Messi misses Presidential Medal ceremony with Biden

AFP – Lionel Messi was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the United States, by President Joe Biden on Saturday but did not attend the ceremony at the White House.
The Argentine World Cup winner and eight times Ballon d'Or winner, now plays in the United States for Major League Soccer's Inter Miami.

Messi is the first Argentine to receive the honor and the first male soccer player.

But while other recipients of the award, including U2 singer and activist Bono, former basketball star Earvin "Magic" Johnson and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, attended the ceremony at the White House, Messi was absent.

Messi's representatives said in a statement distributed by Inter Miami that Messi had a prior commitment.

"The White House informed FIFA, who informed the club at the end of December that Leo was going to be awarded with this recognition," the statement read.

"Leo, through the club, sent a letter to the White House saying that he is deeply honored and that it is a profound privilege to receive this recognition but that due to scheduling conflicts and prior commitments he was going to be unable to attend.

"He appreciated the gesture and noted that he hopes to have the opportunity to meet in the near future," the statement added.

The award is given to individuals who have made "exemplary contributions to the prosperity, values or security of the

United States, world peace or other significant societal, public or private endeavors," according to the White House.

The White House statement said that Messi had been given the award as "the most decorated player in the history of professional soccer. He supports healthcare and education programs for children around the world through the Leo Messi Foundation and serves as a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador."

Biden handed USA women's soccer star Megan Rapinoe the medal in 2022, the first time a soccer player has been given the honor.

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