

## RONALDINHO IN CONTENTION FOR SPORTSMAN OF THE YEAR

LONDON, January 11, 2006 Barcelonas brilliant Brazilian soccer playmaker Ronaldinho is a strong contender to be nominated for the 2006 Laureus World Sportsman of the Year Award after being named FIFA Footballer of the Year for the second straight time in December.

Ronaldinho's spectacular brand of footballing magic, exemplified by his ability to change the course of a football match with a brilliant solo effort, has made him the key man for the Barcelona and Brazil attack and one of the truly great football giants of the moment. He seems certain to play a key role for Brazil in the FIFA World Cup in Germany this summer.

The 2006 Laureus World Sports Awards, which recognise sporting achievement during the period February 1, 2005 to February 28, 2006, are recognised as the premier honours on the international sporting calendar. The final qualifying date this year is one month later than usual to include the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin. The winners, as voted by the Laureus World Sports Academy, will be unveiled during a televised Awards Ceremony staged in Barcelona, Spain, on May 22, 2006.

Ronaldinho will be facing strong competition after a vintage year for sport. No fewer than three former Laureus World Sportsmen of the Year are in contention again. American cyclist Lance Armstrong won a record seventh Tour de France in 2005, Swiss tennis ace Roger Federer won his third Wimbledon crown, plus the US Open, and Tiger Woods won the US Masters and the Open Championship to re-establish himself as the worlds No.1 mens golfer.

They face a strong challenge from a quartet of motor sport aces: Spains Fernando Alonso, who became the youngest Formula One World Champion at 24 years and 58 days, breaking Michael Schumachers monopoly of the sport; Italys Valentino Rossi, who confirmed his status as one of the greatest motor cycle riders of all time with his fifth straight World MotoGP World Championship, Britains Dan Wheldon, who won the Indianapolis 500 and the Indy Car Championship, and Frances Sebastien Loeb who won a second successive World Rally Championship for Citroen, with co-driver Daniel Elena, winning a record ten rallies during the year.

The World Athletics Championship produced some outstanding performances. Ethiopias Kenenisa Bekele, heir to Haile Gebrselassie and holder of the 5,000 metre and 10,000 metre world records, won the 10,000 metres gold medal in Helsinki, his 11th major title since 2002, at the end of a difficult year in which his teenage fiance Alem Techale died from a heart attack, American Justin Gatlin became only the second man to complete the 100 metres and 200 metres World Championship double, and Bahraains Rashid Ramzi became the first athlete to win 800 metres and 1500 metres gold medals at a World Championship.

Although injury ruled him out of the World Championships, Jamaicas Asafa Powell became the fastest man in the world in 2005 when he broke the 100 metres world record in June in Athens with a time of 9.77secs.

In cricket, the highly exciting England v Australia Ashes Series produced two outstanding contenders. Englands Andrew Flintoff was voted Man of the Series after hitting 402 runs and taking 24 wickets, the highlight being the Second Test at Edgbaston when he contributed crucial innings of 68 and 73 and took seven wickets to win the match and turn the Series around. And Australias Shane Warne, who took 40 wickets in the Ashes Series during an amazing year which saw him take a total of 96 Test wickets, eleven more than had ever been taken before. During the year he also became the first cricketer to take a world record 600 Test wickets.

Jacques Kallis was voted joint Cricketer of the Year along with Flintoff, a tribute to his inspirational batting and bowling which has seen him score over 7,000 runs and take almost 200 wickets for South Africa. During the Sydney Test match against Australia he scored his 23rd Test century. Also during the year West Indies Brian Lara became the most prolific run-scorer in Test cricket history when he created a new record of 11,204, while Indias Sachin Tendulkar became the fifth man to pass the 10,000 runs mark.

Tim Duncan, one of the best power forward basketball players of his generation, is in contention again. In 2005 he won his third NBA Champions' ring and was voted Most Valuable Player in the Finals for the third time for San Antonio Spurs.

The World Swimming Championships in Montreal produced three obvious contenders in Australias Grant Hackett, who became the first swimmer to win four consecutive world titles at the same distance as he dominated the 1,500 metres and also won gold medals in the 400 metres and 800 metres freestyle, American prodigy Michael Phelps, 20, who swam in finals to win four gold medals and a silver, and collected another gold for swimming in the heats in the 4 x 100 metres medley relay, and Canadas Alexandre Despatie, who, in front of his home crowd in Montreal, won the three metre springboard with a world record score of 813.60 pts, then won the one metre springboard with another world record score of 489.69 pts.

Among the other contenders for nomination will be Britains double Olympic gold medallist Ben Ainslie, who became the first man to win a fourth consecutive World Championship title in the single-handed Finn dinghy class in Moscow, and Australias Michael Rogers, who won a third consecutive individual time trial gold medal at the World Road Racing Championships.

The World Judo Championships produced two contenders - Hollands Dennis Van der Geest, who won a gold medal after being a perpetual runner-up, and Japans Keiji Suzuki, who became the first man to win judo world titles in the top three weight categories.

There is a two-part voting process to find the winner: Firstly, a Selection Panel of the worlds leading sports editors, writers and broadcasters from over 80 countries votes to create a shortlist of six nominations. The members of the Laureus World Sports Academy then vote by secret ballot to select the Award winners. The Laureus World Sports Academy is the ultimate sports jury, made up of 42 of the greatest sportsmen and sportswomen of all time, who have made an outstanding contribution to world sport.

The names of the winner of the Laureus World Sportsman of the Year Award, and the winners of six other categories, plus several special Awards, will be revealed during a televised Awards Ceremony to be staged in Barcelona on the evening of May 22, 2006.

Last year's Awards Ceremony, in the presence of His Majesty, King Juan Carlos of Spain, was attended by the legends of the Laureus World Sports Academy and Hollywood stars Jackie Chan, Morgan Freeman, Teri Hatcher and Marcia Gay Harden. Among the award winners present were Roger Federer, Kelly Holmes and Greece football coach Otto Rehhagel.

Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia, is a city with an enormous sporting tradition which has staged the most important sports events. The immensely successful 1992 Olympic Games gave a new impulse to sport in the city.

Sport is a part of everyday life in Barcelona and during the past few years the number of high-level international championships staged in the city has multiplied. Therefore it is no surprise that Barcelona was chosen to host the Laureus World Sports Awards in 2006.

Barcelona is a Mediterranean and metropolitan city with the most modern facilities. Its unique architecture, artistic ambience and many tourist attractions have made Barcelona one of the most visited cities in the world. A business and leisure city, it is the ideal place to organise such an important moment of the sporting year - the Laureus Awards Ceremony.