Rodri wins men’s Ballon d’Or as Real Madrid boycott

AFP – Manchester City and Spain midfielder Rodri was awarded the men’s Ballon d’Or on Monday after winning a fourth consecutive Premier League title and Euro 2024, but Real Madrid boycotted the ceremony.
The decision to award the prize for the world’s best player to the deep-lying midfielder came as a surprise, with Real Madrid’s Liga and Champions League double winner Vinicius Junior widely seen as the pre-ceremony favourite.

Hours before the festivities in Paris, the Spanish club announced its delegation would not attend the ceremony at Chatelet Theatre because of what it perceived as a snub of Vinicius.

Rodri, 28, played a key role as City held off Arsenal to win the Premier League title last season and was named player of the tournament at Euro 2024 as unfancied Spain emerged triumphant in Germany.

Despite the French organisers insisting that the identity of the winner was a closely-guarded secret this year, the news appeared to have leaked with Madrid announcing hours before the ceremony they would not attend.

Barcelona and Spain star Aitana Bonmati earlier won her second successive women’s Ballon d’Or, after leading her club to a historic continental quadruple of titles and claiming the Nations League with her country.

– Real Madrid no-show –

The drama started hours before the ceremony as Spanish and European champions Real said if Vinicius was not the winner, then the award should go to his teammate Dani Carvajal.

Like the Brazilian, Carvajal scored in the 2-0 victory against Borussia Dortmund in the Champions League final at Wembley.

“If the award criteria doesn’t give it to Vinicius as the winner, then those same criteria should point to Carvajal as the winner,” Real Madrid told AFP.

“As this was not the case, it is clear that Ballon d’Or-UEFA does not respect Real Madrid. And Real Madrid does not go where it is not respected.”

The Madrid contingent of nominees also included Kylian Mbappe, Antonio Rudiger, Fede Valverde and Jude Bellingham.

The winner of the Ballon d’Or is chosen from the shortlist by an international jury of 100 specialist journalists.

Its organisers, the Amaury group which owns the L’Equipe sports daily and France Football magazine, denied to AFP that the name of the successor to last year’s winner Lionel Messi had leaked and insisted that “no player or club” knew in advance who had won.

– ‘Best in his position’ –

City manager Pep Guardiola has described Rodri as “in his position, the best”.

“He can do everything. The quality, he reads the game, his mentality, he is always ready,” Guardiola has said. “He is so good at many things… The presence, the physicality, he is complete.”

In addition to his metronomic passing and ball-winning capabilities in the centre of the pitch, the former Atletico Madrid player also has a knack of popping up with crucial goals for both club and country.

His goal won City their first Champions League in 2023 but he also scored vital goals for Spain, such as his equaliser in

their last-16 Euro 2024 tie against Georgia.

“We have Rodri, who is a perfect computer, he administers everything, the emotions, all the moments in a magisterial way – that’s a great help for everyone,” said Spain’s Euros-winning coach Luis de la Fuente after his midfield general helped guide his young team-mates into the quarter-finals.

Indeed so central is Rodri to the teams he plays in that each of Manchester City’s past four Premier League defeats have all come when the player dubbed “irreplaceable” by Guardiola has not featured in the side.

Rodri is unbeaten in his past 52 Premier League appearances – a run stretching back to February 2023.

City are currently top of the Premier League but their chances of a record-extending fifth-straight domestic title were dented in September when Rodri suffered an anterior cruciate ligament injury, ruling him out for the season.

AFP