

"I got my first football when I was very young; three, maybe, or four. It was a present, and from then on it was the only present I ever wanted; Christmas, birthday or whatever: a ball."
LIONEL MESSI



Messi set to bask in twilight

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SABBIR HOSSAIN

Lionel Messi turns 36 today and marks a whole new chapter in life after the Argentine maverick went on to get hold of the trophy that long eluded him before exiting the centre-stage of club football.

It must be a fantastic feeling to be in the shoes of the captain of the reigning World Cup champions, who said in a recent interview, "I have achieved everything in football. There is nothing left."

After a tremendous weight of expectation was lifted off of Messi's shoulders in Qatar last year, some speculated that the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner -- arguably the greatest player of all time -- could spend the twilight of his illustrious career away from the spotlight, which is exactly what transpired.

Although FC Barcelona had expressed the desire for its prodigal son to return, the uncertainty surrounding La Blaugrana forced Messi to not walk down the same



did not quite play by his standards with PSG and he was also psychologically in a difficult place for a couple of years.

Following a non-stop, virtuosic display over the years, Messi had been labelled as 'an alien' by players and fans but his departure from Europe revealed a side of human nature that is relatable to many. While announcing his decision to join the MLS club, he said, "I want to get back to enjoying myself, to enjoy my family, my children, and the day-to-day."

European football is bound to sorely miss his presence, on the other hand, Argentina could benefit from the move to a comparatively low-intensity environment in America as it could allow Messi to prolong his international career - more than anticipated. However, Messi has ruled out the possibility of appearing in the 2026 World Cup.

Pele, the late Brazilian great, was credited with considerably enhancing public exposure and interest in football in

the United States when he joined the MLS in 1975. Then star players like David Beckham and Zlatan Ibrahimovic went there and made further impacts. Messi, too, has all the potential to impact a new generation of American football players despite having finally chosen to take his foot off the pedal.

Had he failed to win the showpiece event in Qatar, Messi could have been labelled as an underachiever. Xavi Hernandez, the current Barcelona coach who was a key figure during Messi's glorious years at the Catalan club, recently said something that gave a sense of how difficult it is to be Messi. Xavi said, "Imagine Messi, in the focus he has got on him, he has never got calm, he has to behave perfectly, he has to be perfect on the pitch, he has to be the best in every way."

As Messi embarks on a brand-new adventure in Miami, solely focused on enjoying life to the fullest, his fans will certainly savour whatever action the little magician from Rosario has in store on the pitch.

Lionel Messi

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Date of birth: 24 June 1987 (age 36)
Place of birth: Rosario, Santa Fe, Argentina
Position(s): Forward/Attacking midfielder

TEAM HONOURS

- Barcelona**
- UEFA Champions League: 4
- UEFA Super Cup: 3
- FIFA Club World Cup: 3
- La Liga: 10
- Copa del Rey: 7
- Supercopa de España: 8
- Paris Saint Germain**
- Ligue 1: 2
- Trophée des Champions: 1
- Argentina U20**
- FIFA World Youth Championship: 2005
- Argentina U23**
- Summer Olympics: 2008
- Argentina**
- FIFA World Cup: 2022
- Copa América: 2021
- CONMEBOL-UEFA Cup of Champions: 2022

CLUB CAREER

Barcelona (2004-2021), PSG (2021-23)

INTERNATIONAL CAREER

Argentina (2005-)

INDIVIDUAL HONOURS

- Ballon d'Or/FIFA Ballon d'Or: 7
- FIFA World Player of the Year: 1
- The Best FIFA Men's Player: 2
- FIFA World Cup Golden Ball: 2
- Copa América Best Player: 2
- Copa América Top Goalscorer: 1
- European Golden Shoe: 6
- UEFA Men's Player of the Year Award: 3
- La Liga Best Player: 6
- Pichichi Trophy: 8
- Laureus World Sportsman of the Year: 2
- Argentine Footballer of the Year: 15



tormenting path as experienced two years prior. There was a potential unprecedented lucrative offer from a certain Saudi Arabian club but he turned it down as well.

Instead, Messi opted to prioritise on the well-being of himself and his family by joining Inter Miami, with his Paris Saint-Germain contract set to expire soon. Messi



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House No # 30, Road No # 1, Block # A, Gulshan # 1, Niketan, Dhaka-1212, Tel: +88 02-222283055, Cell: +88 01711-544185, 01552-404705, 01319-406062, E-mail: pinoytravels@gmail.com, www.pinoytravels.org