



Lippi signs off

Football

AFP, Rome

Italy's World Cup winning coach Marcello Lippi stood down from the job on Wednesday, just three days after he brought his country their fourth global crown.

"I believe that I have achieved what I set out to achieve as coach of the Italian team," Lippi said in a press release issued by the Italian Football Federation.

He said his decision came at the end of "an extraordinary professional and personal experience."

"I want to thank the federation for the confidence it had in me during the last two years of work crowned by a result that will rest in the annals of Italian football and live on in the memory of our fans," he added.

Italy won their fourth World Cup in Berlin on Sunday when they defeated France in the final 5-3 on penalties after the game had finished tied at 1-1 after extra-time.

Italian team captain Fabio Cannavaro paid tribute to Lippi saying that he had been a key factor in the team's drive towards glory in Germany.

"We can only thank the man and the coach Marcello Lippi for the perfect work he put in and for the manner in which he managed the team in what were, at times, trying circumstances," he said on his personal website.

The defender was referring to the huge match-fixing scandal which engulfed Italian club football just prior to the finals and which is still resonating.

Lippi was questioned late May as part of that investigation to ascertain whether he had bowed to pressure from Juventus general director Luciano Moggi concerning his team selections.

He admitted that he had been under pressure, but denied ever agreeing to the demands made on him.

A total of 13 out of Italy's 23-strong World Cup winning side play for Juventus, AC Milan, Lazio and Fiorentina, the four clubs at the centre of the storm.

The 58-year old Lippi took over from Giovanni Trapattoni after Italy's poor showing at the Euro 2004 finals in Portugal where they failed to make it out of the group stages.

Bearing a striking resemblance to Hollywood actor Paul Newman, Lippi won five league titles and a Champions League trophy during his two spells with Juventus from whom he parted company shortly before accepting the job as Italy coach.

He was born in the Tuscan seaside town of Viareggio and enjoyed an unspectacular playing career, his most successful spell coming at Genoa club Sampdoria.

His managerial career began in 1985 with third division Pontedera before taking the helm of top flight club Cesena four years later.

After spells at Atalanta and Napoli, Lippi's big breakthrough came in 1994 when he was given the job at Juventus and he led the club to the Serie A title in his first season in charge.

He guided Juve to two more championships before enjoying Champions League success in 1996 when they defeated Ajax on penalties at the Olympic stadium in Rome.

Lippi resigned from Juventus in February 1999 after a poor start to the season and took charge at Inter Milan for a little more than one season before returning to Turin.

He won successive league titles in 2002 and 2003 before losing the Champions League final to AC Milan on penalties last year.

Prior to Sunday, Italy had not

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Zidane to give his version



AFP, Paris

French football skipper Zinedine Zidane is to give his version of the notorious World Cup final headbutt in an appearance on Canal Plus television later Wednesday.

In a live interview to be broadcast at 8.00 p.m. (1800 GMT), the captain is expected to explain the nature of the slur hurled at him before Sunday's incident by Italian player Marco Materazzi.

Materazzi, who was knocked to the ground by the extra-time butt to the chest, has acknowledged that he insulted Zidane -- but denied that he called him a terrorist or impugned his mother.

"It was an insult of the kind you will hear dozens of times and that just slips out on the ground," Materazzi told La Gazzetta dello

Sport Tuesday.

However lip-readers consulted by British newspapers concluded that Materazzi called Zidane the "son of a terrorist whore."

The international football federation FIFA has launched an investigation into the incident, which resulted in Zidane's sending-off shortly before France's 5-3 defeat on penalties.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter warned Wednesday that he could strip Zidane of his World Cup best player title -- awarded after Sunday's final -- if the disciplinary committee finds against him.

He also faces suspension from future matches but this will have little import as he had already announced his retirement from all professional football.

Despite feverish speculation over the reasons for his gesture, France's favourite footballing hero has received overwhelming support from the public -- with 61 percent telling a national newspaper that

they forgive him and 52 percent that they understand his behaviour.

Top politicians have also indicated that the incident must not be allowed to overshadow Zidane's status as role-model and world-class athlete -- with president Jacques Chirac hailing him as a "virtuoso, a genius of world football."

Zizou may lose Golden Ball: Blatter

AFP, Rome

FIFA may strip disgraced French skipper Zinedine Zidane of his World Cup best player award, the organisation's president Sepp Blatter has told Italian newspapers.

Zidane was announced as the winner of the prestigious award on Monday morning, the day after the World Cup final which saw him

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French legend Zinedine Zidane is pictured at the Elysee Palace in Paris on July 10.

PHOTO: AFP

Klinsmann resigns

Football

AFP, Berlin

Jurgen Klinsmann announced here on Wednesday that he was stepping down as coach of Germany and will be replaced by his assistant Joachim Loew.

His resignation comes just four days after he led Germany to third place in the World Cup finals at home an achievement which had fans and players alike clamouring for him to remain in the job.

"My big wish is to go back to my family, to go back to leading a normal life with them," the California-based manager said.

"But another important reason is that after two years of putting a lot of energy into this, I feel that I lack the

power and the strength to continue in the same way.

"I quite simply feel burnt out. I want to give myself half a year's holiday."

More than one million people turned out the following day in central Berlin to pay tribute to Klinsmann and his squad.

The German Football Federation had wanted Klinsmann to stay on and prepare the team for the Euro 2008 qualification programme, but he has decided otherwise.

Klinsmann said he felt he had left a legacy that could be built upon and that Loew was the best man to succeed him.

"The only sensible option has been to ask Joachim to lead them further. I am very glad that he has taken up this challenge."

"I have always said that he was much more than an assistant trainer. He was always a firm partner. My role

semi-finals of the competition where they lost to Italy 2-0 after an extra-time thriller.

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"The only sensible option has been to ask Joachim to lead them further. I am very glad that he has taken up this challenge."

"I have always said that he was much more than an assistant trainer. He was always a firm partner. My role

was perhaps that of a supervisor."

"I did not manage to reach all of the players last night. I will call them over the next few days to thank every one to thank them for this incredible experience."

German Football Federation chief Theo Zwanziger said that even although he had wanted Klinsmann to stay on, he nevertheless respected his decision.

"This is how he feels and one cannot ask somebody to go against that. If you do, then things are not the same as before anymore."

"We have agreed that whatever happens, we will keep the methods and the play philosophy that his given us such attractive football."

"We will walk this road with Joachim Loew. He has agreed to a two-year contract."

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FIFA WC rankings

AFP, Paris

World Cup winners Italy are up to second in the latest FIFA World Cup rankings released on Wednesday.

The Italians' penalty shoot-out win over France in the final in Berlin on Sunday saw them leap 11 places to stand just behind Brazil.

Beaten finalists France are up to fourth with England moving up five places to fifth. Germany improved 10 places to ninth.

FIFA Top Twenty:

1. Brazil	1630 pts (0)
2. Italy	1550 (+11)
3. Argentina	1472 (+6)
4. France	1462 (+4)
5. England	1434 (+5)
6. Netherlands	1322 (-3)
7. Spain	1309 (-2)
8. Portugal	1301 (-1)
9. Germany	1229 (+10)
10. Czech Republic	1223 (-8)
11. Nigeria	1149 (0)
12. Cameroon	1109 (+3)
13. Switzerland	1028 (+22)
14. Uruguay	985 (+8)
15. Ukraine	961 (+30)
16. United States	933 (-11)
17. Denmark	927 (-6)
18. Mexico	924 (-14)
19. Paraguay	915 (+14)
20. Ivory Coast	909 (+12)



PHOTO: AFP

RESIGNATION UNWANTED! German coach Jurgen Klinsmann (R) and his assistant Joachim Loew attend a press conference at the German Football Federation Headquarters (DFB) in Frankfurt Main on Wednesday.

Loew looks to continue legacy

Football

REUTERS, Berlin

Germany's new coach Joachim Loew played a key role in Jurgen Klinsmann's drive to overhaul German soccer with innovative training methods and the introduction of an attractive, attacking style of play.

As assistant coach for the two years that Klinsmann was in charge, Loew won a reputation as a clever tactician and organiser who was able to take inexperienced players under his wing and transform them into top-level performers.

The 46-year-old Swabian, affectionately known as Jogi, helped Klinsmann fend off huge opposition to their progressive training methods and fitness programmes.

"We were strong, and we were a very, very good team that learned how fruitful cooperation through

communication, transparency and open criticism can be," Loew said last week in an interview with the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.

Flanked by Klinsmann at a news conference in Frankfurt on Wednesday, Loew said it would be a huge challenge to continue on the same path but that it was "unavoidable".

"That's the only way we can achieve a lasting place among the very best in the world," he said. He has a two-year contract that runs until after the 2008 European Championship.

At the time of their appointment in 2004, coaching novice Klinsmann said Loew would bring experience gained as coach of German clubs like VfB Stuttgart and Karlsruher SC, and Turkish sides Fenerbahce and Adanaspor.

Klinsmann said on Wednesday Loew had never been merely an assistant and was more of a partner and a kind of supervisor.

Under Loew, Stuttgart won the German Cup in 1997 and reached

the final of the European Cup Winners' Cup the following year.

In 2002, he led Wacker Tirol to the Austrian league title. He left his coaching job at Austria Vienna in early 2004 after falling out with the club president.

He was a midfielder player in the 1980s with clubs including Stuttgart and Eintracht Frankfurt, scoring seven goals in 52 appearances in Germany's top league.

A man who favours dapper suits worn without a tie, Loew has said he gains most fulfilment from seeing a young player developing into one capable of competing with the very best.

He singles out German central defender Per Mertesacker, who was heavily criticised for nervous performances at the start of his international career but showed at the World Cup that he is among the best in the world in his position.

According to an unofficial fan Web site, Loew enjoys Turkish food, Italian red wine and his favourite

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Rino stunned by reception

INTERNET, undated

Gennaro Gattuso was flabbergasted by the reception that awaited the returning Azzurri heroes in Rome last night.

"It all still seems like a dream, with all those people partying and praising us," said the Milan midfielder. "One thing's for sure, we certainly didn't feel alone when we got back to the peninsula!"

The welcome parade at Rome's Circus Maximus saw a massive crowd attend, which estimates range from 600,000 to over 1 million people.

"The Roma players had told me of the celebrations here when they won the Scudetto in 2001. Now I know what they meant."

Gattuso was one of the key figures in the World Cup winning campaign and won over fans throughout the globe with his hard work, warrior spirit and amusingly honest interviews.

"I've never seen anything quite like the Circus Maximus packed out with flags waving and people screaming our names. Now I'll go home to Corigliano Calabro to rest before next season kicks off again."