
Lionel Messi As The Best Soccer Player In The World And A Gift To Soccer Fans

'I am not crazy enough to compare myself with Messi because he is the best there ever was and the best there will ever be'(Gomez).

There are many professional soccer players in the world who have overcome adversity such as poverty but persevered and made it to the big leagues. Lionel Messi is no different. However, his accomplishments in world soccer stand out and above his peers. He is a six-time winner, with the most awards of the coveted "Ballon d'Or" which is awarded by soccer journalists for the best soccer player in the previous season; in the La Liga, the Spanish soccer league, he has the most scored goals for a single club of 354; and the list goes on. He is undoubtedly the best soccer player in the world and possibly the greatest of all time. Not only are his stats incredible, but his journey in achieving them also went against the odds. His story inspires and gives hope to all the "little guys" who have big dreams and demonstrates how to act after they have achieved them.

Lionel Messi was born as Lionel Andrés Messi on June 24, 1987. Messi grew up in a poor, working-class family, where his father was a factory steelworker and his mother a cleaner (Sukumar). The future for the Messi family did not look bright, but Lionel's talent in soccer at a young age was noticed by his parents, and they thought soccer would provide a way out of poverty.

However, that way out did not come easy for the young Messi. At the age of 11, he was diagnosed with growth hormone deficiency (GCD), a condition that stunts an individual's growth and continually does so unless treated with a drug that increases human growth hormones (Sukumar). The youth team that he played for, River Plate, was interested in signing Messi to play for them but was unwilling to pay for his medical treatment that cost about \$1,500 month. His parents could not afford this and government-funded medical insurance could only pay for two years of this treatment (Balague). Things seemed hopeless for the Messi family.

Little did they know that F.C. Barcelona's youth team coach, Carles Rexach, had been hearing about Lionel for the past year. He had thought that Messi was an 18-20-year-old player. But, when he saw Messi play during a scouting trip to Argentina and discovered that he was only 12, Rexach knew that he had to secure Messi before another team did. He was so afraid that he would lose Messi that Rexach quickly drafted a contract on a napkin and it included paying for Messi's growth hormone injections (Sukumar).

After signing with F.C. Barcelona, Messi's father, Jorge Messi, decided to leave with his 13-year-old son, Lionel, so that he could play with the team, leaving his wife and other children behind in Rosario, Argentina. The separation from his family tore Messi apart immensely(Balague). Although his father was present, Lionel was a shy kid who missed his family. Consequently, he fell into a spiral of loneliness which could have ended his career before it even began. Fortunately, he realized the sacrifices his family was making for him, and he turned that loneliness into determination by pouring all his passion into the sport he loved(Balague).

During his first season with FC Barcelona's youth team, he scored 21 goals in just 14 games which helped him climb up the ranks to the higher-level intensity group that was offered to teens who had promising skill and talent. Then, at the young age of just 16 years old, Messi made his semi-official debut with F.C. Barcelona's professional team as a substitute during a friendly match, leaving professional players many years older in the dust(Rollin).

As Messi progressed through the ranks, his skill also improved exponentially. During the 2004-2005 La Liga season, Messi, at the age of 17, 5 feet 7 inches tall, and a light 148 pounds, a dwarf amongst soccer giants, became the youngest official player to start for a professional team and the youngest goal scorer(Rollin). Even though many doubted what Messi could do, he proved to be well-balanced in terms of power, speed, and stamina and very versatile on the field - a formidable player in his own right. With his left dominant foot and his quick and precise control of the ball, Messi criss crossed his way around and through defenders like a knife cutting through butter, ultimately passing the ball to his teammates for a goal.

Even though Messi was at the top of his game, breaking records in La Liga for F.C. Barcelona and the World Cup for Argentina's national team, Messi went through a rough patch beginning in the 2013-2014 La Liga season. The events that transpired from herewith forced Messi to consider leaving Spain, the home of F.C. Barcelona and his only team, altogether. During this season, the Spanish government accused both Lionel Messi and his father of tax fraud and began to conduct an investigation. The government also demanded that Messi stand trial. According to the Spanish government, Messi and his father had "used a series of shell companies such as Pepsi-Cola, Procter & Gamble, and Adidas as tax havens to shield royalties and licensing income from taxes" (Erb). The Spanish government further explained that these companies were "funneled offshore to Belize and Uruguay through an elaborate maze of entities and countries so that Messi and his father could avoid paying income tax in Spain as far back as 2005" (Erb). Simply put, Messi was accused of using all of his resources to avoid paying taxes.

Lionel Messi claimed his innocence and expressed that all he did was "play soccer" and did not manage his own income. He trusted his father and his lawyers to take care of his finances. However, the Spanish government would not accept Messi's ignorance as an excuse or explanation for the tax fraud (Erb). In 2016, Lionel and his father were found guilty of tax fraud of €4.1 million (about 4.5 million U.S. dollars) and were handed a sentence of 21 months in prison (Begley). According to an interview conducted by "Catalan Radio Station RAC 1", Messi stated "the treatment I received ultimately made me want to leave Barcelona. It was difficult for me and for my family." However, after hearing Messi and his father's testimony, the government decided to drop charges if the Messis paid a fine. The court stated that Jorge Messi, who had a sentence of 15 months in prison, would be pardoned if he paid a fine of €180,000 or about \$200,583, and Lionel Messi with a fine of €500,000 euros (about \$558,000)(Wilson). Even world-class professional players at the top of their game are not immune to problems that affect everyone else. Messi weathered this period without any drama, and kept his head down and did what he did best - play soccer.

There are a number of players around the world that pundits in the soccer world argue are better than Lionel Messi such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Kylian Mbappé, and Garrath Bale. However, most agree that Messi is in a league by himself due to his incomparable and well-timed speed, agility, accuracy, and soccer intelligence in addition to the number of awards and the highest level of income (annual income of forty million Euros or about 44 million dollars).

According to Brian Canever, these qualities are the reasons why Messi is without a doubt the best player. He explains that although Messi's speed might not be on par with Ronaldo's, Messi's speed with the ball is remarkable. He further states, "As evidenced in this blazing run against Nigeria, Messi keeps phenomenal close control of the ball as he blasts through numerous defenders before taking a shot." In other words, Messi might not be as fast as other players, but his ability to control the ball at high speeds is superior, bar none. Secondly, Canever remarks on Messi's agility which is on par with his speed and dribbling skills. He states that Messi's "low center of gravity and fantastic control of the ball allows him to turn his waist in the speediest of motions to deceive opponents attempting to strip the ball from him"(TomDotScape). Finally, and most importantly, is his intelligence. According to ESPN sports, Messi usually makes many surprising shots that are scientifically impossible unless the perfect conditions of vision, running acceleration, and shot precision are met. It is no wonder that he is the highest scorer in La Liga history.

What is most impressive about Messi? And why do most fans and fellow players admire him? He remains a humble and grounded person despite his recording making accomplishments and immense wealth. When viewers see him on interviews and witness his life, he seems like just a normal guy. For example, the moment that it was announced that Lionel Messi won the Ballon d'Or, the first thing he did was not to flaunt this achievement but, instead, thanked his friends and family and stated that the honor of winning the award was not only his, but also the hard work and support from his teammates and the love and support from his family. After this ceremony, Messi was asked whether he thought his record of winning six Ballon d'Ors would ever be broken. Messi humbly responded, "I am sure, but I don't know who it will be. Records are to be broken and there is always someone who overcomes them"(The content Factory). Messi seems to believe that there will be others who will be better than he and his records will be broken. He just seems to be grateful to receive this recognition.

Another example of his groundedness was reported by the Daily Mail. According to this British newspaper, once Messi takes off his cleats and hangs his jersey, he is no different than any other family man. It explains that the 34 year old soccer player would often drop off his kids to school before he leaves for practice and picks them up afterwards. And on the weekends, he would often play soccer with his three boys and play around with their pet dogs (Daily Mail). His family and his gratitude for what he has seems to keep him grounded and humble, qualities that are difficult to find amongst professional players at Messi's level of play, fame, and income.

Messi is clearly a man of few words. When he sets new records and makes incredible plays, he thanks God, his teammates, and his family. Rather than boast about his skills and talent, he lets others, who appreciate his play such as his teammates, opponents, coaches, and soccer journalists, praise him. And when there is controversy or he feels slighted, he talks with his heart and tells the public how he feels rather than display ongoing drama. Maybe he is humble and grounded because he appreciates the sacrifices his family made for him - paying costs of the growth hormone injections and being separated from family so he could play in Spain. Maybe he is grateful to God for gifting him with such raw talent that he plays with all of his heart so that he does not disappoint Him. The world does not really know, but his records and stats do not lie (see below). Clearly, he is the best soccer player in the world, possibly the best soccer player of all time, and a gift to all soccer fans around the world.

Works Cited/Bibliography

-
1. "Accomplishments/Awards - Lionel Messi." Google Sites, <https://sites.google.com/site/lionelmessi10barcasoccer/accomplishments>. Accessed 16 Dec. 2019,
 2. Balague, Guillem. "Lionel Messi's Improbable Progression from Struggling Youngster to World Super Star." Telegraph, 2 Dec. 2014, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/players/lionel-messi/10487181/Lionel-Messis-improbable-progression-from-struggling-youngster-to-world-super-star.html>.
 3. Begley, Sarah. "Why Lionel Messi Won't Go to Prison for Tax Fraud." Ebscohost, 7 July 2016 <http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=3&sid=2ce7006b-e30c-4268-816d-a91ea46cc117@sessionmgr4006&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ==#AN=116705314&db=ulh>.
 4. Canever, Brian. "Lionel Messi: 5 Qualities That Make Him the World's Greatest Footballer." Bleacher Report, 3 Oct. 2017, <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/1293725-lionel-messi-5-qualities-that-make-him-the-worlds-greatest-footballer#slide3>.
 5. Erb, Kelly Phillips. "Messi Prison Sentence Stands After Supreme Court Rejects Tax Fraud Appeal." Forbes, 24 May 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kellyphillipserb/2017/05/24/messi-prison-sentence-stands-after-supreme-court-rejects-tax-fraud-appeal/#a93e7371dff1>.
 6. Staff, SportyTell. "Lionel Messi Biography Facts, Childhood And Personal Life." SportyTell, 21 Nov. 2019, <https://sportytell.com/football/lionel-messi-biography-facts-childhood-personal-life>.
 7. Lane, Barnaby. "Lionel Messi Says He Wanted to Leave FC Barcelona after He Felt 'Mistreated' by the Authorities." BUSINESS INSIDER, 10 Oct. 2019, <https://www.businessinsider.com/lionel-messi-was-once-desperate-to-leave-fc-barcelona-2019-10>.
 8. Marsden, Sam. "Barcelona's Lionel Messi to Pay Fine, Avoid Prison Sentence for Tax Fraud." ESPN, 23 June 2017, <https://www.espn.com/soccer/barcelona/story/3147554/barcelonas-lionel-messi-to-pay-fine-to-avoid-21-month-prison-sentence-for-tax-fraud>.
 9. Rollin, Jack. "Lionel Messi." Encyclopædia Britannica, 30 Aug. 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lionel-Messi>.
 10. sukumar, V. "Short Biography Lionel Messi." Biography Online, 3 Feb. 2019 <https://www.biographyonline.net/contact.html>.
 11. TomDotScape. "Why Lionel Messi's Solo Goal is Scientifically Impossible" Youtube, 7 July 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tpg8C0JGCwQ>.
 12. "Lionel Messi - Titles & Achievements." Transfermarkt, Transfermarkt GmbH & Co. KG, <https://www.transfermarkt.us/lionel-messi/erfolge/spieler/28003>.
 13. The content Factory. "Lionel Messi interview after 6th BALLOND'Or 2019" Youtube, 2 Dec. 2019 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHRut4sz-Gg>.
 14. Wilson, Joseph. "Lionel Messi offers to pay \$558,000 to avoid 21-month jail sentence." Business insider, 23 June 2017, <https://www.businessinsider.com/ap-messi-offers-to-pay-558000-to-avoid-21-month-jail-sentence-2017-6>