

Deschamps has no regrets

AFP, Rome

Juventus coach Didier Deschamps said Friday that he has no regrets about joining the troubled and disgraced Italian giants.

Deschamps turned down the opportunity to coach Marseille in the close season, preferring to head to his former club Juventus instead.

But no sooner did he sign on the dotted line than Juve were hit with a hefty punishment - relegation to Serie B, stripped of their last two titles and docked 30 (later reduced to 17) points for the coming season - for their role in a match-fixing scandal.

Meanwhile, Marseille are flying high in France as the early-season pace-setters.

Speaking on the eve of Juve's opening Serie B match this season at the modest home of Rimini, Deschamps said: "I have never thought that I made the wrong choice. "This situation is not the best, but anyhow, Juve will always be Juve and I am here to win."

Juventus face an uphill task to earn promotion in their first ever season in Serie B and have not given up hope of having their points penalty reduced, taking their latest appeal to the Italian Olympic Committee. "The situation is very difficult and for that reason we have to start winning immediately."

Reverse psychology works for Stoichkov

AFP, Sofia

National football coach Hristo Stoichkov lost a 15,000-euro (19,000 dollars) bet in a move to spur his players to the 3-0 win over Slovenia in a Euro 2008 Group G qualifier, 7 Dni Sport newspaper reported Friday.

"The 3-0 win over Slovenia cost Stoichkov 15,000 euros," 7 Dni Sport said. "In order to bug his players, the coach bet on a draw or a victory for Slovenia."

According to the newspaper Stoichkov took bets with Juventus striker Valeri Bojinov, and midfielders Chavdar Yankov (Hanover) and Blagoy Georgiev (Red Star Belgrade) saying he would pay them 5,000 euros each if the team won.

Another player from the team confirmed to 7 Dni Sport that there was such a bet. "Stoichkov did it to spur the boys," he said, refusing to be named.

Bulgaria posted a 3-0 win over Slovenia with second half goals from Bojinov, Atletico Madrid's Martin Petrov and Levski Sofia's Dimitar Telkiyski.

Stoichkov, the leading scorer in the 1994 World Cup who netted a total of 35 goals in 83 internationals for Bulgaria, watched the match from the stands due to a four-match touch-line ban imposed by UEFA for misconduct.

He was reported to have announced in the changing-room that he would pay up should he lose the bet.

Gil Vicente to challenge relegation

AFP, Lisbon

Portuguese club Gil Vicente will continue to contest their relegation to the second division in civil courts, a move which contravenes FIFA rules, the club's president Antonio Fiuza said Friday.

"We don't believe in sports courts, they are authentic clowns," he told reporters following an assembly attended by more than 4,000 members of the Barcelos-based club in comments broadcast on state-owned television RTP.

Gil Vicente's lawyer Jose Luis Cruz Vilaca said the club was willing to take the case all the way up to European courts.

World football's governing body FIFA on Monday threatened to ban Portuguese teams from all international competitions if the dispute, which has disrupted the domestic league schedule, is not resolved by September 14.

The Portuguese Football Federation demoted Gil Vicente last month after ruling the club broke rules governing the mid-season registration of amateur Angola midfielder Mateus Galeano da Costa.

It replaced the club in the top league with Belenenses, who had been relegated last season.

Gil Vicente appealed the federation's decision at Portuguese sports highest court of appeal, the Justice Council, where it lost. It then took its case to a civil case where it won its reinstatement in the first division.

But on Wednesday the federation obtained a public interest order which allowed it to override the civil court's decision. Gil Vicente is scheduled to play in the second division this weekend.

"The risk of the national team and Portuguese clubs being barred from international tournaments no longer exists, as long as the disciplinary measures which the federation put in place are adhered to," federation lawyer Paulo Relogio told daily newspaper Correio da Manha.



PHOTO: AFP

(From L) Real Betis' new signings Brazilian Rafael Sobis, Swiss Johann Vogel and German David Odonkor pose at their press introduction at Ruiz de Lopera Stadium in Sevilla on Saturday.

Odonkor blasts Borussia

Football

INTERNET, undated

Real Betis forward David Odonkor has slammed his former club Borussia Dortmund for sidelining him before his move this summer.

Odonkor was a surprise inclusion in the Germany World Cup squad, but he justified his place with a string of impressive substitute appearances.

However, when he returned to Dortmund for pre-season training, it soon became clear that he no longer figured prominently in the plans of

Borussia coach Bert van Marwijk.

"I find it sad and do not understand why BVB (Dortmund) prefer to sign new players rather than relying on those who have already played well," he told Kicker magazine.

"I would have hoped for more support in that respect."

The 22-year-old was sold to Betis for 6.2 million euros just before the end of the transfer window and is now looking to try his luck in Spain despite being hurt by his departure from the Westphalia.

"To be honest, if I was a regular (at Borussia), then I would have turned this offer down," he revealed. "If a player comes through the

ranks from the youth to the professionals at a club like Dortmund and can prove himself, then he should be given a chance to continue playing and improve further.

"He has already overcome enough obstacles and the money spent on big transfers can be saved and put into youth development."

Dortmund, who only narrowly avoided the threat of extinction two years ago, have now steadied the ship financially and spent 8.8 million euros this summer on new strikers Alexander Frei and Nelson Valdez.

Sponsorship sends United to KL

Football

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United will stop off in Kuala Lumpur next summer as part of a planned Asian tour after signing a new sponsorship deal with Tourism Malaysia.

The contract, an extension of an existing accord with Air Asia, sees Malaysia's tourist office sever its relationship with Chelsea in favour of a link-up with the world's best-supported club.

"Manchester United have more fans in our part of the world than Chelsea and we feel this sponsorship deal offers us the best chance to promote Malaysia worldwide," Malaysian tourism minister YB

Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor said on Friday.

"There are Manchester United fan clubs in Malaysia and so many people who like to watch their games. This package is better for us in a commercial sense and we will strive with United to make it work for the benefit of all parties."

The visit to Kuala Lumpur is designed to help mark the 50th anniversary of Malaysia's independence and United chief executive David Gill said he expected to solidify the club's huge fan base in southeast Asia.

"We have always had a huge following in that region for three main reasons; history, heritage and achievement," he said.

"The success of the Premiership has also been an important factor

and it will be good to have the chance to visit the region again. As with all our tours, we will not just turn up, play a game and leave again. It will be a genuine attempt to project ourselves to supporters who very rarely have the opportunity to see us live."

United's full tour schedule is yet to be finalised but it is expected to include visits to Shanghai and South Korea.

United already have Park Ji-sung on their books and manager Sir Alex Ferguson revealed on Friday that he could soon be joined at Old Trafford by another Korean player.

"The world has changed in terms of where you get players from now and we are currently looking at another young Korean boy we are hoping to bring over quite soon," Ferguson said.

Final snub forced Reyes' hand

Football

THE GUARDIAN

José Antonio Reyes has revealed that his exclusion from the starting line-up for last season's Champions League final against Barcelona finally convinced him to leave Arsenal for Real Madrid and he has promised to stay in Spain beyond his year-long loan.

The 23-year-old played only five minutes as Arsenal lost to Barcelona in the Stade de France last May. And asked if the exclusion was the final straw after two years of struggling to settle in England, he replied: "Well, it was certainly a big factor in me leaving."

"You play all the matches all the way through the Champions League and then you're left out of the final. It was a massive blow. I missed out on one of the most important games of my career. That was really hard."

Reyes maintains that he did not fail as an Arsenal player, but that neither he nor his family were able to adapt to life away from Spain. "Things did work for me at Arsenal but I when I got the chance to come to Real Madrid, I didn't want to pass it up," he said. "Adapting to England was difficult, things like the weather and the language were hard for me. It was really quite difficult."

"My family is the most important thing to me. Both me and my family were unhappy in London. I was very conscious of the fact that they were not settled there. They weren't happy; now they are."

Reyes has joined on a year-long loan deal, with Julio Baptista going to Arsenal in exchange, but he is adamant that he will continue at the Bernabéu rather than return to Arsenal at the end of the season.

"I have got a year to work hard and make the president, the coach and the fans at Madrid trust in me. I

want to concentrate on doing the best I can, day by day, at Madrid to make sure I stay," he said. "I don't even want to think about the possibility of having to go back."

The former Arsenal player has been billed as yet another in a long list of left-wingers on Real Madrid's books, joining a queue that already includes Raúl, Guti, Robinho and Antonio Cassano. But the coach Fabio Capello has hinted that Reyes will instead provide competition for David Beckham on the right, asking: "Why does everyone keep

talking about Reyes being a left winger? Why shouldn't he play on the right?"

And Reyes added: "I have played on the right in England, so it wouldn't be at all strange for me to do that here. I will be happy wherever I play. I have come here to fight for my place, it doesn't matter who I am up against. It's got nothing to do with who I am up against. All I want to do is to convince the coach that I'm worth a place in the side."

"If I have to compete for a place with Raúl I will."



PHOTO: AFP

Spanish striker Jose Antonio Reyes, attired in Real Madrid colours, poses at his formal presentation to the press at the Santiago Bernabeu on Friday.

Hoddle for Jamaica?

AFP, London

Glenn Hoddle is being tipped as the man who will spearhead Jamaica's bid to reach the 2010 World Cup finals in South Africa.

According to English media reports, Hoddle, 49, has become the front runner for the vacancy after Sven-Goran Eriksson failed to follow up an approach from the Jamaican FA.

Jose Pekerman, the manager of Argentina during this summer's World Cup, is also in the running but Hoddle was reported to be the favoured candidate as a English speaker based in Europe, where most Jamaican professionals play. Jamaica missed out on the last two World Cups after reaching the finals in France in 1998.

Former England boss Hoddle stepped down as manager of Wolves in July after one season in charge of the Championship club. He has also previously managed Swindon, Chelsea, Southampton and Tottenham.

Staunton banished to stands

AFP, Nyon

Ireland manager Steve Staunton has been banned for one match after being banished from the touchline during the Euro 2008 qualifier in Germany, UEFA announced Friday.

The Ireland manager was asked to leave the bench after 76 minutes for "constantly protesting against the decisions of the referee" during the 1-0 defeat on September 2, European football's governing body said in statement.

Staunton, who won a record 102 caps for his country, will be obliged to sit in the stands for the whole of Ireland's next qualifier in Cyprus on October 7, UEFA's disciplinary body ruled.

Desert lesson for Aussies

AFP, Sydney

Australia were given a harsh and painful lesson that they are not ordained to conquer Asian football, press reports said Friday.

The Socceroos, fielding eight members of the squad which reached the second round of this year's World Cup finals in Germany, were humbled 2-0 by Kuwait in an Asian Cup qualifier in Kuwait City Wednesday.

Only last month Australia, fielding a team drawn entirely from the domestic A-League, downed the same Kuwaiti lineup 2-0 in Sydney, but a supposedly stronger team full of European-based professionals bumbled to defeat in the return game.

One commentator called for the head of interim coach Graham Arnold, saying he was not the right man for the job and that the loss was an "awful result" for Australian football.

Australia, who have already qualified for next year's Asian Cup finals, are playing in the Asian confederation for the first time since their switch from the much smaller and weaker Oceania confederation on January 1 this year.

"The first thoughts of some people was that it would be easier -- but at the end of the day, coming to Asia is a learning experience," Arnold said after the match. "This was a kick in the backside but you learn more from adversity. We've got to learn from this."

But Australian media took a harder line on Australia's first defeat to Asian opposition since the Socceroos' 3-0 loss to Japan in Shizuoka in August 2001.

"It was a harsh and painful lesson for Australia in the desert heat of Kuwait City - a timely reminder that World Cup glory is a distant memory and conquering Asia will not come quickly or easily for a Socceroos team in transition," The Sydney Morning Herald said.

SBS Television football analyst and former international Craig Foster condemned the Australian performance.

"That team was good enough to play Kuwait off the park, it didn't happen, and that's concerning," Foster told local radio Friday. "The national side has to be held to a certain standard and that wasn't good enough."

He criticised caretaker coach Arnold, claiming he was not the right man for the job and that Football Federation Australia should have already appointed an overseas successor to Gus Hindink, who became Russia's coach after the World Cup in July.

"While it might be harsh, Arnold has to coach at a level of an experienced international coach at this point of time, and the Kuwait game has raised serious concerns about that," Foster said.

Former Australian captain Paul Wade was a bit more forgiving. "It was really a meaningless game and that the players had virtually no time to work together before the game. The Kuwaitis were together for two weeks.

New stadium a reality for L'pool

Football

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool's plan to build a new 60,000-seat stadium moved a step closer to becoming reality on Friday when the local city council approved the lease of land for the ground.

The new stadium, which is to be built on Stanley Park close to the club's current home at Anfield, will receive a definitive green light by the end of this month provided Liverpool FC can prove it can come up with around 180 million pounds (340 million dollars) of funding.

That will trigger the release of

public funds for regeneration work linked to the project, which the council hopes will revitalise one of the most run-down areas of the city.

Provided that there are no last-minute hiccups, work on the new stadium could begin early next year with Liverpool moving into the new ground at the start of the 2009-10 season.

The move to a bigger stadium will strengthen Liverpool's ability to compete more effectively with rivals such as Arsenal and Manchester United, whose grounds hold 60,000 and 75,800 respectively.

But the fans will inevitably miss Anfield, the club's home since

1892 which is widely regarded as the most atmospheric of all English grounds.

Reds boss Rafael Benitez said the new stadium would be a major boost for the club.

"It is very important that we have this new stadium to have more room for our fans," he said.

"It will help us provide very important extra funds for our future, and it will help us to compete with clubs like Manchester United, Chelsea and Arsenal."

"We have fantastic support at Liverpool and the Kop is a very special place, but our capacity is just 45,000. It would be even better for everyone if we had 60,000 fans in the ground."

Fergie backs Carrick

AFP, Manchester



Alex Ferguson insisted Friday that Michael Carrick has already shrugged off the pressure

of his 18.6-million-pound price tag as the England midfielder prepares for his Old Trafford debut against former club Spurs on Saturday.

Carrick, 25, became United's solitary big-money summer signing when he quit White Hart Lane for Old Trafford in the wake of the World Cup.

Having seen expensive midfielders Juan Sebastian Veron and Kleberson fail to live up to the huge expectations in a United shirt in recent seasons, Carrick has been forced to shoulder the dual burden of justifying his fee and also replacing club legend Roy Keane at the heart of United's midfield.

But manager Ferguson insists that the former West Ham youngster has taken the move in his stride as he readies himself for a swift reunion with Martin Jol's Spurs.

Ferguson said: "It's always a big thing to play against your old club and Michael will probably be glad to

get it over and done with.

"But he has not had any problems settling in at the club and I thought he was tremendous in the Amsterdam Tournament before he got injured."

"That ankle injury knocked him back a bit, but his training has been great and it has been easy for him to settle because we have so many English players in the squad. He should be ok here and I've no worries about that."

"But he owes a lot to Tottenham because they took the chance on him when they bought him from West Ham at a time when other clubs weren't prepared to take that chance."

"He left in the right way, however, with everything peaceful and there are no recriminations from either side. Spurs knew that the boy wanted to come here, so we are pleased with that."

"He had his first game against Watford and it's just a shame that he didn't really get involved with England last week because he could have done with more match action."

"But he will start against Spurs and we will hopefully see him take another step up with his fitness."

Ferguson, who revealed that

Alan Smith is still not fit enough to return to first-team duty after his broken leg lay-off, had planned to pair Carrick with England teammate Owen Hargreaves in a new-look midfield at United.

But Bayern Munich's refusal to sell Hargreaves has left Ferguson short on numbers in a key area and he admitted that his desire to land the England star cost him the chance to sign Marcos Senna from Villarreal.

The Scot said: "We tried our best to get Owen Hargreaves and, because we pushed the boat out to get him, we also missed out on the boy Senna."

"He was the alternative, but we couldn't keep him or Villarreal waiting any longer, so we had to withdraw gracefully from that."

"We felt that pursuing Hargreaves was important, but unfortunately we didn't get him. Maybe another time, though, and it's something we will possibly pursue again in the future."

"But the money was there for more players, there's absolutely no doubt about that."

Police probe surprises Pearce

AFP, London



Manchester City boss Stuart Pearce has expressed his surprise at police launching a second investigation into Ben Thatcher.

Thatcher, already facing a police

inquiry into his brutal challenge on Portsmouth's Pedro Mendes, learned Thursday he was the subject of another investigation.

Thatcher, banned for six games and fined 120,000 pounds by City for his August 23 elbow assault on Mendes which left the Portugal international unconscious, is being probed for an incident in a game against Blackburn Rovers' reserves

in February.

Ralph Welch, a 19-year-old playing for Rovers, has complained that he was elbowed in the face by City's 30-year-old former Wales defender during the game in Morecombe.

Pearce was at the game in question and recalled Thatcher actually received a free-kick for the challenge, and he feels the latest move smacks of bandwagon-jumping.

"I find it quite strange given they have waited since February until now," said Pearce.

"It strikes me as someone getting on the back of a bit of publicity."

"I was at the game myself and I remember the linesman giving a free-kick in Ben's favour."

Pearce has previously expressed his distaste for police taking action over events which occur during games, believing the football authorities have enough power to control situations themselves.

And nothing that has happened over the past fortnight has changed his opinion.

"From my point of view, once the players cross the white line they are under the authority of the referee, they are the ones who should deal with things that happen during matches," he said.

"Police forces in this country are overburdened as it is."

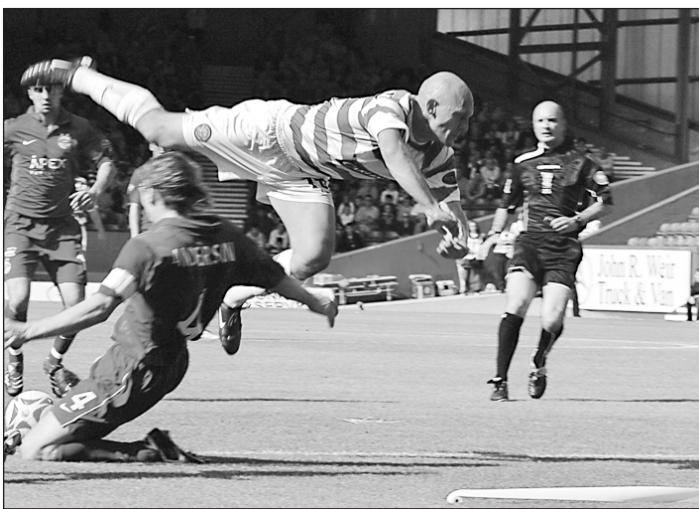


PHOTO: AFP

Celtic's new-signing Danish midfielder Thomas Gravesen jumps to evade a challenge in the Scottish Premier League match against Aberdeen at Pittodrie on Saturday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 1 Hot tub 4 Pinch 7 Campus quarters 8 Cretan king, son of Zeus 10 Criminal 11 Timely word? 13 Becomes boisterous 16 Strange 17 Winter forecast 18 Neither mate 19 Use an old phone 20 Gross 21 First Little Pig's material 23 Tests the waters 25 Blood-curdling 26 Youngsters

27 Altar affirma-tive 28 Sitcom firm 29 Support system? 30 Deals a crushing blow 36 "Dennis the —" 37 Accumulate, as expenses 38 Wheels of fortune? 39 Sea eagle 40 P.I. salad 41 Bond, e.g.

DOWN 1 Hard and 2 Experts Lot 3 Memory evacuated 4 Recess 5 Bay tool 6 Indigent 7 Out of play 8 Highway stopover 9 Bracket of baseball lore 10 To and — 12 Eccen-trics 14 Deli 15 Sauté 19 Parched

20 Dog tags, e.g. 21 City Lot 22 Brick-layer's tool 23 Accompanying 24 Sticks 25 Hodges of baseball lore 26 Wind-borne toys 28 Plant evidence, maybe 29 Neckwear 30 Attractive, to Scots 31 Libertine 32 Pump up the volume 34 Writer Bagnold 35 After-dinner remark?

Solution time: 21 mins.

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CRYPTOQUIP  
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E W J X P H X T H W J X P H X  
Yesterday's Cryptquip: A NEW BEST-SELLER, CALLED "TIPS ON OUTWITTING ANY LIE-DETECTOR TEST," IS BY PAUL E. GRAFF.  
Today's Cryptquip Clue: M equals F  
The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.