

Messi comes off pitch, world waits

Miami: Lionel Messi came off the pitch in the 73rd minute of his last club match before the World Cup on Sunday but Inter Miami coach Guillermo Hoyos said he thought the Argentine was just fatigued after playing on a heavy pitch.

The eight-time Ballon d'Or winner was substituted after clutching the back of his thigh in the wake of one of his trademark free-kicks during Inter's 6-4 win over the Philadelphia Union in Miami.

"We don't have a medical report on that yet, but we will have one shortly," Hoyos told reporters when asked why the talismanic forward was taken off.

"He was genuinely suffering from fatigue in that regard; it is indeed fatigue. He was tired, the pitch was heavy and

when in doubt, the standard approach is always to ensure you don't take any risks."

Major League Soccer is now taking a mid-season break for the World Cup, which will be co-hosted by the US, Canada and Mexico from June 11 to July 19.

Messi had two assists and German Berterame scored twice during a record-setting first half for Inter Miami.

But Messi basically took himself out of play in the 71st minute.

He was replaced by Mateo Silvetti, then left immediately through the tunnel connecting the field with the team's locker room.

Messi was walking on his own, albeit slowly, and without any team medical personnel with him.



Inter Miami captain Lionel Messi leaves the field after complaining of uneasiness on the back of his left thigh during Sunday's MLS match against Philadelphia Union at Nu Stadium in Miami. (X)

Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni announced a 55-man squad, including Messi, on May 11. He will need to reduce it to 26 before Fifa's June 1

deadline. Messi was highly influential when Argentina won the World Cup for a third time in Qatar four years ago. They

open their title defence against Algeria in Kansas City on June 16.

Injuries to some of football's star players are mounting, with Messi joining a list of concerns that already included Lamine Yamal.

Kylian Mbappe and Mohamed Salah have recovered from injuries ahead of the tournament.

Now the focus will switch to Messi.

Yamal, Spain's new superstar, missed the final weeks of the season for Barcelona because of a muscle injury in his left leg but should be healed in time to play at the World Cup.

Others have not been so fortunate.

France striker Hugo Ekitike sustained an Achilles injury in April that could take

more than six months to heal, ruling him out of the tournament and probably the start of next season with Liverpool.

Brazil stars Rodrygo and Eder Militao are definitely out. So is Bayern Munich and Germany forward Serge Gnabry after injuring his adductor in training.

Players and coaches have increasingly warned about the impact of an ever-packed schedule, and the expanded World Cup comes a year after the relaunched, oversized Club World Cup.

The Champions League has also been expanded in recent years.

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta describes the demand on players as "an accident waiting to happen."

Reuters, AP