

Messi eyes goal milestone in first Argentina game since World Cup triumph

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Online Desk: Having fulfilled a lifetime dream, Lionel Messi will get to celebrate with Argentina's fans on Thursday as they play their first match after winning the World Cup in Qatar last year. More than 80,000 people will attend the Monumental Stadium in Argentina's capital for a friendly against Panama.

While many would have seen winning the biggest trophy in football as the perfect note on which to an end an illustrious international career, the 35-year-old Messi has decided he has more to give for his country. "Leo (Messi) is fine," Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said. "Until he says otherwise, he will continue to come. He is happy on the pitch, with the national team."

The Paris St Germain forward could make it a night to remember if gets on the scoresheet as he needs one more goal to reach the 800-mark in his professional career, although his rival Cristiano Ronaldo remains the all-time leader with 828. A double would see Messi, Argentina's record scorer, reach a century of goals for his country. The last time Messi scored more than one goal in a game was in December's World Cup final against France, where Argentina won on penalties to claim the trophy for the first time in 36 years and spark massive celebrations in the football-mad country.

Messi, who also led Argentina to the 2021 Copa America, was named FIFA player of the year in February for the second time, capping a remarkable few months. The Argentine playmaker, who also boasts a record seven Ballon d'Or awards, has little left to prove having also enjoyed huge success at club level at Barcelona and then PSG, having won 11 league titles, four Champions Leagues, three Club World Cups and three UEFA Super Cups.