

Soccer fans should be mad at FC Barcelona, not Messi, for his exit

The 34-year old Messi signs a two-year deal with Paris Saint-Germain, thus ending his 17-year tenure with FC Barcelona



COREY KIRK

In the world of soccer, news recently broke that has left a state of chaos in the sport. Lionel Messi, who has graced the world of international soccer from the age of 17, has spent half of his life draped in the red and blue of Futbol Club Barcelona.

Well, until this past week. Facing a financial crisis and structural obstacles as they attempt to maintain being competitive in La Liga, FC Barcelona was unable to

commit to the initial five-year contract that they had in the works with the 34-year-old superstar, one that would have seen him finish his career in Catalunya. What impressed me was what Messi decided to do next.

He was ready to play for less.

He offered to play with up to a 50% pay cut to remain with the club — yet FC Barcelona still wouldn't be able to afford his services at that price tag. It was quite evident that Messi would have loved to stay, however, after the tumultuous run with Josep Maria Bartameu, who was pushed out of

the position of President after a six-year run with his extravagant spending that led to over \$1.4 billion in debt.

After watching his tearful conference thanking the organization and their fans for the 17-year run, I was taken aback by the conversation that dominates all different domains of sports.

I recognize that athletes in recent memory have often been seen taken by the highest bidder; focused on making money that most dream of, which sometimes may lie with championship aspirations. We have seen athletes getting huge paydays to profit off their skillset or willingly take a pay cut to join a talented team at a chance to win a title. Though Barcelona was paying Messi handsomely with his

last contract, where he was nearly making a million dollars a week, it was evident that money was no longer motivating where he was wanting to play. He wanted to start his career and finish it with FC Barcelona.

"I gave everything for Barcelona from the first day that I arrived right to the last. I never imagined having to say goodbye," Messi told the news conference on Sunday.

I've always enjoyed that athletes, no matter the sport, feel loyalty to the organization and the city that brought them in to compete professionally. It's even better when we see these athletes reward their team like Giannis Antetokounmpo bringing the Milwaukee Bucks their first championship in over 50 years in basketball,

and we saw Messi since the age of 13 — when he played for Barcelona's youth academy — win numerous championships and score 672 goals during his tenure.

Messi's offseason will prove one thing that is evident in sports, the business side of the organization won't be able to reward loyalty all the time.

If success comes from the athlete playing with their organization, and they are happy to be there, then contract negotiations are normally simple. However, the upper brass from FC Barcelona failed themselves by keeping a big spender like Bartameu at the helm spoiling their chances to keep a generational talent like Messi in their ranks.

Being a free agent for the blink of an eye, Messi now joins

the likes of Neymar Jr. and Angel Di Maria on the Paris Saint-Germain team, and now they are going to be the most anticipated team to watch in the Ligue de Football Professionnel. Fans of FC Barcelona shouldn't direct their anger toward Messi, because it was evident that he wanted to stay.

This could have been prevented. If the right person was in charge of how their money was spent, both sides would be happy. One of the best players in the world would remain under contract, and Messi would have retired where he probably preferred to retire.

Messi may not have the storybook ending to his career that he truly deserved.

Corey Kirk is the sports editor at the Baker City Herald.

Seahawks practice in front of fans at Lumen Field

For the first time since the end of the 2019 season, fans packed Lumen Field to watch the Seahawks in person as they practiced

By **CURTIS CRABTREE**
Associated Press

SEATTLE — As Russell Wilson and the Seattle Seahawks walked to the line of scrimmage to run out the remaining two minutes of clock, boos rained down on the team from the 15,758 fans in attendance at Lumen Field.

"That was great," head coach Pete Carroll remarked afterward.

After all, it was the first time fans have been able to watch the Seahawks perform in any fashion inside Lumen Field since the end of the 2019 regular season. All nine of Seattle's home games last season came without fans in attendance.

So even some well-natured boos were a welcome occurrence for the Seahawks.

"It was fun for our guys to

have that whole setting," Carroll added.

The practice saw Wilson unofficially complete 13 of 20 passes for 196 yards, running back Chris Carson score the only offensive touchdown, and defensive tackle Poona Ford scoop up a fumble for a 15-yard defensive score in a 22-3 win over the Blue team. It was the team's rehearsal before their first preseason game of the year next Saturday on the road against the Las Vegas Raiders.

"That was a really good day," Carroll said. "That was what we wanted to get done. We wanted to get over here, get the feeling of what it's like to be at Lumen Field. ...

The guys did a really nice job of using their imagination to make this a good event that will make some sense for us

as we come back in a couple weeks. We accomplished a lot."

The team was rather short-handed at a couple positions. Tackles Jamarco Jones (back spasms), Cedric Ogbuehi (biceps strain) and Tommy Champion (groin) all were hurt in Saturday's practice and held out. With starting left tackle Duane Brown and safety Jamal Adams both not practicing as part of contract disputes, the team was testing its depth to get the practice completed.

Carroll said that Brown is "making a statement" about his contract, which is set to pay him \$10 million in base salary in the final year of his deal.

"He's making a statement about what he feels he needs to have happen," Carroll said. "He's not going to play in pre-



Ted S. Warren/Associated Press

Seattle Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson stretches at the start of practice on Tuesday, June 8, 2021, in Renton, Washington.

season. He wasn't going to. It's not going to make a difference right now."

Wilson uncharacteristically expressed displeasure this offseason at "getting hit

too much." He made clear his hope the Seahawks can resolve Brown's situation.

"Not having Duane Brown out there is a pretty significant deal. ... We've got to figure that out because we need Duane Brown," Wilson said.

Wilson and the Seahawks' offense is working to get up to speed with new offensive coordinator Shane Waldron. Wilson said Waldron's offense allows him to have more plays to change to at the line of scrimmage than he's had previously and the trust to change it up based on what he sees on the field. Wilson is bullish on what the team can accomplish offensively this season with Waldron calling plays.

"I think we can be the No. 1 offense in football," Wilson said. "I don't see why not."

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