

## Lionel Messi Injury Raises Concerns for Inter Miami and Leagues Cup

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FORT LAUDERDALE, FL – Inter Miami’s star forward Lionel Messi left the pitch early during Saturday’s Leagues Cup match against Club Necaxa after sustaining a leg injury, raising concerns for both his team and the tournament. The Argentine international appeared to injure his inner right thigh less than ten minutes into the match, prompting an early substitution and casting uncertainty over his availability in the coming fixtures.

The injury occurred in the 6th minute as Messi sprinted toward the penalty area past Necaxa defenders Raúl Sánchez and Alexis Peña. After tripping and falling to the ground, Messi showed visible frustration, slapping the turf and eventually lying flat on his back. He then sat up as a trainer examined his upper leg. Despite the discomfort, Messi walked off the field unassisted after handing over the captain's armband. He was replaced in the 11th minute by midfielder Federico Redondo.

Inter Miami head coach Javier Mascherano is expected to provide an update on Messi's condition following the match. The 37-year-old forward has a history of muscle-related injuries, particularly in the upper leg, which have affected his availability in recent months. He also missed part of the 2024 Leagues Cup due to an ankle injury sustained during the Copa América.

This was Messi's second appearance in four days, following a brief return in Inter Miami's win over Atlas on July 30. Despite providing two assists in that game, Messi noted he struggled to regain rhythm after a layoff. In a post-match interview with Apple TV, he explained that while rest is intended to help recovery, it sometimes disrupts his match fitness: "I feel good physically the more matches I play and get into rhythm."

Messi had skipped the Major League Soccer (MLS) All-Star Game on July 23 and served a one-match suspension on July 26 for doing so. Prior to this period, he had played the full 90 minutes in 22 out of 23 matches for Inter Miami this season.

Inter Miami co-owner Jorge Mas recently commented that any decisions about Messi's playing time fall to the player himself: "Load management is on Lionel Messi. ... When he steps on the pitch, he will step off when the final whistle blows."

Messi's absence could be a significant setback for Inter Miami, which currently ranks fifth in the MLS Eastern Conference with 42 points. The club, which captured the Supporters' Shield in the previous season, is in a competitive race for playoff positioning. The injury is also a loss for the Leagues Cup, a joint tournament between Major League Soccer and Liga MX, which has seen substantial growth in attention, partly due to Messi's star power. According to Leagues Cup executive director Thomas Mayo, Apple TV viewership doubled during the first week of the 2025 tournament, with Inter Miami's opening match against Atlas ranking among the top three most-watched games on the MLS Season Pass.

Inter Miami is scheduled to face Pumas UNAM on August 6 in the final match of the group stage. The team will then return to MLS play with matches at Orlando City on August 10 and at home against the LA Galaxy on August 16. Should Inter Miami advance past the group stage, they would appear in the Leagues Cup quarterfinals on August 19 or 20.

Messi's injury status in the coming days will be crucial not only for Inter Miami's performance but also for fan engagement and tournament visibility across North America.