

Messi told Neymar he'd make him a Ballon d'Or

Lionel Messi tried to persuade Neymar not to leave Barcelona by telling him: 'I'll make you a Ballon d'Or winner', according to Spain's *Diario Sport*.

In a last ditch attempt by Messi and Luis Suarez to make Neymar stay the pair took the 25-year-old to one side at the Sheraton Parsippany hotel in New Jersey where the team were staying ahead of their game against Juventus in the MetLife Stadium in July.

According to *Sport's Ivan San Antonio*, Messi told Neymar: 'What do you want?' Do you want to be a Ballon d'Or [winner]? I'll make you the Ballon d'Or.'

It was Messi's last big play for Neymar to stay and it centred on giving his team-mate more of the spotlight. The inference is that the Brazilian would be able to take more free-kicks and penalties and have a more central role in finishing Barcelona attacks as Messi morphed ever more into a playmaker.

In the subsequent friendly with Juventus Neymar scored twice with Messi standing aside,

while holding off defenders, as the Brazilian completed his dribble before shooting past Gianluigi Buffon. He also laid a potential third goal on a plate for Neymar who this time failed to beat the keeper.

Despite that especially generous performance from Messi and the declaration before the game, Neymar's mind was already made up and he is now Messi's main rival for the big individual prizes in football.

Messi already has five Ballon d'Or/Fifa World Player/The Best awards. Cristiano Ronaldo should win this year's prize but Neymar will join the race in 2018 with the outcome of

the Russia World Cup likely to play a crucial role in who gets the personal gong.

Messi left an emotional video dedicated to Neymar on social media when he left the club. He wrote: 'It was an enormous pleasure to have shared these years with you my friend @neymarjr I wish you luck in this new stage of your life.' Neymar responded: 'Thanks brother. I will miss you.' Suarez and Neymar also exchanged goodbye messages.

Dani Alves has since revealed that it was at Messi's wedding that he and Neymar schemed

their joint move to Paris Saint Germain and so Neymar's subsequent divorce from Barcelona.

Messi tied the knot in Argentina on July 1 and both Alves and Neymar were at the ceremony having a tete-a-tete about meeting up in Ligue 1 for the new season. (*dailymail.co.uk*)

Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez spoke to Neymar in a New Jersey hotel during Barcelona's pre-season tour against Juventus in the MetLife Stadium in July



Neymar (file pic)



Neymar (L) with Messi and Suarez (R) (file pic)



Lionel Messi (file pic)

Liverpool reject third Barca bid for Coutinho



Philippe Coutinho (file pic)

London

Liverpool have rejected a third bid from Barcelona for star playmaker Philippe Coutinho, a source from the Premier League club confirmed yesterday.

British media reports said Barcelona's latest bid was worth around £114 million (\$146.5 million, 124.7 million euros), a significant increase on their previous offer of £90 million.

Liverpool have publicly stated that Coutinho is not for

sale at any price and consider the figures being offered by Barcelona irrelevant.

The 25-year-old Brazil playmaker, currently sidelined by a back problem, has submitted a transfer request.

He signed a new five-year contract in January.

Barcelona have targeted Coutinho and Borussia Dortmund winger Ousmane Dembele to plug the gap created by Neymar's world-record £222 million euro (\$260.8 million) move to Paris Saint-Germain.

Speaking on Thursday, Barca general manager Pep Segura said deals for the pair were "close".

But Liverpool are refusing to budge and Dembele, 20, has been suspended by Dortmund after going on strike in a bid to force through a move.

Coutinho joined Liverpool from Inter Milan in an £8.5 million move in January 2013 and is the key creative figure in Jurgen Klopp's team, scoring 14 goals in all competitions last season. (*AFP*)