

France fire Lemerre



AFP, Lyon

A Roger Lemerre was sacked as coach of 1998 world champions France here Friday following their catastrophic first round exit in the World Cup finals, the president of the French Football Federation (FFF) announced.

"Roger Lemerre has been relieved of his duties as coach by the Federal Council of the FFF," Claude Simonet told reporters.

"He will remain with the National Technical Directorate (DTN) as he has an open ended contract whereas his one as coach of the French team was limited to two years (till 2004).

"After paying tribute to his efforts as French coach we then told him to step down so he could take on other challenges," he added.

Simonet said the council had not discussed the reasons behind the disastrous campaign but he did not hold that Lemerre had been hugely at fault.

"I can't say that Roger Lemerre was at fault.

"I do not remember him committing a serious mistake and we did not analyse the reasons for the failure of the campaign. All I would say is that the luck that was with us in 1998 deserted us in 2002.

"In a business you change strategy from time to time and I cannot say that Roger Lemerre was against such a change.

"The conversations which we



ROGER LEMERRE

held together indicated to me that this would be a solution that would please him," Simonet added.

Simonet said a successor would be named as quickly as possible.

"We will consult with many people including the clubs themselves.

"I would guess we would reach a decision pretty rapidly," he said.

However Simonet got prickly when pressed about names of potential successors.

"I have no need to mention anyone's name now nor to express it in a public place such as this...it is for me alone to assume that responsibility.

"The suitable candidate is for us to decide on," he said.

Names being bandied around include former French international midfielder Alain Giresse, who was part of the great team of the 80's which reached two World Cup semi-finals and won the Euro 84 trophy,

and Lyon boss Jacques Santini, who guided them to their first title

LEMERRE AT A GLANCE

Factfile on Roger Lemerre following his sacking on Friday:

Name: Roger Lemerre
Date of birth: 18/06/1941
Birthplace: Bricquebec (France)

PLAYING CAREER

Position: Centre forward and defender
Clubs: Sedan (1961-69), Nantes (1969-71), Nancy (1971-73), Lens (1973-75)
Caps: 6 (1968-71)
Trophies: French Cup finalist (1965 and 1970), player of the year 1966, 1968 and 1969

COACHING CAREER

Clubs: Red Star (1975-78), Lens (1978-79), Paris FC (1979-81), Strasbourg (1981-85), Red Star (1985-86), Esperance (Tun/1985-86).

National coach: At the National Technical Directorate (DTN) in 1986, French military team, French B team (1986-98), assistant coach French team (Jan 1 - July 12 1998), national coach (1998-2002)

Trophies: Military World Championships 1995, Euro 200, Confederations Cup 2001

Record as coach of France: 53 played, 34 victories, 11 draws, 8 defeats, 106 goals scored, 43 conceded

last term. French Under-21 handler Raymond Domenech has also been mentioned though his strong personality may count against him and Frenchman Philippe Troussier has also entered the frame after his successful spell in charge of Japan.

Troussier, though, has joined legend Michel Platini in calling for a foreigner to be appointed to the post.

The 61-year-old Lemerre paid the price for France's first round exit at the World Cup finals where they garnered just one point and failed to score a goal.

Lemerre, who also guided France to the Euro 2000 title, had refused to resign claiming he was not solely responsible for the woeful performance in Asia.

Lemerre, capped six times from 1968-71 as a centre forward, had signed a new contract just prior to the finals which it is estimated could cost the FFF around a million euros (975,000 dollars).

Simonet indicated that there would be further discussions over the final sum paid out.

"There will be more talks on that matter but I will keep my word and Roger Lemerre will receive honourable treatment," he said.

Lemerre was always fighting a losing battle to keep his job given that no previous French manager had ever survived the fallout of a disastrous international campaign.

Stefan Kovacs, Henri Michel, Michel Platini and Gerard Houllier have all been forced to leave their posts after failure to either qualify or make an impact at the World Cup or the European Championships.



PHOTO: AFP

WATCH OUT TIGER WOODS! Brazil superstar Ronaldo makes a swing while playing a round of golf in Rio de Janeiro on July 4.

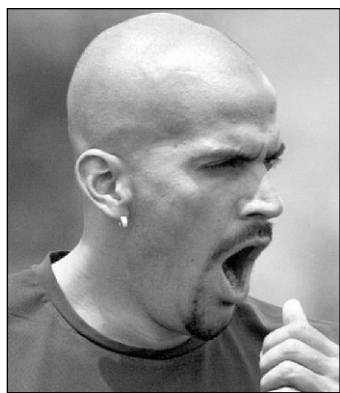
Veron wants out

INTERNET, Manchester

Manchester United have confirmed for the first time that Juan Sebastian Veron wants to leave the club - according to reports in Italy.

Chief executive Peter Kenyon is quoted on an Italian website claiming that Veron has made his first declaration that he wants to quit Old Trafford - but that there have been no bids for the club-record signing.

"As far as Veron goes, the player wants to leave Manchester but



VERON

there is still no acceptable offer for him," Kenyon told tuttomercato.com.

Veron was bought for £28.1million from Lazio last summer but never hit top gear and suffered with an Achilles tendon problem towards the latter part of the season. The midfielder has long been linked with a return to Italy and, after a disappointing World Cup campaign with Argentina, may well decide to call time on his brief stint in England.

Kenyon has also said that United are not interested in signing Juventus defender Lilian Thuram, inferring that their main priority signing is Leeds' England star Rio Ferdinand.

He added: "It is fair to say that, at the moment, we have abandoned the negotiations to bring the Juventus player to our club as we are looking towards other clear targets."

BSkyB buys rights for second-tier English football

AFP, London

British satellite broadcaster BSkyB said Friday it had agreed to buy the rights to broadcast second-tier English football for the next four years for 95 million pounds (144 million dollars, 148 million euros).

The deal follows the demise of digital terrestrial broadcaster ITV Digital, which went bankrupt in April owing the Football League 178.5 million pounds after media groups Granada and Carlton pulled the plug on their loss-making subsidiary.

That decision left a string of England's smaller football clubs, who had spent large sums of money in anticipation of the TV revenues, facing financial ruin, and prompted the league to launch legal action against the two companies.

The agreement, which will see Nationwide League, Worthington Cup and LDV Trophy games broadcast live, will provide the league with 20 million pounds in the first season.

Ronaldo wants his dues

Football

AFP, Geneva

Brazil World Cup winner Ronaldo is claiming four million dollars from a Swiss watch manufacturer, a lawyer for the company Montega said here on Thursday.

Montega signed a 5.2m dollar contract with the Inter Milan striker to promote a new line - the R9 watch - with the Brazilian also receiving royalties on sales of the line, three percent of which the player had destined for disadvantaged children.

But Montega stopped paying Ronaldo after an initial payment of 1.2m dollars after he suffered an injured knee which kept his appearances down to a minimum in the

Italian league.

Montega's lawyer Alain Macaluso told Swiss agency ATS: "A clause in the contract specifies that the star must be in good health during this period and promote the R9 watches."

Ronaldo's lawyer, Cyrille Pigeat, countered: "Last week the Geneva court confirmed on appeal that the Montega company is indebted to my client for the sum of four million dollars."

Montega for their part are claiming back the 1.2m sum already paid out.

The two warring sides will air their differences at an upcoming session in front of a court of arbitration.

The watch's name is made up of the 'R' in Ronaldo and his position in the team.

Victoria venom!

AFP, London

Victoria Beckham, the pop star wife of England soccer captain David Beckham, will face a slander trial over an outburst at shop owners whom she claimed were selling fake autographs of her husband.



VICTORIA BECKHAM

Three Court of Appeal judges Thursday gave the go-ahead for the action in which the family-run shop is claiming 500,000 pounds (762,000 dollars, 778,000 euros) in damages against the former Spice Girl, who is expected to give birth to the couple's second child in September.

Timothy, Glynis and Anthony McManus claim that following Beckham's alleged outburst at their shop in Kent, southern England, media publicity and trade gossip resulted in a dramatic fall in sales and financial loss.

James Price, representing the shop owners, had told the appeal judges last month that the outburst took place in March 2001 when two shop assistants and at least three customers were in the open-fronted store.

"What is alleged is that the defendant's manner of making these statements was rude and loud and unreasonable and such as to draw attention to what she said," he had said.

"Our case overall is that this sort of thing said by a super celebrity in a public place is like setting a wildfire."

Following Thursday's ruling, lawyers for Beckham issued a statement saying she would defend "an action which she believes is without merit."

Beckham was ordered to pay the legal costs of the case so far, estimated to total 100,000 pounds.

Zico ready for Japan



AFP, Tokyo

Former Brazil international Zico has reached an agreement with the Japan Football Association (JFA) to coach the national team, Kyodo News agency said on Friday.

Zico's attorney Antonio Simoes da Costa ended negotiations on the four-year-long contract with association representatives in Tokyo on Wednesday, the news agency said in a dispatch from Rio de Janeiro, quoting a Zico aide in Brazil.

"He authorized da Costa to close the deal with the Japanese prior to leaving Tokyo," on Thursday, Zico's assistant was quoted by Kyodo as saying.

Zico, 49, who is due in Rio on Friday night Japan time, will be flying back to Japan on July 17 to make his official announcement at the association's headquarters in Tokyo on July 20, according to the assistant.

A JFA spokesman declined to confirm the report, saying: "We cannot say anything until July 20th."

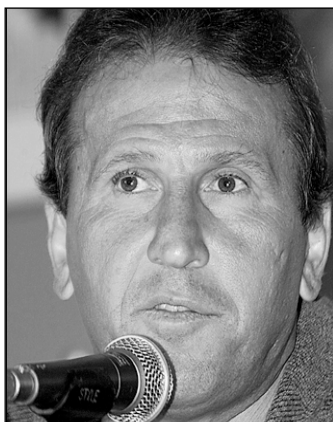
Zico took part in three World Cup finals from 1978. He came out of retirement to play for Japanese club side Kashima, hanging up his boots for good in 1994.

He is now Kashima's general manager and the team has won the league title four times.

Zico, Brazil's technical director at the 1998 finals, emerged as one of the top candidates to guide Japan to a place in the 2006 World Cup in Germany, replacing outgoing coach Philippe Troussier whose contract expired at the end of the 2002 tournament on June 30.

On Friday, sports and education minister Atsuko Toyama welcomed Zico's reported acceptance of the offer.

"He has brilliant achievements



ZICO

as a player and has his own experience in Japan," Toyama told a news conference. "I am sure that prospects for Japan's football will be brighten" with the association to be headed by Zico, she said.

COACHES' MUSICAL CHAIR



Fate of 32 World Cup managers following the sacking of France's Roger Lemerre on Friday:

STILL IN THEIR POST

Germany: Rudi Voller
England: Sven-Goran Eriksson
Cameroon: Winfried Schaefer
Denmark: Morten Olsen
Ireland: Mick McCarthy
United States: Bruce Arena
Italy: Giovanni Trapattoni
Senegal: Bruno Metsu
Sweden: Tommy Soderberg and Lars Lagerbaeck
Tunisia: Ammar Souayah
Turkey: Senol Gunes

RETIRED AFTER END OF CONTRACT

South Africa: Jomo Sono
Belgium: Robert Waseige
Brazil: Luiz Felipe Scolari

Ecuador: Hernan Dario Gomez
China: Bora Milutinovic
South Korea: Guus Hiddink
Costa Rica: Alexandre Guimaraes
Japan: Philippe Troussier
Mexico: Javier Aguirre
Paraguay: Cesare Maldini

UNDECIDED

Argentina: Marcelo Bielsa (contract ended June 30)

RESIGNED

Croatia: Mirko Jozic
Spain: Jose Antonio Camacho
Russia: Oleg Romantsev
Slovenia: Srecko Katanec
Uruguay: Victor Pua

SACKED

Saudi Arabia: Nasser Al-Johar
France: Roger Lemerre
Nigeria: Adegboye Onigbinde
Poland: Jerzy Engel
Portugal: Antonio Oliveira



PHOTO: AFP

MAY I HAVE THE HONOUR MADAM? South Korea's outgoing coach Guus Hiddink (C) makes a toast with Korean First Lady Lee Hee-ho (R) during a lunch at the Presidential palace yesterday. President Kim Dae-Jung is also seen.

They've earned it



AFP, Seoul

South Korea's footballers each received 250,000-dollar bonuses on Friday after winning a battle with the national football association to make sure everyone got the same amount.

The Korean Football Association (KFA) was forced to back down after deciding earlier this week that players would get a bonus according to the role they played in South Korea's landmark advance to the World Cup semi-finals.

"Each player got 300 million won. We have changed our policy," a KFA spokesman told AFP after the players had lunch with President Kim Dae-Jung and later held a ceremony to mark the end of their 18 months with departing coach Guus

Hiddink.

The players were upset after the KFA board announced that bonuses would depend on the role played in the World Cup campaign. This would have meant that the core of the squad who played in most matches would have received more.

According to press reports, captain Hong Myung-Bo led the revolt to make sure each member of the 23-man squad got the 300 million won promised before the World Cup if the team reached the semi-finals.

The players and Hiddink have been showered with gifts and accolades since the tournament finished last weekend. Hundreds of thousands of fans lined the streets of Seoul this week to pay tribute to Hiddink and the players, whose performance was the best by any Asian team at a World Cup.

Striker Ahn Jung-Hwan has just signed an 825,000 dollar deal - the second highest in South Korean advertising history -- to advertise a

mobile phone.

SK Telecom director Yang Myung-Kyu said Ahn, Korea's most high-profile player who is looking for a new club after refusing to return to Perugia in Italy, has signed a one-billion won contract with the firm.

Ahn's wife Lee Hae-Won, a 25-year-old former Miss Korea, has signed a 200 million won (165,000 dollar) deal to promote rival mobile phone firm KTF.

Ahn and South Korea have also won international awards for their success.

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) on Friday made Ahn the Asian player of the month, South Korea the team of the month for the second time in a row and Hiddink the coach of the month.

South Korea -- who had never won a match in any of their five previous appearances at the World Cup finals appearances -- received the award for beating European powerhouses Portugal, Italy and Spain.

Hiddink, who is on the verge of signing a three-year deal with PSV Eindhoven in his native Holland, was also hailed by the AFC.

"Guus Hiddink, the man who revolutionised the Korean team, masterfully maintained the momentum the team had built up in the warm-up matches when it mattered most," the AFC said in a statement.

Ahn was praised for his "outstanding performance in Korea's vital campaign and vital goals against the United States and Italy".

South Korea lost in the semi-final 1-0 to Germany and then went down 3-2 to Turkey in the third place play-off.

At the ceremony to mark the end of the squad's campaign, KFA president Chung Mong-Joon, who is also vice president of FIFA, said: "I am pleased that the team and coach Hiddink made a great achievement. But the players are requested to make efforts for the further development of Korean football."