

Football essay: the ballon d'or award

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The Ballon d'Or is a global award; it first started back in 1956 and the first winner of the award was Stanley Matthews from England who is one of the few English players to win this special honor (McInerney and Anderson, 1970). This award consists of a golden football, which is valuable due to its material value, and more importantly the prestigious value and honor it gives to the winner. For the prize is a representation of the world's greatest footballer for a given year, with an esteemed panel of journalist deciding on the winner. Hence, the Ballon d'Or has always been held in high esteem, with every footballer dreaming to one day be honored by the grand individual prize. But recently much debate has surrounded the significance of the Ballon d'Or, mainly due to the fact that for the past ten years the prize has been shared between only two players; Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi, with each winning it five times. Thus is the prize as valuable as it used to be, and does it still carry the same meaning and value?

Historically, France Football, a French magazine, has awarded the Ballon d'Or. Between 2010-2015 the award was merged with Fifa, but in 2016, the collaboration ended with the two parties parting ways. Originally, the Ballon d'Or was solely for European players, as the laws forbid any non-European winners. However, due to the controversies concerning the award and concerns over its credibleness, the governing body decided to change the rules in 1995 by expanding the nominees to any player playing within a European club (Sonntag, 2013). But, this led to further conflict, as it furthered the barriers between the nations, hence in 2007 the award officially became global, meaning; any player from the world, even if he

doesn't play for a European club, can win this award officially (Ruizeendal, 2014).

With the new laws, came new winners from new nations; the first non-European player to win this honor was the Liberian George Weah in 1995 who now is the current president of Liberia (Ruizeendal, 2014). George Weah's current popularity and global recognition somewhat represents the value of the Ballon d'Or, as it granted him eternal fame and a legacy in the world of football. In turn, Weah was able to not only better his life but also the lives of many, through his many charitable works during and after his career, and more importantly being the leader of a deprived country. The countries with the most Ballon d'Or winners are Germany and Holland with seven winners each come from many all-time greats such as Marco Van Basten, Franz Beckenbauer who is one of the many few defenders to win this award and many other great players (McInerney and Anderson, 1970).

But recently, Ronaldo and Messi have monopolized the award. The two are very important players in football, who vastly changed football. Their influence can be witnessed through their dominance over Ballon d'Or. They have dominated the award since 2008 winning it ten times combined. Individually both players have created history by simply winning the award multiple times, in addition to their stellar career.

Ronaldo's career started in Sporting CP where he was perceived as a national prodigy. But Ronaldo's popularity increased during a friendly match with Manchester United, a gigantic club in the world of football. His performance was so astonishing that fans, players and the opposing

manager Sir Alex Ferguson were intrigued and fascinated. In return this led Manchester United into acquiring the starlet for a hefty figure of £20 million (Transfermarket, 2006). At Manchester United he achieved many things such as the Premier League three times in a row from (2006-2007 2007-2008 and 2008-2009), FA Cup in the year of 2003-2004, the UEFA Champions League in the year 2007-2008 and the Club World Cup in the year 2008. These achievements with the right manager lead him to the right direction, which made 2008 the year of Ronaldo, as represented by him winning his first ever Ballon d'Or in 2008 (Oldfield, 2008).

Upon his new found global fame and recognition Ronaldo was set on a new adventure, this time in his childhood dream club, Real Madrid. This transfer to another football superpower cost 94 million (Transfermarket, 2008), making it a record-breaking transfer at that time. But the value is considered a bargain, based on Ronaldo's extravagant achievements both on an individual and team level. As for his national career Ronaldo was able to win Euro 2016, where he starred as a team leader, thus, further adding to his legacy (Hasaan, 2016).

On the other hand, Lionel Messi began his career with Barcelona where he started in the academy at a young age. At the beginning Messi suffered from a hormone disorder that diminished his growth. But Barcelona's persistence and efforts were well rewarded when Messi blasted into the first team and brought the glory back to a club in need. He accomplished many things with the club such as winning the league eight times from 2004-2016, winning the Copa Del Rey five times, the Champions League four times, the UEFA super

cup three times and the Club World Cup three times. Messi surpassed Gerd Muller by netting 91 goals in 69 official games in a year which made him a world record breaker book for breaking the record of scoring the most goals in a single year giving him a ratio of 1.35 in each game which is tremendous (Transfermarket, 2013). There also come the part of doubters who doubt that Messi's ability and passion due to his shortcomings with the national team. But with such aspects success is a subjective manner, as many also believe that Messi has achieved the impossible with a weak Argentinian squad without winning any trophy. Nonetheless, Messi is one of the most successful players in the history of football because he won many trophies with one club only because he believed in his club, which indicates that hard work and determination brings you trophies.

Therefore both players have had great success and built great career. Both have also been very successful from a financial perspective, as the monetary part of football has grown with their growing fame. But many believe that money has ruined football, as it has become a players greatest concern and thus diminished the passion for the game. For imagine earning 615,000 pound in one week while the two best players in football combining their salaries get a total of 730,000 pounds (Innes, 2016). Now in football it's all starting to become about the money since only 2 players can win this award so what do the footballers do They go to clubs that offer them a high salary giving them treble the money they were offered instead of trying to win this award, since these 2 players said that it's not a priority to them to win this award after winning it ten times combined and turning their focus on to other things (Daniel Edwards, 2017).

But does the monetary aspect support Messi and Ronaldo in this debate. For many argue that these players are so successful due to their passion for the sport, while other players cannot reach their levels as they are blinded by money. Players must put their mindset in winning awards instead of focusing on the money. Of course financial concerns are important, especially in a sport where players retire at a rather young age, but a balance must be done between passion for the game and financial gains.

I recommend that they add a further rule for the Balon d'Or, which can make the award very interesting. The rule is; you can only win the award for a maximum number of 3 times, thus giving an opportunity to other players and making the award more fascinating. But this may have a negative effect as people may not give it importance since they know that there are two players with the names of Messi and Ronaldo who concluded football by achieving everything possible. On the other hand another suggestion s for the changes in the awards rules, regulations and voting system. Thus making it more realistic which can attract more fans to the mix, hence introducing a new generation in football in which everything will be redone.

To sum up what I said in the end, everybody has their subjective opinions but the prestige of the award somewhat diminished after the consecutive wins of Ronaldo and Messi continuously. The question every player asks himself is do we stand a chance against these predators where they consider them self's the ashes of the fire. In addition to the mentioned above they could return the prestige of this tittle by making new rules and regulations and make new barriers to entry, which will make the award achievable to

new players that are performing well who are in the shadow of Messi and Ronaldo. This may be beneficial to the game as it may attract new viewers and raise awareness about the Ballon d'Or itself. Overall did Messi and Ronaldo ruin the prestige of this award, in my opinion the pair are legends of the sport and have earned all their accolades, but the Ballon d'Or must change its system in order to capture the intrigue of all the fan base and explain to the average viewer why a certain player has won it over the other.