

Del Bosque, Hierro dumped



PHOTO: AFP

Vicente del Bosque listens to a question during an interview with the Spanish radio SER in Madrid on June 23.

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid instituted a major shake-up at the club on Monday by deciding to replace coach Vicente del Bosque and also release captain Fernando Hierro just a day after clinching their 29th league championship.

The decisions not to renew the two men's contracts, taken less than a week after the signing of David Beckham from Manchester United, were accompanied by media reports that Real were targeting United's assistant manager Carlos Queiroz to succeed Del Bosque.

"The board of directors made a unanimous decision not to renew Vicente del Bosque's contract as the first team coach of Real Madrid," club spokesman Enrique Sanchez told a news conference at the Bernabeu on Monday.

"They considered that the team needs a change in its sporting planning and criteria in accordance with more modern methods."

Real's sporting director Jorge Valdano then announced that the 35-year-old Hierro would be leaving the club after 14 years during which he won three European Cups and six league titles.

"Hierro is nearing the top age limit and we believe it's the right moment to break our relationship, with all the love and respect he is due."

Valdano added: "It hasn't been an easy day. Two people who have been standard bearers for the club have gone. But we believed that it was time for a change in direction before things stagnate at the club."

It had been widely predicted that the club would offer to renew Hierro's contract for at least a season.

Sanchez added that the search for a new coach, led by Valdano, had already begun.

One of the first names mentioned by the Spanish media was Queiroz, the Portuguese coach who is credited with discovering Real forward Luis Figo.

Queiroz knows Beckham well from his time at Manchester United and would help the England captain Beckham settle in at the club.

Valdano justified the decision to replace Del Bosque as a way of ensuring his reign would not reach a "decadent" end.

Del Bosque in turn accused Real of a lack of straight talking.

"A lot of abstract words have been used to explain my dismissal," Del Bosque told Spanish radio Cadena Ser.

"It's been called the end of a cycle at the club but they're just empty words."

Del Bosque took charge of Real Madrid after the sacking of John Toshack in November 1999.

In less than four seasons in charge he steered the club to two European Cups, two domestic league titles, a European Super Cup, a Spanish Super Cup and a World Club Cup.

In recent weeks practically all the club's leading players expressed their hope that Del Bosque would continue in charge of the team.

"I think he is the prefect coach for Real," midfielder Zinedine Zidane said. "For him football is everything, but he always approaches his work very calmly."

The quietly spoken Del Bosque is renowned for his unassuming character and loyalty to the club he

has served as both player and coach for 30 years.

The players' decision not to return to the pitch for a second lap of honour to celebrate winning the league title at the Bernabeu on Sunday is believed have been a protest at the club's expected decision not to renew Del Bosque's contract.

Del Bosque said he would like to find a new club to coach next season.

"I don't want a year off and I'll try to find something that appeals to me," he said.

"I'll never coach Atletico Madrid or Barcelona, though."

The Hierro decision surprised the coach.

"I thought it had been sorted out some time ago," Del Bosque said. "I wasn't expecting them not to renew his deal."

HIERRO FACTS

AFP, Madrid

Factfile on Fernando Hierro

following the announcement that

the Real Madrid board had

decided not to renew the club

captain's contract on Monday:

FERNANDO RUIZ HIERRO
Born: 23/03/68
Birthplace: Velez near Malaga,

Spain
Height: 1.87m
Weight: 84 kg
Position: Midfielder and then

central defender

CLUBS:
1987/1989: Valladolid
1989/2003: Real Madrid

HONOURS:
Caps: 89 (Spanish record) 29

goals (second in all-time list

behind Raul)

Spanish titles: (5) 2003, 2001,

1997, 1995, 1990

Spanish Cups: (1) 1993

Champions League: (3) 2002,

2000, 1998

World Clubs championships:

(2) 1998, 2002

Matches played domestically:

498 (6th in all-time list) 105 goals

First cap: September 20 1989,

Spain v Poland (1-0)

Last cap: World Cup quarter-final

June 22 2002, South Korea 0

Spain 0 (Korea won on penalties

First goal: December 19 1990,

Spain v Albania (9-0)

Last goal: June 7 2002, Spain v

Paraguay (3-1)

World Cups: (4) 1990-2002 12

appearances scoring five goals.

Twice a quarter-finalist (1994,

2002).



PHOTO: AFP

I'M IN CHARGE HERE! Santos sensation Robinho (2nd from R) jokes with his best mate Diego (R) during a training session in Santos on June 23.

PREVIEW: Libertadores Cup final 1st leg

Santos know what's in store

Football

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian champions Santos are expecting a large dose of gamesmanship from opponents Boca Juniors when they take on the Argentinians in the first leg of the South American Libertadores Cup final on Wednesday.

"We will have to be on our guard because they will want to wind up our players, especially (teenagers)

Diego and Robinho," goalkeeper Fabio Costa told reporters after training on Monday.

"We have got to keep our heads so that their gamesmanship does not distract us from our main target which is to bring back a good result."

The Santos goalkeeper, who himself has a reputation for possessing a hot temper, said he watched two of Boca's previous home games in the competition and accused the Argentinians of deliberately trying to get opponents sent off.

Fabio Costa said he watched

fellow Brazilians Paysandu have one player dismissed and Colombians America two sent off as they rose to Boca's provocation.

In both cases, Boca went on to win the away legs against opponents weakened by suspension.

After losing 1-0 to Paysandu in their first leg at home, Boca won the away match 4-2.

In the semi-final against America, they won 2-0 in the Bombonera and 4-0 away.

"Playing at home, they managed to remove two America players from the field and also Robson of

Paysandu, which made life easier in the away leg, which they won," Fabio Costa said.

Captain Paulo Almeida warned: "If you get punched, of course you get angry, but you have to keep your cool because the referee may only see the retaliation."

Santos, the club where Pele spent most of his career, last reached the Libertadores final 40 years ago when they also faced Boca. The Brazilian side won the tie 5-3 on aggregate.

DEL BOSQUE FACTS

REUTERS, Madrid

Factbox on Vicente del Bosque, whose three-and-a-half-year spell as Real Madrid coach came to an end on Monday when the club decided not to renew his contract.

Born: December 23, 1950, in Salamanca, Spain.

Playing career: Begins his footballing career as a midfielder playing on loan from Real Madrid at Cordoba and Castellon before returning to Real in 1973.

Enjoys 11 successful seasons at Real from 1973 to 1984, winning five league titles, four Spanish Cups and playing in the European Cup final defeat against Liverpool in Paris in 1981.

International career: Also wins 18 international caps for Spain between 1975 and 1980.

1987-1990: Coaches Real Madrid's affiliate team Castilla.

1990: Becomes head coach of Real Madrid youth teams.

1994: Has a brief period in charge of the first team following the sacking of Benito Floro, but was replaced by Jorge Valdano at the end of the season.

1996: Has another spell as caretaker coach for just one game, a 5-0 win over Athletic Bilbao.

1999-2000: Takes charge of Real again in November 1999 after the sacking of John Toshack. Steers the club to their eighth European Cup win, culminating in a 3-0 victory over Valencia in the final in Paris.

2000-01: Confirmed in his post by new president Florentino Perez at the start of the season and with Luis Figo in the team goes on to guide Real to their first league title in four years.

2001-02: Wins the Spanish Super Cup and the European Cup for the second time with a 2-1 win against Bayer Leverkusen in the final at Hampden Park, Glasgow, new signing Zinedine Zidane scoring a brilliant goal.

2002-03: Real win the European Super Cup with a sparkling 3-1 success against Feyenoord at the start of the season. Perez then signs Ronaldo to add further firepower to the squad. In December, Real win the World Club Cup, beating Olimpia of Paraguay 2-0 in the final.

In May: Real lose 4-3 on aggregate to Juventus in the semi-finals of the Champions League.

June 17: Real announce they have signed England captain David Beckham for 35 million euros from Manchester United.

June 22: Real clinch 29th league championship on the final day of the season with a 3-1 win over Athletic Bilbao at the Bernabeu.

June 23: Real decide not to renew Del Bosque's contract. Club captain Fernando Hierro is also discarded.

Queiroz Real's first choice as coach

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid have lined up Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson's assistant Carlos Queiroz to take over from Vicente del Bosque as coach next season.

Real president Florentino Perez confirmed Tuesday he was interested in the coach.

"Carlos Queiroz is one of the people we are thinking of. He has the profile we are interested in," Perez told a news conference.

Queiroz has a clause in his contract allowing him to leave Old Trafford if a foreign club makes an approach.

The 53-year-old Portuguese was expected to fly to Spain on Wednesday for talks.

"In the next few days I've got a very important decision to make," Queiroz, who only became United No.2 a year ago, told Spanish media. "I don't like to talk about speculation but to coach Real Madrid would be an enormous challenge. There are a lot of things that I have to talk to United about."

Queiroz was formerly coach of Portugal, Sporting Lisbon and South Africa.

But having guided the Africans to the 2002 World Cup he quit before the finals and joined United last summer.

Perez said he had several alternatives if Queiroz turned down the job.

They include former Real Zaragoza coach Juan Manuel Lillo who is also a friend of Real's sporting director Jorge Valdano and Jose Mourinho, who coached Porto to the UEFA Cup and Portuguese title last season.

Barca overhaul

Football

REUTERS, Barcelona

Barcelona's new board began rebuilding work at a hectic pace on Monday, appointing Frank Rijkaard as coach in place of Radomir Antic, letting centre-back Frank de Boer go and offering midfielder Philip Cocu a new deal.

New Barcelona president Joan Laporta had promised a rapid overhaul of the club and he was as good as his word on his first full day in charge.

The first act of the new regime was to tell Antic the option of a one-year extension to his contract would not be taken up.

That was despite the achievement of the Serb coach in taking the side from 12th place when he took over at the end of January to sixth at the season's finale to gain entry to the UEFA Cup.

Dutchmen dominated the discussions for the rest of Monday's business, with Rijkaard, De Boer and Cocu all going in for meetings with Laporta's new team.

Rijkaard, the former Netherlands national team coach, flew into Barcelona during the afternoon to sign a four-year contract with the Catalan club.

"I share a philosophy with the people running the club," Rijkaard said at his presentation.

"This is a big chance at a wonderful club. We are in a moment when we have to work hard for the future. A wonderful club like Barcelona deserves that."

Antic said he accepted the decision, but was clearly disappointed at finding himself out of a job after finishing the season with four successive victories.

"It's a decision that doesn't go in my favour but that's life," Antic shrugged. "I think I did enough to deserve a chance to stay on."

The other disappointed man at the Nou Camp on Monday was centre-back De Boer, who could not

reach agreement with the club over an extension to his contract.

"The club don't want me to carry on," De Boer told reporters after his meeting with Barcelona officials.

The 33-year-old Dutch international, whose contract expired at the end of the season, had warned Barca last month that he would listen to offers from other clubs unless the Catalans made a quick decision over extending his contract.

"In contract negotiations today in Barcelona Frank de Boer and the club were not able to reach an agreement," Amsterdam law firm Hellingman Bunders, which represents the player, said in a statement.

"After four-and-a-half years Frank de Boer is leaving Barcelona and is looking for another club."

His Dutch international colleague Cocu is likely to stay, however.

Barca's new technical director, Txiki Begiristain, confirmed the club have offered the 32-year-old midfielder a new contract and expected the player's response in the next few days.

Cocu sounded positive about the offer when he spoke to reporters

after the meeting.

"They've offered me the chance to carry on but we're still talking," Cocu said. "The idea on both sides is to continue but this sort of thing is not sorted out in half an hour."

At least one more Dutchman is still waiting to see what Laporta's people have in mind.

Patrick Kluivert's contract includes a clause allowing him to leave the club for a cut-price fee if the new president attempts to reduce his salary.

Part of Laporta's election manifesto was to introduce salary cuts for as many players as possible, but Rijkaard at least made it clear he would not like to see his compatriot leave.

"Kluivert's quality is unquestionable," said the new Barcelona coach. "He's a great player."

Laporta, Begiristain and Sandro Rosell, vice-president in charge of sporting matters, must also sort out the futures of Argentine full-back Juan Pablo Sorin and Spanish midfielder Gaizka Mendietta, who were on loan at the Nou Camp last season.



PHOTO: AFP

Former Dutch star Frank Rijkaard (L) shakes hand with Barcelona president Joan Laporta during his official presentation as the new coach of the club on June 23.

Ronaldinho relaxed

AFP, Saint Etienne

Paris Saint Germain's Ronaldinho is benefiting from Brazil's Confederations Cup elimination to take a holiday just as reports suggest a new club has joined in the hunt to buy him.

Roberto Assis, the World Cup winner's brother who doubles up as his agent, has held face-to-face transfer talks with Newcastle chairman Freddy Shepherd, the French sports daily L'Equipe reported Tuesday.

Shepherd was said to have invited Assis to his holiday home to explore the possibility of the Brazil star moving to the English Premiership club which has qualified for next season's Champions League.

This comes hot on the heels of an alleged meeting between the 23-year-old player and Manchester United coach Alex Ferguson in Paris last Thursday.

Ronaldinho has declined to comment on all the speculation surrounding his future over the past week, insisting whenever the subject was raised that he wanted to concentrate on the tournament "100 per cent."

"I'm going to be returning to Brazil to take some holiday," Ronaldinho announced after his country was knocked out of the Confederations Cup by Turkey on Monday.

His Confederations Cup ended on a dramatic note when he was at the centre of a goalmouth fracas in the last minute of Brazil's 2-2 draw with Turkey in Saint Etienne resulting in his being sent off.

Newcastle enter the fray 24 hours after another interested party, Barcelona, said they would not get into a bidding war with Manchester United and Real Madrid, the front runners in the race to secure the star's services.

Lions end on top

AFP, Lyon

Cameroon ensured they finished top of their Confederations Cup group by shutting out the United States in a 0-0 stalemate here on Monday.

Few pundits would have given Cameroon a chance of remaining in the tournament while world champions Brazil packed their bags for home, but the African champions ended their Group B campaign as group winners on seven points, three ahead of Turkey who edged out Brazil by virtue of a superior number of goals scored.

The US team won their solitary point of the competition but Bruce Arena has work to do before qualifiers begin for the 2006 World Cup finals.

Beckham taken aback!

Football

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

England's superstar captain David Beckham on Tuesday expressed shock that Vicente Del Bosque is quitting as the coach of the English icon's new club Real Madrid next season.

"I am shocked. This is the first time I heard about it," Beckham told reporters. The former Manchester United star, who arrived in Malaysia for a day trip from neighbouring Thailand, however, declined to elaborate further.

"It is not for me to comment," he said.

Del Bosque is to leave his post as coach of Real Madrid after the club's board voted unanimously Monday not to renew his contract.

The decision came a day after Real won their 29th league title and less than a week after Beckham was signed.

Earlier, Beckham was greeted by some 2,500 fans who chanted "we want Beckham, we want Beckham" as he arrived at a stadium here to play football with former Malaysian national players.

Sporting pony-tailed hair and wearing a red casual tee-shirt and white baggy pants, he was received by Malaysian fans decked out in Manchester United kits, who yelled out his name and clutched posters of their idol.

Beckham changed into black shorts, red socks and grey tee-shirt before being ushered into the stadium accompanied by the fanfare of a traditional Chinese lion dance.

Asked if he had demanded to wear the number seven jersey when he joins Real Madrid, he said: "It is not true that I have demanded the number seven jersey from Raul Gonzalez. To me he is Mr Real Madrid. And I have not sat down to discuss this with Real Madrid."

"I am sure any number that they give me is going to be a special number," he said.

Beckham said he rejoiced when he heard that Real Madrid had won the league title.

"I was so excited because I will



PHOTO: AFP

Superstar David Beckham (L) signs an autograph on a ball for disabled child James Low at a stadium in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

be joining them and to play along with players that were my opponents previously," he said.

Beckham paid tribute to his family, in particular his wife Victoria for his success.

"It is true when you are married, you wife has a certain amount of control. I do ask her her opinion. Sometimes there are things that she likes and I value her opinion," he said.

Beckham said despite his football success, he cherished his family dearly.

"At the end of the day, it is the family that matters, despite all the success that you achieve," he said.

Asked what he hoped to achieve with Real Madrid, Beckham said he had already realised all his dreams.

"When I started to play football, I had always wanted to play for Manchester United, wear the number seven jersey and to play for England. All the dreams have now

come true.

"I do not know what is left for me, but I believe I can continue the success with Real Madrid."

During his meeting with his fans in an indoor badminton stadium, Beckham demonstrated his football skills, including his ability to juggle the ball, dribble and the famous "Beckham bend".

He also showed off his penalty kicks, but only one out of four balls hit the target.

Victoria did not accompany Beckham to Malaysia and organisers said she is still in Bangkok.

Football's glamour boy and his popstar wife are on a week-long Asian tour, which will earn the couple an estimated one million pounds (£1.66 million US dollars), according to British media reports.

Veron Serie A bound?

Football

GUARDIAN UNLIMITED, Manchester

Manchester United midfielder Juan Sebastian Veron wants a move back to Serie A - and claims that Internazionale and Juventus are ready to sign him.

Veron, who joined United for a then club record £28m from Lazio in the summer of 2001, expects to

return to Italy before the start of next season, although he would not command anything like the fee Sir Alex Ferguson paid for him.