

Messi wins goal of the season

AGENCIES, Barcelona

Lionel Messi won the UEFA Goal of the Season award for a brilliantly worked strike against Roma in the Champions League.

The Barcelona star exchanged slick passes with Neymar and Luis Suarez before dinking an inch-perfect finish past goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny in a 6-1 victory over the Serie A side at Camp Nou last November.

The Argentina international was not in the running for the UEFA Best Player in Europe accolade, but the 29-year-old can console himself with having seen off Xherdan Shaqiri's overhead kick against Poland in Euro 2016 round of 16, as well as the solo strike produced by Saul Niguez as Atletico Madrid defeated Bayern Munich in the Champions League semifinals.



Cristiano Ronaldo kisses the trophy after winning the UEFA Best Player in Europe Award for a record-equalling second time, beating out club teammate Gareth Bale and Frenchman Antoine Grizmann.

PHOTO: AFP

CR7 named Europe's best

AFP, Monaco



Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo won the UEFA Best Player in Europe Award on Thursday after winning both last season's Champions League and Euro 2016 with Portugal.

Ronaldo, 31, received the accolade for the second time in his career after finishing ahead of Real team-mate Gareth Bale and Atletico Madrid's Antoine Griezmann.

"I'm obviously delighted to receive this award, it's been an incredible season. But these two other players deserve it as well," said Ronaldo, who also won the prize in 2013-14.

Ronaldo struck the winning spot-kick as Real claimed a record 11th European Cup title, beating city rivals Atletico on penalties in May, before leading his country to Euro 2016 glory.

Ronaldo scored three goals en route to the final of the tournament to equal France's Michel Platini's record of nine goals in the European Championship finals.

The award was voted for by journalists from each of UEFA's 55 member associations.

Norway striker Ada Hegerberg won the women's award, ahead of France's Amandine Henry and Dzenifer Marozsan of Germany, after helping Lyon lift the Women's Champions League trophy in addition to the French league and cup double.

Pep returning to Nou Camp

Bayern meet Atletico, Arsenal face PSG

REUTERS, Monaco



Pep Guardiola will return to the Nou Camp in the Champions League group stage after his new club Manchester City were drawn against his former Barcelona team on Thursday.

The two sides were drawn in Group C alongside Borussia Moenchengladbach and former European champions Celtic in one of the toughest of the eight sections.

The Spanish coach faced the Catalans when he was in charge of Bayern Munich two seasons ago and suffered a 5-3 defeat in the semifinals.

It was one of three successive semifinal eliminations that Guardiola suffered in as many seasons at Bayern.

Bayern, now under triple Champions League winner Carlo Ancelotti, will have a chance to avenge last season's semifinal defeat by Atletico Madrid after they were paired together in Group D along with PSV Eindhoven and group stage debutants Rostov.

Holders and 11-times winners Real Madrid will have a tough pair of matches against Borussia Dortmund in Group F although both teams should progress from a section that also contains Sporting Lisbon and Legia Warsaw.

The Polish team are back in the group stage after a 20-year absence.

English Premier League winners Leicester City, the only other newcomers among the 32 teams, will face Porto, Club Bruges and FC Copenhagen in Group G.

Porto are taking part in the group stage for the 21st time, a record they share with Real and Barca. The double champions from Portugal have won only three of their last 16 ties against English teams in the competition.

Paris St Germain and Arsenal, who are attempting to reach the round of 16 for the 17th time in a row, were drawn in Group A alongside dark horses Basel and rank Bulgarian outsiders Ludogorets.

Juventus, Serie A winners for the last five seasons, face Sevilla, Olympique Lyonnais and Dinamo Zagreb in Group H.

For the third season running Serie A has only two teams in the group stage. The other side, Napoli, will meet Benfica, Besiktas and Dynamo Kiev in Group B.

Group E is arguably the most evenly-balanced with CSKA Moscow, Bayer Leverkusen, Tottenham Hotspur and Monaco.

Champions League				2016 / 2017
Group stage				
Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	
Paris St Germain	Benfica	Barcelona	Bayern Munich	
Arsenal	Napoli	Manchester City	Atletico Madrid	
Basel	Dynamo Kiev	Moenchengladbach	PSV Eindhoven	
Ludogorets	Besiktas	Celtic	Rostov	
Group E	Group F	Group G	Group H	
CSKA Moscow	Real Madrid	Leicester	Juventus	
Leverkusen	Dortmund	Porto	Sevilla	
Tottenham	Sporting CP	FC Bruges	Lyon	
Monaco	Legia Warsaw	Copenhagen	Dinamo Zagreb	

Source: UEFA

AFP

Maradona slates Messi

AFP, Buenos Aires



Argentina great Diego Maradona has criticised Lionel Messi, suggesting that the Barcelona star's retirement from international football, and subsequent change of heart, was "staged".

"I don't know whether this was staged to make us understand that he'd lost three finals, but we never lost by big margins," said Maradona to radio station La Red.

Messi announced his retirement from international football after Argentina lost the Copa America final to Chile on penalties in June, with the Barcelona forward crucially missing in the shoot-out.

"This is the end for me with the national team, it's not for me," said Messi at the time.

"I think it's best for everyone, for me and for many people who want it. The choice for me is over, it is a decision."

That defeat came after Argentina lost the 2015 Copa America final to the same opponents and the 2014 World Cup final to Germany. Maradona believes Messi spoke too rashly and upset many people in Argentina with his comments.

"He got annoyed for nothing. He wasn't to blame for the defeat, others were. So why did he announce his retirement? He spoke too quickly, made everyone hold their breath (on a potential return)," added Maradona, the star of the Argentina team that won the 1986 World Cup.

Earlier this month, the 29-year-old confirmed he would rejoin the national set-up after being convinced by new coach Edgar Bauza to make a comeback.

Barca sign Cillessen

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona have completed the signing of Dutch international goalkeeper Jasper Cillessen from Ajax, the Spanish champions confirmed on Thursday.

In a statement on their official website the Catalans confirmed they had signed the 27-year-old on a five-year contract for a fee of 13 million euros (£11.1 million, \$14.7 million), rising to a potential 15 million euros.

Barca said Cillessen flew to Spain on Thursday morning to undergo a medical and would be officially unveiled on Friday.

Cillessen made a farewell appearance for Ajax on Wednesday in their 4-1 Champions League play-off defeat to Rostov in Russia.

His arrival clears the way for Chilean goalkeeper Claudio Bravo to leave the Camp Nou for Manchester City.

Man City seal Bravo deal

REUTERS, London

Manchester City have signed Chile goalkeeper Claudio Bravo from Barcelona for an initial 18 million euros (\$20.3 million), the clubs confirmed on Thursday.

The 33-year-old agreed a four-year contract to join City as new manager Pep Guardiola continues his major overhaul of the 2014 Premier League champions.

"Claudio is a fantastic goalkeeper and an excellent addition to our squad," Guardiola told the club website.

"He has experience and great leadership qualities and is in the prime of his life. He is a goalkeeper I have admired for a number of years and I'm really happy he is now a City player."

Bravo moved to Barcelona from Real Sociedad in 2014 and enjoyed great success, winning the Spanish title in 2015 and 2016 and the Champions League in 2015.

The Spanish champions said Bravo had moved for an initial 18 million euros plus a further two million in add-ons. They signed his replacement Jasper Cillessen from Ajax Amsterdam earlier on Thursday for 13 million euros.

Bayern kick off season

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich kick off the 2016/17 German Bundesliga season at home to Werder Bremen on Friday with their rivals out to stop them winning a fifth straight Bundesliga title.

Germany defender Mats Hummels and burly Portugal midfielder Renato Sanches have been Bayern's only off-season signings, but it's all change behind the scenes at the Munich giants.

Against Bremen, new coach Carlo Ancelotti will be in charge of his first game at the Allianz Arena as he becomes the fourth Italian to coach in the Bundesliga after Giovanni Trapattoni, Nevio Scala and Roberto Di Matteo.

"Our priority is to win the league," Ancelotti said when he first took over from Pep Guardiola.

"We're looking forward to the start of the season and we're ready for the first game against Bremen."

Ancelotti has brought in an entire new backroom staff, including son Davide, while Bayern are without a sporting director since Matthias Sammer quit with health problems at the end of the season.

Security has been stepped up for the season opener in Munich amid terror fears in Germany.

Rucksacks over an A4 size and large bottles are banned with a crowd of around 75,000 expected.

Nothing short of three points will be acceptable for the defending champions who made history last season by becoming the first club to win four consecutive German league titles.

Bremen are without Germany striker Max

Kruse, who injured his knee in their shock German Cup defeat to third-division Sportfreunde Lotte last Sunday.

Kruse has undergone an operation and will be out for the foreseeable future.

"It's a real blow because it looks like we're going to be without a key player for a good while," coach Viktor Skripnik told the club's website.

However Bremen, who narrowly avoided relegation last season, hope to have ex-Bayern striker and Peru veteran Claudio Pizarro, who turns 38 in October, back from a thigh injury.

Several Bayern stars who are coming back

FIXTURES
(all times 1330 GMT unless stated)
Friday Bayern Munich v Werder Bremen (1830)
Saturday Eintracht Frankfurt v Schalke 04, Augsburg v Wolfsburg, Hamburg v Ingolstadt, Cologne v Darmstadt, Borussia Dortmund v Mainz, Borussia Moenchengladbach v Bayer Leverkusen (1630)
Sunday Hertha Berlin v Freiburg, Hoffenheim v RB Leipzig (1530)

from injury will be missing including Sanches, defender Jerome Boateng, defender Holger Badstuber and winger Arjen Robben.

New-look Borussia Dortmund, who finished second to Bayern last season, open their campaign at home to Mainz on Saturday having made eight new signings over the summer.

Spain defender Marc Bartra, France under-21 winger Ousmane Dembele, midfielder Sebastian Rode, Portugal international left-back Raphael Guerreiro and Germany winger Andre Schuerle are some of the new signings set to feature for Thomas Tuchel's side.

2nd D/N Test to be played by Pak, WI

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan on Thursday announced the schedule for their series against the West Indies in the United Arab Emirates beginning next month, including their first-ever day-night Test.

The series, which runs from September 23 to November 3, includes three Twenty20 internationals and as many one-day and Tests, the highlight being the day-night Test in Dubai in October, only the second such Test to be played. Australia hosted the first-ever day-night Test at Adelaide against New Zealand in November last year.

Pakistan's plans to host the day-night Test were made after they agreed to play Australia. The West Indies Test will give them their first taste of playing an international match with the new pink balls used in the day-night Test last year.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said in a statement it "will host its first ever day-night Test match from October 13-17 to be played with the pink ball under lights at the Dubai cricket stadium".



Former FIFA president Sepp Blatter speaks to the media as he arrives for his appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) seeking to overturn a suspension imposed by world football's governing body in Lausanne yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Clubs shatter PL transfer record

AFP, London



Big spending English clubs have shattered the Premier League's transfer spending record after the total splashed out reached £880 million on Thursday.

Shortly after Manchester City's signing of Barcelona goalkeeper Claudio Bravo was confirmed, the Premier League clubs' gross spending in the current transfer window had topped the record of £870m set last year.

According to financial services firm Deloitte, the figure is likely to pass £1 billion by the time the window closes next Wednesday as teams make the most of the riches reaped from lucrative new television contracts.

Manchester United have been among the

biggest spenders, paying a world record £89 million to sign France midfielder Paul Pogba from Juventus, while local rivals City have paid over £150 million to revamp their squad.

Dan Jones, partner and head of the Sports Business Group at Deloitte, said: "This is the fourth summer in a row where we have seen record-breaking spending by PL clubs."

"Buoyed by the prospect of increased revenue from the new broadcast deals, clubs' gross spending has now passed last year's record of £870m. This is particularly striking considering we still have the best part of a week to go before deadline day."

"With the third round of games in the new season to come this weekend and a number of clubs keen to strengthen, total spending in this window will likely break the £1 billion barrier for the first time."