

# Triumph and Transformation: Messi's Journey in Club and International Football

By

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B.A., Universidad de Rosario, 2017

M.A., University Name, 2024

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
Department of Something at University Name

City, State or Province

Month YYYY

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank my family and friends for their support.

I thank my colleagues for the discussions and feedback.

I thank my committee for the invaluable guidance.

## PREFACE

The life of Lionel Messi embodies the pinnacle of footballing achievement. His otherworldly talent captivated the world, shattering records while leading FC Barcelona and the Argentina national team to countless victories. This dissertation delves into Messi's remarkable journey, providing a comprehensive analysis of his extraordinary career.

Beginning with his meteoric rise at Barcelona, this work examines Messi's iconic goals, titles, and the transformative impact he had on the sport. It then explores his triumphs—and heartbreaks—with Argentina, culminating in his ultimate conquest: winning the World Cup. Finally, the dissertation analyzes Messi's continued evolution on the pitch at Paris Saint-Germain and the potential future role with Inter Miami.

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# CHAPTER 1

## The FC Barcelona years

### 1.1 Introduction

Lionel Messi’s ascension from a gifted youth prospect to a global football icon unfolded over a remarkable period at FC Barcelona. His time with the Catalan giants serves as a testament to both extraordinary talent and unwavering dedication, ultimately elevating him to a status few athletes ever achieve.

This chapter examines the formative years of Messi’s legendary career. By analyzing his performances, his unparalleled success in winning titles, and the transformative impact he had on FC Barcelona, the groundwork for understanding his enduring influence on the sport is established. His successes are reflected in titles, such as Messi and Guardiola (2011) and Messi et al. (2015), and in astounding individual performances (e.g, Messi, 2009).

This exploration sets the stage for the dissertation’s subsequent analysis of Messi’s continued evolution throughout his career, including the challenges and triumphs he faced beyond Barcelona’s hallowed grounds.

This chapter is organized as follows. Section 1.2 provides background information on Messi’s early years at FC Barcelona. Section 1.3 presents an overview of the titles Messi won during his time at the club. Section 1.4 analyzes Messi’s performance metrics during his tenure at FC Barcelona.

### 1.2 Background

Lionel Messi joined FC Barcelona’s youth academy, La Masia, at the age of 13. His prodigious talent was evident from an early age, and he quickly rose through the ranks of the club’s youth system.

Messi made his first-team debut for Barcelona in 2004, at the age of 17, under the coaching of Frank Rijkaard. He quickly established himself as a key player for the club, showcasing his remarkable dribbling ability, vision, and goal-scoring prowess.

In fact, Messi’s first goal for Barcelona came on May 1, 2005, in a match against Albacete. In the 88th

minute of the game, Messi received a pass from Ronaldinho and skillfully put the ball above the goalkeeper to celebrate his first goal. At just 17 years and 10 months old, Messi became the youngest goal scorer in the history of the club.

## 1.3 Titles

During his time at FC Barcelona, Lionel Messi won numerous titles, as depicted in Table 1.1. These include multiple La Liga titles, UEFA Champions League titles, and Copa del Rey titles.

Table 1.1: Lionel Messi's Titles with FC Barcelona

Competition	Number of Titles
La Liga	10
Copa del Rey	7
UEFA Champions League	4

His position in the field and playing style evolved over the years, as different coaches utilized his talents in various ways. For example, under Pep Guardiola, Messi played as a false nine, dropping deep to create space for his teammates and exploit opposition defenses. This constant evolution and adaptation to different roles on the field demonstrate Messi's versatility and footballing intelligence, and were key to his success at Barcelona.

Table 1.2: Goals and Assists by Lionel Messi Each Year in FC Barcelona

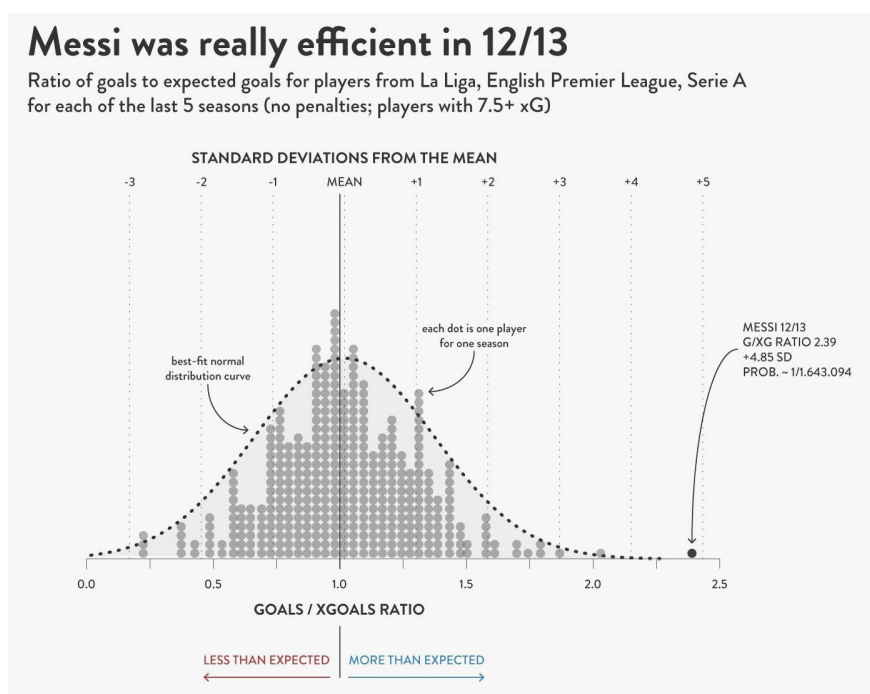
Season	Goals	Assists
2004-05	9	1
2005-06	25	8
2006-07	36	17
2007-08	40	16
2008-09	51	38
2009-10	53	47
2010-11	55	53
2011-12	60	73
2012-13	50	60
2013-14	46	41
2014-15	58	57
2015-16	49	41
2016-17	52	54
2017-18	54	45
2018-19	50	51
2019-20	44	31
2020-21	47	38

## 1.4 Performance

The performance of Lionel Messi during his tenure at FC Barcelona is nothing short of extraordinary. His goal-scoring and playmaking abilities have earned him numerous accolades and titles. Table 1.2 showcases Messi’s remarkable goal and assist statistics, highlighting his immense contribution to the team’s success.

Messi had a record-breaking calendar year in 2012, scoring 91 goals in all competitions. This peak performance is illustrated in Figure 1.1, which shows the ratio of goals to expected goals (xG) for Messi and other players in the 2012/13 season. Messi consistently outperformed his xG, demonstrating his exceptional finishing ability and efficiency in front of goal.

Figure 1.1: Messi’s Exceptional Finishing in 2012/13



*Notes:* The figure shows the ratio of goals to expected goals (xG) for several players in the 2012/13 season. *Source:* Twitter, @xGPhilosophy (<https://twitter.com/xGPhilosophy/status/1604202292139491328>)

Messi was coached by some of the best managers in the world during his time at Barcelona, including Pep Guardiola, Luis Enrique, and Ronald Koeman. A key aspect of Messi’s success was his ability to adapt to different tactical systems and playing styles. For instance, Guardiola implemented a “false nine” role for Messi, allowing him to drop deep and create overloads in midfield. This tactical innovation is explored in Appendix 1.B.

Messi's performances resulted in multiple awards and accolades. Appendix 1.A provides a summary of Messi's Ballon d'Or awards, highlighting his dominance in world football during his time at Barcelona.

## 1.5 Messi's Departure from Barcelona

Despite the deep connection between Messi and FC Barcelona, a complex set of circumstances led to his unexpected departure from the club in 2021. Financial constraints within Barcelona, coupled with LaLiga's salary cap restrictions, made it impossible to renew Messi's contract. Even with substantial salary concessions on Messi's part, the club could not comply with the league's financial regulations.

This unforeseen turn of events marked a shocking end to an era that had defined both the player and the club. Messi's exit underscored the complexities of modern football, highlighting the interplay between sporting ambition and financial considerations.

# APPENDIX

## 1.A Ballon d'Or Awards

This section provides a summary of Lionel Messi's Ballon d'Or awards.

Table 1.A: Lionel Messi's Ballon d'Or Awards

Year	Ballon d'Or Position
2007	3rd
2008	2nd
2009	1st
2010	1st
2011	1st
2012	1st
2013	2nd
2014	2nd
2015	1st
2016	2nd
2017	3rd
2018	5th
2019	1st
2020	6th
2021	7th
2022	1st
<b>Total</b>	8 awards

## 1.B False Nine Role

One of the most notable tactical innovations during Lionel Messi's time at FC Barcelona was his deployment as a false nine. This positional change, implemented by then-coach Pep Guardiola, revolutionized the way Messi played and influenced the team's overall style of play. The false nine role allowed Messi to drop deep into midfield, creating numerical superiority and overloading opposition defenses.

Figure 1.A: Messi and Guardiola



*Notes:* The figure shows a picture of Messi and Guardiola. *Source:* Eurosport.

The false nine role was a strategic masterstroke that maximized Messi's playmaking abilities and goal-scoring prowess. This tactic went to change the landscape of modern football, with many teams adopting similar approaches to utilize their creative forwards effectively.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Messi's International Journey**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Lionel Messi's international career with the Argentine national team has been a rollercoaster of emotions, filled with triumphs and heartbreaks.

## CHAPTER 3

Another chapter title



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