

Lionel Messi

Argentine-born football player

Lionel Messi, in full **Lionel Andrés Messi**, also called **Leo Messi**, (born June 24, 1987, [Rosario](#), Argentina), Argentine-born [football](#) (soccer) player who was named Fédération Internationale de [Football Association](#) (FIFA) world player of the year five times (2009–12 and 2015).

Messi started playing football as a boy and in 1995 joined the youth team of Newell's Old Boys (a Rosario-based top-division football club). Messi's phenomenal skills garnered the attention of prestigious clubs on both sides of the Atlantic. At age 13 Messi and his family relocated to Barcelona, and he began playing for [FC Barcelona](#)'s under-14 team. He scored 21 goals in 14 games for the junior team, and he quickly graduated through the higher-level teams until at age 16 he was given his informal debut with FC Barcelona in a friendly match.

In the 2004–05 season Messi, then 17, became the youngest official player and goal scorer in the Spanish La Liga (the country's highest division of football). Though only 5 feet 7 inches (1.7 metres) tall and weighing 148 pounds (67 kg), he was strong, well-balanced, and versatile on the field. Naturally left-footed, quick, and precise in control of the ball, Messi was a keen pass distributor and could readily thread his way through packed defenses. In 2005 he was granted Spanish citizenship, an honour greeted with mixed feelings by the fiercely Catalan supporters of Barcelona. The next year Messi and Barcelona won the Champions League (the European club championship) title.

Messi's play continued to rapidly improve over the years, and by 2008 he was one of the most dominant players in the world, finishing second to [Manchester United's Cristiano Ronaldo](#) in the voting for the 2008 [FIFA](#) World Player of the Year. In early 2009 Messi capped off a spectacular 2008–09 season by helping FC Barcelona capture the club's first "treble" (winning three major European club titles in one season): the team won the La Liga championship, the Copa del Rey (Spain's major domestic cup), and

the Champions League title. He scored 38 goals in 51 matches during that season, and he bested Ronaldo in the balloting for FIFA World Player of the Year honours by a record margin. During the 2009–10 season Messi scored 34 goals in domestic games as Barcelona repeated as La Liga champions. He earned the Golden Shoe award as Europe's leading scorer, and he was named the 2010 world player of the year (the award was renamed the FIFA Ballon d'Or that year).

Messi led Barcelona to La Liga and Champions League titles the following season, which helped him capture an unprecedented third consecutive world player of the year award. In March 2012 he netted his 233rd goal for Barcelona, becoming the club's all-time leading scorer in La Liga play when only 24 years old. He finished Barcelona's 2011–12 season (which included another Copa del Rey win) with 73 goals in all competitions, breaking [Gerd Müller](#)'s 39-year-old record for single-season goals in a major European football league. His landmark season led to his being named the 2012 world player of the year, which made Messi the first player to win the honour four times. His 46 La Liga goals in 2012–13 led the league, and Barcelona captured another domestic top-division championship that season. In 2014 he set the overall Barcelona goal record when he scored his 370th goal as a member of the team. That same year he also broke the career scoring records for play in both the Champions League (with 72 goals) and La Liga (with 253 goals). Messi helped Barcelona capture another treble during the 2014–15 season, leading the team with 43 goals scored over the course of the campaign, which resulted in his fifth world player of the year honour. He scored 41 goals across all competitions for Barcelona in 2015–16, and the club won the La Liga title and the Copa del Rey during that season. Messi topped that with 53 goals for Barcelona in 2016–17, leading the team to another Copa del Rey title. In 2017–18 he scored 45 goals, and Barcelona won the La Liga–Copa del Rey double once again. Messi scored 51 goals across all domestic competitions in 2018–19 as Barcelona won another La Liga championship. In December 2019 he won his sixth career Ballon d'Or.

Despite his dual citizenship and professional success in Spain, Messi's ties with his homeland remained strong, and he was a key member of various Argentine national teams from 2005. He played on [Argentina's](#) victorious 2005 FIFA World Youth Championship squad, represented the country in the 2006 [World Cup](#), and scored two goals in five matches as Argentina swept to the gold medal at the [Beijing 2008 Olympic Games](#). Messi helped Argentina reach the 2010 World Cup quarterfinals, where the team was eliminated by Germany for the second consecutive time in World Cup play. At the 2014 World Cup, Messi put on a dazzling display, scoring four goals and almost single-handedly propelling an offense-deficient Argentina team through the group stage and into the knockout rounds, where Argentina then advanced to the World Cup final for the first time in 24 years. Argentina lost that contest 1–0 to Germany, but Messi nevertheless won the Golden Ball award as the tournament's best player. During the 2016 [Copa América](#) Centenario tournament, he netted his 55th international goal to break [Gabriel Batistuta's](#) Argentine scoring record. After Argentina was defeated in the Copa final—the team's third consecutive finals loss in a major tournament—Messi said that he was quitting the national team, but his short-lived “retirement” lasted less than two months before he announced his return to the Argentine team. At the 2018 World Cup, he helped an overmatched Argentine side reach the knockout stage, where they were eliminated by eventual champion France in their first match. In 2019 he was a member of Argentina's third-place team at the Copa América.

Off the field, Messi was one of the biggest athletic stars in the world. In addition to earning a football salary that was frequently, with Ronaldo's, one of the two largest athletes' salaries in all professional [sports](#), he was an extremely successful product pitchman, notably for the sportswear company Adidas. In 2013 Messi and his father (who handled his son's finances) were charged with tax fraud and accused of using overseas shell companies to avoid paying €4.2 million in Spanish taxes on endorsement earnings. Despite subsequently paying €5 million to the Spanish state, the pair were nevertheless ordered to stand trial on the charges in 2016. In July of that year, Messi and his father were each given suspended 21-month prison sentences (first-time offenders in

Spain are given suspended sentences if the duration is under two years) and were fined €2 million and €1.5 million, respectively.