THE SOCCER GOAT

INDEPENDENT & UNOFFICIAL



WHO IS THE GREATEST OF ALL TIME?

MESSI V. RONALDO



MATT OLDFIELD

SETH BURKETT


WHO IS THE
GREATEST
OF ALL
TIME?

With special thanks to Jamie "The Legend" Evans
of the Langley Academy, who helped us come
up with the idea during an author visit.
MO & SB



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THE SOCCER GOAT



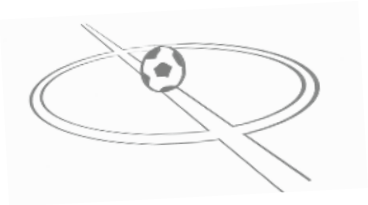
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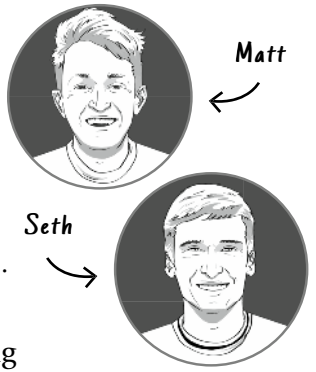
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KICKOFF

WHAT *IS* A SOCCER GOAT?

Hi there, we're Matt and Seth—we're two friends who love soccer. *A lot*. Now, seeing as you're reading this book (thanks, by the way), we're guessing you love soccer too. *Snap!* Welcome to our world . . .



We love playing soccer, watching soccer, and reading about soccer. But most of all, we love *arguing* with each other about soccer.



Matt
Your team is trash! My team would beat your team any day—50–0!

Seth
Matt, that would be the biggest win in soccer history!





Matt
So?!

And our favorite topic to fight over? The soccer GOAT!

Oh yeah, before we go any further, we should issue a very important warning: This book is *not* about animals. Sorry! Don't get us wrong, we do like the goats you find on farms, with their cute, fluffy beards; it's just that we prefer the GOATs you find on the soccer field—the . . .

GREATEST OF ALL TIME.

Yes, we're talking about the smartest, the fastest, the most skillful, and the most successful players to ever grace the beautiful game. There have been some real legends over the years, but we believe that two stand out above the rest . . .

IT'S MESSI V. RONALDO!



LIONEL

MESSI



DATE OF BIRTH	June 24, 1987
BIRTHPLACE	Rosario, Argentina
CURRENT POSITION	Center-forward
CLUBS	• Barcelona (2003–21) • Paris Saint-Germain (2021–23) • Inter Miami (2023–present)
NICKNAMES	Leo • Messidona *La Pulga* (The Flea) The Little Magician • GOAT

CRISTIANO

RONALDO



DATE OF BIRTH	February 5, 1985
BIRTHPLACE	Madeira, Portugal
CURRENT POSITION	Striker
CLUBS	• Sporting Lisbon (2002–03) • Manchester United (2003–09, 2021–22) • Real Madrid (2009–18) • Juventus (2018–21) • Al-Nassr (2022–present)
NICKNAMES	Ronnie • CR7 • *El Bicho* (The Bug) • Mr. Champions League • GOAT

So, go on then . . . Who is the number one, the best of the best, the ultimate soccer GOAT?

Seth
That's obvious. It's Ronaldo, duh! Let's just agree on that and save ourselves a whole lot of writing.





Matt
Whoa, hold on a moment—
I disagree! Messi is the GOAT.

Seth
What, that little Argentinian who can only use his left foot? Who's always had amazing teammates and never had to work for his success?





Matt
You mean that little Argentinian who's won everything, including the World Cup?

Seth
Whatever! We're going to have to write the rest of this book, aren't we?





Matt
We are. I'll write in favor of Messi.

Seth
And I'll write in favor of Ronaldo. And we'll let the reader decide.





Matt
Finally, something we agree on.

Don't worry, it isn't just us who can't agree on the question of the ultimate soccer GOAT. Soccer fans and players alike all join in on this debate. Which is why this book is all about helping *you* to answer it. We're going to compare Messi and Ronaldo—judging them head-to-head on a range of different qualities. Let's take a closer look at the categories.

WHAT MAKES A SOCCER GOAT?

THEIR CHARACTER

We'll look at the mental side of the game—personality, mindset, and leadership.

THEIR SKILLS

We'll study the full soccer skill set—physical, technical, and tactical skills. And then we'll give you a halftime break.

THEIR STATS

Next up, we'll analyze the numbers—the goals and assists, the individual awards, and the team trophies.

THEIR CONTRIBUTION

We'll end by looking at the bigger picture—how our GOATs have transformed their clubs, their countries, and the beautiful game itself!







And who knows what might happen in extra time? Exciting, right? But before we officially let the battle begin, it's time to learn all about the early lives and careers of our GOATs.

ORIGIN STORIES: LIONEL MESSI



It all began in Rosario, Argentina, with the best birthday present ever: a soccer ball! So what if Leo was only three years old and the ball reached up past his knees? It went everywhere with him, glued to his little left foot.

By the age of five, Leo was already dribbling his way past friends and family on the local dirt playing fields, and scoring goal after goal for Grandoli, his very first soccer team. With his parents working hard to look after him and his brothers, it was his grandmother Celia who usually took him to training and cheered him on from the sidelines.

Did you know? Leo's favorite goal celebration—pointing to the sky with both hands—is a tribute to his grandmother, who sadly died when he was only ten years old.

By his seventh birthday, Leo was ready for his next challenge: playing for Newell's Old Boys, the biggest club in Rosario and his father's favorite team. At Newell's, Leo's rapid rise continued. Over the next six years, he scored nearly five hundred goals, leading his team to every available trophy. People were soon calling him "The Little Magician" and even "Little Maradona"—after Diego Maradona, Argentina's greatest-ever soccer player (more about him later!). That was a big nickname to live up to, but Messi seemed to have it all: speed, skill, unbelievable ball control, a beautiful left foot, and a relentless will to win.

Well, Messi had everything except for one very important thing: height. Yes, at the age of ten, Leo was still so little that his parents decided to take him to see a doctor. It turned out that Leo's body wasn't producing enough of a certain growth hormone. The good news was that there were injections that could help him grow. But the bad news? Those injections were too expensive for Leo's family, and Newell's couldn't afford them either.

Leo's family came up with a dramatic solution: to travel across the world to Barcelona, Spain, to one of the most prestigious (and wealthiest) soccer clubs in the world. When the Barcelona academy coaches saw Leo play, they were blown away by his talent. The club's technical director was so desperate to sign him that he quickly scribbled down a contract on a napkin. Done deal! Leo was a Barcelona player now, and not only that, but the club also agreed to pay for his pricey growth hormone treatment! The whole family moved to Spain to help Leo achieve his dream.

When Leo first arrived at La Masia, Barcelona's academy, aged thirteen, he struggled to settle in. But as he grew older (and taller!), his soccer talent shone through. By sixteen, he was training with the Barcelona first team and impressing everyone, including the club's Brazilian superstar, Ronaldinho. "I've just finished training with someone who is going to be better than me," the star famously said.

In 2004, Leo made his Spanish league debut for Barcelona, becoming their youngest-ever senior player at just seventeen. Seven months later, he became Barcelona's youngest-ever goal-scorer too.

As Ronaldinho lifted Leo onto his back and carried him around the stadium, a new star was born. And that was just the beginning. As the seasons went by, Leo got better and better, and so did his goals.

MESSI'S BREAKTHROUGH MOMENT

BARCELONA 5 | 2 GETAFE

APRIL 18, 2007

Leo started wide on the right wing, just inside his own half—that doesn't sound that dangerous, does it? Then again, this is "The Little Magician" we're talking about!

In a flash, Leo danced past one opponent, then nutmegged the next. As he approached the Getafe penalty area, two defenders stood in his way, but with two quick taps of the ball and a beautiful body swerve, he skipped right through them. Surely now it was time to shoot? No, Leo decided to dribble around the goalkeeper too, before sliding the ball into the empty net with his right foot.

WHOA, what a wondergoal! No one had seen anything like it since Maradona himself, against England at the 1986 World Cup. This was a player who was determined to prove himself. And the rest is soccer history . . .

MESSI'S CAREER TIMELINE

– 2009 Under new manager Pep Guardiola, Leo wins the treble with Barcelona: the Spanish league, the Spanish Cup, and the Champions League. Oh, and he also wins the Ballon d'Or (one of the most prestigious individual awards in soccer) for the first time.

– 2011 Leo helps Barcelona to win the Champions League yet again.



– 2012 He scores ninety-one goals in a single year, a ridiculous record that will surely never be broken.

– 2014 Messi becomes Barcelona's all-time record goal-scorer and the Spanish league's all-time top scorer too.

– 2015 He wins a second treble with Barcelona.

– 2017 Leo scores his five hundredth goal for Barcelona, with a last-minute winner against Ronaldo's Real Madrid.

– 2018 Leo becomes only the second player to reach one hundred Champions League goals. (The first? Yep, you guessed it . . . Cristiano Ronaldo!)

– 2021 After twenty-one years at Barcelona, Leo leaves to join French club PSG, and he also wins the Copa América with Argentina.

– 2022 Leo wins the first of two French league titles with PSG, and then the World Cup, leading Argentina to glory in Qatar.

– 2023 Messi sets off on one last amazing soccer adventure: to the USA to play for Inter Miami!

ORIGIN STORIES: CRISTIANO RONALDO



When Cristiano was born on the Portuguese island of Madeira, the doctor told his parents, Maria Dolores and José Dinis, that based on his weight, he could become a soccer player. When he was growing up, Cristiano's parents were often out for long hours while they worked to support their family. This left Ronaldo free to do what he wanted, and what he wanted to do was play soccer.

He kicked and kicked—balls, stones, pieces of fruit, whatever he could find. He practiced and practiced—right foot, left foot, plus lots of flicks and tricks. And he played and played on the streets of Funchal, his home city.

Cristiano loved showing off and scoring goals, but most of all, he loved to win. He was such a bad loser that his friends nicknamed him "Crybaby." At the age of six, Ronaldo was already the most competitive kid in Funchal. Soon after his eighth birthday, his father decided it was time for his son to start playing soccer for one of Madeira's proper teams—Andorinha.

At this small soccer club, Ronaldo had to learn a lot about tactics and teamwork, but once he had settled in, he soon became their star player. After a few amazing years, Cristiano joined Nacional, one of Madeira's most successful clubs. Then, aged twelve, he was offered an even bigger move: to Sporting Lisbon, one of the most famous soccer teams in the whole of Portugal.

Leaving behind calm island life for the chaos of Portugal's capital city, Cristiano—like Leo—left home at an early age to pursue his soccer dream. But Cristiano didn't have his family there to support him—they had to stay behind to work in Funchal. Cristiano struggled at first, but thanks to lots of support from his coaches and phone calls home to his family, he stayed focused on his dream of becoming a professional soccer player.

Did you know? Cristiano used to spend so much time at the sporting academy gym that the coaches put a lock on the door. Even that didn't stop him, however; he used buckets of water as weights and worked out in the shower instead!

When Ronaldo turned fifteen, disaster struck. One of his doctors discovered that he had a heart condition. Was this the end of his soccer career? But in true GOAT style, Ronaldo refused to give up on his dream. He had surgery and was back training in record time.

By seventeen, Ronaldo was already starring in the first team's starting lineup. He also caught the eye of lots of Europe's biggest clubs. Rumor had it that the Premier League champions, Manchester United, were looking for an electric new winger to replace David Beckham. The United manager, Sir Alex Ferguson, thought Cristiano could be just the superstar for the job. First, however, they wanted to see him in action, and so they took their team to Portugal to play a preseason friendly.

This was exactly the opportunity Ronaldo had been waiting for. But how would "Crybaby" cope under such enormous pressure?

RONALDO'S BREAKTHROUGH MOMENT

SPORTING LISBON 3 | 1 MANCHESTER UNITED

AUGUST 7, 2003

Cristiano walked out onto the field, determined to put on a memorable performance against his potential new team.

United's left-back that night, John O'Shea, didn't stand a chance—and he wasn't the only one. Cristiano danced his way through the whole defense, all while showing off his full range of twists and turns, flicks and tricks. He helped to set up Sporting's first goal with a clever pass, and it was clear to see that the eighteen-year-old wonderkid was only just getting started . . .

By full time, Ferguson had done the deal. For a fee of £12 million, Madeira's young genius was moving to Manchester United!

And the rest is soccer history . . .

RONALDO'S CAREER TIMELINE

– 2004 Cristiano wins his first trophy with Manchester United, the FA Cup, scoring in the final.

– 2008 Ronaldo wins the double with Manchester United: the Premier League and the Champions League. Oh, and he also wins the Ballon d'Or for the first time.



– 2009 Cristiano signs for Spanish giants Real Madrid for £84.6 million, becoming the world's most expensive player.

– 2011 He scores the winner for Real in the Spanish Cup final versus . . . yep, Messi's Barcelona!

– 2014 Cristiano wins the Champions League again, scoring seventeen goals in the competition, the most ever in a single season.

– 2016 Ronaldo leads Portugal to glory at Euro 2016.

– 2017 Cristiano lifts the Champions League trophy for the fourth time, scoring two in the final against Juventus.



– 2018 Cristiano joins Juventus, where he wins two Italian league titles and becomes the first player to reach 100 Champions League goals.

– 2021 Cristiano grabs his 110th goal for Portugal, becoming the record scorer in the history of men's international soccer.



– 2022 Cristiano returns to Manchester United and breaks FIFA's all-time men's record for most goals in competitive matches.

– 2023 Cristiano sets off on one last amazing soccer adventure: to Saudi Arabia to play for Al-Nassr!

OK, so now that we've got to know our GOATs a little better, it's time to get the battle underway! But remember, this isn't going to be a wild, angry, "I'm right and you're wrong!," "You smell!" kind of battle. No, no, no—there'll be no fighting here! Instead, we're going to discuss the GOATs calmly and carefully like two soccer superfans, putting forward the best case for both players. Otherwise, it's just two people shouting at each other, and that isn't fun for anyone, is it?



Matt
We're talking good, clean fun, with no one left face down in the mud!

Seth
Think less "booo!," more "boom!"





Matt
And all "wham!" and no "slam!"

Seth
That last one was actually quite good, Matt . . . for you.

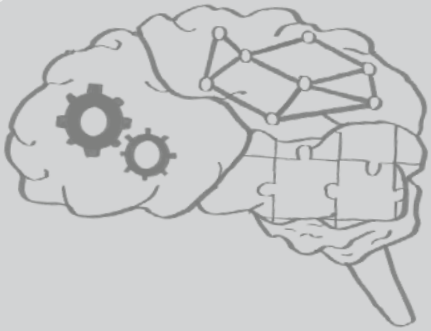




Matt
Hey, what's that supposed to mean?!

Let's kick off with Character . . .

CHARACTER



WHAT IS CHARACTER?

Don't worry, we're going to learn all about how epic Messi's and Ronaldo's skills are. But first we're going to find out about their characters. That's because skills will only get you so far as a professional soccer player.

No matter how fast you are, or how precise your shooting is, your skills will become almost worthless if you can't perform under pressure. And being a top soccer player is often very stressful. Some coaches place more importance on character than on actual skills! Even if you have incredible skills like Messi and Ronaldo, you still need character superpowers to be a GOAT.

In this section, we're going to look at . . .

PERSONALITY
We'll look at how Ronaldo and Messi get the best out of their different personalities.

MINDSET
We'll study their mindsets—ways of thinking—and how they've overcome challenges during their careers.

LEADERSHIP
We'll end by looking at how they lead and inspire the people around them.

PERSONALITY

When it comes to personality, one thing is certain—Ronaldo and Messi are *very* different. One is loud and confident, and the other is shy and humble. One shows his emotions, and the other keeps them hidden. One loves the headlines, and the other hates being spoken about. Can you guess who is who?



CRISTIANO RONALDO

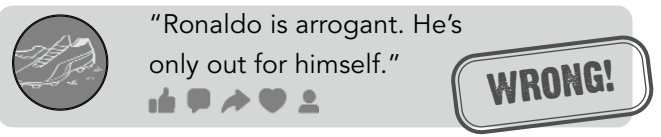
We know lots about Ronaldo. We know he eats the perfect diet. He dresses well and he doesn't let a single strand of hair fall out of place. He doesn't

have any tattoos and he's famous for spending as much time at the training ground as possible. And, of course, there's his iconic "*Siuuu!*" celebration—where he leaps into the air and throws his arms out wide. But what do these facts tell us about his personality?

HE'S CONFIDENT

Yes, Cristiano Ronaldo certainly loves Cristiano Ronaldo, and this GOAT loves to be the center of attention. This is the guy who in 2017, after winning his fifth Ballon d'Or, said, "I've never seen anyone better than me. I have always thought that. No soccer player can do the things I can."

WHAT THE DOUBTERS SAY



When you are arrogant, you believe that you are already the best you can be. But *confident* people understand that they can get even better if they ask for help!

Cristiano Ronaldo hasn't been afraid to ask for help time and time again in his career. Whether

he's asking for support from psychologists or nutritionists, with his mental attitude or his diet, Cristiano is always on the lookout for new ways to improve. Ronaldo's confidence and self-belief ensure that he isn't afraid to try out new ideas and to push the limits of what it means to be a soccer GOAT!

HE'S DEDICATED

Ronaldo knows that to be the greatest soccer player in the world, he needs to work harder than any other soccer player in the world (*especially* Messi). As a result, he's often the first person into training and the last person to leave, staying behind to practice his free kicks, dribbling, and finishing.

When Ronaldo goes home, he takes perfect care of his body. He eats healthy food made by his personal chef to restore his energy, takes ice baths to help his aching muscles recover, works with his personal trainer to improve his strength, and checks in with his doctor to make sure his body is at its best. Even as an experienced superstar, Ronaldo still trains harder than anyone else.

HE HAS HIGH STANDARDS

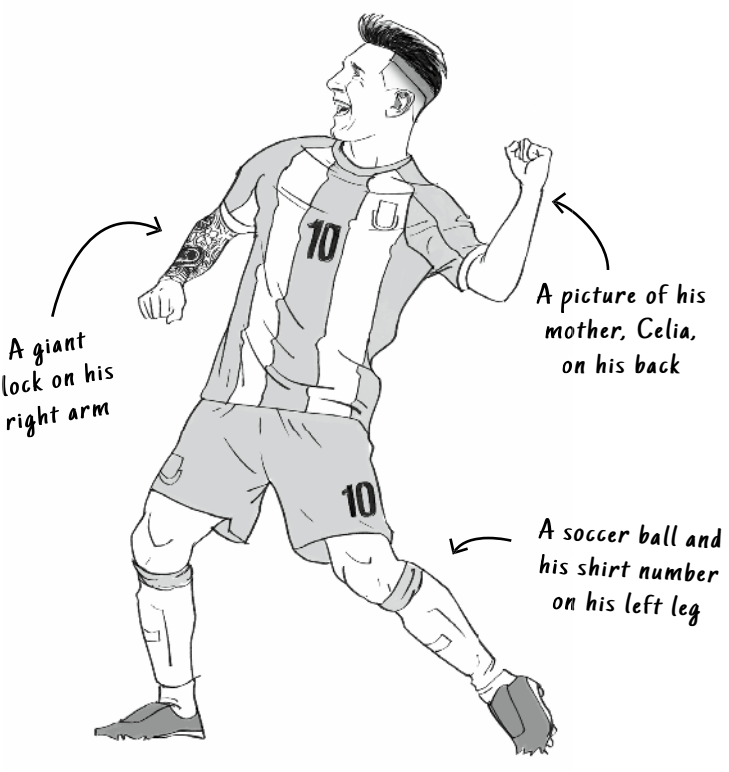
Cristiano is obsessed with scoring goals. Even if his team wins the game, he's often not happy unless *he* scores. Given this, he's sometimes accused of being too much of an individual and not enough of a team player.

It's true that Ronaldo is motivated by individual achievements, but he also knows that you have to pull together as a team if you want to win big trophies! Throughout his career, Ronaldo has inspired many of his teammates with his relentless will to win. "He never wanted his standards to drop," said Manchester United coach Mike Phelan after Ronaldo joined the club for the second time in 2022. "He wanted his teammates to raise their standards instead."

So yes, Ronaldo is a bit of an individual. But he knows that to be the best, you need a bit of help from your teammates too.

LIONEL MESSI

So, what do we know about Messi? We know that he once wore a sparkly suit to the Ballon d'Or ceremony. He has lots of tattoos, including:



Other than that, however, the answer is—we don't know very much about Messi! Despite being a soccer superstar, this GOAT candidate prefers to stay out of the spotlight.