

MONDAY
Money

TUESDAY
Build the Change

WEDNESDAY
Sport

THURSDAY
Science

FRIDAY
Culture

THE DAY
Build a better world



NEWS DETECTIVES

TODAY'S BIG STORY

Messi signs deal to play for Saudi Arabia

Is money bad for sport? Argentina's most famous football star is said to have signed a deal for more than half a billion pounds to play in Saudi Arabia.

He's won the **Copa America**. He's won **La Liga**. Ten times! He's won the Champions League three times. Last year he capped it all by leading **Argentina** to glory at the World Cup.

But now, Lionel Messi, football legend, is setting his sights on the Saudi Pro league.

Ending your career playing for Al Hilal, a team few people outside of the Middle East follow, might seem like a strange move. But Messi has his reasons. More than 500 million of them.



Last tango: At 35, Lionel Messi's move is likely to mark the end of his **professional** career.

THE STORY SO FAR

Lionel Messi is perhaps the greatest footballer of all time. The Argentine player, who started a 20 year career at Barcelona in 2003, has won seven Ballons d'Or, football's highest award.

At £522m, the deal he is **rumoured** to have made with Al Hilal would make him the highest paid athlete in the world.

He would overtake his great rival Cristiano Ronaldo, who is also playing in the **Gulf**, at Saudi Arabia's Al Nassr. His deal was for a **measly** £400m.

The **oil-rich** kingdom of Saudi Arabia has splashed a lot of cash on sport recently, buying Newcastle United, and establishing a new pro-golf tournament.

Critics accuse the kingdom of sportswashing — using sports to distract from its treatment of ordinary Saudi Arabians and its war in Yemen.

But Saudi money is everywhere. It spends billions of pounds loaning out money to the whole world.

Messi has not confirmed the move. But he has already taken up a role as tourism ambassador for the Saudis.

KEY WORDS

Copa America: The South American football championship

La Liga: The top Spanish football league

Argentina: A country in South America

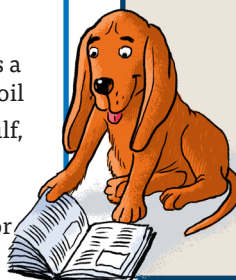
Rumoured: Said but not known for certain

Measly: Small (used here ironically)

Oil-rich: Saudi Arabia makes a lot of money from the sale of oil

Gulf: Short for the Persian Gulf, a sea in West Asia

Professional: Doing something as a job, not just for fun



YOU DECIDE

Is money bad for sport?

YES. If players are rushing to play for countries that are trying to improve their image, this is not a good sign for sport.

NO. Money is what makes sport at the highest level possible. Players deserve their cut of the business.



THE DETECTIVE ZONE

SPOT THE FAKE

One of these three news stories is fake. Which one?

Contested goal leads to school rematch 50 years on

World's oldest professional footballer is aged 74

Video assisted referee to check old World Cups

Which country's rugby team is called The Springboks?



- A) Argentina
- B) Fiji
- C) South Africa
- D) Italy

TIME TO DESIGN!

Messi's new team is trying to bring together the greatest footballers in the world. In this challenge, you will design your own dream football team.

Step one:

Think about your team! What skills will you need? Is attitude as important as ability? Would you sign professional players, celebrities or people you know?



Step two:

Put together your team! You could draw a picture of them, or write a match report about their first game!

Talking point

Are fans justified in feeling betrayed when players leave their teams?

Amaze someone

Saudi Arabia has plans to build an entire hi-tech city, called Neom, at a cost of almost £400bn.

Sultan bin Salman Al Saud, the eldest son of Saudi Arabia's king, is the only royal to have been to space.

THE EXTRA PAGE

Messi's megabucks move

Argentine superstar Lionel Messi will play in Saudi Arabia next season under a blockbuster deal, a source close to the negotiations in the kingdom said.

The deal would mean Messi potentially joining his archrival Cristiano Ronaldo in the Saudi Pro League as the Gulf state lavishes its oil wealth on sport.

The source said Messi will sign a "huge" deal with an as-yet-unnamed Saudi club, just months after the 35-year-old lifted the World Cup in neighbouring Qatar in December.

"Messi is a done deal. He will play in Saudi Arabia next season," said the source, who is not authorised to speak to media and spoke on condition of anonymity. "The contract is exceptional. It's huge. We are just finalising some small details."

Despite several reports linking Messi with Al Hilal, one of the top Saudi teams, club sources said they had not been in direct contact with PSG.

Lionel Messi's father and agent Jorge insisted his son has not decided where he will play next season.

Just five years after allowing its



Garlands: Messi will hope to outdo Ronaldo in the Gulf — his team lost the title this year.

first non-Muslim tourists to visit and letting women drive, Saudi Arabia is attempting to open up its conservative society and diversify its oil-reliant economy.

The world's biggest oil exporter has thrown hundreds of millions at sports deals including Ronaldo's signing, Formula One in Jeddah and the divisive LIV Golf tour, drawing frequent claims it is "sportswashing" its human rights record.

Messi's long-time sparring partner Ronaldo joined Saudi Pro League club Al Nassr in a massive deal in January. His agreement to June 2025 is said to total more than €400m (£348m), making him the world's highest paid athlete.

Ronaldo, 38, has not been a guarantee of success at Al Nassr, which has slipped off the top of the Saudi Pro

League.

But Messi is also intended to raise the profile of Saudi Arabia as it tries to bring in tourists and investment, the source said.

"The plan is not only Messi and Ronaldo, the plan is to bring glorious players like these two and also upcoming youth players who have a promising future.

"We want people to visit Saudi Arabia to watch football stars."

Saudi Arabia has held talks with Egypt and Greece about a joint World Cup bid, according to officials. In coming years it will hold the men's Asian Cup soccer tournament, the Asian Games and even the Asian Winter Games on artificial snow. ■

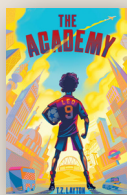
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