

# MLS suspension of Messi and Alba is 'draconian,' Inter Miami owner says

**BY ALANIS THAMES**  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — The owner of Inter Miami called Major League Soccer's suspension of Lionel Messi and Jordi Alba for skipping the All-Star Game a “draconian” punishment.

“They don't understand the decision,” owner Jorge Mas said Friday of the one-game suspensions. “They don't understand why not attending an exhibition match leads directly to a suspension.”

Messi and Alba did not suit up for the match between the MLS and Liga MX of Mexico despite being voted to the game. Messi did not play to rest amid a packed schedule and Alba was dealing with a previous injury. Mas said the club made the decision for Messi and Alba to sit out of the All-Star Game.

Per MLS rules, any player who doesn't participate in the All-Star Game without prior approval from the league is ineligible to compete in their club's next match.

The players will miss Miami's home match Saturday against FC Cincinnati, which sits atop the Eastern Conference standings. Both Messi and Alba practiced with the club on Friday in anticipation of playing in Saturday's match before



Inter Miami defender Jordi Alba, left, and forward Lionel Messi chat as they arrive before the start of an MLS soccer match against Toronto FC, Wednesday, Sept. 20, 2023, in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

MLS announced the suspension.

“I know Lionel Messi loves this league,” said MLS Commissioner Don Garber. “I don't think there's a player — or anyone — who has done more for Major League Soccer than Messi. I fully understand, respect, and admire his commitment to Inter Miami, and I respect his decision.”

“Unfortunately, we have a long-standing policy regarding participation in the All-Star Game, and we had to

enforce it. It was a very difficult decision.”

Garber added that the league will re-evaluate the policy and work with players to "determine how the rule should evolve.”

Mas said Inter Miami expressed its disagreement over the suspension and the rule. Mas also noted there were six MLS games Friday night less than 48 hours after an All-Star Game.

“That's not right,” Mas said. “That's not right to the players.”

# NFL fining more than 100 players for selling Super Bowl tickets above face value, AP source says

**BY ROB MAADDI**  
AP PRO FOOTBALL WRITER

The NFL is fining about 100 players and two dozen club employees for violating league policy by selling Super Bowl 59 tickets for above face value, a person with knowledge of the details told The Associated Press on Friday.

The person, speaking to the AP on condition of anonymity because of the ongoing investigation, said the players who resold their tickets will have to pay a fine of 1 1/2 times the face value they paid. They also won't be permitted to buy tickets for the next two Super Bowls unless they are playing in the game.

Club employees who violated the policy will be fined two times face value.

In a memo sent to teams and obtained by the AP, NFL head of compliance

Sabrina Perel said the league was still completing its investigation.

“Our initial investigation has determined that a number of NFL players and coaches, employed by several NFL Clubs, sold Super Bowl tickets for more than the ticket's face value in violation of the Policy. This long-standing League Policy, which is specifically incorporated into the Collective Bargaining Agreement, prohibits League or Club employees, including players, from selling NFL game tickets acquired from their employer for more than the ticket's face value or for an amount greater than the employee originally paid for the ticket, whichever is less. We are in the process of completing our investigation into this matter, but the investigation has revealed that club employees and players sold their tickets to a small number of ‘bundlers’ who were working with a

ticket reseller to sell the Super Bowl tickets above face value.”

The “bundlers” will face increased penalties, per the memo.

According to the CBA, players on all 32 teams can purchase two tickets for the Super Bowl.

“In advance of Super Bowl LX, we will be enhancing the mandatory compliance training regarding the Policy for all League personnel, which will emphasize the specific requirements of the Policy and the broader principle that no one should profit personally from their NFL affiliation at the expense of our fans,” Perel said in the memo. “We will also increase the penalties for future violations of this Policy. All clubs must ensure their personnel understand and comply with this policy. Additional details regarding the enhanced compliance measures will be provided in early fall.”

# Players' union slams FIFA and Infantino over Club World Cup

**BY GRAHAM DUNBAR**  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

The global soccer players' union hit back at FIFA and its president Gianni Infantino on Friday, saying their autocratic style of leadership was harming the rights of its members.

“Football needs responsible leadership, not emperors,” the FIFPRO network said after a meeting of 58 national player unions responded to FIFA pursuing its agenda with unofficial player representatives.

“It needs fewer autocratic monologues and more genuine, inclusive and transparent dialogue,” the union added.

FIFA announced two weeks ago it reached a consensus on key issues after Infantino hosted a group of mostly non-

recognized officials in New York ahead of the Club World Cup final.

The latest rift between soccer's governing body and its players' unions flared while the European Commission in Brussels is considering a formal complaint against FIFA. It was filed by FIFPRO's European division and national leagues in Europe against FIFA's style of governance and decision-making.

FIFA denounced what it called Friday the union leadership's “increasingly divisive and contradictory tone” in pursuing a public relations battle “to preserve their own personal positions and interests.”

FIFPRO said Friday its core concerns included an overloaded global match calendar with too many games for elite players, lack of

physical and mental recovery periods and extreme playing conditions.

Players at the month-long Club World Cup in the United States reported feeling dizzy and unwell in the heat of daytime games played to appeal to worldwide TV audiences.

The 63-game tournament backed by Saudi Arabian money was lucrative for clubs, especially in Europe, though FIFA added it to the schedule without formally consulting players.

The tournament, FIFPRO said, was “celebrated by President Infantino despite being held under conditions that were extreme and inappropriate for any human being, demonstrating a troubling insensitivity to human rights, even when it concerns elite athletes.



McLaren driver Oscar Piastri of Australia steers his car during the sprint qualification ahead of the Formula One Grand Prix at the Spa-Francorchamps racetrack in Spa, Belgium, Friday, July 25, 2025.

# Piastri beats Verstappen for Belgium sprint pole

**BY JAMES ELLINGWORTH**  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Oscar Piastri beat Max Verstappen to pole position for the sprint race at the Belgian Grand Prix as Red Bull began its first Formula 1 race weekend since the firing of Christian Horner as team principal.

Red Bull has been the focus of attention in F1 after Horner's dismissal earlier this month, but Piastri, Verstappen and Lando Norris showed the title fight remains vibrant ahead of Saturday's sprint.

Piastri was at risk of being eliminated after straying off track in the second part of the session but bounced back to take pole by .477 of a second from Red Bull's Verstappen, who split the two dominant McLarens by relegating Norris to third, .618 off the pace.

“The car's been mega all day,” Piastri said on Friday. “This is a track I love, it's my favorite one of the year and maybe that gave me a couple of extra tenths (of a second).”

Norris' emotional win in the rain at the British Grand Prix cut Piastri's championship lead to eight points, while Piastri fumed at what he saw as the unfair penalty he received at Silverstone.

Friday was the first test of the Australian driver's vow

to harness the “frustration” he felt to win more races. And just like at Silverstone, rain could play a big part this weekend. It may affect both Saturday's sprint and the Grand Prix on Sunday.

Charles Leclerc was fourth for Ferrari and Haas had a strong day with Esteban Ocon fifth and Oliver Bearman seventh. Yuki Tsunoda continued to struggle in the second Red Bull, qualifying 12th for the sprint, and it was a poor session for Mercedes, with George Russell 13th and Kimi Antonelli 20th.

**RED BULL UNCERTAINTY**

Red Bull's new team principal Laurent Mekies says he hasn't been told why its parent company chose to fire Horner.

Amid rampant speculation across Formula 1, Red Bull's parent company hasn't explained its reasons for removing Horner from his role after 20 years. Mekies said his appointment was “a surprise for everyone”.

“We didn't get into the ‘why?’ and the ‘why now?’”, but they outlined the sort of objectives they had for the team moving forward,” said Mekies, who is in charge of the team for the first time at the Belgian Grand Prix after moving up from sister team Racing Bulls.

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