Spain hails Messi 'the greatest'

Football

AFP, Madrid

Spain bathed in glory on Tuesday after Barcelona star Lionel Messi won the Ballon d'Or for best footballer of the year for a record fourth time, cementing his claim to be one of the greatest players of all time.

Spain coach Vicente del Bosque also snatched top honours, in recognition of their Euro 2012 triumph, which followed its 2010 World Cup win and Euro 2008 crown, to top a virtual clean sweep for Spanish and La Liga players at the prestigious awards.

But it was the smiling 25-year-old Argentine international who stole the show, with pictures of him picking up the FIFA prize in Zurich dressed in an eye brow-raising black and white-spotted suit and bow tie, splashed across front pages.

"Spain!!!" headlined Madrid-based Marca, Spain's biggest-selling sports daily and a favourite of Real Madrid fans.

"Unique, unmatchable Messi," the paper said after the striker scored a stun- Barcelona-based Mundo Deportivo, ning 91 goals in 2012 in all competitions, smashing the 40-year-old record of Huge. Unique."



praise on Messi.

Relano.

TheFA

CUP

minutes.

German legend Gerd Mueller of 85.

"Leo Messi was crowned yesterday as

Rival sports daily AS, too, lavished

"Since we have known him, every year

he plays better, every year he scores more

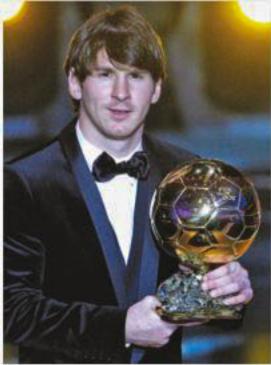
goals," said the paper's columnist Alfredo

adding: "Leo Messi is the greatest.

the best player in history," Marca said. "No-

one until now had won four Ballons d'Or in

a row. Leo has done it, and consecutively."





being treated for a cancer of the salivary

The French defender is training with

"When things calmed down I remem-

bered Tito and Abidal and everyone, obvi-

ously," Messi said, apologising for his

Spanish league on the shortlist for the

world's best footballer award. The two

Messi was one of three players in the

the squad again after a liver transplant.

gland, and defender Eric Abidal.



others were his Barca teammate Andres On his return to Barcelona airport, Messi Iniesta and rival striker Cristiano Ronaldo told reporters that he had forgotten many people in his speech but had wanted to of Real Madrid. In addition, all of the top six names in mention Barca coach Tito Vilanova, who is

> the final ranking that Messi topped were from La Liga teams. In the FIFPro selection for the best 11-

man line-up, meanwhile, six were Spaniards and all but two were from the Spanish league.

That selection included Ronaldo and three other Real players -- Iker Casillas, Sergio Ramos and Xabi Alonso -- plus Iniesta, Messi and two other Barcelona players, Gerard Pique and Xavi Hernandez.

AWARDS LIST

Ballon d'Or:

1. Lionel Messi (ARG)

2. Cristiano Ronaldo (POR)

3. Andrés Iniesta (ESP) Coach:

1. Vicente Del Bosque (ESP)

2. Jose Mourinho (POR)

3. Pep Guardiola (ESP)

Team

Iker Casillas (ESP) - Dani Alves (BRA), Gerard Pique (ESP), Sergio Ramos (ESP), Marcelo (BRA) - Xabi Alonso (ESP), Xavi Hernandez (ESP), Andres Iniesta (ESP) - Lionel Messi (ARG), Radamel Falcao (COL), Cristiano Ronaldo (POR)

Best goal:

1. Miroslav Stoch (SVK)

2. Falcao (COL)

3. Neymar (BRA)

Fairplay: Uzbekistan Football Federation (UFF)

FIFA president award: Franz Beckenbauer (GER)

Woman player 1. Abby Wambach (USA)

2. Marta (BRA)

more AFP, Zurich

Spain's Andres Iniesta shrugged off the disappointment of failing to dislodge favourite Lionel Messi as the Argentinian won a record fourth Ballon d'Or at a FIFA gala

here on Monday by predicting his Barcelona teammate would be back for more next year.

Messi easily saw off Real Madrid rival Cristiano Ronaldo and Iniesta for the prize - and Iniesta said he would surely win again.

"Leo, if he continues in this vein, won't let a fifth straight Ballon d'Or title slip. I congratulate him on a fourth which makes him unique.

"It's not a question of sharing it out with others just because somebody has won a lot - you have to savour a job well done and that's what we are doing today (Monday)," said Iniesta after the award in Zurich.

Iniesta, 28, joined Messi in saying such awards are essentially a reflection of the team in which the winner plays and "the fact that we (Barcelona) have so many representatives in the team (of the year) means we have fulfilled our mission."

Barcelona had five players in the team of 2012 - as did Real Madrid, with Atletico Madrid's Radamel Falcao making up the numbers.



BTV World Bangladesh Premier League Team BJMC v Abahani Live from 4:30pm

ESPN Sportscentre India Sports News



Bangladesh Cricket League (Four-day match, Day-2) Prime Bank South Zone v BCB North

Zone Time: 9:15am Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, Mirpur Walton Central Zone v Islami Bank South Zone Time: 9:15am

Bogra **Bangladesh Premier League** Team BJMC v Abahani Time: 4:30pm

Venue: Bangabandhu National

Venue: Shaheed Chandu Stadium,

Iniesta backs Messi for Five-star Everton for Cheltenham there was never any AFP, Cheltenham

Although

Everton are flying high in the Premier

League and harbour genuine

ambitions of qualifying for the

Champions League, Toffees boss

David Moyes refused to rest

his key players and sent out a strong

side at Whaddon Road to guard

against a potential third round giant-

And his senior stars proved too

hot for fourth-tier Cheltenham to

handle as Nikica Jelavic's early goal

and a Leighton Baines penalty put

the result beyond doubt within 21

Leon Osman added Everton's

third goal soon after half-time and

although Russell Penn got one back

chance of a comeback. Everton swept into Seamus Coleman and Marouane the FA Cup fourth Fellaini rounded off the scoring to round with a 5-1 ensure Everton, beaten by Liverpool rout of League Two in the semifinals last season, earned minnows a last 32 clash with Bolton or Cheltenham on Sunderland later this month. Monday.

"Golden Messi," headlined the omission.

With 67 places between the clubs in the English league system it was hardly surprising to see Everton, featuring eight of the team that won 2-1 at Newcastle last weekend, take charge right from the kick-off.

The Toffees opened the scoring after 12 minutes when Fellaini's curling shot from the right crashed against the far post and Croatia forward Jelavic alertly slotted home the rebound for his seventh goal of the campaign.

Everton were cutting through the home defence with ease and Jelavic shot wide after more good play by Fellaini before Brown produced a superb save to keep out Baines' curling free-kick.

Baines wasn't to be denied and the England left-back doubled Everton's lead from the penalty spot in the 21st minute.

Cheltenham captain Alan Bennett was harshly ruled to have fouled Fellaini and the resulting spot-kick from Baines contained too much power for Brown.

Moyes' men killed off the tie after 49 minutes when Osman slotted the ball past Brown after taking a Baines pass in stride. Cheltenham's training ground

was broken into last week, but there was no chance they would rob Everton of victory even after they pulled one back two minutes later through Penn's powerful finish. Coleman re-established Everton's

three goal lead in the 58th minute with a clever flick over Brown after exchanging passes with Victor Anichebe.

Belgian midfielder Fellaini rubbed salt into Cheltenham's wounds in the 89th minute with a close-range finish from Anichebe's cross.

Pep eyeing return



AFP, Zurich

Former Barcelona coach Josep Guardiola, currently on a one-year sabbatical, said Monday he was already thinking about a return to coaching but stressed he didn't know at which club.

"I want to coach," said Guardiola, who left the Nou Camp last summer. "I'm young, I'm only 41 years old. Now I have another type of life, a type of life that I wanted to have at this moment, that's it.

"I don't have a team to go to, but yes, I'd like to return to coaching.

"I have taken a decision to return to coaching but beyond that no decision has been taken."

Guardiola's name has been linked with jobs at a raft of top-flight clubs and countries after his decision to step down as coach of Barcelona after four years in charge in which he delivered 14 trophies, including two Champions League titles.

But he played down any link to either German giants Bayern Munich or Brazil,

hosts of the 2014 World Cup. "Bayern have a coach by the name of

Jupp Heynckes. It would be disrespectful on my part to speak with a club that currently has a coach," he said, then turning to Brazil, where his name was evoked after the departure of Mano Menezes. "It's an honour that they spoke of me,

but Brazil has great coaches. For example, the one they chose, (Luiz Felipe) Scolari. "I'm grateful to the Brazilian fans," he

said, adding that he thought it best if a national team was managed by someone from that country. "Pep", as he is known, added that he felt

pride at watching the team he once coached, now overseen by his long-time assistant Tito Vilanova. "I love coming to see Barcelona play. To

see them play is a great show," said Guardiola. "I was lucky enough to have been with

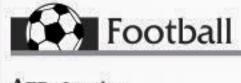
the team for a few years, and I'm delighted that everything's continuing as normal or even better.

"I feel happy that a club is admired and respected for its game," he said.



Everton striker Nikica Jelavic (C) celebrates his opening goal with teammate Marouane Fellaini during their FA Cup third round match against Cheltenham Town at the Abbey Business Stadium on Monday. PHOTO: AFP

Ronaldo heading to London



AFP, London

Former Brazil footballer Ronaldo is heading to London to continue his commercial links with WPP, one of the world's largest advertising groups, it was confirmed Tuesday.

For the past two years Ronaldo has been running a Brazilian sports marketing agency 9ine, which has worked with WPP and he has also helped the group with their plans for the next football World Cup and Olympic Games, both of which will take place in Brazil in 2014 and 2016 respectively.

When contacted by AFP in London, WPP were guarded about Brazilian press reports that Ronaldo would be 'mentored' by WPP chief executive Martin Sorrell while in Britain.

But in a statement, Sorrell said: "We have a joint venture with Ronaldo - 9ine -- which has already had great success in Brazil with clients Claro (a wireless communications company) and Duracell (batteries).

"He'll be working with us on that in the UK. We've also been working with him on the World Cup and Olympics."

Ronaldo, 36, scored both goals when Brazil beat Germany 2-0 to win the 2002 World Cup final in Yokohama, Japan and, after spells with Real Madrid, Barcelona and Inter Milan retired from football in 2011.

WPP owns the Young & Rubicam and Ogilvy advertising agencies among others, as well as communications agency RLM Finsbury and market research firm Kantar Worldpanel.

Abby wins FIFA gong

Football

AFP, Zurich

US football veteran Abby Wambach, 32, won FIFA's coveted Women's Player of the Year award for the first time on Monday. The forward's five goals in the London Olympics helped the United States win

gold. The Americans capped their London campaign with a 2-1 victory over Japan in the final, a win that was particularly meaningful after they lost to Japan in the 2011

Women's World Cup final. Wambach is the first American to win

the award since Mia Hamm in 2002. Wambach bested Brazil's Marta and

her US teammate Alex Morgan in the voting, which is decided by a poll of captains, national team coaches and international media. Wambach earned 20.67 percent of the votes to 13.50 for Marta and 10.87 for Alex Morgan.

"Most importantly, winning any individual award is a total product of the team that you play for," the striker said. "I've never scored a goal without receiving a pass from my team-mates. Thanks to all the fans out there who continue to inspire me and the rest of the team to win as many games as we can."

