was reflected in a new contract, signed that month, which greatly increased his wages.^[64]



Messi makes his Maradona-esque run against Getafe in April 2007.

Already frequently compared to compatriot Diego Maradona, Messi proved their similarity when he nearly replicated Maradona's two most famous goals in the span of three weeks.^[65] During a Copa del Rey semi-final against Getafe on 18 April, he scored a goal remarkably similar to Maradona's goal in the quarter-finals of the 1986 FIFA World Cup, known as the Goal of the Century. Messi collected the ball on the right side near the halfway line, ran 60 metres (200 ft), and beat five defenders before scoring with an angled finish, just as Maradona had done.^{[20][66]} A league match against Espanyol on 9 June saw him score by launching himself at the ball and guiding it past the goalkeeper with his hand in similar fashion to Maradona's Hand of God goal in the same World Cup match.^[67] As Messi continued his individual rise, Barcelona faltered; the team failed to

reach the Copa del Rey final after Messi was rested during the second leg against Getafe and lost the league to Real Madrid on head-to-head results.^{[68][69]}

After Ronaldinho lost form, Messi became Barça's new star player at only 20 years old, receiving the nickname "Messiah" from the Spanish media.^{[20][70][71]} His efforts in 2007 also earned him award recognition; journalists voted him the third-best player of the year for the 2007 Ballon d'Or, behind Kaká and runner-up Cristiano Ronaldo, while international managers and national team captains voted him second for the FIFA World Player of the Year award, again behind Kaká.^{[72][73]} Although he managed to score 16 goals during the 2007–08 campaign,^[74] the second half of his season was again marred by injuries after he suffered a torn hamstring on 15 December.^[75] He returned to score twice in their away victory against Celtic in the last 16 round of the Champions League, becoming the competition's top scorer at that point with six goals,^[76] but reinjured himself during the return leg on 4 March 2008. Rijkaard had fielded him despite warning from the medical staff, leading captain Carles Puyol to criticise the Spanish media for pressuring Messi to play every match.^[75] Barcelona finished the season without trophies, eliminated in the Champions League semi-finals by the eventual champions, Manchester United, and placed third in the league.^[77]

After two unsuccessful seasons, Barcelona were in need of an overhaul, leading to the departure of Rijkaard and Ronaldinho. Upon the latter's departure, Messi was given the number 10 shirt.^[54] He signed a new contract in July 2008 on an annual salary of €7.8 million, becoming the club's highest-paid player.^{[78][79]} Ahead of the new

season, a major concern remained his frequent muscular injuries, which had left him side-lined for a total of eight months between 2006 and 2008. To combat the problem, the club implemented new training, nutrition, and lifestyle regimens, and assigned him a personal physiotherapist, who would travel with him during call-ups for the Argentina national team. As a result, Messi remained virtually injury-free during the next four years, allowing him to reach his full potential.^{[61][80]} Despite his injuries early in the year, his performances in 2008 saw him again voted runner-up for the Ballon d'Or and the FIFA World Player of the Year award, both times behind Cristiano Ronaldo.^{[72][81]}

2009–11: Sustained success

In his first uninterrupted campaign, the 2008–09 season, he scored 38 goals in 51 games, contributing alongside Eto'o and winger Thierry Henry to a total of 100 goals in all competitions, a record at the time for the club.^{[82][83]}

During his first season under Barcelona's new manager, former captain Pep Guardiola, Messi played mainly on the right wing, like he had under Rijkaard, though this time as a false winger with the freedom to cut inside and roam the centre. During the Clásico on 2 May 2009, however, he played for the first time as a false nine, positioned as a centre-forward but dropping deep into midfield to link up with Xavi and Andrés Iniesta. He assisted with a chip his side's first goal and scored twice to end the match in an emphatic 6–2 victory, the team's greatest-ever score at Real Madrid's Santiago Bernabéu Stadium.^{[84][85]} Returning to the wing, he played his first final since breaking into the first team on 13 May, scoring once and assisting a second goal as Barcelona defeated Athletic Bilbao 4–1 to win the Copa del Rey.^[86] With 23 league goals from Messi that season, Barcelona became La Liga champions three days later and achieved its fifth double.^{[82][87]}

As the season's Champions League top scorer with nine goals, the youngest in the tournament's history,^[88] Messi scored two goals and assisted two more to ensure a 4–0 quarter-final victory over Bayern Munich.^[84] He returned as a false nine during the final on 27 May in Rome against Manchester United. Barcelona were crowned champions of Europe by winning the match 2–0, the second goal coming from a Messi header over goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar. Barcelona thus achieved the first treble in the history of Spanish football.^{[89][90]} This success was reflected in a new contract, signed on 18 September, which committed Messi to the club through 2016 with a new buyout clause of €250 million, while his salary increased to €12 million.^[78] His team's prosperity continued into the second half of 2009, as Barcelona became the first club to achieve the sextuple, winning six top-tier trophies in a single year.^[91] After victories in the Supercopa de España and UEFA Super Cup in August, Barcelona won the FIFA Club World Cup against Estudiantes de La Plata on 19 December, with Messi scoring the winning 2–1 goal with his chest.^[92] At 22 years old, Messi won the Ballon d'Or and the FIFA World Player of the Year award, both times by the greatest voting margin in each trophy's history.^[72]

Unsatisfied with his position on the right wing, Messi resumed playing as a false nine in early 2010, beginning with a Champions League last 16-round match against VfB Stuttgart. After a first-leg draw, Barcelona won the second leg 4–0 with two goals and an assist from Messi. At that point, he effectively became the tactical focal point of Guardiola's team, and his goalscoring rate increased.^[94] Messi scored a total of 47 goals in



Messi in the Champions League final against Manchester United in May 2009

"Messi is the best player in the world by some distance. He's like a PlayStation. He can take advantage of every mistake we make."

all competitions that season, equaling Ronaldo's club record from the 1996–97 campaign.^{[95][96]} He notably scored all of his side's four goals in the Champions League quarter-final against Arsène Wenger's Arsenal on 6 April while becoming Barcelona's all-time top scorer in the competition.^{[97][98]} Although Barcelona were eliminated in the Champions League semi-finals by the eventual champions, Inter Milan, Messi finished the season as top scorer (with 8 goals) for the second consecutive year.^[99] As the league's top scorer with 34 goals (again tying Ronaldo's record), he helped Barcelona win a second consecutive La Liga trophy with only a single defeat.^{[96][100]}

—Arsène Wenger commends Messi for his four-goal display against Arsenal in April 2010.^[93]



Messi (centre) and his teammates celebrate winning the [FIFA Club World Cup](#) in December 2011.

Messi secured Barcelona's first trophy of the 2010–11 campaign, the Supercopa de España, by scoring a hat-trick in his side's second-leg 4–0 victory over Sevilla, after a first-leg defeat.^[101] Assuming a playmaking role, he was again instrumental in a *Clásico* on 29 November 2010, the first with José Mourinho in charge of Real Madrid, as Barcelona defeated their rivals 5–0.^[102] Messi helped the team achieve 16 consecutive league victories, a record in Spanish football, concluding with another hat-trick against Atlético Madrid on 5 February 2011.^{[103][104]} His club performances in 2010 earned him the inaugural [FIFA Ballon d'Or](#), an amalgamation of the Ballon d'Or and the [FIFA World Player of the Year](#) award, though his win was met with some criticism due to his lack of success with Argentina at the [2010 FIFA World Cup](#).^{[72][105]} Under the

award's old format, he would have placed just outside the top three, owing his win to the votes from the international coaches and captains.^[105]

Towards the end of the season, Barcelona played four *Clásicos* in the span of 18 days. A league match on 16 April ended in a draw after a penalty from Messi. After Barcelona lost the [Copa del Rey](#) final four days later, Messi scored both goals in his side's 2–0 win in the first leg of the Champions League semi-finals, the second of which – a dribble past three players – was acclaimed as one of the best ever in the competition. Although he did not score, he was again important in the second-leg draw that sent Barcelona through to the Champions League final,^{[23][106][107]} where they faced Manchester United in a repeat of the final two years earlier. As the competition's top scorer for the third consecutive year, with 12 goals, Messi gave a man-of-the-match performance at [Wembley](#) on 28 May, scoring the match-winning goal of Barça's 3–1 victory.^{[108][109]} Barcelona won a third consecutive La Liga title. In addition to his 31 goals, Messi was also the league's top assist provider with 18.^{[110][111]} He finished the season with 53 goals and 24 assists in all competitions, becoming Barcelona's all-time single-season top scorer and the first player in Spanish football to reach the 50-goal benchmark.^{[110][112][113][114]}

As Messi developed into a combination of a number 8 (a creator), a 9 (scorer), and a 10 (assistant),^[115] he scored an unprecedented 73 goals and provided 29 assists in all club competitions during the 2011–12 season, producing a hat-trick or more on 10 occasions.^{[116][117][118]} He began the campaign by helping Barcelona win both the Spanish and European Super Cups; in the Supercopa de España, he scored three times to achieve a 5–4 aggregate victory over Real Madrid, overtaking Raúl as the competition's all-time top scorer with eight goals.^{[119][120]} At the close of the year, on 18 December, he scored twice in the [FIFA Club World Cup](#) final, a 4–0 victory over Santos, earning the [Golden Ball](#) as the best player of the tournament, as he had done two years previously.^[121] For his efforts in 2011, he again received the [FIFA Ballon d'Or](#), becoming only the fourth player

in history to win the Ballon d'Or three times, after Johan Cruyff, Michel Platini, and Marco van Basten.^[122] Additionally, he won the inaugural UEFA Best Player in Europe Award, a revival of the old-style Ballon d'Or.^[123] By then, Messi was already widely considered one of the best footballers in history, alongside players like Diego Maradona and Pelé.^[23]

2012: A record-breaking year

As Messi maintained his goalscoring form into the second half of the season, the year 2012 saw him break several longstanding records. On 7 March, two weeks after scoring four goals in a league fixture against Valencia, he scored five times in a Champions League last 16-round match against Bayer Leverkusen, an unprecedented achievement in the history of the competition.^{[126][127]} In addition to being the joint top assist provider with five assists, this feat made him top scorer with 14 goals, tying José Altafini's record from the 1962–63 season, as well as becoming only the second player after Gerd Müller to be top scorer in four campaigns.^{[128][129]} Two weeks later, on 20 March, Messi became the top goalscorer in Barcelona's history at 24 years old, overtaking the 57-year record of César Rodríguez's 232 goals with a hat-trick against Granada.^[125]

"I feel sorry for those who want to compete for Messi's throne – it's impossible, this kid is unique."

—Pep Guardiola after Messi became Barcelona's all-time top scorer at age 24 in March 2012^{[124][125]}



Messi points to the sky during his five-goal display against Bayer Leverkusen in March 2012.

Despite Messi's individual form, Barcelona's four-year cycle of success under Guardiola – one of the greatest eras in the club's history – drew to an end.^[130] Although Barcelona won the Copa del Rey against Athletic Bilbao on 25 May, its 14th title of that period, the team had lost the league to Real Madrid and was eliminated in the Champions League semi-finals by the eventual champions, Chelsea, with Messi sending a crucial second-leg penalty kick against the crossbar.^{[131][132]} In Barça's last home league match on 5 May, against Espanyol, Messi scored all four goals before approaching the bench to embrace Guardiola, who had announced his resignation as manager.^[133] He finished the season as league top scorer in Spain and Europe for a second time, with 50 goals, an all-time La Liga record, while his 73 goals in all competitions surpassed Gerd Müller's 67 goals in the 1972–73 Bundesliga season,^{[134][135]}

Under manager Tito Vilanova, who had first coached him aged 14 at La Masia, Messi helped the club achieve its best-ever start to a La Liga season during the second half of 2012, amassing 55 points by the competition's midway point, a record in Spanish football.^{[136][137]} A double scored on 9 December against Real Betis saw Messi break two longstanding records: he surpassed César Rodríguez's record of 190 league goals, becoming Barcelona's all-time top scorer in La Liga, and Gerd Müller's record of most goals scored in a calendar year, overtaking his 85 goals scored in 1972 for Bayern Munich and Germany.^[138] Messi sent Müller a number 10 Barcelona shirt, signed "with respect and admiration", after breaking his 40-year record.^[139] At the close of the year, Messi had scored a record 91 goals in all competitions for Barcelona and Argentina.^[140] Although FIFA did

not acknowledge the achievement, citing verifiability issues, he received the [Guinness World Records](#) title for most goals scored in a calendar year.^{[141][142]} As the odds-on favourite, Messi again won the [FIFA Ballon d'Or](#), becoming the only player in history to win the Ballon d'Or four times.^{[140][143]}

2013–14: *Messidependencia*

Barcelona had virtually secured their [La Liga](#) title by the start of 2013, eventually equalling Real Madrid's 100-point record of the previous season. However, their performances deteriorated in the second half of the [2012–13 campaign](#), concurrently with Vilanova's absence due to ill health.^{[144][145]} After losing successive *Clásicos*, including the [Copa del Rey](#) semi-finals, they were nearly eliminated in the first knockout round of the Champions League by [Milan](#), but a revival of form in the second leg led to a 4–0 comeback, with two goals and an assist from Messi.^[146] Now in his ninth senior season with Barcelona, Messi signed a new contract on 7 February, committing himself to the club through 2018, while his fixed wage rose to €13 million.^{[147][148]} He wore the captain's armband for the first time a month later, on 17 March, in a league match against [Rayo Vallecano](#); by then, he had become the team's tactical focal point to a degree that was arguably rivalled only by former Barcelona players [Josep Samitier](#), [László Kubala](#) and [Johan Cruyff](#).^[149] Since his evolution into a false nine three years earlier, his input into the team's attack had increased exponentially; from 24% in their treble-winning campaign, his goal contribution rose to more than 40% that season.^[150]

"In Leo we are talking about the best player in the world and when things are not going well you have to use him. Even if he is half lame, his presence on the pitch is enough to lift us and our play in general."

—Defender [Gerard Piqué](#) explains Barcelona's reliance on an unfit Messi against [Paris Saint-Germain](#) in April 2013.^[151]

After four largely injury-free seasons, the muscular injuries that had previously plagued Messi reoccurred. After he suffered a hamstring strain on 2 April, during the first quarter-final against [Paris Saint-Germain](#), his appearances became sporadic. In the second leg against PSG, with an underperforming Barcelona down a goal, Messi came off the bench in the second half and within nine minutes helped create their game-tying goal, which allowed them to progress to the semi-finals. Still unfit, he proved ineffective during the first leg against Bayern Munich and was unable to play at all during the second, as Barcelona were defeated 7–0 on aggregate by the eventual champions.^{[152][153]} These matches gave credence to the notion of *Messidependencia*, Barcelona's perceived tactical and psychological dependence on their star player.^[153]

Messi continued to struggle with injury throughout 2013, eventually parting ways with his long-time personal physiotherapist.^[154] Further damage to his

hamstring sustained on 12 May ended his goalscoring streak of 21 consecutive league games, a worldwide record; he had netted 33 goals during his run, including a four-goal display against [Osasuna](#), while becoming the first player to score consecutively against all 19 opposition teams in La Liga.^{[149][155][156][157]} With 60 goals in all competitions, including 46 goals in La Liga, he finished the campaign as league top scorer in Spain and Europe for the second consecutive year, becoming the first player in history to win the [European Golden Shoe](#) three times.^{[158][159]} Following an irregular start to the new season under manager [Gerardo Martino](#), formerly of his boyhood club Newell's Old Boys, Messi suffered his fifth injury of 2013 when he tore his hamstring on 10 November, leaving him sidelined for two months.^{[160][161]} Despite his injuries, he was voted runner-up for the [FIFA Ballon d'Or](#), relinquishing the award after a four-year monopoly to Cristiano Ronaldo.^[162]

File:[Golden Shoe, Lionel Messi 2012-2013 01.jpg](#)

Messi's [Golden Shoe](#) award for the 2012–13 season



Messi celebrates his second goal against [Granada](#) in September 2014.

During the second half of the 2013–14 season, doubts persisted over Messi's form, leading to a perception among the *culés* that he was reserving himself for the [2014 FIFA World Cup](#). Statistically, his contribution of goals, shots, and passes had dropped significantly compared to previous seasons.^{[163][164][165]} He still managed to break two longstanding records in a span of seven days: a hat-trick on 16 March against Osasuna saw him overtake [Paulino Alcántara](#)'s 369 goals to become Barcelona's top goalscorer in all competitions including friendlies, while another hat-trick against Real Madrid on 23 March made him the [all-time top scorer](#) in *El Clásico*, ahead of the 18 goals scored by former Real Madrid player [Alfredo Di Stéfano](#).^{[163][166]} Messi finished the campaign with his worst output in five seasons, though he still managed to score 41 goals in all competitions.^{[164][167]} For the first time

in five years, Barcelona ended the season without a major trophy; they were [defeated in the Copa del Rey final](#) by Real Madrid and [lost the league](#) in the last game to Atlético Madrid, causing Messi to be booed by sections of fans at the Camp Nou.^{[168][169]} After prolonged speculation over his future with the club, Messi signed a new contract on 19 May 2014, only a year after his last contractual update; his salary increased to €20 million, or €36 million before taxes, the highest wage ever in the sport.^{[170][171]}

2014–15: A historic treble

Under new manager and former captain [Luis Enrique](#), Messi experienced a largely injury-free start to the [2014–15 season](#), allowing him to break three more longstanding records towards the end of the year.^[173] A hat-trick scored against Sevilla on 22 November made him the [all-time top scorer in La Liga](#), as he surpassed the 59-year record of 251 league goals held by [Telmo Zarra](#).^[174] Three days later, he scored another hat-trick against [APOEL](#), overtaking Raúl's 71 goals to become top scorer in the history of the Champions League.^[175] A third hat-trick, scored against city rivals Espanyol on 7 December, allowed him to surpass César Rodríguez as the all-time top scorer in the [Derbi barceloní](#) with 12 goals.^[176] Messi again placed second in the FIFA Ballon d'Or behind Cristiano Ronaldo, largely owing to his second-place achievement with Argentina at the World Cup.^[177]

"Messi is an alien that dedicates himself to playing with humans."

—Juventus captain [Gianluigi Buffon](#) ahead of their meeting in the [Champions League final](#) in June 2015^[172]

At the start of 2015, Barcelona were perceived to be headed for another disappointing end to the season, with renewed speculation in the media that Messi was leaving the club. A turning point came on 11 January during a 3–1 victory over Atlético Madrid, the first time Barça's attacking trident of Messi, [Luis Suárez](#) and [Neymar](#), dubbed "MSN", each scored in a match, marking the beginning of a highly successful run.^{[178][179]} After five years of playing in the centre of the pitch, Messi had returned to his old position on the right wing late the previous year, by his own suggestion according to Suárez, their striker.^{[179][180]} From there, he regained his best – arguably his best-ever – form, while Suárez and Neymar ended the team's attacking dependency on their star player.^{[181][182]} With 58 goals from Messi, the trio scored a total of 122 goals in all competitions that season, a record in Spanish football.^{[183][184]}



Messi battles Juventus defender Patrice Evra for the ball during the Champions League final in June 2015.

feinting the goalkeeper to score in a tight space by the near post.^[190] The goal was later named one of the three final nominees for the 2015 FIFA Puskás Award.^[191]

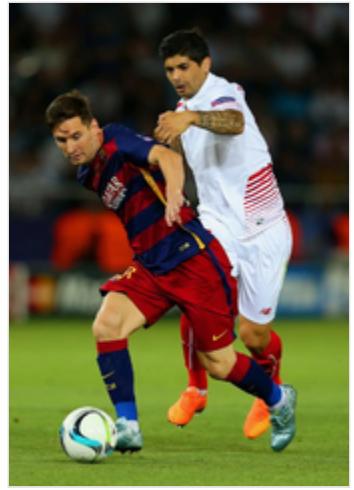
In the Champions League, Messi scored twice and assisted on another in their 3–0 semi-final victory over Bayern Munich, now under the stewardship of Guardiola.^[192] His second goal, which came only three minutes after his first, saw him chip the ball over goalkeeper Manuel Neuer after his dribble past Jérôme Boateng had made the defender drop to the ground; it went viral, becoming the year's most tweeted about sporting moment, and was named the best goal of the season by UEFA.^{[193][194]} Despite a second-leg loss, Barcelona progressed to the final on 6 June in Berlin, where they defeated Juventus 3–1 to win their second treble, becoming the first team in history to do so.^{[195][196]} Although Messi did not score, he participated in each of his side's goals, particularly the second as he forced a parried save from goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon from which Suárez scored the match-winning goal on the rebound.^[183] In addition to being the top assist provider with six assists, Messi finished the competition as the joint top scorer with ten goals, which earned him the distinction of being the first player ever to achieve the top scoring mark in five Champions League seasons.^{[197][198]} For his efforts during the season, he received the UEFA Best Player in Europe award for a second time.^[199]

2015–16: Domestic success

Messi opened the 2015–16 season by scoring twice from free kicks in Barcelona's 5–4 victory (after extra time) over Sevilla in the UEFA Super Cup.^[200] A subsequent 5–1 aggregate defeat against Athletic Bilbao in the Supercopa de España ended their expressed hopes of a second sextuple, with Messi scoring his side's only goal.^[201] On 16 September, he became the youngest player to make 100 appearances in the UEFA Champions League in a 1–1 away draw to Roma.^[202] On 26 September, Messi sustained an injury in Barcelona's match against Las Palmas; tests later confirmed that he suffered a tear in the medial collateral ligament of his left knee, ruling him out for six to eight weeks.^[203] He finally returned to the pitch on 21 November, making a substitute appearance in Barcelona's 4–0 away win over rivals Real Madrid in *El Clásico*.^[204] Messi capped off the year by winning the 2015 FIFA Club World Cup Final on 20 December, collecting his fifth club trophy of 2015 as Barcelona went on to defeat River Plate 3–0 in Yokohama. Messi also won the tournament's Silver Ball, despite missing the semi-final.^[205] On 30 December, Messi scored on his 500th appearance for Barcelona, in a 4–0 home win over Real Betis.^[206]

Towards the end of the campaign, Messi scored in a 1–0 away win over Atlético Madrid on 17 May, securing the La Liga title.^[185] Among his 43 league goals that season was a hat-trick scored in 11 minutes against Rayo Vallecano on 8 March, the fastest of his senior career; it was his 32nd hat-trick overall for Barcelona, allowing him to overtake Telmo Zarra as the player with the most hat-tricks ever in Spanish football.^{[184][186]} Additionally, as the season's top assist provider with 18 assists, he surpassed Luís Figo as the player with the most assists in La Liga;^[note 4] he made his record 106th assist in a fixture against Levante on 15 February, in which he also scored a hat-trick.^{[187][188][189]} Messi then scored twice as Barcelona defeated Athletic Bilbao 3–1 in the Copa del Rey final on 30 May, achieving the sixth double in their history. His opening goal was hailed as one of the greatest in his career; he collected the ball near the halfway line and beat four opposing players, before

On 6 January 2016, recording Barcelona's first goal of the new year, Messi scored two goals and assisted the other two in a 4–1 derby win over Espanyol at the Camp Nou, in the first leg of the round of 16 of the 2015–16 Copa del Rey.^[207] Five days later, Messi won the FIFA Ballon d'Or for a record fifth time in his career.^[208] On 3 February, he scored a hat-trick in Barcelona's 7–0 win against Valencia in the first leg of the Copa del Rey semi-final at the Camp Nou, also scoring his 500th career goal in the process, including youth competitions.^[209] With teammate Luis Suárez scoring the other four goals in the same match, this was the first time that two players had scored at least three goals each at Camp Nou, and the first time since Luis Suárez Miramontes and Justo Tejada in 1956. The feat had only occurred three times before in the club's history, all at Camp de Les Corts.^[210] The next league match at Camp Nou, a 6–1 win against Celta de Vigo, Messi assisted Suárez from a penalty kick. Some people saw it as "a touch of genius", while others criticised it as being disrespectful to the opponent. The Celta players, however, never complained and their coach defended the penalty, stating, "Barca's forwards are very respectful." The penalty routine has been compared to that of Barça icon Johan Cruyff in 1982, who was battling lung cancer, leading many fans to indicate that the penalty was a tribute to him. Cruyff himself was "very happy" with the play, insisting "it was legal and entertaining".^{[211][212][213]}



Messi dribbling past
Sevilla's Éver Banega in the
2015 UEFA Super Cup

On 17 February, Messi reached his 300th league goal in a 1–3 away win against Sporting de Gijón.^[214] A few days later, he scored both goals in Barcelona's 0–2 win against Arsenal at the Emirates Stadium, in the first leg of the 2015–16 UEFA Champions League round of 16, with the second goal being Barcelona's 10,000th in official competitions.^[215] On 17 April, Messi ended a five-match scoring drought with his 500th senior career goal for club and country in Barcelona's 2–1 home loss to Valencia.^[216] Messi finished the 2015–16 season by setting up both goals in Barcelona's 2–0 extra time win over Sevilla in the 2016 Copa del Rey Final, at the Vicente Calderón Stadium, on 22 May 2016, as the club celebrated winning the domestic double for the second consecutive season.^{[217][218]} In total, Messi scored 41 goals and provided 23 assists, as Barcelona's attacking trio managed a Spanish record of 131 goals throughout the season, breaking the record they had set the previous season.^[219]

2016–17: Fourth Golden Boot

Messi opened the 2016–17 season by lifting the 2016 Supercopa de España as Barcelona's captain in the absence of the injured Andrés Iniesta;^[221] he set-up Munir's goal in a 2–0 away win over Sevilla in the first leg on 14 August,^[222] and subsequently scored and assisted in a 3–0 win in the return leg on 17 August.^[223] Three days later, he scored two goals and provided an assist to lead Barcelona to a 6–2 victory against Real Betis in the opening game of the 2016–17 La Liga season.^[224] On 13 September 2016, Messi scored his first hat-trick of the season in the opening game of the 2016–17 UEFA Champions League campaign against Celtic in a 7–0 victory; this was also Messi's sixth hat-trick in the Champions League, the most by any player. A week later, Messi sustained a groin injury in a 1–1 draw against Atlético Madrid and was ruled out with injury for three weeks.^[225] He marked his return with a

"[Messi] is indispensable, but the rest of us are dispensable. – No, the club is bigger than any manager, than any player... except Leo. That's the reality, and you have to accept it."

—In an interview with
Barcelona's official magazine,
Messi's compatriot Javier
Mascherano points out that

goal, scoring three minutes after coming off the bench in a 4–0 home win over Deportivo de La Coruña, on 16 October.^[226] Three days after this, he netted his thirty-seventh club hat-trick as Barcelona defeated Manchester City 4–0.^[227] On 1 November, Messi scored his 54th Champions League group stage goal in Barcelona's 3–1 away return fixture loss to Manchester City, surpassing the previous record of 53 goals held by Raúl.^{[228][229]} On 12 November, Messi placed second in the 2016 Ballon d'Or behind Cristiano Ronaldo, who claimed the award for the fourth time.^[230] He finished the year with 51 goals, making him Europe's top scorer, one ahead of Zlatan Ibrahimović.^[231]

Barcelona has continued to enjoy success despite the departures of its key figures.^[220]

After placing second in the 2016 Ballon d'Or, on 9 January 2017 Messi also finished in second place – behind Cristiano Ronaldo once again – in the 2016 Best FIFA Men's Player Award.^[232] On 11 January, Messi scored from a free-kick in Barcelona's 3–1 victory against Athletic Bilbao in the second leg of the round of 16 of the Copa del Rey, which enabled Barcelona to advance to the quarter-finals of the competition; with his 26th goal from a free-kick for Barcelona in all competitions, he equalled the club's all-time record, which had previously been set by Ronald Koeman.^[233] In his next league match, on 14 January, Messi scored in a 5–0 win against Las Palmas; with this goal, he equalled Raúl's record for the most number of teams scored against in La Liga (35).^[234] On 4 February, Messi scored his 27th free-kick for Barcelona in a 3–0 home win over Athletic Bilbao in the league, overtaking Koeman as the club's all-time top-scorer from free-kicks.^[235] On 23 April, Messi scored twice in a 3–2 away win over Real Madrid. His game-winning goal in stoppage time was his 500th for Barcelona.^[236] On 27 May, Messi scored a goal and set up another for Paco Alcácer in the 2017 Copa del Rey Final, helping Barcelona to a 3–1 victory over Alavés, and was named Man of the Match. In total, Messi finished the 2016–17 season with 54 goals and 16 assists, while his 37 goals in La Liga saw him claim both the Pichichi and European Golden Boot Awards for the fourth time in his career.^{[237][238]}

2017–18: Domestic double and a record fifth Golden Boot

Messi opened the 2017–18 season by converting a penalty in Barcelona's 1–3 first leg home defeat to Real Madrid in Supercopa de España.^[239] Thereby, Messi also extended his El Clásico goalscoring record with the goal being his 24th official and 25th overall.^[240] On 27 August, Messi scored his first two goals of the 2017–18 La Liga season in a 2–0 away win over Alavés. Messi's first goal marked his 350th in the fixture, becoming the first player ever to achieve this milestone.^[241] On 9 September, Messi scored his first hat-trick of the 2017–18 league campaign, against Espanyol in derbi barceloní, thus helping to secure a 5–0 home victory for Blaugrana over local rivals.^[242] Messi netted twice against Gianluigi Buffon, on 12 September, as Barça defeated the last season's Italian champions Juventus 3–0 at home in the UEFA Champions League.^[243] On 19 September, Messi found the net four times in a 6–1 trashing of Eibar at the Camp Nou in La Liga.^[244] Three weeks later, on 1 October, Messi surpassed his former teammate Carles Puyol to become the third highest appearance maker in the club's history, as he helped Barça defeat Las Palmas 3–0 by assisting Sergio Busquets' opener and later adding two himself in his 594th official game for the club; the league game was played behind closed doors at the Camp Nou due to violence in Catalonia relating to an ongoing independence referendum.^[245]

On 18 October, in his 122nd European club appearance, Messi scored his 97th UEFA Champions League goal, and his 100th in all UEFA club competitions, in a 3–1 home victory over Olympiakos; he also set up Lucas Digne's goal during the same match.^[246] Messi became only the second player after Cristiano Ronaldo to reach this century milestone, but accomplished it in 21 fewer appearances than the Portuguese counterpart.^[247] On 23 October, Messi finished as the runner-up behind Cristiano Ronaldo in 2017 Best FIFA Men's Player award for

the second consecutive year.^[248] On 4 November, he made his 600th appearance for Barcelona in a 2–1 home win over Sevilla in La Liga.^[249] Following the reception of his fourth Golden Boot, Messi signed a new deal with Barcelona on 25 November, keeping him with the club through the 2020–21 season. His buyout clause was set at €700 million.^[250] On 7 January 2018, Messi made his 400th La Liga appearance with Barcelona in a 3–0 home win over Levante, marking the occasion with his 144th league assist and 365th league goal for the club, the latter of which saw him equal Gerd Müller's record for the most league goals scored for the same club in one of Europe's top five divisions.^{[251][252]} A week later, he broke the record, scoring his 366th La Liga goal from a free kick in a 4–2 away win against Real Sociedad.^{[252][253]} On 4 March, he scored his 600th senior career goal from a free kick in a 1–0 home win over Atlético Madrid, in La Liga.^[254] On 14 March, Messi scored his 99th and 100th Champions League goals in a 3–0 home win over Chelsea, becoming only the second player after Cristiano Ronaldo to reach this landmark, and achieving it at a younger age, in fewer appearances, having played fewer minutes, and having taken fewer shots than his Portuguese counterpart; his opening goal, which came after only two minutes and eight seconds, was also the fastest of his career. During the same match, he also set up Ousmane Dembélé for his first Barcelona goal; the result saw Barcelona advance to the quarter-finals of the competition for the eleventh consecutive season.^{[255][256][257]} On 7 April, he scored a hat-trick in a 3–1 win over Leganés including his sixth goal scored from a free-kick for the season, matching the record set by former teammate Ronaldinho.^[258]

International career

2004–05: Success at youth level

As a dual Argentine-Spanish national, Messi was eligible to play for the national team of both countries.^[259] Selectors for Spain's Under-17 squad began pursuing him in 2003 after Barcelona's director of football, Carles Rexach, alerted the Royal Spanish Football Federation to their young player. Messi declined the offer, having aspired to represent *La Albiceleste* since childhood. To further prevent Spain from taking him, the Argentine Football Association organised two under-20 friendlies in June 2004, against Paraguay and Uruguay, with the purpose of finalising his status as an Argentina player in FIFA. Five days after his 17th birthday, on 29 June, he made his debut for his country against Paraguay, scoring once and providing two assists in their 8–0 victory. He was subsequently included in the squad for the South American Youth Championship, held in Colombia in February 2005. As he lacked the stamina of his teammates, the result of his former growth hormone deficiency, he was used as a substitute in six of the nine games, proving more effective when coming on in the second half. After being named man of the match against Venezuela, he scored the winning 2–1 goal in the crucial last match against Brazil, thereby securing their third-place qualification for the FIFA World Youth Championship.^[260]

Aware of his physical limitations, Messi employed a personal trainer to increase his muscle mass, returning to the squad in an improved condition in time for the World Youth Championship, hosted by the Netherlands in June 2005. After he was left out of the starting line-up in their first match against the United States, a 1–0 defeat, the squad's senior players asked manager Francisco Ferraro to let Messi start, as they considered him their best player. After helping the team defeat Egypt and Germany to progress past the group stage, Messi proved decisive in the knockout phase as he scored their equaliser against Colombia, provided a goal and an assist against title favourites Spain, and scored their opening goal against reigning champions Brazil. Ahead of the final, he was awarded the Golden Ball as the best player of the tournament. He scored two penalties in their 2–1 victory over

Nigeria, clinching Argentina's fifth championship and finishing the tournament as top scorer with 6 goals.^{[261][262]} His performances drew comparisons with compatriot Diego Maradona, who had led Argentina to the title in 1979.^[262]

2005–06: Senior and World Cup debuts

In recognition of his achievements with the under-20 side, senior manager José Pékerman gave Messi his first call-up for a friendly against Hungary on 17 August 2005. Aged 18, Messi made his senior debut for Argentina when he came on in the 63rd minute, only to be sent off after two minutes for a perceived foul against Vilmos Vanczák, who had grabbed his shirt; Messi had struck the defender with his arm while trying to shake him off, which the referee interpreted as an intentional elbowing, a contentious decision.^[263] Messi was reportedly found weeping in the dressing room after his sending-off.^[264] He returned to the team on 3 September in their World Cup qualifier defeat to Paraguay, which he had declared his "re-debut" ahead of the match.^[265] Messi started his first game in the next qualifying match against Peru, in which he was able to win a crucial penalty that secured their victory. After the match, Pékerman described him as "a jewel".^[266] He subsequently made regular appearances for the team ahead of Argentina's participation in the 2006 FIFA World Cup, scoring his first goal in a friendly against Croatia on 1 March 2006.^[267] A hamstring injury sustained a week later jeopardised his presence in the World Cup, but he was nevertheless selected for Pékerman's squad and regained fitness in time for the start of the tournament.^[268]

During the World Cup in Germany, Messi witnessed their opening match victory against the Ivory Coast from the substitutes' bench. In the next match, against Serbia and Montenegro, he became the youngest player to represent Argentina at a FIFA World Cup when he came on as a substitute in the 74th minute. He assisted their fourth strike within minutes and scored the final goal in their 6–0 victory, making him the youngest scorer in the tournament and the sixth-youngest goalscorer in the history of the World Cup.^[269] As their progression to the knockout phase was secured, several starters were rested during the last group match. Messi consequently started the game against the Netherlands, a 0–0 draw, as they won their group on goal differential.^{[270][271]} In the round of 16 match against Mexico, played on his 19th birthday, Messi came on in the 84th minute, with the score tied at 1–1. He appeared to score a goal, but it was contentiously ruled offside, with the team needing a late goal in extra time to proceed.^{[272][273]} He did not play in the quarter-final against Germany, during which Argentina were eliminated 4–2 in a penalty shootout.^{[274][275]} Back home, Pékerman's decision to leave him on the bench against Germany led to widespread criticism from those who believed Messi could have changed the outcome of the match in Argentina's favour.^{[276][277]}

2007–08: Copa América final and Olympic gold

As Messi evolved into one of the best players in the world, he secured a place in Alfio Basile's starting line-up, as part of a team considered favourites to win the 2007 Copa América, held in Venezuela.^{[58][278]} He set up the game-winning goal of their 4–1 victory over the United States in the opening match, before winning a penalty that led to the game-tying first strike of their 4–2 win in the next match against Colombia.^{[279][280]} As they had secured their place in the knockout phase, Messi started the next game on the bench, coming on in the last 25 minutes with the score at 0–0 to help his team defeat Paraguay by assisting their only goal. At the quarter-final stage, where the group winners faced Peru, he scored the second goal of a 4–0 victory that saw them through to the semi-final, during which he chipped the ball over Mexico's goalkeeper to ensure another 3–0 win.^[278] In a surprise defeat, Argentina lost the final 3–0 to a Brazil squad which lacked several of the nation's best

players.^[281] Their unexpected loss was followed by much criticism in Argentina, though Messi was mostly exempt due to his young age and secondary status to star player Juan Román Riquelme.^[278] He was named the best young player of the tournament by CONMEBOL.^[282]

Ahead of the 2008 Summer Olympics, Barcelona legally barred Messi from representing Argentina at the tournament as it coincided with their Champions League qualifying matches.^[283] After interference from newly appointed Barcelona manager Pep Guardiola, who had won the tournament in 1992, Messi was permitted to join Sergio Batista's under-23 squad in Beijing.^[284] During the first match, he scored the opening goal and assisted another in their 2–1 victory over the Ivory Coast. Following a 1–0 win in the next group match against Australia, ensuring their quarter-final qualification, Messi was rested during the game against Serbia, while his side won the match to finish first in their group. Against the Netherlands, he again scored the first goal and assisted a second strike to help his team to a 2–1 win in extra time. After a 3–0 semi-final victory over Brazil, Messi assisted the only goal in the final as Argentina defeated Nigeria to claim Olympic gold medals.^[285] Along with Riquelme, Messi was singled out by FIFA as the stand-out player from the tournament's best team.^[286]

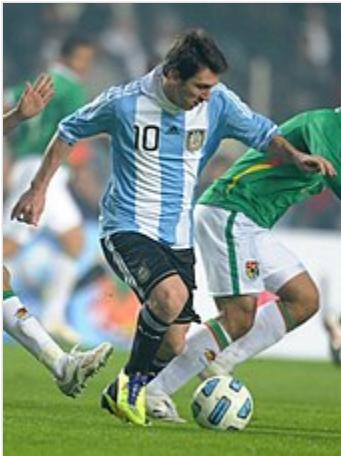


Messi evades Brazil's Marcelo in the semi-final of the 2008 Summer Olympics.

2008–11: Collective decline

From late 2008, the national team experienced a three-year period marked by poor performances.^[278] Under manager Diego Maradona, who had led Argentina to World Cup victory as a player, the team struggled to qualify for the 2010 World Cup, securing their place in the tournament only after defeating Uruguay 1–0 in their last qualifying match. Maradona was criticised for his strategic decisions as he played Messi out of position, positioned too deep for him to be able to contribute to the attack to his full ability. In eight qualifying matches under Maradona's stewardship, Messi scored only one goal, netting the opening goal in the first such match, a 4–0 victory over Venezuela.^{[267][287]} During that game, played on 28 March 2009, he wore Argentina's number 10 shirt for the first time, following the international retirement of Riquelme.^[288] Overall, Messi scored four goals in 18 appearances during the qualifying process.^[267] Ahead of the tournament, Maradona visited Messi in Barcelona to request his tactical input; Messi then outlined a 4–3–1–2 formation with himself playing behind the two strikers, a playmaking position known as the *enganche* in Argentine football, which had been his preferred position since childhood.^[289]

Despite their poor qualifying campaign, Argentina were considered title contenders at the World Cup in South Africa. At the start of the tournament, the new formation proved effective; Messi managed at least four attempts on goal during their opening match but was repeatedly denied by Nigeria's goalkeeper, resulting in a 1–0 win. During the next match, against South Korea, he excelled in his playmaking role, participating in all four goals of his side's 4–1 victory. As their place in the knockout phase was guaranteed, most of the starters were rested during the last group match, but Messi reportedly refused to be benched.^[287] He wore the captain's armband for the first time in their 2–0 win against Greece; as the focal point of their play, he helped create their second goal to see Argentina finish as group winners.^{[290][291]} In the round of 16, they defeated Mexico 3–1, with Messi assisting their first goal, a controversial strike that stood despite being offside.^[292]



Messi in action during the opening match against Bolivia in the [2011 Copa América](#)

Argentina's unstructured defence had proved a liability throughout the World Cup and finally led to their elimination in the quarter-final against Germany, at the same stage of the tournament and by the same opponent as four years earlier. Their 4–0 loss was their worst margin of defeat since 1974.^[292] FIFA subsequently identified Messi as one of the tournament's 10 best players, citing his "outstanding" pace and creativity and "spectacular and efficient" dribbling, shooting and passing.^[293] Back home, however, Messi was the subject of far harsher judgement. As the perceived best player in the world, he had been expected to lead an average team to the title, as Maradona arguably did in 1986, but he had failed to replicate his performances at Barcelona with the national team, leading to the accusation that he cared less about his country than his club.^{[294][295]}

Maradona was replaced by Sergio Batista, who had orchestrated Argentina's Olympic victory. Batista publicly stated that he intended to build the team around Messi, employing him as a [false nine](#) within a 4–3–3 system, as used to much success by Barcelona.^{[294][296]} Although Messi scored a record 53 goals during the 2010–11 club season, he had not scored for Argentina in an official match since March 2009.^{[110][267]} Despite the tactical change, his goal drought continued during the [2011 Copa América](#), hosted by Argentina. Their first two matches, against Bolivia and Colombia, ended in draws, with Messi underperforming by his standards. Media and fans noted that he did not combine well with striker [Carlos Tevez](#), who enjoyed far greater popularity among the Argentine public; Messi was consequently booed by his own team's supporters for the first time in his career. During the crucial next match, with Tevez on the bench, he gave a well-received performance, assisting two goals in their 3–0 victory over [Costa Rica](#). After the quarter-final against Uruguay ended in a 1–1 draw following extra time, with Messi having assisted their equaliser, Argentina were eliminated 4–5 in the penalty shootout by the eventual champions.^[294]

2011–13: Assuming the captaincy

After Argentina's unsuccessful performance in the [Copa América](#), Batista was replaced by [Alejandro Sabella](#). Upon his appointment in August 2011, Sabella awarded the 24-year-old Messi the captaincy of the squad, in accord with then-captain [Javier Mascherano](#). Reserved by nature, Messi went on to lead his squad by example as their best player, while Mascherano continued to fulfil the role of the team's on-field leader and motivator.^{[297][298]} In a further redesign of the team, Sabella dismissed Tevez and brought in players with whom Messi had won the World Youth Championship and Olympic Games. Now playing in a free role in an improving team, Messi finally ended his goal drought by scoring during their first World Cup qualifying match against [Chile](#) on 7 October, his first official goal for Argentina in two-and-a-half years.^{[267][297]}

Under Sabella, Messi's goalscoring rate drastically increased; where he had scored only 17 goals in 61 matches under his previous managers, he scored 25 times in 32 appearances during the following three years.^{[267][297]} He netted a total of 12 goals in 9 games for Argentina in 2012, equalling the record held by Gabriel Batistuta, Argentina's all-time top scorer, for the most goals scored in a



Messi scored his first international [hat-trick](#) against [Switzerland](#) in February 2012.

calendar year for their country.^{[299][300]} His first hat-trick with the *Albicelestes* came in a friendly against Switzerland on 29 February 2012, followed by two more hat-tricks over the next year-and-a-half in friendlies against Brazil and Guatemala. Messi then helped the team secure their place in the 2014 World Cup with a 5–2 victory over Paraguay on 10 September 2013; in addition to providing an assist, he scored twice from a penalty kick, taking his international tally to 37 goals to become Argentina's second-highest goalscorer behind only Batistuta. Overall, he had scored a total of 10 goals in 14 matches during the qualifying campaign.^{[267][301]} Concurrently with his bettered performances, his relationship with his compatriots improved, as he gradually began to be perceived more favourably in Argentina.^[297]

2014–15: World Cup and *Copa América* finals

Ahead of the World Cup in Brazil, doubts persisted over Messi's form, as he finished an unsuccessful and injury-plagued season with Barcelona. At the start of the tournament, however, he gave strong performances, being elected man of the match in their first four matches.^{[165][302]} In his first World Cup match as captain, he led them to a 2–1 victory over Bosnia and Herzegovina; he helped create their early opening goal and scored their second strike after a dribble past three players, his first World Cup goal since his debut in the tournament eight years earlier.^[303] During the second match against Iran, he scored an injury-time goal from 23 metres out to end the game in a 1–0 win, securing their qualification for the knockout phase.^[304] He scored twice in the last group match, a 3–2 victory over Nigeria, his second goal from a free kick, as they finished first in their group.^[305] Messi assisted a late goal in extra time to ensure a 1–0 win against Switzerland in the round of 16, before starting the play that led to their match-winning 1–0 goal in the quarter-final against Belgium, helping Argentina progress to the semi-final of the World Cup for the first time since 1990.^{[306][307]} Following a 0–0 draw in extra time, they eliminated the Netherlands 4–2 in a penalty shootout to reach the final.^[308]



Messi battles Germany's Mats Hummels for the ball during the final of the 2014 FIFA World Cup.

Billed as Messi versus Germany, the world's best player against the best team, the final was a repeat of the 1990 final featuring Diego Maradona.^{[309][310]} Within the first half-hour, Messi had started the play that led to a goal, but it was ruled offside. He missed several opportunities to open the scoring throughout the match, in particular at the start of the second half when his breakaway effort went wide of the far post. Substitute Mario Götze finally scored in the 113th minute, followed in the last minute of extra time by a free kick that Messi sent over the net, as Germany won the match 1–0 to claim the World Cup.^[311] At the conclusion of the final, Messi was awarded the Golden Ball as the best player of the tournament. In addition to being the joint third-highest goalscorer, with four goals and an assist, he created the most chances, completed the most dribbling runs, made the most deliveries into the penalty area and produced the most throughballs in the competition.^{[302][312]} However, his selection drew criticism due to his lack of goals in the knockout round; FIFA President Sepp Blatter expressed his surprise, while Maradona suggested that Messi had undeservedly been chosen for marketing purposes.^[313]

Another final appearance, the third of Messi's senior international career, followed in the 2015 *Copa América*, held in Chile. Under the stewardship of former Barcelona manager Gerardo Martino, Argentina entered the tournament as title contenders due to their second-place achievement at the World Cup.^{[314][315]} During the opening match against Paraguay, they were ahead two goals by half-time but lost their lead to end the match in a 2–2 draw; Messi had scored from a penalty kick, netting his only goal in the tournament.^[316] Following a 1–0

win against defending champions Uruguay, Messi earned his 100th cap for his country in the final group match, a 1–0 win over Jamaica, becoming only the fifth Argentine to achieve this milestone.^{[317][318]} In his 100 appearances, he had scored a total of 46 goals for Argentina, 22 of which came in official competitive matches.^{[267][318]}

As Messi evolved from the team's symbolic captain into a genuine leader, he led Argentina to the knockout stage as group winners.^{[319][320]} In the quarter-final, they created numerous chances, including a rebound header by Messi, but were repeatedly denied by Colombia's goalkeeper, and ultimately ended the match scoreless, leading to a 5–4 penalty shootout in their favour.^[321] At the semi-final stage, Messi excelled as playmaker as he provided three assists and helped create three more goals in his side's 6–1 victory over Paraguay, receiving applause from the initially hostile crowd.^[319] Argentina started the final as the odds-on title favourites, but were defeated by Chile 4–1 in a penalty shootout after an 0–0 extra-time draw. Faced with aggression from opposing players, including taking a boot to the midriff, Messi played below his standards, though he was the only Argentine to successfully convert his penalty.^{[322][323]} At the close of the tournament, he was reportedly selected to receive the Most Valuable Player award but rejected the honour.^[324] As Argentina continued a trophy drought that began in 1993, the World Cup and Copa América defeats again brought intense criticism for Messi from Argentine media and fans.^{[325][326]}

2016: Copa América Centenario, retirement, and return

Messi's place in Argentina's Copa América Centenario squad was initially put in jeopardy when he sustained a back injury in a 1–0 friendly win over Honduras in a pre-Copa América warm-up match on 27 May 2016.^[327] It was later reported that he had suffered a deep bruise in his lumbar region, but that he would remain in Martino's squad for the tournament,^{[328][329]} although he was later left on the bench in Argentina's 2–1 opening win over defending champions Chile on 6 June due to concerns regarding his fitness.^[330] Although Messi was declared match-fit for his nation's second group match against Panama on 10 June, Martino left him on the bench once again; he replaced Augusto Fernández in the 61st minute and subsequently scored a hat-trick in 19 minutes, also starting the play which led to Sergio Agüero's goal, as the match ended in a 5–0 victory, sealing Argentina's place in the quarter-finals of the competition;^[331] he was elected man of the match for his performance.^[332]

On 18 June 2016, in the quarter-final of the Copa América against Venezuela, Messi produced another man of the match performance,^[333] assisting two goals and scoring another in a 4–1 victory, which enabled him to equal Gabriel Batistuta's national record of 54 goals in official international matches.^[334] This record was broken three days later when Messi scored in a 4–0 win in the semi-final of the Copa América against hosts the United States; he also assisted two goals during the match as Argentina sealed a place in the final of the competition for a second consecutive year,^[335] and was named man of the match once again.^[336]

During a repeat of the previous year's final on 26 June, Argentina once again lost to Chile on penalties after a 0–0 deadlock, resulting in Messi's third consecutive defeat in a major tournament final with Argentina, and his fourth overall. After the match, Messi, who had missed his penalty in the shootout, announced his retirement from international football. Sources reported that other Argentine players – Sergio Agüero, Javier Mascherano, Gonzalo Higuaín, Lucas Biglia, Éver Banega, Ezequiel Lavezzi and Ángel Di María – could follow their captain in retiring from international football.^[338] Chile coach Juan Antonio Pizzi said

"I tried my hardest. It has been four finals, I want more than anyone to win a title with the national team, but unfortunately, it did not happen... I think this is best for everyone, firstly for me

after the match, "My generation can't compare him to Maradona that's for my generation, because of what Maradona did for Argentine football. But I think the best player ever played today here in the United States."^[339] Messi finished the tournament as the second highest scorer, behind Eduardo Vargas, with five goals, and was the highest assist provider with four assists, also winning more Man of the Match awards than any other player in the tournament (3);^[340] he was named to the team of the tournament for his performances, but missed out on the Golden Ball Award for best player, which went to Alexis Sánchez.^[341]

and for a lot of people that wish this. The team has ended for me, a decision made."

—Messi announcing his retirement on 27 June 2016^{[337][338]}

"Don't go, Leo"

Following his announcement, a campaign began in Argentina for Messi to change his mind about retiring.^[342] He was greeted by fans with signs like "Don't go, Leo" when the team landed in Buenos Aires. President of Argentina Mauricio Macri urged Messi not to quit, stating, "We are lucky, it is one of life's pleasures, it is a gift from God to have the best player in the world in a footballing country like ours... Lionel Messi is the greatest thing we have in Argentina and we must take care of him."^[343] Mayor of Buenos Aires Horacio Rodríguez Larreta unveiled a statue of Messi in the capital to convince him reconsider retirement.^{[344][345]} On social networks, NoTeVayasLeo became a global trending topic, and even a playlist on Spotify.^{[346][347]} The campaign also continued in the streets and avenues of the Argentine capital, with about 50,000 supporters going to the Obelisco de Buenos Aires on 2 July, using the same slogan.^{[348][349]}

Return

"A lot of things went through my mind on the night of the final and I gave serious thought to quitting, but my love for my country and this shirt is too great."

—Messi reversing his decision from retiring on 12 August 2016^[350]

Just a week after Messi announced his international retirement, Argentine newspaper La Nación reported that he was reconsidering playing for Argentina at the 2018 FIFA World Cup qualifiers in September.^[351] On 12 August, it was confirmed that Messi had reversed his decision to retire from international football, and he was included in the squad for the national team's upcoming 2018 World Cup qualifiers.^[352] On 1 September 2016, in his first game back, he scored in a 1–0 home win over Uruguay in a 2018 World Cup qualifier.^[353]

On 28 March 2017, Messi was suspended for four international games for insulting an assistant referee in a game against Chile on 23 March 2017. He was also fined CHF 10,000.^{[354][355]} On 5 May 2017, Messi's four match ban as well as his 10,000 CHF fine was lifted by FIFA after Argentina Football Association appealed against his suspension, which meant he could now play Argentina's remaining World Cup Qualifiers.^[356] Argentina's place in the 2018 World Cup was in jeopardy going into their final qualifying match as they were sixth in their group, outside the five possible CONMEBOL World Cup qualifying spots, meaning they risked failing to qualify for the World Cup for the first time since 1970. On 10 October 2017, Messi led his country to World Cup



Messi celebrating scoring a hat-trick against Ecuador on 10 October 2017. His goals sent Argentina through to the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia.

qualification in scoring a hat-trick as Argentina came from behind to defeat Ecuador 3–1 away; Argentina had not defeated Ecuador in Quito since 2001.^[357] Messi's three goals saw him become the joint all-time leading scorer in CONMEBOL World Cup qualifiers with 21 goals, alongside Uruguay's Luis Suárez, overtaking the previous record which was held by compatriot Hernán Crespo.^{[357][358][359]}

Player profile

Style of play

Due to his short stature, Messi has a lower centre of gravity than taller players, which gives him greater agility, allowing him to change direction more quickly and evade opposing tackles;^{[360][361]} this has led the Spanish media to dub him *La Pulga Atómica* ("The Atomic Flea").^{[362][363][364]} Despite being physically unimposing, he possesses significant upper-body strength, which, combined with his low centre of gravity and resulting balance, aids him in withstanding physical challenges from opponents; he has consequently been noted for his lack of diving in a sport rife with playacting.^{[17][361][365]} His short, strong legs allow him to excel in short bursts of acceleration while his quick feet enable him to retain control of the ball when dribbling at speed.^[366] His former Barcelona manager Pep Guardiola once stated, "Messi is the only player that runs faster with the ball than he does without it."^[44] Although he has improved his ability with his weaker foot since his mid-20s, Messi is predominantly a left-footed player; with the outside of his left foot, he usually begins dribbling runs, while he uses the inside of his foot to finish and provide passes and assists.^{[367][368]}



Messi prepares to shoot with his dominant left foot during the final of the 2014 FIFA World Cup.

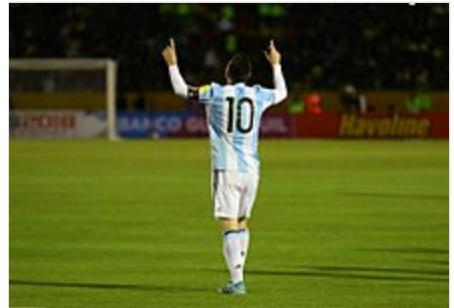
"I have fun like a child in the street. When the day comes when I'm not enjoying it, I will leave football."

—Messi explains his approach to the game in May 2011.^[23]

A prolific goalscorer, Messi is known for his finishing, positioning, quick reactions, and ability to make attacking runs to beat the defensive line. He also functions in a playmaking role, courtesy of his vision and precise passing, and is an accurate free kick and penalty kick taker,^{[361][369]} though his ability on penalties has somewhat deteriorated in recent seasons.^{[370][371][372]} His pace and technical ability enable him to undertake individual dribbling runs towards goal, in particular during counterattacks, usually starting from the halfway line or the right side of the pitch.^{[360][369]} Widely considered to be the best dribbler in the world,^[373] and one of the greatest of all time,^[374] with regard to this ability, his former Argentina manager Diego Maradona has said of him, "The ball stays glued to his foot; I've seen great players in my career, but I've never seen anyone with Messi's ball control."^[368] Beyond his individual qualities, he is also a well-rounded, hard-working team player, known for his creative combinations, in particular with Barcelona midfielders Xavi and Andrés Iniesta.^{[360][361]}

Tactically, Messi plays in a free attacking role; a versatile player, he is capable of attacking on either wing or through the centre of the pitch. His favoured position in childhood was the playmaker behind two strikers, known as the *enganche* in Argentine football, but he began his career in Spain as a left-winger or left-sided forward.^[289] Upon his first-team debut, he was moved onto the right wing by manager Frank Rijkaard; from this position, he could more easily cut through the defence into the middle of the pitch and curl shots on goal with his

left foot, rather than predominantly cross balls for teammates.^[44] Under Guardiola and subsequent managers, he most often played in a false nine role; positioned as a centre-forward or lone striker, he would roam the centre, often moving deep into midfield and drawing defenders with him, in order to create and exploit spaces for passes, dribbling runs or combinations with Xavi and Iniesta.^[23] Under the stewardship of Luis Enrique, Messi returned to playing in the right-sided position that characterised much of his early career,^[180] while also being deployed in a deeper, free role.^[376] With the Argentina national team, Messi has similarly played anywhere along the frontline; under various managers, he has been employed on the right wing, as a false nine, or in a deeper, creative role as a classic number 10 or attacking midfielder.^[296]



Messi frequently celebrates a goal by pointing a finger on each hand towards the skies in dedication to his late grandmother.^[375] It was she who encouraged a young Messi to play, and also took him to games.^[375]

Reception

A prodigious talent as a teenager, Messi established himself among the world's best players before age 20.^[58] Diego Maradona considered the 18-year-old Messi the best player in the world alongside Ronaldinho, while the Brazilian himself, shortly after winning the Ballon d'Or, commented, "I'm not even the best at Barça," in reference to his protégé.^{[377][378]} Four years later, after Messi had won his first Ballon d'Or by a record margin,^[72] the public debate regarding his qualities as a player moved beyond his status in contemporary football to the possibility that he was the greatest player in history.^{[13][365][379]} An early proponent was his then-manager Pep Guardiola, who, as early as August 2009, declared Messi to be the best player he had ever seen.^[380] In the following years, this opinion gained greater acceptance among pundits, managers, former and current players,^{[112][381]} and by the end of Barça's second treble-winning season, Messi's superiority, ahead of Maradona and Pelé, had become the predominant view among insiders in continental Europe.^{[9][382]} A frequent dismissal, however, has centred on the fact that Messi has not won the FIFA World Cup with Argentina, leading some in the sport to instead cite him as the best club player in history.^[383]

Throughout his career, Messi has been compared with his compatriot Diego Maradona, due to their similar playing styles as diminutive, left-footed dribblers. Initially, he was merely one of many young Argentine players, including his boyhood idol Pablo Aimar, to receive the "New Maradona" moniker, but as his career progressed, Messi proved his similarity beyond all previous contenders, establishing himself as the greatest player Argentina had produced since Maradona.^{[21][287]} Jorge Valdano, who won the 1986 World Cup alongside Maradona, said in October 2013, "Messi is Maradona every day. For the last five years, Messi has been the Maradona of the World Cup in Mexico."^[384] César Menotti, who as manager orchestrated their 1978 World Cup victory, echoed this sentiment when he opined that Messi plays "at the level of the best Maradona".^[385] Other notable Argentines in the sport, such as Osvaldo Ardiles, Javier Zanetti, and Diego Simeone, have expressed their belief that Messi has overtaken Maradona as the best player in history.^{[386][387][388]}

"I've seen the player who will inherit my place in Argentinian football and his name is Messi."

—Diego Maradona hails the 18-year-old Messi as his successor in February 2006.^[65]

In Argentine society, Messi is generally held in lesser esteem than Maradona, a consequence of not only his uneven performances with the national team, but also of differences in class, personality, and background. Messi is in some ways the antithesis of his predecessor: where Maradona was an extroverted, controversial character

who rose to greatness from the slums, Messi is reserved and unassuming, an unremarkable man outside of football.^{[259][389][390]} An enduring mark against him is the fact that, although through no fault of his own, he never proved himself in the Argentine Primera División as an upcoming player, achieving stardom overseas from a young age,^{[17][259]} while his lack of outward passion for the *Albiceleste* shirt—he does not sing the national anthem and is disinclined to emotional displays—have in the past led to the false perception that he felt Catalan rather than truly Argentine.^{[294][295]} Despite having lived in Spain since age 13, Messi has said: "Argentina is my country, my family, my way of expressing myself. I would change all my records to make the people in my country happy."^[391] In November 2016, with the Argentine Football Association being run by a FIFA committee for emergency due to an economic crisis, it was reported that three of the national team's security staff told Messi that they haven't been given their salaries for six months. He stepped in and paid the salaries of the three members.^{[392][393][394]}

Comparisons to Cristiano Ronaldo

Among his contemporary peers, Messi is most often compared and contrasted with Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo, as part of an ongoing rivalry that has been compared to past sports rivalries like the Muhammad Ali–Joe Frazier rivalry in boxing, the Björn Borg–John McEnroe rivalry in tennis, and the Ayrton Senna–Alain Prost rivalry from Formula One.^{[395][396]} Although Messi has at times denied any rivalry,^{[397][398]} they are widely believed to push one another in their aim to be the best player in the world:^[163] since 2008, both players have won five Ballons d'Or^[399] and four European Golden Shoes.^[400] Pundits and fans regularly argue the individual merits of both players;^{[163][401]} beyond their playing styles, the debate also revolves around their differing physiques—Ronaldo is 1.85 m (6 ft 1 in) with a muscular build—and contrasting public personalities, with Ronaldo's self-confidence and theatrics a foil to Messi's humility.^{[402][403][404]} Messi faces Ronaldo at least twice every season in *El Clásico*, which ranks among the world's most viewed annual sports events.^[405] Off the pitch, Ronaldo is his direct competitor in terms of salary, sponsorships, and social media fanbase.^[405]



Messi has been compared to Cristiano Ronaldo (left) throughout much of their careers.

In popular culture

According to *France Football*, Messi was the world's highest-paid footballer for five years out of six between 2009 and 2014; he was the first player to exceed the €40 million benchmark, with earnings of €41 million in 2013, and the €50–€60 million points, with income of €65 million in 2014.^{[171][407]} Messi was second on *Forbes* list of the world's highest-paid athletes (after Cristiano Ronaldo) with income of \$81.4 million from his salary and endorsements in 2015–16.^[408] In 2018 he was the first player to exceed the €100m benchmark for a calendar year, with earnings of €126m (\$154m) in combined income from salaries, bonuses and endorsements deals.^[409] Since 2008, he has been Barcelona's highest-paid player, receiving a salary that increased incrementally from €7.8 million to €13 million over the next five years.^{[78][79][147]} Signing a new Barcelona contract in 2017, he earns \$667,000 per week in wages, and Barcelona also paid him \$59.6 million as a signing on bonus.^[410] His new buyout clause is set at \$835 million

"That is me and Messi. We're right up there. Absolutely."

—US president Barack Obama when given an honorary number 10 jersey at the White House.^[406]

(€700 million).^[410] In addition to his salary and multimillion-euro bonuses, much of his income derives from endorsements; *SportsPro* has consequently cited him as one of the world's most marketable athletes every year since their research began in 2010.^[411] His main sponsor since 2006 is the sportswear company *Adidas*. As Barça's leading youth prospect, he had been signed with *Nike* since age 14, but transferred to Adidas after they successfully challenged their rival's claim to his image rights in court.^[412] Over time, Messi established himself as their leading brand endorser;^[405] from 2008, he had a long-running signature collection of Adidas F50 boots, and in 2015, he became the first footballer to receive his own sub-brand of Adidas boots, the Adidas Messi.^{[413][414]}

File:LIONEL MESSI - zona
San Siro - Milano -
Italy.JPG

A mural of Messi's likeness in the San Siro district of Milan, photographed in 2013

brand ambassador for *Gillette*, *Turkish Airlines*, *Ooredoo*, and *Tata Motors*, among other companies.^{[418][419][420][421]} Additionally, Messi was the face of Konami's video game series *Pro Evolution Soccer*, appearing on the covers of *PES 2009*, *PES 2010* and *PES 2011*. He subsequently signed with rival company *EA Sports* to become the face of their series *FIFA* and has since appeared on four consecutive covers from *FIFA 13* to *FIFA 16*.^{[422][423]}

Messi's global popularity and influence are well documented. He was among the *Time 100*, an annual list of the world's most influential people as published by *Time*, in 2011 and 2012.^{[424][425]} His fanbase on the social media website Facebook is among the largest of all public figures: within seven hours of its launch in April 2011, his Facebook page had nearly seven million followers, and by November 2013, he had become only the second sportsperson, after Cristiano Ronaldo, to amass over 50 million followers.^{[426][427]} According to a 2014 survey by sports research firm Repucom in 15 international markets, Messi was familiar to 87% of respondents around the world, of whom 78% perceived him favourably, making him the second-most recognised player globally, behind Ronaldo, and the most likable of all contemporary players.^{[428][429]}

Other events have illustrated Messi's presence in popular culture. A solid gold replica of his left foot, weighing 25 kg (55 lb) and valued at \$5.25 million, went on sale in Japan in March 2013 to raise funds for victims of the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami.^[430] A 2013 Turkish Airlines advertisement starring Messi, in which he engages in a *selfie* competition with then-Los Angeles Lakers star *Kobe Bryant*, was the most-watched ad on YouTube in the year of its release, receiving 137 million views, and was subsequently voted the best advertisement of the 2005–15 decade to commemorate YouTube's founding.^{[431][432]} *World Press Photo* selected



Fans of Messi in India decorated this vehicle.

"The Final Game", a photograph of Messi facing the World Cup trophy after Argentina's final defeat to Germany, as the best sports image of 2014.^[433] Messi, a documentary about his life by filmmaker Álex de la Iglesia, premiered at the Venice Film Festival in August 2014.^[434]

Personal life

Family and relationships

Since 2008, when he was 20, Messi has been in a relationship with Antonella Roccuzzo, a fellow native of Rosario. He has known Roccuzzo since he was five years old, as she is the cousin of his best friend since childhood, Lucas Scaglia, who is also a football player.^[435] After keeping their relationship private for a year, Messi first confirmed their romance in an interview in January 2009, before going public a month later during a carnival in Sitges after the Barcelona–Espanyol derby.

Messi and Roccuzzo have three sons: Thiago (born 2012), Mateo (born 2015) and Ciro (born 2018). To celebrate his partner's first pregnancy, Messi placed the ball under his shirt after scoring in Argentina's 4–0 win against Ecuador on 2 June 2012, before confirming the pregnancy in an interview two weeks later.^[437] Thiago was born in Barcelona on 2 November 2012, with Messi attending the birth after being given permission by Barcelona to miss training. He announced his son's arrival on his Facebook page, writing, "Today I am the happiest man in the world, my son was born and thanks to God for this gift!"^[438] Thiago's name and handprints are tattooed on his left calf.^[150] In April 2015, Messi confirmed on Facebook that they were expecting another child.^[439] He missed training ahead of a match against Atlético Madrid to attend the birth of his second son, Mateo, on 11 September 2015 in Barcelona.^[440] On 30 June 2017, he married Roccuzzo at a luxury hotel named Hotel City Center in Rosario with about 260 guests attending his wedding.^[441] On 15 October 2017, his wife announced they were expecting their third child in an Instagram post, with the words "Family of 5".^{[442][443]} On 10 March 2018, Messi skipped the match against Málaga after Ciro was born.^[444]

"Leo is not shy. He's introverted. He's reserved."

—Endocrinologist Dr. Diego Schwarzstein addressed Messi's growth hormone deficiency from 1997 to 2001. According to Bleacher Report's Richard Fitzpatrick, "Schwarzstein and Messi built up a close relationship during more than four years of treatment."^[436]

Messi enjoys a close relationship with his immediate family members, particularly his mother, Celia, whose face he has tattooed on his left shoulder. His professional affairs are largely run as a family business: his father, Jorge, has been his agent since he was 14, and his oldest brother, Rodrigo, handles his daily schedule and publicity. His mother and other brother, Matías, manage his charitable organisation, the Leo Messi Foundation, and take care of personal and professional matters in Rosario.^[445]

Since leaving for Spain at age 13, Messi has maintained close ties to his hometown of Rosario, even preserving his distinct Rosarino accent. He has kept ownership of his family's old house, although it has long stood empty; he maintains a penthouse apartment in an exclusive residential building for his mother, as well as a family compound just outside the city. Once when he was in training with the national team in Buenos Aires, he made a three-hour trip by car to Rosario immediately after practice to have dinner with his family, spent the night with them, and returned to Buenos Aires the next day in time for practice. Messi keeps in daily contact via phone and text with a small group of confidants in Rosario, most of whom were fellow members of "The Machine of '87" at

Newell's Old Boys. Although considered a one-club man, he has long planned to return to Rosario to end his playing career at Newell's. He was on bad terms with the club after his transfer to Barcelona, but by 2012 their public feud had ended, with Newell's embracing their ties with Messi, even issuing a club membership card to his newborn son.^{[17][446][447]}

Charity

Throughout his career, Messi has been involved in charitable efforts aimed at vulnerable children, a commitment that stems in part from the medical difficulties he faced in his own childhood. Since 2004, he has contributed his time and finances to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), an organisation with which Barcelona also have a strong association.^{[448][449]} Messi has served as a UNICEF goodwill ambassador since his appointment in March 2010, completing his first field mission for the organisation four months later as he travelled to Haiti to bring public awareness to the plight of the country's children in the wake of the recent earthquake. He has since participated in UNICEF campaigns targeting HIV prevention, education, and the social inclusion of disabled children.^[450] To celebrate his son's first birthday, in November 2013, Messi and Thiago were part of a publicity campaign to raise awareness of mortality rates among disadvantaged children.^[451]



Messi pictured in July 2014

In addition to his work with UNICEF, Messi founded his own charitable organisation, the Leo Messi Foundation, which supports access to health care, education, and sport for children.^[452] It was established in 2007 following a visit Messi paid to a hospital for terminally ill children in Boston, an experience that resonated with him to the point that he decided to reinvest part of his earnings into society.^[446] Through his foundation, Messi has awarded research grants, financed medical training, and invested in the development of medical centres and projects in Argentina, Spain, and elsewhere in the world.^{[446][453]} In addition to his own fundraising activities, such as his global "Messi and Friends" football matches, his foundation receives financial support from various companies to which he has assigned his name in endorsement agreements, with Adidas as their main sponsor.^{[454][455]}

Messi has also invested in youth football in Argentina: he financially supports Sarmiento, a football club based in the Rosario neighbourhood where he was born, committing in 2013 to the refurbishment of their facilities and the installation of all-weather pitches, and funds the management of several youth players at Newell's Old Boys and rival club Rosario Central, as well as at River Plate and Boca Juniors in Buenos Aires.^[446] At Newell's Old Boys, his boyhood club, he funded the 2012 construction of a new gymnasium and a dormitory inside the club's stadium for their youth academy. His former youth coach at Newell's, Ernesto Vecchio, is employed by the Leo Messi Foundation as a talent scout for young players.^[17] On 7 June 2016, Messi won a libel case against La Razón newspaper and was awarded €65,000 in damages, which he donated to the charity Doctors without Borders.^{[456][457]}

Legal issues

Messi's financial affairs came under investigation in 2013 for suspected tax evasion. Offshore companies in tax havens Uruguay and Belize were allegedly used to evade €4.1 million in taxes related to sponsorship earnings between 2007 and 2009. An unrelated shell company in Panama, set up in 2012, was subsequently identified as belonging to the Messis in the Panama Papers data leak. Messi, who pleaded ignorance of the alleged scheme,

voluntarily paid arrears of €5.1 million in August 2013. He stood trial alongside his father on three counts of tax evasion in May 2016.^[458] On 6 July 2016, Messi and his father were both found guilty of tax fraud and were handed suspended 21-month prison sentences and respectively ordered to pay €1.7 million and €1.4 million in fines.^[459]

While the District Attorney did not consider there to be motives to accuse Messi, the state lawyer's office became the only party that requested a punishment for him, despite his declarations that he was not aware of any of the deals that were taking place with his money. Facing the judge, he said, "I just played football."^[460]

Career statistics

Club

As of 20 May 2018

Appearances and goals by club, season and competition

Club	Season	League			Copa del Rey		Champions League		Other		Total	
		Division	Apps	Goals	Apps	Goals	Apps	Goals	Apps	Goals	Apps	Goals
Barcelona C	2003–04 ^[461]	Tercera División	10	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	10	5
Barcelona B	2003–04 ^[41]	Segunda División B	5	0	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	0
	2004–05 ^[42]	Segunda División B	17	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	17	6
	Total		22	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	22	6
Barcelona	2004–05 ^[42]	La Liga	7	1	1	0	1	0	—	—	9	1
	2005–06 ^[56]	La Liga	17	6	2	1	6	1	0	0	25	8
	2006–07 ^[59]	La Liga	26	14	2	2	5	1	3 ^[a]	0	36	17
	2007–08 ^[74]	La Liga	28	10	3	0	9	6	—	—	40	16
	2008–09 ^[82]	La Liga	31	23	8	6	12	9	—	—	51	38
	2009–10 ^[95]	La Liga	35	34	3	1	11	8	4 ^[b]	4	53	47
	2010–11 ^[110]	La Liga	33	31	7	7	13	12	2 ^[c]	3	55	53
	2011–12 ^[117]	La Liga	37	50	7	3	11	14	5 ^[d]	6	60	73
	2012–13 ^[159]	La Liga	32	46	5	4	11	8	2 ^[c]	2	50	60
	2013–14 ^[167]	La Liga	31	28	6	5	7	8	2 ^[c]	0	46	41
	2014–15 ^[184]	La Liga	38	43	6	5	13	10	—	—	57	58
	2015–16 ^[462]	La Liga	33	26	5	5	7	6	4 ^[e]	4	49	41
	2016–17 ^[463]	La Liga	34	37	7	5	9	11	2 ^[c]	1	52	54
	2017–18 ^[464]	La Liga	36	34	6	4	10	6	2 ^[c]	1	54	45
	Total		418	383	68	48	125	100	26	21	637	552
Career total			450	394	68	48	125	100	26	21	669	563

a. One appearance in UEFA Super Cup, two appearances in Supercopa de España

- b. One appearance in UEFA Super Cup, one appearance and two goals in Supercopa de España, two appearances and two goals in FIFA Club World Cup
- c. Appearances in Supercopa de España
- d. One appearance and one goal in UEFA Super Cup, two appearances and three goals in Supercopa de España, two appearances and two goals in FIFA Club World Cup
- e. One appearance and two goals in UEFA Super Cup, two appearances and one goal in Supercopa de España, one appearance and one goal in FIFA Club World Cup

International

As of 16 June 2018

Appearances and goals by national team, year and competition

Team	Year	Competitive		Friendly		Total	
		Apps	Goals	Apps	Goals	Apps	Goals
<u>Argentina U20</u> ^{[260][261]}	2004	—		2	3	2	3
	2005	16 ^[a]	11	—		16	11
	Total	16	11	2	3	18	14
<u>Argentina U23</u> ^[285]	2008	5 ^[b]	2	—		5	2
	Total	5	2	—		5	2
<u>Argentina</u> ^{[267][465]}	2005	3 ^[c]	0	2	0	5	0
	2006	3 ^[d]	1	4	1	7	2
	2007	10 ^[e]	4	4	2	14	6
	2008	6 ^[c]	1	2	1	8	2
	2009	8 ^[c]	1	2	2	10	3
	2010	5 ^[d]	0	5	2	10	2
	2011	8 ^[f]	2	5	2	13	4
	2012	5 ^[c]	5	4	7	9	12
	2013	5 ^[c]	3	2	3	7	6
	2014	7 ^[d]	4	7	4	14	8
	2015	6 ^[g]	1	2	3	8	4
	2016	10 ^[h]	8	1	0	11	8
	2017	5 ^[c]	4	2	0	7	4
	2018	1	0	1	3	2	3
	Total	82	34	43	30	125	64
Career total		103	47	45	33	148	80

- a. Nine appearances and five goals in the 2005 South American U-20 Championship, seven appearances and six goals in the 2005 FIFA World Youth Championship

- b. Appearances in [Summer Olympics](#)
- c. Appearances in [FIFA World Cup qualification](#)
- d. Appearances in [FIFA World Cup](#)
- e. Six appearances and two goals in [Copa América](#), four appearances and two goals in [FIFA World Cup qualification](#)
- f. Four appearances in [Copa América](#), four appearances and two goals in [FIFA World Cup qualification](#)
- g. Appearances in [Copa América](#)
- h. Five appearances and three goals in [FIFA World Cup qualification](#), five appearances and five goals in [Copa América Centenario](#)

Honours and achievements

Club

Barcelona^{[466][467]}

- [La Liga](#): 2004–05, 2005–06, 2008–09, 2009–10, 2010–11, 2012–13, 2014–15, 2015–16, 2017–18
- [Copa del Rey](#): 2008–09, 2011–12, 2014–15, 2015–16, 2016–17, 2017–18
- [Supercopa de España](#): 2005, ^[a] 2006, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2016
- [UEFA Champions League](#): 2005–06, 2008–09, 2010–11, 2014–15
- [UEFA Super Cup](#): 2009, 2011, 2015
- [FIFA Club World Cup](#): 2009, 2011, 2015



Messi accepting the [Golden Ball](#) award, alongside his future teammate Neymar after the [2011 FIFA Club World Cup Final](#)

International

Argentina

- [FIFA U-20 World Cup](#): 2005
- [Olympic Gold Medal](#): 2008

Individual

Awards

- [FIFA Ballon d'Or/Ballon d'Or](#): 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2015^{[471][472]}
- [European Golden Shoe](#): 2010, 2012, 2013, 2017, 2018^{[158][238][473]}
- [FIFA World Player of the Year](#): 2009^[472]
- [FIFA World Cup Golden Ball](#): 2014^[474]
- [Copa América Golden Ball](#): 2015^{[475][476][477][478]}
- [UEFA Men's Player of the Year Award](#): 2011, 2015^[199]
- [UEFA Club Footballer of the Year](#): 2009^[479]

- UEFA Club Forward of the Year: 2009^[479]
- Onze d'Or: 2009, 2010–11, 2011–12, 2017–18^{[480][481]}
- Globe Soccer Awards Best Player of the Year: 2015^[482]
- La Liga Best Player: 2008–09, 2009–10, 2010–11, 2011–12, 2012–13, 2014–15^{[483][484][485]}
- La Liga Best Forward: 2008–09, 2009–10, 2010–11, 2011–12, 2012–13, 2014–15, 2015–16^{[483][484][485][486]}
- FIFA Club World Cup Golden Ball: 2009, 2011^[487]
- FIFA Club World Cup Silver Ball: 2015^[488]
- FIFA Club World Cup Final Most Valuable Player: 2009, 2011^[487]
- FIFA World Youth Championship Golden Ball: 2005^[489]
- FIFA World Youth Championship Golden Shoe: 2005^[489]
- Olimpia de Oro (Argentine Sportsperson of the Year): 2011^[483]
- Olimpia de Plata (Argentine Footballer of the Year): 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017^{[483][490][491][492]}
- Copa América Best Young Player: 2007^[493]
- FIFPro Young World Player of the Year: 2006, 2007, 2008^[493]
- Bravo Award: 2007^[494]
- Golden Boy (Young European Footballer of the Year): 2005^[55]
- IFFHS World's Best Playmaker: 2015, 2016, 2017^{[495][496][497]}
- IFFHS World's Best Top Goalscorer: 2011, 2012^[498]
- IFFHS World's Best Top Division Goalscorer: 2012, 2013, 2017^[498]
- IFFHS Men's World Team: 2017^[499]
- La Liga Player of the Month: January 2016, April 2017, April 2018^{[500][501][502]}
- FIFA FIFPro World XI: 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017^{[493][503][504][505]}
- UEFA Team of the Year: 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017^{[479][506][507]}
- UEFA Ultimate Team of the Year^[508]
- La Liga Team of the Season: 2014–15, 2015–16^[509]
- UEFA La Liga Team of The Season: 2015–16, 2016–17^{[510][511]}
- FIFA World Cup Dream Team: 2014^[512]
- Copa América Dream Team: 2007, 2011, 2015, 2016^{[513][514][515][341]}
- AFA Team of All Time (published 2015)^[516]
- UEFA Goal of the Season: 2006–07, 2014–15, 2015–16^{[483][194][517]}
- Copa América Best Goal: 2007^{[518][519]}

Performances

- La Liga top goalscorer: 2009–10, 2011–12, 2012–13, 2016–17, 2017–18^[520]
- La Liga top assist provider: 2010–11, 2014–15, 2015–16, 2017–18^[521]
- Copa del Rey top goalscorer: 2008–09, 2010–11, 2013–14, 2015–16, 2016–17^[522]
- Copa del Rey top assist provider: 2016–17, 2017–18^[523]
- UEFA Champions League top goalscorer: 2008–09, 2009–10, 2010–11, 2011–12, 2014–15^[524]
- UEFA Champions League top assist provider: 2011–12, 2014–15^[525]
- FIFA Club World Cup top goalscorer: 2011^[526]
- FIFA World Youth Championship top goalscorer: 2005^[262]

- Copa América top assist provider: 2011, 2015, 2016^{[514][527][528]}

Records

As of May 2018

World

- Most (FIFA) Ballons d'Or: 5 (2009–12, 2015) (shared with Cristiano Ronaldo)^[529]
- Guinness World Record as top goalscorer for club and country in a calendar year: 91 goals in 2012^[142]
- Top goalscorer in all club competitions in a calendar year: 79 goals in 2012^[140]
- Top goalscorer in a club season: 73 goals in 2011–12^[530]
- Longest goalscoring run in a domestic league: 21 matches, 33 goals in 2012–13^{[156][155][531]}
- Only player to have won more than one FIFA Club World Cup Golden Ball^[487]
- Most appearances in the FIFPro World XI: 11 times (2007–2017) (shared with Cristiano Ronaldo)^[532]

Continental

- Most European Golden Shoes: 5^[473]
- Most goals scored in a European Cup/Champions League game: 5 goals (shared with 13 other players)^{[533][534]}
- Most goals scored in the UEFA Champions League group stages: 60 (shared with Cristiano Ronaldo)^[535]
- Most hat-tricks scored in the UEFA Champions League: 7 (shared with Cristiano Ronaldo)^[536]
- Youngest player to make 100 appearances in the UEFA Champions League: 28 years, 84 days in 2015^[537]
- Top goalscorer in the UEFA Super Cup: 3 goals (shared with Arie Haan, Oleg Blokhin, Gerd Müller, Rob Rensenbrink, François Van der Elst, Terry McDermott, and Radamel Falcao)^[538]
- Top assist provider in Copa América: 11 assists^[539]
- Most goals scored in CONMEBOL World Cup Qualifiers: 21 goals (shared with Luis Suárez)^[359]

Spain

- Most Best Player in La Liga awards: 6 (2009–13, 2015)^[540]
- Most Best Forward in La Liga awards: 7 (2009–13, 2015, 2016)^[540]
- Top goalscorer in La Liga: 383 goals^[541]
- Top assist provider in La Liga: 149 assists^{[note 4][188][189][542]}
- Top goalscorer in the Supercopa de España: 13 goals^{[299][543]}
- Top goalscorer in a La Liga season: 50 goals in 2011–12^[544]
- Most hat-tricks scored in a La Liga season: 8 in 2011–12 (shared with Cristiano Ronaldo)^[299]
- First player to reach 300 La Liga goals; only player to reach 350 La Liga goals.^{[545][241]}

- Most opposition teams scored against in La Liga history: 36^{[546][547]}

Argentina

- Argentina all-time top goalscorer: 61 goals^{[548][549][550]}
- Top goalscorer for Argentina in a calendar year: 12 goals in 2012 (shared with Gabriel Batistuta)^[299]
- Only Argentine player to score against every CONMEBOL nation^[551]
- Youngest player to play for Argentina in a FIFA World Cup: 18 years, 357 days in 2006^[269]
- Youngest player to score for Argentina in a FIFA World Cup: 18 years, 357 days in 2006^[269]
- Youngest player to reach 100 caps for a country under CONMEBOL's jurisdiction: 27 years, 361 days in 2015^[552]
- Most Argentine Footballer of the Year awards: 11 (2005, 2007–13, 2015–17)^{[553][554][555][556]}

Barcelona

- Top goalscorer in the Derbi barceloní: 21 goals^[557]
- Top goalscorer in El Clásico: 26 goals^{[note 5][558]}
- Top goalscorer in the Athletic–Barcelona clásico: 24 goals^[559]
- Top goalscorer in official competitions: 552 goals^{[560][561]}
- Top goalscorer including friendlies: 586 goals^{[560][561]}
- Top goalscorer in the UEFA Champions League: 100 goals^{[560][561][562]}
- Top goalscorer in European competitions: 103 goals^{[560][561]}
- Top goalscorer in international competitions: 108 goals^{[560][561]}
- Most hat-tricks scored in La Liga: 30^[560]
- Most hat-tricks scored in all competitions: 41^[560]
- Most official trophies won with the team: 32 (shared with Andrés Iniesta)^{[560][467]}

See also

- List of one-club men
- Football records in Spain
- UEFA club competition records and statistics
- Football at the Summer Olympics
- FIFA U-20 World Cup
- FIFA World Cup awards

	Biography portal
	Association football portal
	Argentina portal

- L'Équipe Champion of Champions

Notes

A. In isolation, *Andrés* is pronounced [an'drɛs].

References

a. See:[468][469][470]

Notes

1. ▪ According to his club's official website, FCBarcelona.com, and his authorised biography, *Messi* by Guillem Balagué, his surname is the single "Messi", in accordance with Argentine customs.^{[3][4]} Other sources, including a 2014 document by FIFA, give his surname as the double "Messi Cuccittini".^[5] After winning a libel case in 2017, Messi's own management company stated: "The football player Lionel Andres Messi Cuccittini has donated a total of €72,783.20 to the organisation Doctors Without Borders."^[1]
▪ According to Milan Sufflay, the surname *Messi* comes from Meksi, Mexi, Mesi family originated from *mjek*—meaning Doctor—in Albanian.^{[6][7][8]}
2. In addition to four FIFA Ballons d'Or, Messi received France Football's Ballon d'Or and FIFA's World Player of the Year award prior to their fusion; both organisations credit him with five (FIFA) Ballons d'Or.^{[10][11]}
3. Since surpassed by Cristiano Ronaldo, Messi is the second-highest goalscorer in the European Cup/Champions League as of April 2018.
4. Assist statistics began in 1990.
5. Does not include a goal scored in the 2017 International Champions Cup.

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