

FIFA announces 2014 Golden Ball shortlist

FIFA has officially announced the names of the 10 players in contention for the Golden Boot award usually given to the championship's most outstanding player.

Four Germans, three Argentines, and one player each from Brazil, Colombia and the Netherlands are vying for the coveted trophy, won by Uruguayan Diego Forlan in the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

While Lionel Messi and Thomas Muller will be top favourites, Neymar will remain a sentimental choice after a back injury ruined his campaign in the tournament. Strikingly, there is no Cristiano Ronaldo in the shortlist. Portugal had failed to advance to the second stage of the FIFA world cup 2014. The winners of the Golden Ball, Silver Ball and Bronze Ball will all be announced after Sunday's Final between Germany and Argentina. The shortlist was drawn up by the members of FIFA's Technical Study Group. According to FIFA, the 10 contenders for the prestigious award are as follows:

Angel Di Maria (Argentina) In providing Lionel Messi with the best possible support, Di Maria has led the Albiceleste attack with distinction, posing a constant menace to opposing defences with his long-range shooting, mazy dribbling and finishing skills, which he showcased with a well-taken winner against Switzerland in the Round of 16.

Mats Hummels (Germany) The Borussia Dortmund centre-half has attracted much praise for his solid displays at the heart of the German defence. As if that were not enough, Hummels has also impressed at the other end of the pitch, rising high to score against Portugal in the group phase and head home the winner against France in the quarter-finals.

Toni Kroos (Germany) Kroos ran the show as Die Mannschaft swept aside hosts Brazil 7-1 in the semi-finals, dominating the midfield and posing a constant threat with his passing and shooting, which brought him two goals - all in a day's work for this most consistent of performers.

Philipp Lahm (Germany) The Germany captain began the tournament in midfield before seamlessly making the switch to the right-back slot, without it undermining his performance levels or his considerable influence on Joachim Low's side.

Javier Mascherano (Argentina) Though their much-vaunted attack attracts most of the headlines, Argentina have also been solid in defence, a large part of the credit for which must go to Mascherano for his tireless work in providing the Albiceleste rearguard with essential protection.

Lionel Messi (Argentina) Messi added to his FIFA World Cup goal tally with some lethal finishing in each of Argentina's three group matches in Brazil. Though yet to find the back of the net in the knockout rounds, he has remained an influential figure for his side.

Thomas Muller (Germany) In opening his campaign with a hat-trick against Portugal, Muller picked up where he left off at South Africa 2010, where he collected the Golden Boot. His performances since have underlined his status as the spearhead of Germany's deadly front line.

Neymar (Brazil) Though only 22, the livewire forward ably shouldered the huge responsibility of leading A Selecao. Neymar was his side's stand-out performer with four goals before an unfortunate injury ended his tournament in the quarter-finals.

Arjen Robben (Netherlands) The flying Dutch wide man has been in peerless form since putting defending champions Spain to the sword in his side's opening match. His incisive runs from deep have been a feature of the tournament.

James Rodriguez (Colombia) Recognised as a huge talent heading into the competition, the gifted Rodriguez has since proved his ability to rise to the big occasion. His haul of six goals in five outings was a major reason why Los Cafeteros broke new ground in reaching the last eight for the first time.

Previous Golden Ball winners: 1982 FIFA World Cup Spain: Paolo Rossi (Italy) 1986 FIFA World Cup Mexico: Diego Maradona (Argentina) 1990 FIFA World Cup Italy: Salvatore Schillaci (Italy) 1994 FIFA World Cup USA: Romario (Brazil) 1998 FIFA World Cup France: Ronaldo (Brazil) 2002 FIFA World Cup Korea/Japan: Oliver Kahn (Germany) 2006 FIFA World Cup Germany: Zinedine Zidane (France) 2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa: Diego Forlan (Uruguay) (With inputs from FIFA.com) Source: sports.ndtv.com