



PHOTO: AP

LET'S DANCE THE NIGHT AWAY! Real Madrid superstar player Ronaldo and teammate Claude Makelele celebrate on a special bus that took the team to the Cibeles fountain in central Madrid on June 23.

Wind beneath the wings

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Vicente del Bosque is still unsure about his future as Real Madrid coach, despite landing his fourth major trophy in less than four years in charge.

Real were celebrating the club's 29th Spanish league title on Monday, after keeping Real Sociedad at bay with a 3-1 win at home to Athletic Bilbao on the final night of the season.

It followed Champions League wins in 2000 and 2002, either side of another domestic league title in 2001, and strengthened Del Bosque's status as by far the most successful coach in Spain.

As well as his hugely successful track record, Del Bosque enjoys the unswerving loyalty of his players, but even that may not be enough to keep him in his job.

The 52-year-old's contract is up at the end of the season and he has still not agreed a new deal with club president Florentino Perez.

"I don't know if I'm going to continue or not," the unassuming Del Bosque told Telemadrid on Monday. "It's hard to please everyone in football, particularly at a club like Real Madrid."

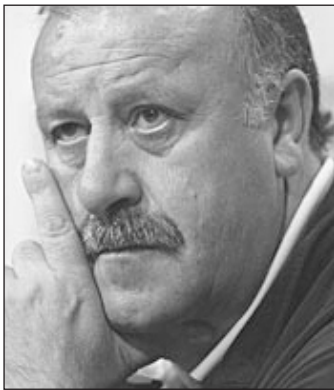
"The decision should be well thought out and taken in the best interests of the club."

According to widespread media reports in Spain, Del Bosque is

being offered a one-year extension on the same terms as his current contract.

For the first time, Del Bosque has appointed an agent to negotiate with the club and it is still far from certain whether an agreement will be reached.

"I may have to accept what other people may think about the situa-



VICENTE DEL BOSQUE

tion," Del Bosque said. "At Real Madrid we have the best players in the world and one might think that success is down to them."

Perez described Del Bosque as "very important" to Real Madrid on Monday but stopped short of confirming the coach in his post.

Del Bosque meanwhile, heaped praise on his team but was typically modest about his own contribution.

"The team has made an extraordinary effort throughout this season and we're delighted at winning a

29th title," Del Bosque told radio station Onda Cero.

"What with the Champions League, the (King's) Cup and inter-national matches it has been a very long and a very hard season."

"I'm just glad to have done my little bit, but the people who should get the real praise are the players."

Real clinched the title thanks to a well-taken double from World and European Player of the Year Ronaldo and a thunderous free kick from Roberto Carlos.

"The early goal gave us a great start," Del Bosque said at a news conference. "But Bilbao then began to gain the upper hand and it was only after Roberto Carlos's goal at the very end of the half that we began to relax a little."

He gave special thanks to the squad players who had not featured in the final game, but had played a part in the side's victorious season.

"It is a good time to remember all those players who have not played as much as they would have liked," he said. "They have also been very important in this triumph."

He also had words of congratulation for two-goal hero Ronaldo, who claimed the first league title of his career.

"We're talking about the best player in the world," said Del Bosque. "He has proved that and has helped us become the best team."

Del Bosque's contract with the club finishes at the end of the season and Real have not yet confirmed that he will continue as coach.

Colombia oust Japan



AFP, St. Etienne

Colombia reached the last four of the Confederations Cup by beating a gallant Japan side 1-0 here on Sunday.

Unlucky to lose to France in their opening match, the South American champions sealed their semi-final slot with a second half goal from Giovanni Hernandez after a slip-up by Japan defender Tsuneyasu Miyamoto.

While Francisco Maturana's men celebrated their continued existence in the tournament the beaten finalists in 2001 head for the airport empty-handed.

Japan's Brazilian coach Zico had

suffered a major setback when sharp shooter Shunsuke Nakamura, who with three goals is the tournament's top scorer, had to cry off with a left foot injury.

Japan also had to cope without Fulham's suspended midfielder, Junichi Inamoto.

Yet underfettered they controlled the game for much of the second half but still ended up eliminated along with New Zealand, Mick Watt's minnows beaten by titleholders France in Paris.

While the hosts meet the runners-up of Group B on Thursday at the Stade de France, Colombia move to Lyon for a date with the winners of that group.

Cameroon are currently leading it but either Brazil or Turkey could still claim top spot - all will be decided on Monday.

An uninspiring first 45 minutes produced little in the way of noteworthy chances, the best perhaps coming four minutes from the break when Brazilian-born Alex Santos, Zico's so-called secret weapon, floated a weighted lob at Colombian

keeper Oscar Cordoba's goal.

Early in the second period Naohiro Takahara picked up a pinpoint pass from Nobuhiso Yamada over on the right, the header only being kept out of the goal by the left post.

Maturana, who was missing the suspended duo Ivan Cordoba of Inter Milan and Elson Becerra, made one substitution at the start of the second half, bringing on Arnulfo Valentierra for Oscar Diaz.

And the 28-year-old midfielder almost made an immediate impact with a fierce shot from inside the box which Seigo Narazaki coped with admirably.

Then, in the 69th minute against the run of play, Colombia got the vital goal after Japanese defender Miyamoto lost the ball and, after a frantic Colombian attack, it ended up at the feet of Hernandez whose low shot at close range raced past Narazaki.

France a class apart



AFP, Paris

A new-look France team thrashed an outclassed New Zealand 5-0 in their final Confederations Cup group match at a half-full Stade de France here on Sunday.

Auxerre's Olivier Kapo opened the scoring. Thierry Henry headed the second goal, Djibril Cisse made it 3-0 after 70 minutes and as the visitors caved in, Ludovic Giuly and Robert Pires scored in second-half injury time.

As group A winners, France's semi-final opponents will be the runners-up of Group B, likely to be Turkey or world champions Brazil who meet in their final group match in Saint Etienne on Monday.

By giving goalkeeper Mickael Landreau and Ludovic Giuly a match, France fielded the last two members of their squad yet to play in the tournament.

French coach Jacques Santini said squad rotation was an essential element in this end-of-season event which forms a key part of his rebuilding of the 1998 World Cup winners.

"We wanted to play as many people as possible in the first three matches to allow the others to have a good rest," said the former Lyon coach.

"As a team, we're progressing nicely and I think we'll be even better for the semi-final."

Giuly provided the cross-field pass for Kapo to cut inside and fire

past goalkeeper Mike Utting and into the corner of the New Zealand net after 17 minutes.

Three minutes later, Henry's close-range header put France 2-0 ahead with the New Zealand defence in complete disarray.

Cisse shot inches wide from a tight angle a minute later as France demonstrated their superiority.

It was Cisse who scored France's third goal on the 70-minute mark after Arsenal ace Henry turned provider for the Auxerre striker who is being pursued by a clutch of English Premiership clubs.

As the New Zealanders tired, Monaco midfielder Giuly and then Robert Pires scored goals two minutes apart in second-half injury time.

New Zealand finish the tournament without a point, while Jacques Santini's team have four days to prepare for their semi-final.

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Ronaldo once again demonstrated that he is the best in the world when it comes to the big occasion as he almost single-handedly guided Real Madrid to their 29th league title on a night of high drama in Spain.

With Real needing to beat Athletic Bilbao to win the championship, Ronaldo obliged with another match-winning display when it really counted.

The Brazilian, sporting the same bizarre hairstyle he wore at the World Cup, put his side ahead with a close-range strike after nine minutes and, after Bilbao had equaled, won the free kick that led to their second.

When news began to filter through that second-placed Real Sociedad were winning at home to Atletico Madrid and closing in, nerves were starting to fray at the Bernabeu but a brilliant second goal from Ronaldo settled matters.

Timing his run to perfection, Ronaldo latched on to a pass from

Zinedine Zidane and belted the ball past Bilbao keeper Aranzubia to score his 23rd league goal of the season.

It was a first domestic league title for Ronaldo, who scored 34 league goals for Barcelona in the 1996-97 season but had to settle for the runners-up spot behind Real in the league.

"We're talking about the best player in the world," said Real coach Vicente del Bosque. "He has proved that and has helped us become the best team."

A tally of 23 league goals looked a distant target when he arrived from Inter Milan in a \$44.2 million transfer.

His eight goals in South Korea and Japan, including two in the final, had made him the competition's top scorer and proved that he was back to something like his best after career-threatening injury problems.

Real's move for the Brazilian striker was still a huge gamble, though, with many questioning whether he could reproduce his World Cup form on a regular basis.

When he arrived at the Bernabeu, he was patently unfit and he did not make his debut until the

fifth league match of the season against Alaves.

With the eyes of the world on him, and many people waiting for him to fail, Ronaldo did what he does best, scoring two brilliant goals, one of them within a minute of coming on, to lead Real to a 5-2 win.

He has continued scoring vital goals for Real Madrid ever since, always saving his best for the biggest matches.

He returned to Yokohama, the scene of his World Cup triumph with Brazil, to win his first title with Real in December, scoring the opening goal in the side's 2-0 win over Olimpia of Paraguay in the World Club Cup.

Later in December he won the European Player of the Year award for the second time and the FIFA World Player of the Year award for the third time as he finished the year on a high note.

Ronaldo proved Real's saviour in the second phase of the Champions League, heading the only goal in a 1-0 win away to Lokomotiv Moscow that took his team through to the knock-out phase.

In the quarter-finals, his hat-trick in the second leg away to Manchester United clinched a 6-5

aggregate win for Real and earned him a standing ovation from the Old Trafford crowd.

Ronaldo scored in Real's 2-1 win over Juventus in the semi-final first leg but injury limited him to a substitute's role in the return and Juventus denied the Spaniards a place in the final.

That left the domestic league as Real's only hope of claiming a major trophy and Ronaldo's inspirational run of form at the end of the season led them to victory.

He scored twice in a crucial 2-1 win away to Valencia, twice again away to Atletico Madrid last week and added another double to clinch the title against Bilbao.

"I'm so happy," Ronaldo told Real Madrid's website after the Bilbao win. "It's all worked out perfectly."

"When I was at Barcelona I was more spectacular but now I'm more effective. I'm getting better all the time."

Antic out, Rijkaard in

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Radomir Antic will not continue as Barcelona coach next season and could be replaced by former Dutch national team boss Frank Rijkaard, the club said on Monday.

Tixi Begiristain, Barcelona's new sporting director, told reporters that the club would not be taking up the optional one-year extension on Antic's contract, despite the Serb's achievement in guiding the side to a UEFA Cup place.

"Antic met his objective in getting the club into Europe but we believe a new coach is needed," said Begiristain, who took up his post following Joan Laporta's victory in the club's presidential election last week.

Antic replaced Louis van Gaal as coach at the end of January when the club were in 12th place in the Spanish first division, three points off the relegation zone.

Four successive victories at the end of the season took them up to sixth and clinched a place in the

UEFA Cup but that was not enough to persuade Laporta's new team to keep Antic on.

Begiristain confirmed media reports that talks with Rijkaard's representatives were taking place but said there would be no announcement from the club until a deal was reached.

Dutch news agency ANP and Dutch television NOS reported that Rijkaard was expected to reach an agreement with Barcelona later on Monday.

"A contract is only a contract if there is also a signature on it," Rijkaard was quoted as saying by ANP. "Yes, I am still in the Netherlands. But the contract indeed has to be completed in Barcelona."

Laporta had reportedly also wanted to sign Guus Hiddink, the former Dutch and South Korean national team coach who led PSV Eindhoven to the title last season.

Last week Laporta admitted defeat in his bid to buy David Beckham from Manchester United after the England captain agreed to join Real Madrid.

Barca give up on Ronaldinho

Football

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona said Monday they would not get into a bidding war with Manchester United and Real Madrid for Paris St Germain's Brazil World Cup star Ronaldinho.

Manchester and Real have both offered 20 million euros.

Paris St Germain insist the 23-year-old is staying in France and new president Francis Graille has refused to meet United chief executive Peter Kenyon.

Real Madrid president Florentino Perez, who last week bought England captain David Beckham from Manchester for 35 million euros, said Sunday he was interested in signing Ronaldinho and leaving him in Paris for a year.

Perez said Ronaldinho could not fit into the team next season

because they already have three foreign players from outside the European Union.

New Barcelona president Joan Laporta, faced with debts of around 100 million euros, says he cannot afford to win a bidding war.

"We want Ronaldinho but our offer is lower than Manchester United and Real Madrid," Laporta's sports director Sandro Rosell told a press conference Monday.

"We are not going to enter into a fight with them. Paris St Germain now have new owners as well who want to keep the player, which makes it more difficult."

Barcelona were also reported to be chasing Leeds United's Australian international Harry Kewell.

Leeds chairman Professor John McKenzie told the club's website Monday both Barcelona and Arsenal had enquired about Kewell.

De Boer leaving

Football

REUTERS, Amsterdam

Barcelona defender Frank de Boer is to quit the Spanish club after failing to agree a deal to extend his contract, his lawyers said on Monday.

The 33-year-old Dutch international, whose contract expired at the end of the season, warned Barcelona last month 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 the club

and is looking for another club."

De Boer joined Barcelona from Ajax Amsterdam along with his twin brother Ronald in December 1998. Ronald moved to Rangers in 2000.

Frank de Boer, who has won more than 100 caps for the Netherlands, said he would not join his brother in Scotland if he left the Nou Camp, saying he favoured playing in England or staying in Spain.



FRANK DE BOER

TOP SCORERS

Leading scorers in the Spanish league after the final weekend of matches:

29 - Roy Makaay (Deportivo La Coruna)
23 - Ronaldo (Real Madrid), Nihat

Kahveci (Real Sociedad)
20 - Darko Kovacevic (Real Sociedad)
16 - Patrick Kluivert (Barcelona), Raul

Gonzalez (Real Madrid)
15 - Fernando Fernandez (Real Betis),

Javi Guerrero (Racing Santander)
14 - Joseba Etxeberria (Athletic Bilbao),

Samuel Eto'o (Mallorca), Ismael Urzaiz
(Athletic Bilbao), Walter Pandiani

(Mallorca)
13 - Fernando Torres (Athletic Bilbao),

Javier Saviola (Barcelona)
12 - Savo Milosevic (Espanyol)

CHAMPIONS OF THREE DECADES

The Spanish league champions for the last 30 years, and the number of championships won, are given below after Real Madrid clinched the 2002-2003 title on Sunday:

1973-74 Barcelona
1974-75 Real Madrid
1975-76 Real Madrid
1976-77 Atletico Madrid
1977-78 Real Madrid
1978-79 Real Madrid
1979-80 Real Madrid
1980-81 Real Sociedad
1981-82 Real Sociedad
1982-83 Athletic Bilbao
1983-84 Athletic Bilbao
1984-85 Barcelona
1985-86 Real Madrid
1986-87 Real Madrid
1987-88 Real Madrid
1988-89 Real Madrid
1989-90 Real Madrid
1990-91 Barcelona
1991-92 Barcelona
1992-93 Barcelona
1993-94 Barcelona
1994-95 Real Madrid
1995-96 Atletico Madrid
1996-97 Real Madrid
1997-98 Barcelona
1998-99 Barcelona
1999-00 Deportivo La Coruna
2000-01 Real Madrid
2001-02 Valencia
2002-03 Real Madrid

The first Spanish league championship was contested in 1928-29. The following clubs have won the Spanish league:

Real Madrid - 29 times
Barcelona - 16
Atletico Madrid - 9
Athletic Bilbao - 8
Valencia - 5
Real Sociedad - 2
*Real Betis, Sevilla and Deportivo La Coruna have won the Spanish league once each.

Cash come flowing in

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid players are each to get a hefty cash bonus after helping the club to their 29th Spanish league title at the weekend, the sports press reported here Monday.

Each player will receive a 300,000-euros (346,000-dollars) bonus, a sum which was fixed at the beginning of the season could the club win the Primera Liga title.

Real Madrid beat Athletic Bilbao 3-1 to win the 2002-03 Spanish league title here on Sunday.

Two goals from Ronaldo and another by his fellow Brazilian Roberto Carlos gave Real Madrid a final tally of 78 points from their 38 games with Real Sociedad second, two points behind.