

Messi Madness



Argentine soccer forward **Lionel Messi** made international news this past summer when he confirmed rumors about signing with **Inter Miami**, marking the first time Messi has played for a **U.S. soccer club**. The deal has come to symbolize a new start for the team and for major league sports in the city. The global icon is actively **paving the way** for renewed interest in soccer in the States, bringing along his fame, talent and alleged craving for **pub-sub**s.

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In the world of sports, few names shine as brightly as Lionel Messi's. After appearing in five world cups across a 16-year period, the relentless Argentine soccer player has finally earned his new title of World Cup champion following Argentina's victory over France in the 2022 World Cup, which was held in the blazing desert of Qatar. Despite this colossal win, years of highly competitive professional soccer is what truly granted Lionel Messi his global fame.

Due to his exceptional performances in the European clubs FC Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain, news outlets across the world have routinely referred to him as the greatest player of all time. While he is a star player, his fame goes beyond the boundaries of sports. Many fans view Messi as a global icon, inspiring millions with his skills, humility and love for the game.

So what is a global soccer icon doing signing with Inter Miami? Why now? On June 7, 2023, Lionel Messi publicly announced he would sign with Inter Miami, turning down the multimillion dollar offer made by the Saudi Professional League Team, Al-Hilal. To say the soccer world was in shock is an understatement.

Al-Hilal has gained recent success both domestically and internationally, having earned four league titles in the last seven years and an AFC Champions League title. To further add to their reputation, Al-Hilal recently acquired the globally renowned Brazilian soccer forward Neymar, attracting him with a \$300 million contract. However, these accolades and a \$500 million contract were not enough for Messi.

"I came here to play and to keep enjoying soccer, which is what I loved my whole life, and I chose this place because of all those things," Messi explained to CNN reporters after an away game against Philadelphia.

Team captain of the University of Miami women's soccer team, Melissa Dagenais, suggests why Messi might have chosen Miami as his final destination.

"I assume he was looking for a place where he can thrive on and off the field, a place where he knows he will be appreciated and supported by the fans," said Dagenais.

Inter Miami CF was founded in 2018 under the guidance and



▲ **THE STARTING GOALKEEPER,** Drake Callender is ready to protect the goal during a game. Callender has a 70% success rate, as stated on the Miami CF website.



▲ **THE GAME IS ON IN A MATCH AGAINST ATLANTA UNITED** on Sep. 16. Inter Miami CF lost in a tough game 5-2 and is currently standing at number 14 in the Eastern conference.



▲ **INTER MIAMI TEAMMATES** bring it in for a huddle to plan their next attack against Atlanta United. Atlanta out-shot Miami by 16 to 10 with six to three shots on target.

ownership of the now-retired British right winger David Beckham, who is a soccer legend in his own right. Since its inception, Inter Miami has encountered a fair share of struggles. The club made its Major League Soccer debut in 2020, yet fell short of the grand expectations set for its inaugural season.

In their first season, the team finished in 10th place in the Eastern Conference and failed to secure a spot in the playoffs due to a surplus of injured players and tactical issues. Inter Miami struggled, and the challenges faced on the field quickly translated into challenges faced with fans of the club. With a stadium located more than 30 miles north of downtown Miami and a brand new team struggling to make their mark, hope for Inter Miami was dwindling. The team was left wounded — until Messi arrived.

Welcoming a new player to a team is bound to alter dynamics on the field. Luckily for Inter Miami, this is just what they needed. Messi's contribution to the team has already created a motivation for them to find plenty of success in their 2023 season.

Drake Callender, the starting goalkeeper for Inter Miami, described his team as a “ticking time bomb,” waiting for their opportunity to finally prove their ability.

“Having one of the worst records in the league, our team was in flight or fight mode, and we had a lot to prove,” said Callender. “Yes, he had many contributions to our team on the field, but he was joining a team who was hungry and desperate for a win. The greatest player of all time joined a team that had everything to prove.”

Kayley Sullivan, the assistant coach of UM's women's soccer team, had a similar experience. She describes player changes on a team similarly to Callender who spoke on Inter Miami's variety of talent.

“Any time a team changes by a single member, you have a new team,” she shared. “[It] requires deliberate planning and consistency,” said Sullivan. “Everyone contributes in their own unique way,” she added.

Additionally, of Messi to Inter Miami CF has done more than just enhance the team's stats. His presence alone in the United States has the potential to inspire a new generation of soccer players. In addition, Messi holds the power to elevate the popular sport to new heights in the country, and even more so in Miami, a city known for its immense diversity and passionate sports culture.

The enduring Latin American influence on the city's culture and residents' undying love for the Miami Heat can describe Miami in a nutshell. Fortunately, the locals

have quickly embraced the soccer legend and reignited their deep-running pride in Miami athletics.

“Having Messi in Miami has been really exciting and has drawn a lot more attention to soccer in America,” said Julia Edwards, UM's second women's soccer team captain. “I hope that the fan base continues to grow.”

It's inspiring to see junior soccer teams thrive throughout the city, and particularly moving to see our very own UM soccer players feel enthused by this new addition to our home. 🏠

► MESSI DRIBBLES

the ball in warmups, ready to take on the opponents. The star is ranked as the number one soccer player in the world.



photo_jared lennon.

MESSI SPOTTED

Despite the overwhelming soccer enthusiasm for this promising season, nothing exceeds the excitement of local sightings of Messi. He has quickly taken it upon himself to explore his new home base. He has been spotted roaming around Miami Beach, dining with his wife in small cafes in Pembroke Pines, and even shopping in the produce aisle of our local South Miami Publix. So if you find yourself at your local grocery store in Miami, keep your eyes peeled, since you never know which worldwide champion you might encounter amidst the produce and pub-sub.