

FIFA Ballon d'Or 2014 Candidates Named: Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi and More

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[Cristiano Ronaldo](#), Lionel Messi and Manuel Neuer lead the nominations for FIFA's 2014 Ballon d'Or award, although there is no room on the list for [Luis Suarez](#).

A shortlist of the final three candidates will be announced before the eventual winner is crowned on Jan. 12, 2015. Ronaldo is gunning to retain the trophy for the first time in his career with a third overall win, while Messi will be looking to become the first-ever player to win five Ballon d'Or trophies.

All club and international performances are counted through the calendar year of 2014. This means the World Cup is likely to be an important factor in the vote. A [total](#) of 184 national coaches and captains plus 173 members of the media named their top three last year, with this season's vote taking on the same formula.

As noted by FIFA's breakdown of [the 2013 vote](#), each time a player is put first, he will receive five points. Second gains three, while third has one added to his total.

Let's check the 2014 nominees:

2014 Ballon d'Or Nominees	Name	Club(s)	Country
	Cristiano Ronaldo	Real Madrid	Portugal
	Lionel Messi	Barcelona	Argentina
	Thomas Muller	Bayern Munich	Germany
	Neymar	Barcelona	Brazil

Manuel Neuer	Bayern Munich	Germany
Arjen Robben	Bayern Munich	Netherlands
Paul Pogba	Juventus	France
Gareth Bale	Real Madrid	Wales
James Rodriguez	Monaco, Real Madrid	Colombia
Philipp Lahm	Bayern Munich	Germany
Toni Kroos	Bayern Munich, Real Madrid	Germany
Angel Di Maria	Real Madrid, Manchester United	Argentina
Diego Costa	Atletico Madrid, Chelsea	Spain
Mario Gotze	Bayern Munich	Germany
Zlatan Ibrahimovic	Paris Saint-Germain	Sweden
Eden Hazard	Chelsea	Belgium
Bastian Schweinsteiger	Bayern Munich	Germany
Javier Mascherano	Barcelona	Argentina
Karim Benzema	Real Madrid	France
Yaya Toure	Manchester City	Cote d'Ivoire
Sergio Ramos	Real Madrid	Spain
Andres Iniesta	Barcelona	Spain
Thibaut Courtois	Chelsea	Belgium

Source: FIFA

### **Identifying the Likely Top Three**

**Manuel Neuer, Bayern Munich (Germany)**



Shaun Botterill/Getty Images

Less obvious than his willingness to bomb off the line to shackle strikers, one aspect of Manuel Neuer's game which sets him apart is his presence. The German stopper has a dominant air about him. Like Peter Schmeichel, his powerful physique and ability to fill the goal often intimidates, while his sweeper-keeper act has gone a long way to redefining the position.

Neuer helped Bayern Munich achieve the Bundesliga and DFB-Pokal double in Germany last season, but his most important performances were reserved for the nation's World Cup win.



Julian Finney/Getty Images

The tournament's Golden Glove winner made a number of important saves during the Brazilian showpiece, with his last-second stop from Karim Benzema's shot in the quarter-finals proving one of the most memorable. With a thrust of his right arm, the 28-year-old deflected the Frenchman's thumping attempt away from goal and out of danger.

"It was just instinct. It comes naturally," said Neuer after the match, reported by [Charlie Scott](#) for Mail Online.

He plays physically imposing, risky football that lacks remorse, but Neuer's all-round game underlines him as the best goalkeeper in the world. He can even pick a pass and is no slouch when setting his team away on counter-attacks.

### **Lionel Messi, Barcelona (Argentina)**



Ronald Martinez/Getty Images

Leo joined Neuer in the Maracana stands shortly after failing to beat the German stopper in the World Cup final. He received the Golden Ball for almost single-handedly firing Argentina through the group stages in Brazil, where he [picked up](#) an impressive four Man of the Match awards.

Despite failing to consistently reach full pace during the competition, Messi netted winning goals against Bosnia and Herzegovina and Iran, not to mention a brace in the 3-2 win over Nigeria. [Many questioned](#) whether Messi deserved to win the individual prize, but aside from Neuer, it's difficult to suggest any other single player who positively influenced his nation like the Barcelona star.



Dean Mouhtaropoulos/Getty Images

At club level, 2014 began with Messi returning from a [serious injury](#). Barca failed to capture a trophy during Gerardo Martino's reign, and the player came under fire for some less-than-perfect performances. But Messi has regained fitness and form since the summer.

A late burst of form for Barcelona puts Messi back among the front-runners for the prize, as he threatened to be overruled by German influence before the start of the club campaign. Messi's year is best defined by his ability to win matches even when is largely thought to be misfiring, a true mark of the player's quality.

### **Cristiano Ronaldo, Real Madrid (Portugal)**



Gonzalo Arroyo Moreno/Getty Images

While Messi will be counting on his international form to gain votes, Ronaldo shall be pointing to his club numbers. Make no mistake about it, the former Manchester United man has been in frightening form for most of the year.

Ronaldo confirmed a record haul of 17 goals along the way to winning La Decima, while he also played an important role in helping Real Madrid win the Copa del Rey and Super Cup. Like Messi, he has started the current season in dazzling form. He struck three hat-tricks, including one quartet, in just 15 days from Sep. 20, significantly aiding Madrid's poor defensive displays this season.

[Alfredo Relano](#) of AS compared Ronaldo to his eternal rival, indicating he continues to play like a star of the 1950s who would destroy less physically able opponents. "Cristiano's frenetic rhythm, which Messi seems to have decided not to follow in order to mix the passing facet of his game in with the scoring part, is exceptional because it's not of this time," wrote Relano.

He notes CR7 can score "with both legs, his head, from distance, from close range. And with penalties and free-kicks." Considering the Madrid superstar also won [UEFA's Best Player in Europe](#) award at the end of August—a continental Ballon d'Or, if you will—he is destined to head up plenty of voting sheets when the decisions begin.

Ronaldo [risked his career](#) through injury toward the end of the 2013-14 club season and struggled with just one goal at the World Cup, but now fully fit, he appears unstoppable. He is likely to pull himself to within one Ballon d'Or victory of Messi's current total, meaning next year's battle for supremacy could be the most intriguing yet.