Vinicius favourite for Ballon d’Or in post-Messi/Ronaldo era

Paris (AFP) – The elite of world football will gather in Paris on Monday for the Ballon d’Or ceremony, with Real Madrid forward Vinicius Junior the leading candidate for the men’s award and Barcelona’s Aitana Bonmati the hot favourite to win her second-successive crown.

The men’s shortlist for the 2023/24 edition of the prestigious individual award is the first since 2003 to feature neither Lionel Messi nor Cristiano Ronaldo who hoovered up the prize 13 times between them.

Vinicius, the man who inherited Ronaldo’s number seven shirt at Real Madrid, has been tipped by many pundits to succeed Messi as the Men’s Ballon d’Or after a season in which he won the Spanish championship and Champions League.

“Vinicius is going to win (the Ballon d’Or),” Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti declared after his player netted a hat-trick in a 5-2 Champions League win against Borussia Dortmund last week.

“And not because of the three goals but because of his character. He’s extraordinary.”

If the 24-year-old Brazilian showed why he is expected to take Messi’s crown in Madrid’s stunning comeback midweek, he was less influential in Saturday’s La Liga Clasico as Real were comprehensively beaten 4-0 by Barcelona.

But Vinicius’ six goals last term were vital as Madrid lifted their 15th Champions League, with the attacker scoring a brace in the semi-final and a goal in the final.

Vinicius has also become a figurehead in the fight against racism after being targeted on numerous occasions since arriving in Spain in 2018.

He earned worldwide support in May 2023 when he squared off with Valencia supporters after suffering abuse at their Mestalla Stadium.

The players expected to challenge Vinicius for the Ballon d’Or are club-mate and England star Jude Bellingham, as well as Manchester City and Spain’s Euro 2024-winning midfield general Rodri.

Also among the list of nominees are goal machines Erling Haaland, Harry Kane and Kylian Mbappe.


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Vinicius Junior poses with the Champions League trophy at Wembley © Glyn KIRK / AFP

Real Madrid right-back Dani Carvajal has an outside shot, after a season which saw him lift the treble of La Liga, Champions League and European Championship.

In the Women’s Ballon d’Or, 26-year-old Barcelona and Spain playmaker Bonmati is expected to retain the title she claimed for the first time last season.

She was again the outstanding player in a team which won its first continental quadruple of domestic league and cup, Spanish Supercopa and Champions League.

Barcelona’s dominance of the women’s game is reflected in the number of nominees the Catalan club boasts, with attackers Caroline Graham Hansen and Salma Paralluelo considered the two principal threats to their club-mate Bonmati.

The Ballon d’Or ceremony will take place in the centre of Paris on Monday where the winners, as decided by an international jury of football journalists, will be announced.

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