

LEWANDOWSKI

'deserves award for 2020'

AGENCIES

Lionel Messi has said he believes Robert Lewandowski should be retrospectively awarded the 2020 Ballon d'Or as he praised the Bayern Munich striker in his acceptance speech for the 2021 honour on Monday.

Messi was crowned the 2021 Ballon d'Or winner at a ceremony in Paris, claiming the trophy for the seventh time in his career.

But the Paris Saint-Germain star admits he had tough competition in the form of Lewandowski this year as he gave a special mention to the Poland international.

"I would like to mention Robert Lewandowski, it's been a real honour to compete with you," Messi said after collecting the trophy.

"Everyone knows and we agree that you were the winner last year.

"I think France Football should award you your 2020 Ballon d'Or - you deserve it and you should



have it at home."

He added: "I think Robert Lewandowski had a great year. Year after year, he improves and shows the excellent striker he is, as well as his ability to score goals.

"This year he was awarded as the top scorer. Of course he can certainly aspire to that level next year, thanks to his way of being on the pitch. And in addition, he plays for a big club."

Lewandowski was largely seen as the favourite to win the Ballon d'Or in 2020 because of his goal scoring exploits for Bundesliga champions Bayern.

But the award was cancelled that year because of the Covid-19 pandemic.



Lionel Messi beams with the Ballon d'Or award, which he won for a record-extending seventh time beating competition from the likes of Robert Lewandowski and Jorginho, at a programme in Paris on Monday.

PHOTO: TWITTER

'I don't know if the record is beatable'

AGENCIES

Lionel Messi is not sure if his record will be broken after the Paris Saint-Germain and Argentina superstar won a seventh Ballon d'Or on Monday.

Messi claimed the coveted award for a record-extending seventh time during a ceremony in Paris, while Bayern Munich talisman Robert Lewandowski won the inaugural Striker of the Year award and finished second in the Ballon d'Or voting.

Many had backed Lewandowski to take home the prized individual honour, after France Football's 2020 Ballon d'Or was scrapped due to COVID-19 -- the Bayern forward has scored 53 goals in 42 appearances in 2021, the most of any player in Europe's top five leagues across all competitions.

But Messi added to his incredible haul after guiding Argentina to a drought-ending

triumph at the Copa America -- the country's first piece of silverware in 28 years, while he has netted 32 goals and supplied 12 assists across 40 club appearances for Barcelona and PSG this year.

"I don't know if the record is beatable, I just have to accept it," the 34-year-old Messi told reporters, with Cristiano Ronaldo next on the list after winning the award five times.

"But honestly, I don't know if this record seven Ballon d'Ors can be beaten. But seven anyhow is really impressive and I'm very happy to win it here in Paris.

"Concerning [Liverpool star] Mohamed Salah, like [Robert] Lewandowski he will have other opportunities in the years to come. Both players are really at the best at what they've managed so far. They will have other opportunities to win the trophy."

Messi scored four goals and provided five assists as he led the Albiceleste to their first

Copa America title since 1993, involved in nine of the 12 goals scored by Argentina at the showpiece South American tournament.

"I had a pretty good year with Barcelona without titles, however I did win the Copa del Rey," Argentina's captain and all-time leading scorer Messi added.

"The Copa America was very important to help me win this Ballon d'Or. And yes, I am very proud to be the first PSG to conquer this Ballon d'Or. It's special to do so with another jersey and it makes me very proud.

"This trophy really is special. It gives me a feeling of accomplishment with the Argentine national team. It was indeed a special year for me and of course it helped me in this new stage in my life, this move to PSG and my family and kids.

"I know they enjoy the moment and I enjoy seeing them happy. Seeing my parents, cousins and brothers happy, too."

Ronaldo takes a dig at Pascal Ferre

REUTERS

Cristiano Ronaldo has hit back at comments made by Ballon d'Or organiser Pascal Ferre, saying the editor-in-chief of France Football "lied" about his rivalry with Lionel Messi.

Ferre told the New York Times on Friday that Manchester United forward Ronaldo's sole ambition was to retire with more of the awards for the world's best player than Messi.

"Pascal Ferre lied, he used my name to promote himself and to promote the publication he works for," Ronaldo, who has won the award five times, said in an Instagram post on Monday.

"It is unacceptable that the person responsible for awarding such a prestigious prize could lie in this way, in absolute disrespect for someone who has always respected France Football and the Ballon d'Or."

France Football did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment on Ronaldo's post. "I always win for myself and for the clubs I represent, I win for myself and for those who love me. I don't win against someone," added the Portugal forward. "The biggest ambition of my career is to leave my name written in golden letters in the history of world football."



Schick's Euro stunner in FIFA shortlist

REUTERS

FIFA have announced an 11-player shortlist for this year's Puskas Award, with Patrik Schick's goal against Scotland at Euro 2020 among the nominees.

Czech forward Schick beat goalkeeper David Marshall with one of the most remarkable goals in European Championship history, a stunning 45-metre strike from just inside the halfway line as his team beat Scotland 2-0.

Schick's effort was subsequently voted goal of the tournament.

Tottenham Hotspur forward Son Heung-min won the award in 2020 for his solo effort against Burnley in the Premier League in which he ran nearly the length of the pitch, dribbling past several Burnley defenders before scoring.



Manchester City's Caroline Weir makes a second consecutive appearance in the shortlist, courtesy of a deft chip from the edge of the box in an FA Women's Super League derby match against Manchester United.

Premier League players Erik Lamela and Riyad Mahrez are also on the list.

Lamela scored with a rabona against Arsenal in a North London derby and Mahrez was recognised for his solo effort against Zimbabwe while on international duty with Algeria. The winner of the award will be selected by an international jury comprised of former footballers and select fans from across the globe. The winner will be announced on Jan. 17.



Bangladesh Police FC's Denilson Roldao manoeuvres the ball past a Chattogram Abahani player during their Riviera Independence Cup fixture in Kamalapur yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF

Thankgod for Ctg Abahani

SPORTS REPORTER



Former champions Chattogram Abahani came from behind to play out a 1-1 draw against Bangladesh Police FC in a Group D encounter of the Riviera Independence Cup at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Abahani's Nigerian forward Ebimobowei Thankgod cancelled out a 48th-minute lead from Police's Brazilian Denilson Roldao in the 50th minute to snatch a valuable point for the 2016 champions.

Even though Chattogram Abahani could not form a strong squad like last season as all national players left the club, the current brigade of Maruful Haque were good enough to hold Rumanian tactician Aristica Cioaba's rejuvenated Bangladesh Police side.

Bangladesh Police, who fielded all four foreign recruits from Brazil, Germany and Afghanistan, looked much better from the beginning against a depleted Chattogram Abahani side but they were not lucky

to leave the field with a victory over the Sky Blues, who played with three foreign recruits.

Police could have taken the lead in the very first minute when Afghan forward Amiruddin Sharifi ran into the box from the right flank to cut it back for Amirul Islam, who however surprised all to tap it wide from in front of open net. Then national discard Mathews Bablu, after being

KINGS EASE PAST NAVY

Defending champions Bashundhara Kings thrashed Bangladesh Navy Football Club 6-0 in the day's second clash, which saw some 16 current and former national players pitted against each other. The foreign recruits of Kings, though, made the difference against Navy, who were playing without foreigners.

Former Bosnian international Stojan Vranjes scored twice while Brazilians Jonathan Fernandes, Robson Robinho and Nigerian-born Bangladeshi striker Eleta Kingsley scored a goal apiece for the defending champions. The last goal conceded by Navy was an own goal.

set up by Denilson, was denied brilliantly by defender Shawkat Russel in the 13th minute.

Police kept pressing to break the deadlock, with Sharifi coming close in the 24th minute but his placing shot at far post narrowly missed the target.

Police kept mounting pressure on Chattogram Abahani and broke the deadlock three minutes into the second half when Bablu ran down the left to drive a shot only to be parried by goalkeeper Mohammad Nehal but the ball fell to Denilson, who mustered a powerful shot to the upper corner of the net.

However, Police could hold the lead for only two minutes as Rashed Alam handled the ball inside the box and Thankgod stepped up to convert the resulting spot-kick.

Maruful soon brought a couple of changes in midfield to battle equal with Police, who could hardly make any room in the second half except for a dying minute-attempt when Sharifi, availing a long ball, raced into the box to drive a low shot only to be thwarted by goalkeeper Azad in the 89th minute.

Domestic chores put Burundian on track to success

REUTERS, Nairobi

For 19-year-old Burundian Adelphine Nimfasha, regularly carrying more than twice her own weight in rice on her father's bicycle proved to be excellent - albeit unusual - preparation for becoming a professional cyclist.

On Sunday, Nimfasha came sixth in Africa's first international women's cycling competition after a fall cost her the lead she had held for most of the way.

"I didn't give up but rose up, took my bicycle, and proceeded to finish the race," said Nimfasha, who finished in the top three in national competitions in Egypt and Nigeria before the latest competition, held in her home country.

Her determination earned her the road cycling "combativity" award. Two Kenyans and a Ugandan won the top three prizes.

Cycling is gaining popularity as a

Ngenzirabona, a coach.

Cyclists are hopeful that Burundi's move to host the first African competition of its kind will help change that.

"We (the Burundian team) trained for three weeks, others trained for three months," said Nimfasha, adding that more training will help the team secure podium finishes.

Cycling has been important to Nimfasha since she was a child. In her home area of Gihanga, women are not discouraged from riding them as they are in many other parts of the region.

"My parents would send me to fetch water and carry rice from the fields at the harvest and I could pack up to 150 or 120 kilos of rice. During that season my father could not hire other workers, it was me who ensured the transport," she said.



sport in Burundi, where bicycles are already an essential part of life for many. But resources are limited.

"The bicycles are not...suitable. There is also a financial problem - organising training requires huge financial means to accommodate and feed participants for three or four months," said Prosper

She hopes to be an internationally celebrated athlete like Francine Niyonsaba, the Burundian runner who won silver in the 2016 Rio Olympics and broke a 2,000-metre world record in September this year.

"Now I want to become for cycling what Niyonsaba is for athletics."