

One Last Chance

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Growing up a Barcelona fan and witnessing Leo Messi's arrival into the first-team and his eventual dominance of the world, I could never have predicted that there'd be a time where he would struggle to make it to the World Cup with his national side. A trophy that was inches away from his hands three years back is now one that looks like a fleeting fantasy.

The weight of a whole nation seems to fall on the 5'7" frame of the little man. While you could argue that Argentina have, arguably, the best options available going forward, the fact is that those players are polar opposites to what they are for their respective clubs. You have Di Maria, who looks out of place and extremely wasteful on the right-wing, far from his good years as a central-midfielder. You have Sergio Aguero, the greatest goalscorer in the history of the Premier League who struggles to find his English form for country. And what Higuain's done over these years for Argentina is quite evident. While Burruchaga immortalized Maradona, it was Higuain who couldn't do the same for Messi.

Imagine a career where you've won two Copa Americas and one World Cup. Add to that 8 league titles and 4 UCL trophies while having the biggest say in how the winners of those trophies were decided. You'd be hailed as the greatest of all time. There isn't much room for doubt anyways but this career would have smothered any that remained. Luck, however, chose a different path for a certain man. Lionel Messi is the best footballer alive. No matter what you say or think. Teammates have let him down in every major tournament as he's dragged Argentina to three consecutive finals only to watch his perfect passes be put everywhere other than in the back of the net by the likes of Di Maria and Higuain.

Look at Messi's game vs Peru – I'm not one for stats but this is important to note to get my point across – 6 key passes and 4 clear-cut chances created. And as you'd expect, all were missed by his teammates, this time including new addition Benedetto. What else is Messi supposed to do? He can't really have a game better than this and watching Argentina's matches will make you realize that. It's not his fault this happens and he doesn't deserve one ounce of the blame or hate he gets for Argentina's lack of trophies. For the past one year in this FIFA World Cup

qualifying campaign, all of Argentina's goals have been scored by Messi. That says all you need to know about the team. There's too much for one person to do.

One of Argentina's greatest and one of football's purest #10s, Riquelme, had this to say:

"If I were returned the passes as they are returned to Messi in the national team, I would shout on them until I had no voice, I do not understand what's wrong with these kids, I do not understand how they play so badly here. Leo must be losing his patience all the time."

I'm grateful that out of the 4 – 5 billion years that Earth has existed, I was born in the era of Lionel Andres Messi. There's absolutely nothing in the world that can tarnish or belittle this man's legacy and his status as the greatest footballer to live. A World Cup would certainly cement that claim in those who still have doubts.

Before all that, however, there's one final mission for the little man himself. A trip to Ecuador, at one of the most hostile stadiums in the world to visitors due to altitude and location, to seal a spot in one last World Cup to battle for. As long as there's a Messi in this team, there's hope.

Vamos Argentina!

- **This article also appears on the official totalBarca page at <http://www.totalbarca.com/2017/10/one-last-chance/>**