

Grieving Argentine icon Messi **unsure** about playing on ‘much longer’

Messi recalls his father's influence throughout his remarkable career and World Cup journey

● **Messi mourns his father**

● **Jorge Messi died aged 68**

● **Family funeral takes place Sunday**

AFP | Buenos Aires

Argentina superstar and inspiration behind his country's 2022 World Cup victory Lionel Messi said yesterday he has "serious doubts" about continuing to play football for "much longer" after the death of his father Jorge Messi.

"I don't know what I'll do without you, I don't know how to go on. I just played football, and now I have serious doubts about continuing to do so for much longer," Messi, 39, wrote in a message on social media. His father, who was also his agent, died last week aged 68.

In the message, Messi, whose contract with Major League Soccer outfit Inter Miami runs till the end of the 2028 season, reflected on the final months of his father's life, which coincided with the 2026 World Cup.

Jorge Messi's absence from the World Cup in June had already attracted attention.

"You kept asking me to play in one last World Cup, yet just days before it started, your condition took a turn for the worse. It was the first time you wouldn't be there for a tournament," wrote Messi, who returned to the United States on Tuesday night following his father's funeral on Sunday.

"I kept telling you we would reach the final so you could make the trip.

"Every time a match ended

I

waited for and missed your message. That's when I realized the situation was really bad.

"We made it to the final, but you couldn't be there. I wanted to win it to bring it to you and show you a new one. I couldn't, my legs just gave out.

"This time I tried to push past my physical limits, but I couldn't. I never felt right," Messi said in his first comments after the 1-0

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LIONEL MESSI

loss to Spain in the final in New Jersey.

Immediately after the World Cup final defeat against Spain, Messi returned to spend a few days with his family in Rosario, 340 km north of Buenos Aires.

Messi recalled that he noticed his father had not been able to enjoy the World Cup.

"When I arrived, you thought we had lost the final on penalties. We couldn't talk about anything that had happened. You couldn't enjoy any

of it," he said.

"We didn't become champions, but you have no idea how much we enjoyed every match. Once again, you were right: I had to be there and play."

'Father, friend and agent'

Competing in his sixth World Cup, Messi scored eight goals as he steered his country to the final.

After bursting into tears after scoring against Algeria in a group match, Messi had admitted to dealing with "a situation outside of sports".

On Sunday, the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner bid farewell to his father during a private ceremony with close family and a few Argentina teammates in the town of Perez, adjacent to Rosario.

The cause of death was not disclosed, but local media reported that Jorge Messi had been suffering from cancer.

Messi highlighted his father's pivotal role in his life and career: "You were a father, a friend, and an agent. You were always exactly who you needed to be in every moment, and you never put a foot wrong."

Jorge was his first coach who left everything behind to accompany him in 2000 when Barcelona invited the young prodigy, then aged 13, to Catalonia to continue treatment for a growth hormone deficiency while playing for the club's youth teams.



Jorge Messi moved to Spain in 2000, leaving behind his job and family in Argentina to accompany 13-year-old Lionel after Barcelona invited him to Catalonia

Jorge left behind his job in Argentina, his wife, and his three other children to settle in Spain with Lionel.

His father was later the agent who negotiated contracts on his behalf, from Barcelona to Paris Saint-Germain and Inter Miami.

"You were always like that, right from when I was little. You'd take me to every training session as soon as you got home from work," Messi recalled.

"You never missed a single match. You suffered while watching me play, yet you enjoyed it too -- even though you never lavished me with praise.

"Rest in peace, and watch over us from above just as you did down here. Thank you for everything."

Bangladesh get Das fitness boost for daunting Australia task



Bangladesh coach Phil Simmons (C) speaks to his players during training in Darwin

AFP | Sydney

Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto yesterday declared wicketkeeper Litton Das "100 percent fit" for the first Test against Australia while suggesting the tourists could play two spinners.

Experienced wicketkeeper-batsman Das had been sidelined since June with a left calf injury and was initially ruled out of the opening Test of the two-match series.

But he was a late addition to the squad and is set to line up in Darwin on Thursday in a big boost to a side that lost their only warm-up game by an innings and 38 runs.

"Litton gives us batting depth," Shanto told reporters. "He is consistent. We are hopeful of our batting unit doing well in the Test match."

The series marks Bangladesh's first Test tour of Australia in 23 years, with their last visit in 2003.

They have their work cut out against a full-strength side ranked one in the world and buoyed by the return from injury of bowling heavyweights Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Nathan Lyon.

While Shanto confirmed the inclusion of Das, he did not confirm the remainder of the starting side, wanting a last look at the wicket before deciding.

Sri Lanka's Kusal Mendis out of India Tests with injury

AFP | Colombo

Sri Lanka wicketkeeper Kusal Mendis has been ruled out of two Tests against India due to injury as selectors named the squad for the home series yesterday.

Wicketkeeper-batter Niroshan Dickwella, who could play his first Test in over three years, makes the 16-member squad in place of Mendis.

The opening match will be played at the Galle International

Stadium from August 15. The second will begin on August 23 at Colombo's Sinhalese Sports Club.

Dickwella, 33, a left-hand batter, has not played a Test since March 2023 after dis-

ciplinary action against him.

Mendis injured his hamstring in a domestic game.

Pathum Nissanka was unavailable for selection as he recovers from a wrist injury.

Man City sign Argentina goalkeeper Rulli from Marseille

AFP | London

Manchester City have signed Argentina international goalkeeper Geronimo Rulli from Marseille on a two-year deal, both clubs announced yesterday.

The 34-year-old will serve as City's number-two goalkeeper behind Italian Gianluigi Donnarumma.

"This is an amazing opportunity for me and one I had to grasp," said Rulli, who returns for a second spell at City having spent the 2016/17 season at the Etihad without making a first team appearance.

"When the chance to join Manchester City comes along you have to go for it.

"Everyone knows what an impressive club this is.



Geronimo Rulli reacts during a match (file photo)

"City's success over a long time has been impressive. Everyone I have spoken to about City said I had to join

them because they are a club with incredibly high standards.

"My job now is to train hard, get to know the players and staff and do everything I can to reach my best level."

Rulli has won eight caps for Argentina and was in the squad that won the 2022 World Cup and 2024 Copa America and reached last month's World Cup final in which they lost to Spain.

He previously played for European clubs including Real Sociedad, Villarreal, Montpellier and Ajax.

He famously scored a penalty in Villarreal's 2021 Europa League final victory over Manchester United, before denying opposite number David de Gea to claim the trophy 11-10 in the shootout.