

SPORTS  
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# Messi wanted to leave Barca during tax probe

● **Lionel Messi was handed a prison sentence of 21 months and ordered to pay a fine after he was found guilty of tax fraud by Spanish authorities**

● **The Argentine felt that he was being poorly treated during the investigation**

AFP | Madrid

Lionel Messi has admitted he wanted to leave Barcelona when he was under investigation from the Spanish tax authorities but insists now he intends to finish his career at the club.

In an interview with Catalan radio station RAC1, Messi also said he had expected Neymar to sign for Real Madrid last summer after Barca failed to strike an agreement with Paris Saint-Germain.

Messi and his father Jorge were found guilty of defrauding Spain of 4.1 million euros in taxes between 2007 and 2009, for which they paid close to 10 million euros and Messi was handed a 21-month suspended prison sentence.

Asked on Tuesday night if he had ever wanted to leave Bar-

celona, Messi said: "In 2013-14, when I started having the tax problems, it was very difficult for me and my family."

"My children were young and we had a very bad time. At that time, I had it in mind to leave, not because I wanted to leave Barca but because I wanted to leave Spain. I felt mistreated and I didn't want to be here anymore."

The 32-year-old's current contract expires in 2021 and Messi believes extending his deal "will not be a problem".

"Today it is clearer that my idea is to finish here," Messi said.

"For how I am at the club, for what I feel, and for the family and the children and how settled we are in this city. I would not like to disrupt that. "Of course anything can happen but in principle, the idea is to stay here."

Messi began playing football aged six for Newell's Old Boys, the Rosario club he supports in

Argentina.

"I always dreamed of being able to play again for Newell's and to have the experience of playing football in Argentina," he said.

"But I have already told them that sometimes you have to think about what is best for your family."

## No rift with Griezmann

Messi was keen to be reunited with Neymar last summer but Barcelona were unable to agree a fee with PSG.

"I honestly thought at one time, especially in this market, that if he did not come here, he would go to Real Madrid because I thought he wanted to leave," Messi said.

"I wanted Ney to come because as a footballer, he is one of the best in the world. He is unpredictable, different and having him in our team would have given us more options."



Lionel Messi

## Dembele to miss Clasico after receiving two-match ban

AFP | Madrid

Ousmane Dembele will miss this season's first Clasico between Barcelona and Real Madrid after he was banned for two matches by the Spanish football federation (RFEF) yesterday.

Dembele was sent off near the end of Barca's 4-0 win over Sevilla on Sunday for saying to referee Mateu Lahoz: "very bad, very bad".

The RFEF disciplinary committee ruled that Dembele's reaction constituted an "attitude of contempt or disregard for referees" and suspended the Frenchman for two matches.

It means Dembele is unavailable for Barca's upcoming La Liga fixtures away at Eibar on October 19 and at home to Real Madrid on October 26.

Madrid and Barca are first and second in the table after eight games.



## England prepared to walk off if they are racially abused: Abraham

AFP | London

Tammy Abraham says England are prepared to defy UEFA rules on racism and walk off the pitch if they face abuse during Euro 2020 qualifiers.

Gareth Southgate's team travel to the Czech Republic and Bulgaria for back-to-back matches on Friday and Monday.

The second game, in Sofia, will be closely watched as the hosts will be playing in the Vasil Levski National Stadium, partially closed as a sanction following previous incidents of racism.

England's players received similar abuse in their qualifier against Montenegro in Podgorica earlier this year, where they stayed on the pitch and won 5-1.

Southgate has said England will follow UEFA's three-step protocol for racial abuse.

The first step is for the referee to be made aware of any racism and halt the game for an announcement to be made. If the abuse continues, the referee will suspend the game for a period of

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TAMMY ABRAHAM

time. The third and final step will see the official abandon the game.

But Abraham, 22, suggested that if England's players believe someone is not comfortable, captain Harry Kane could lead them off the pitch before the three steps are played out if they are not working.

"We've touched base on how to deal with the situation," said the Chelsea forward. "Harry Kane even said that if it happens and we're not happy with it, we speak to the player and if he's not happy, we all come off the pitch together."



Tammy Abraham

## BIKC set for opening round of endurance karting championship

TDT | Manama

Bahrain International Karting Circuit (BIKC) will host the opening round of the 2019/2020 Bahrain Karting Enduro Championship (BKEC) this weekend.

Following an ultra-exciting meeting of national sprints last week, the spotlight shifts to endurance racing with a three-hour challenge set to take place Saturday at the world-class Sakhir facility.

The event marks the first of four rounds in this year's BKEC. The series will not only measure a driver's quickness and racing ability, but it will also require superior teamwork, perseverance and reliability. Teams will go head to head not only against one another, but they will also face the test of time and the unpredictability of the elements.

Action on Saturday is scheduled to begin at 3pm with Qualifying Practice. The three-hour race then flags off at 4pm and will conclude at exactly 7pm.

To date, 14 teams have signed up to compete. They include



Participants in action during a race (file photo)

three teams representing BAPCO, two for Racing BH, three from Bahrain Airport Services, two from ARAMCO, and two for

Manama Drift, along with GO Bahrain and Pakistan Team.

They will be battling it out in the Pro, Corporate and Nations classes. Each team will be competing in identical 390cc RT8 karts.

Entrance to BIKC is free of charge.

Following this weekend's meeting, Round Two on November 9 will be another three-hour race. Round Three is then set for January 18 next year and it will be a six-hour event. Round Four will then be the championship-finale and the ultimate challenge of the season: a 24-hour race, scheduled for February 14 and 15.



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