



PHOTO: INTERNET

Barcelona sensation Lionel Messi is all-smiles as he holds up three fingers to signify the three Champions League titles he has won following Saturday's triumph over Manchester United at Wembley.

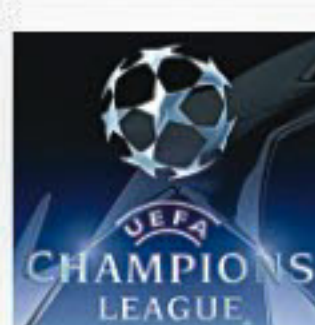
The world is his oyster



HOW THEY RATED



AGENCIES, Undated



The disconcerting thing is, Lionel Messi has conquered the world at the age of just 23.

His performance of beauty and industry at Wembley, which he capped off with a stunning goal, catapulted Barcelona to a fourth European crown and had his coach describing him as unparalleled.

Driven to distraction by Messi's darting, probing runs, dancing feet and sudden acceleration, Manchester United were left for dead.

The goal he scored made him the top scorer in the Champions League for the third consecutive year. It also equalled Ruud van Nistelrooy's competition record of 12 in a single campaign.

The list of awards continues to accumulate for a player who shuns the limelight and traditional footballer's nightlife off the pitch in preference to a game of PlayStation with his

nephews.

At times at Wembley it was as if Messi was indeed playing by computer. Only the stoic resilience of Rio Ferdinand and Nemanja Vidic kept United on level terms at half-time.

But there was no denying Messi in the second half.

He ripped at the badge on his shirt after producing a Wembley goal for the ages, a 25m crack shot with no back lift that flew past Edwin van der Sar.

Even a man as wedded to the value of the collective as Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola was finally moved to anoint Messi as the finest player he has seen - or is ever likely to.

"Lionel is the best player I have seen, probably the best player I will ever see," Guardiola said.

Without him, I don't think we would have that qualitative leap that we have with him in the side.

"Messi is unique, a one-off, and we'll continue to try

to have the right players around him and put him at his ease.

"When he doesn't play well it is because something is wrong with the environment that surrounds him.

The man himself, as usual, had little to say after receiving the man of the match award with a nervous smile.

He exited the room as quickly as possible.

"This is a game to remember," he said. "What this team does is tremendous and we are still not conscious of what we are achieving. We want to keep winning things."

And winning things is what he does - five Spanish league titles, three Champions Leagues, a Spanish King's Cup and sundry other titles.

Almost certainly he won't replicate those achievements on a national scale, thanks to the lack of depth in the Argentina side he manfully tries to carry. Some have claimed Messi cannot be a true great without a matching achievement for his country.

But Messi cannot be

blamed for the quality of his national team. Instead, he has achieved quality with a club side that brooks no argument.

There is now undoubtedly a Messi-shaped star in soccer's most illustrious firmament.

A touching gesture

INTERNET, Undated

Cancer survivor Eric Abidal was reduced to tears by his teammates' gesture in allowing him to lift the Champions League trophy for Barcelona.

Abidal made a dramatic return to the Barcelona team after having a cancerous tumor on his liver removed and played a full part in the club's 3-1 victory over Manchester United at Wembley Stadium on Saturday.

Normally, the team captain is awarded the honor of being the first man to hoist the trophy aloft, but

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Victor Valdes, 7 - The Spanish goalkeeper could do nothing about Wayne Rooney's sublime equaliser and was rarely tested after that.

Dani Alves, 7 - After being pushed back by Park Ji-Sung in the opening minutes, the Brazilian right-back was able to influence play with his forceful runs.

Gerard Pique, 8 - The former Manchester United defender gave an imperious display.

Javier Mascherano, 7 - The Argentine midfielder gave a composed showing in an unnatural position.

Eric Abidal, 8 - Just weeks after surgery for liver cancer, the French left-back completed an emotional season by completely shutting down Antonio Valencia.

Sergio Busquets, 7 - A no-frills display from the Spanish midfielder.

Xavi, 8 - The Spanish midfielder provided the assist for Pedro's opener with a sublime pass with the outside of his foot.

Andres Iniesta, 7 - Kept the ball moving well enough to frustrate United.

Lionel Messi, 9 - The Argentina forward ascended to the ranks of the immortals with a magnificent display.

David Villa, 8 - The livewire striker put the seal of Barca's victory with a brilliant curling goal.

Pedro, 7 - One of Barca's lesser lights took centre-stage as he opened the scoring in the 27th minute with a cool finish after a perfectly timed run onto Xavi's pass.

Substitutes:

Seydou Keita, 6 - Brought on to shut up shop and the midfielder did the job effectively.

Carles Puyol, 5 - A touching moment for the club captain as he came on for the final minutes.

Ibrahim Affellay, 5 - Given just a few moments in the closing stages.

Edwin Van der Sar, 6 - The 40-year-old goalkeeper's final match before retirement ended in bitter disappointment as he was beaten by Messi's low shot when he could have done better.

Fabio da Silva, 6 - The Brazilian stuck to his task well but couldn't deal with Barca's movement.

Rio Ferdinand, 6 - The England defender spent most of the match trying to keep Barca at bay.

Nemanja Vidic, 7 - A solid display by United's captain for the most part, but Barca's relentless attacks eventually overwhelmed the Serbian defender.

Patrice Evra, 6 - Not one of the French left-back's better days.

Antonio Valencia, 5 - Regarded as a major threat to Pep Guardiola's team, the winger failed to produce.

Michael Carrick, 5 - Not for the first time against Barca, the England midfielder found it impossible to make any impact.

Ryan Giggs, 5 - After a traumatic week for the Welshman following allegations about his private life, this was a disappointingly subdued display.

Park Ji-Sung, 7 - The South Korean set the tempo for United in the first half with some crunching tackles and typically tenacious harrying.

Wayne Rooney, 7 - The England forward has sometimes flopped on the big occasion but there could be no complaints this time as he equalised for United in the 34th minute with a superb strike.

Javier Hernandez, 5 - After a sensational first season at United, this was a match too far for the Mexican striker, who rarely troubled Barca in a nervous display.

Substitutes:

Paul Scholes, 5 - The veteran midfielder had little opportunity to make his influence tell in the closing stages.

Nani, 5 - The Portugal winger came to get United back into the match but was easily beaten by Messi in the build-up to Barca's decisive third goal.

SPORTS POLL
WEEKLY QUESTION
Do you think Shakib Al Hasan is being overworked?
Visit the sports page of www.thedailystar.net to cast your vote
Follow The Daily Star Sport on [twitter](https://twitter.com/dssport)
www.twitter.com/dssport

What to WATCH
STAR Cricket
England v Sri Lanka
First Test, Day 5
Live from 4:00pm
STAR Sports
French Open
Live from 3:00pm
ESPN
Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm

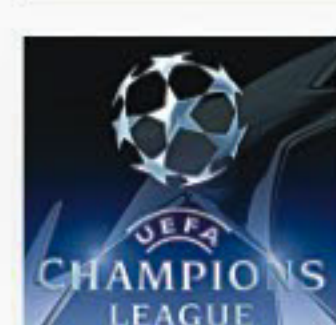
DAY'S EVENT
Bangladesh League
Sk Jamal Dhanmondi Club v Ctg Mohammedan
Time: 4:15pm
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

'Best I have faced' Hammam exits race



AFP, Paris

Agencies, undated



Sir Alex Ferguson saluted Barcelona as one of the greatest teams the game has ever seen and the Manchester United

manager conceded: 'No one has given us a hiding like that.'

Ferguson saw his side torn apart 3-1 at Wembley as the Catalan club, inspired by the brilliant Lionel Messi, won their fourth European Cup - and third in the past six years.

'We were well beaten by a fantastic team, there's no other way to describe it,' said Ferguson, who has managed United since 1986 and was hoping to lift the European Cup for a third time.

'The best team we have ever played. I expected us to do better but we have to acknowledge we were beaten by a better team. No one has given us a hiding like that.'

Wayne Rooney's 34th-minute equaliser wiped out Pedro's opener but the outstanding Messi restored Barca's lead early in the second half and David Villa killed off United. It must have been as painful for Ferguson and his players as the 2009 final in Rome when Barcelona ran out 2-0 winners against a United side which included Cristiano Ronaldo.



SIR ALEX FERGUSON

'You get teams who elevate themselves to that status and Barcelona are that team,' added Ferguson.

'They mesmerise you with their passing. We never controlled Messi but many teams over the past couple of seasons could say that. Our challenge now is to get better and better. Next season we may improve even more.'

Ferguson was still very proud of United's campaign, which also saw them land a record 19th English league title.

'It has been a great season in many

ways but we are disappointed to lose at Wembley twice, against Barcelona and in the FA Cup semifinal against Manchester City. This is a fantastic stage and we are disappointed it has ended like this.

'There is good evidence we are a consistent European team. Our record has been excellent, we have won important games, but tonight we were beaten by the best team in Europe. There is no shame in that - sometimes you come up against a team that is far better than you, and tonight was that night.'

There is doubt over Paul Scholes' future at United and Ferguson said: 'Paul has not made his mind up yet - we'll talk to him next week.'

But it was definitely the last match in a United jersey for veteran 40-year-old goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar, who now retires.

'Edwin has been a fantastic servant for Manchester United and we wish him well,' added Ferguson. 'He's had a great career with tremendous honour and professionalism. He stands out.'

Van de Sar said: 'They had the better chances and we made one or two mistakes. But they finished (them). They are very good. We started well, the same as in Rome in 2009, and we had to score the first goal but we didn't.'

corruption allegations against his rival, 75-year-old Blatter.

The two men had been due to face off in a June 1 election for control of world football. Bin Hammam and FIFA vice-president Jack Warner, of Trinidad, are due to be questioned by FIFA's ethics committee later Sunday. Both deny any wrongdoing.

They and two Caribbean Football Union (CFU) officials will be asked to answer allegations of bribery.

On Thursday, bin Hammam called for the investigation be widened to include Blatter. The committee also summoned the FIFA chief to ask him about claims he knew about the alleged cash bribes at the centre of the probe into bin Hammam.

In a brief statement issued Friday, Blatter said only: 'I cannot comment on the proceedings that have been opened against me today. The facts will speak for themselves.'

Bin Hammam and Warner were targeted after Chuck Blazer, general secretary of regional footballing body CONCACAF, reported possible misdeeds during a May 10 and 11 meeting in Trinidad.

British media reports said bin Hammam and Warner are accused of offering \$40,000 cash gifts to national associations at the Trinidad conference in return for their votes in next week's presidential election.

During his campaign for the FIFA leadership, bin Hammam vowed to bring more transparency to the running of the organisation.

In his message posted early Sunday, he wrote: 'I believe my candidacy has been a catalyst for debate within FIFA and has brought change to the top of the agenda.'