

# Contracts in football – the unconventional, bizarre and shocking

Article By:

Sports & Entertainment - Squire Patton Boggs

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The first of January saw the opening of the 2017/18 winter transfer window. Clubs have until 11pm on 31 January to conclude their business for this season. As ever, transfer windows bring with them much speculation about potential moves and the terms of those players signing new contracts contracts.

Speculation that Lionel Messi would leave Barcelona was at its peak last summer. FC Barcelona announced that an agreement was being pursued between the parties but it was yet to be agreed with the five-time [Ballon d'Or](#) winner. Had he not signed a new deal, Messi would be eligible to leave Barcelona as a free agent in the summer of 2018. If Messi was ever – realistically – to leave Barcelona, this seemed like the opportune time, perhaps the only time.

After four months of discussion and negotiation, Lionel Messi signed [a new, lucrative contract](#) with FC Barcelona in November 2017, committing him to the Nou Camp until the end of the 2020-21 season. The club confirmed that Messi's new buyout clause is set at €700 million, more than double his previous release clause. This will certainly deter any approaches from other clubs whilst the superstar is under contract with Barcelona.

It has recently been speculated that a peculiar release clause operates, allowing the Argentine [to leave the club for free in the event that Catalonia is granted independence](#). Before Manchester City or Paris Saint-Germain fans become too excited, Messi's agent and father Jorge Messi confirmed that a clause to this effect does exist but only in the event that Barcelona would no longer compete in a top league. The possibility of independence did cast some doubt over Barcelona's eligibility to compete in La Liga (the domestic league of Spain) and the Champions League but Barcelona has since confirmed that its participation in La Liga is guaranteed regardless of whether Catalonia achieves independence.

Whilst Messi is likely to stay at Barcelona despite the uncertain political climate, there have been a number of unconventional, bizarre and shocking clauses entered into between football player and club.

1. Giuseppe Reina signed for DSC Arminia Bielefeld in the Bundesliga in 1996. He inserted a clause into his contract, requiring the club to build him a house for every year he was under

contract at the club (a total of three years). However, Reina became a victim of unclear drafting when the club [built him a house of LEGO](#) for each year he was under contract, as he did not stipulate the size of the house.

2. In 1999, Sunderland signed Stefan Schwarz from Valencia for £4,000,000. At the time, Schwarz was interested in visiting outer space and considered signing up to the first commercial flight to space, due to depart in 2002. Sunderland was prudent to [insert a clause into Schwarz's contract](#) to prevent him from visiting outer space.
3. Dennis Bergkamp is arguably one of Arsenal's best ever forwards, a key part of the 'Invincibles' team that went unbeaten in the 2003-04 Premier League season. The Netherlands striker earned himself the nickname 'the Non-Flying Dutchman' due to his chronic phobia of flying. It was so pervasive that [he insisted on inserting a clause into his contract with Arsenal](#) that he would not be required to travel on trips that needed the team to fly to its destination. Ray Parlour recalls the Arsenal squad flying back to London after matches in Manchester, Newcastle and Stoke whilst Bergkamp took the team bus back to London, arriving much later than the rest of the squad.
4. In 2011, Ronaldinho returned home to Brazil after an incredibly successful time in Europe. He joined Flamengo, scoring 15 goals in 33 appearances over 14 months at the club. As part of the deal bringing the star to Flamengo, Ronaldinho requested that he would be entitled to two nights out per week, which the club formalised as a clause in his contract.
5. Cristiano Ronaldo is the latest Ballon d'Or winner at the age of 32 – matching Messi's record of winning five Ballon d'Or awards. It should be no surprise then that Real Madrid inserted [a €1 billion release clause](#) into his contract, eliminating any chance of Ronaldo signing for another club.