

## valsport bet

Kylian Mbappe celebrates after scoring a goal for Paris Saint-Germain in Champions League play against Borussia Dortmund on Dec. 13. (Martin Tj T\*

For more than a decade Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi have been at the center of a fierce and largely unsettled debate over who is the greatest player in soccer history.

A decade from now, they might still be part of that debate.

Only the question then may be more like who were those two guys who came before Kylian Mbappe and Erling Haaland?

That might sound like a bit of a stretch, but consider the evidence.

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Ronaldo, 38, and Messi, 36, rewrote the record books, redefined greatness and took the sport to new plateaus. Soccer is more popular, more profitable and better-played than at any point in its history, and Ronaldo and Messi, who defined an era if not an entire sport, are big reasons why.

Playing much of their careers against one another in Spain's La Liga and Messi for Barcelona and Ronaldo for Real Madrid they pushed one another, combining for 19 league championships, four Champions League titles and 13 Ballon d'Or awards, achieving levels of greatness together neither could have reached alone.

Yet at comparable points in their careers, Mbappe and Haaland have been even better. And it's not beyond reason to think they could stay

there.

Start with the numbers. Portugal's Ronaldo is the most prolific scorer in history with 870 goals for five clubs — Sporting CP, Manchester United, Juventus and Al Nassr, in addition to Real Madrid and country. Messi, an

Argentine who played at Paris Saint-Germain and Inter Miami after leaving Barcelona, has 821 goals while the once-incomparable Pele is a distant third at 762, according to the Zurich-based International Federation of

Football History and Statistics.

Ronaldo and Messi also rank in the top 10 all-time in assists, meaning each has contributed to more than 1,110 goals in their careers.

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Mbappe and Haaland are on pace to outproduce both. Less than a week past his 25th birthday, Mbappe already has 306 goals and 127

assists, according to Football365, more than either Messi or Ronaldo had at the

same age. Haaland, who won't turn 24 until next summer, has 232 goals for club and country, is also better than Messi and Ronaldo at the same