

# 6.O.A.T

Barcelona legend Messi pips Van Dijk and Ronaldo to claim record sixth men’s Ballon d’Or as Rapinoe wins women’s award

REUTERS  
PARIS, DECEMBER 2

LIONEL MESSI claimed a record sixth Ballon d’Or award on Monday, beating Liverpool’s leading nominees and Cristiano Ronaldo to lift soccer’s most prestigious individual trophy.

The Argentine, who won the Liga title with Barcelona but only managed third place in the Copa America with his country, added to his 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2015 trophies.

He finished above Dutchman Virgil van Dijk and Portugal’s third-placed Ronaldo, who has won the award five times.

“I am very lucky, I am blessed. I hope I will continue for a long time,” Messi told reporters. “I realize that I’m lucky even if one day it will be time to retire,” he added. “It will be tough but I still have some years ahead of me. Time flies so I will enjoy football and my family.”

Senegal’s Sadio Mane, who along with runner-up Van Dijk and fellow Liverpool nominees Alisson Becker of Brazil and Egypt’s Mohamed Salah, helped the Merseyside club win the Champions League, came fourth in the poll of international journalists.

“It was amazing,” said Van Dijk. “There are a couple of players like him (Messi) who are fantastic. I’m proud of what I’ve achieved with Liverpool and Holland. It’s going to be tough (to win the award) when these guys are around.” Messi, whose stellar career was rewarded with another trophy, and Ronaldo, had between them won 10 consecutive Ballon d’Or awards until Croatia’s Luka Modric prevailed in 2018.

Megan Rapinoe earlier won the women’s Ballon d’Or after leading the United States to a record-extending fourth World Cup title in France this year as they retained the trophy.

The 34-year-old midfielder, the standout player at the June-July tournament, succeeded Norway’s Ada Hegerberg who did not take part in the World Cup. Rapinoe was not present at the ceremony in the Theatre du Chatelet, where the show ‘An American In Paris’ is on.

“I’m so sad I can’t make it tonight. It’s absolutely incredible congrats to the other nominees. I can’t believe I’m the one winning in this field, it’s been an incredible year,” Rapinoe said in a recorded message.

Ron’s sister jumps to his defence

Cristiano Ronaldo’s sister failed to see the funny side after Liverpool defender Virgil van



In 54 appearances this year, Lionel Messi has managed an astonishing 46 goals and 17 assists. Reuters

Dijk joked that the Portuguese forward was “not really a rival” in the Ballon D’Or award voting. Ronaldo was absent from the presentation for the prize he has won five times, preferring to go to Milan where he was voted Serie A’s Player of the Year.

Asked by a Dutch reporter about Ronaldo’s absence, Van Dijk replied: “Why, was he a candidate?”, provoking an Instagram tirade from Ronaldo’s sister, Katia Aveiro.

“Dear Virgil, from where you are now, Ronaldo has come and gone one thousand times,” she said. “Cristiano was three-times league champion in that country where you have played for years and still haven’t put your hands on ‘the tin,’” she said, referring to her brother’s Premier League titles with Manchester United.

After listing more Ronaldo achievements with Real Madrid, she said: “Now, Virgil, go and win some of those titles that really matter and we will talk again. When you have a hand full of them, maybe you can sit at the same table as Cristiano.”

### VAN DIJK FELL SHORT BY JUST SEVEN POINTS

Ballon d’Or is voted by one leading sports journalist from every country and is distinct from FIFA’s ‘The Best’ award, which is voted for by national team coaches, captains and a member of the media from each country. Each journalist participating in the Ballon d’Or process votes for five players in order of preference for the award.

■ There was a difference of just seven points (686-679) between Messi and Van Dijk. India’s vote went to Messi, followed by Van Dijk, Mane, Salah and Ronaldo	
Some of the choices made by the voters raised a few eyebrows:	
■ None more so than Sri Lanka, whose five choices were Trent Alexander-Arnold, Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, Antoine Griezmann, Robert Lewandowski and Marc-Andre Ter Stegen, in that order	
■ Algeria’s first choice was Senegal’s	

#### THE OVERALL TOP FIVE IS AS FOLLOWS

Messi	686 pts
Van Dijk	679 pts
Ronaldo	476 pts
Mane	347 pts
Salah	178 pts

Mane while its own Riyad Mahrez was only the third choice. There was no Ronaldo in the top five

■ Bhutan, too, voted for Mane but neither Messi nor Ronaldo was in the

top five. All were Liverpool players.

■ Ivory Coast voted for Liverpool custodian Alisson. Neither Messi nor Ronaldo was named.

■ Spain, where Messi has played the whole of his professional life, didn’t go for him. Van Dijk was the first choice, followed by Ronaldo and Messi.

■ Guatemala voted for goalkeeper Alisson. There was no Messi or Ronaldo. Four of the five players were from Liverpool.

■ Italy didn’t vote for Juventus’ Ronaldo as first choice, instead going for Van Dijk.

## Man United a closed chapter: Mourinho

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE  
LONDON, DECEMBER 3

JOSE MOURINHO says his time at Manchester United is “a closed chapter” and he is only interested in beating them when he takes his in-form Tottenham side to Old Trafford on Wednesday.

It is the new Tottenham manager’s first return to the touchline at United’s home ground since his sacking by the club last December. “This is a closed chapter for me,” said Mourinho, who has won all three of his matches in charge of Spurs.

“I left the club, I took my time to process everything that happened, I took my time to prepare myself for the next challenge.

“Honestly, United for me is in my book of experiences, it’s in my history book.” United are struggling under Mourinho’s successor, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, but go into the game just two points behind fifth-placed Spurs. “It is not for me to analyse United now,” Mourinho said at his pre-match press conference.

“I analyse them as an opponent, how they play. How can we beat them? How can they beat us? For me that is the important thing.”

Mourinho is excited about the prospect of returning to Old Trafford.

He said: “I feel good, I like to play big matches, I like to play against the best teams and go back to a place where I was happy.

“I have a great relationship with the Manchester United supporters. I went back as a pundit and I was humbled by such a beautiful reception.

“Tomorrow I go back as the coach of the team that will try and beat Manchester United. “I understand that what they want is the exact opposite of what I want. Of course during the match I expect them to forget me.”

Reports say Spurs midfielder Christian Eriksen has refused to sign a new deal with the club, while there has been speculation over the futures of Belgian defenders Toby Alderweireld and Jan Vertonghen.

Mourinho said he was speaking with Spurs chairman Daniel Levy about the contract issues but refused to be drawn on the details. “I’m not going to discuss these individual things,” he said.

“If I tell you that I didn’t speak with Mr (Daniel) Levy about Eriksen, Alderweireld and Vertonghen, I would be lying. So, yes I’m speaking with Mr Levy about it.”

“The important thing, really, is (they are) great professionals, big relationship with Tottenham, amazing understanding of what the club is and what we need from them,” he added. “So, all three ready to play, all three ready to forget the contractual situation.”

No fear

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer says he does not fear for his future as Manchester United manager



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JOSE MOURINHO  
TOTTENHAM MANAGER

despite a spate of Premier League sackings as he prepares to face his predecessor Jose Mourinho. Spurs turned to Mourinho after dismissing Mauricio Pochettino last month, while Arsenal and Watford have subsequently sacked Unai Emery and Quique Sanchez Flores.

Solskjaer is under increasing pressure, with United ninth in the Premier League, 22 points behind leaders Liverpool and eight off a top-four spot as they prepare for Wednesday’s match against Tottenham. “No, it doesn’t make me more concerned,” Solskjaer said at his pre-match press conference on Tuesday.

“I’m just focusing on my job and that’s just doing as well as I can, and look forward to the next game, and look long-term, plan things with board. “It’s that time of year. It’s never nice to see your colleagues lose your jobs — three in a very short space of time.

“It’s a game of margins,” he added. “Sometimes you have luck, sometimes you don’t, but it doesn’t make me any more concerned that it’s December.

“I’m good, absolutely no problem. Sometimes you laugh when you read stories about what I’ve said and stuff, at least I know the sources are just made up, blatant lies.”

The United boss bemoaned his team’s failure to turn draws into wins, saying they were not getting the results their football deserved.

The club are winless in three games and Solskjaer’s job will not get any easier with a derby against Manchester City on Saturday to follow the game against Mourinho’s Spurs side.

The Norwegian, though, dismissed any need for crisis talks with the United board.

## Ljungberg seeks ex-boss Wenger’s guidance

REUTERS  
DECEMBER 3

ARSENAL CARETAKER boss Freddie Ljungberg said he would seek advice from former manager Arsene Wenger as he prepares for his first home game in charge against Brighton & Hove Albion in the Premier League on Thursday.

Ljungberg, who was named interim boss following Unai Emery’s sacking last week, guided Arsenal to a 2-2 draw at Norwich City last Sunday that extended the eighth-placed club’s winless run in the league to six games.

The Swede, a member of Wenger’s “Invincibles” team that went a complete season unbeaten en route to the 2003-04 league title, said he was keen to speak to the Frenchman as he bids to turn around the club’s fortunes.

“I would really like to speak to him,” Ljungberg told a news conference on Tuesday. “I’m in contact with him but I haven’t spoken to him because it’s been a bit hectic, but it’s on my list to do so.”

Wenger left Arsenal in May last year after a reign of 22 years during which he redefined the Premier League club and became their most successful manager, winning three Premier League titles as well as seven FA Cups. Ljungberg said he is determined to improve the atmosphere at the Emirates Stadium.

Arsenal were beaten 2-1 at home in the Europa League by Eintracht Frankfurt in Emery’s final match in charge. “When it comes to the Emirates, the fans want us to win and they want us to play good football,” Ljungberg said.

“The only way to try and get a good atmosphere is to try and achieve that. If that’s me or someone else as a coach, I don’t think that matters. “The fans were amazing against Norwich, we were on top & I felt they got more and more energy from that... I need to develop the game plan, how we want to play football.”



Freddie Ljungberg was a member of Wenger’s ‘Invincibles’. Reuters

### ARTICLE 15

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