

Soap opera of Messi's future likely to grow in coming season



- Cristiano Ronaldo may have dominated 2022 summer transfer window, but rumors of return to Barcelona mean Messi will once again be under spotlight when his contract with PSG ends

Lionel Messi may have been the talk of last summer's transfer window, but when Paris Saint-Germain kick off their defense of Ligue 1 title on Saturday night against Clermont Foot 63, he will have a somewhat more low-key start to the new season.



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The drama this summer lies with his great rival from Portugal. The summer of 2022 transfer window is not over yet, but we can already say it has been dominated by the soap opera of Cristiano Ronaldo, regardless of where he ends

up playing in the 2022–23 season.

But just like the two have exchanged Ballon d'Or awards over the last decade and a half, next summer's transfer window could well be about the Argentine again, at least if Joan Laporta's recent statements are anything to go by.

The Barcelona president has made clear his desire to have back the club's dearest son back at Camp Nou.

Laporta hopes that Messi, whose career at PSG has not quite gone as expected, has not yet finished his love story with Barça and is open to a return.

"I feel indebted to Messi," the Catalan told ESPN. "It is our responsibility to ensure that history remains open and has a much more splendid ending than it did."

Laporta lamented the way Messi left the club, blaming the previous management, which had left Barcelona with the serious financial problems that he has inherited.

With each financial impasse, Barcelona have tried to cure the situation by activating the now-infamous economic "levers."

Laporta has managed to raise around €650 million (\$662 million) with the sale of 25 percent of the TV rights to the company Sixth Street for 25 years.

This has given the club some breathing space, but with several new players coming in — such as Robert Lewandowski, Jules Koundé and Raphinha — and needing to be registered, the club's financial situation remains in flux. More levers may need to be pulled.

Coach Xavi Hernandez no doubt would be keen for Messi to return to Barcelona for the 2023–24 season as he shared some glorious years with the Argentinian legend, particularly in Pep Guardiola's mythical team.

Hernandez considers the return of the Ballon d'Or record holder to be the key to rebuilding the club.

The idea would be that Messi returns to the club for free when his contract with PSG ends next summer.

The Barca coach also believes that even at 36 years of age, the Argentina captain still has a lot of football to deliver, saying: "Messi deserves a second chance in Barcelona."

Last May, Messi's father also expressed a desire to see his son in the Blaugrana jersey again.

With a contract that is still valid until June 2023, Messi himself, unsurprisingly, has remained respectful to all parties and has not commented on the possibility of a return. But does his silence indicate alternate plans? Maybe.

The Argentinian channel Direct TV reported in May that Messi could acquire 35 percent of Inter Miami, the MLS club owned by David Beckham, to play there in 2023. As with any move next summer, he would head to Florida at zero cost.

According to Transfermarkt, the value of Messi has dropped from well over \$200 million at his 2018 Barcelona peak to almost \$60 million now at PSG.

With that in mind, and taking into account his age, Messi will want to make sure that his next move is the right and most lucrative one for the final chapter of his career.

He has not reacted to Laporta's comments, but his unquestioned affection for Barcelona could be a decisive factor in a potential return to the Catalan team.

Ronaldo continues to hog the headlines this summer, but a year from now, the soap opera could well swing back Messi's way.
