



Mascherano committed to West Ham

AFP, London

Argentina midfielder Javier Mascherano has vowed to ignore calls from his national coach Alfonso Basile to quit West Ham.

Mascherano has endured a nightmare start to his West Ham career following his surprise move to the English Premiership club in August.

Alan Pardew's side have yet to win since Mascherano and his international teammate Carlo Tevez arrived from Brazilian side Corinthians.

Mascherano was dropped for West Ham's last match, a home defeat against Reading, amid suggestions that he and striker Tevez, who has yet to score for the club, had unsettled the rest of their new teammates.

But he is happy to stay and fight for his place and told the London Evening Standard: "I came with the idea of staying a long time. I think when you arrive, and more so in a club like this, you need time to adapt, to get to know it all."

Basile is keen for the pair, both key players for Argentina, to leave London already because he claims they are playing with no enthusiasm and does not want their troubles to affect the national team.

West Ham have lost their last five matches, including a UEFA Cup first round exit against Palermo, and Mascherano has been linked with a move to Italian club Juventus in the January transfer window.

"Maybe the first year is just about getting to know it. My idea is to stay a long time," added Mascherano.

"It's not right for a player to spend a year in one country, another year in another, another in another, that's too hard."

"Not just in terms of football, but the life you lead, for your family, everything. I want to be here for a long time."

Scolari wishes Silva recovery

AFP, Lisbon

Portugal coach Luiz Felipe Scolari on Friday wished a rapid recovery for Uruguay striker Dario Silva, who had his right leg amputated following a car accident.

"We want to send a message of concern and solidarity to Dario Silva. He's an athlete who has had a misfortune and we hope that he recovers as soon as possible," the Brazilian World Cup-winning manager told reporters in Lisbon.

Silva, 33, left a hospital in Montevideo on Thursday, 10 days after doctors amputated his leg below the knee.

He was driving his van in the company of former footballers Elvio Pappa and Dard Pereira when the accident occurred on September 24 near Montevideo.

His two friends received only minor injuries.

Silva played for Portsmouth in the English Premiership last season but was without a club at the time of the accident.

The player, who previously played for Cagliari, Espanyol, Malaga and Sevilla in his decade in Europe, was on holidays in his homeland awaiting news of a possible transfer to a new club.

He scored 15 goals in 49 international games for Uruguay, and played at the 2002 World Cup.

Two-match ban for Hoeness, Mihajlovic

AFP, Paris

European football's governing body, UEFA, has slapped two-match touchline bans on Bayern Munich general manager Uli Hoeness and Inter Milan's assistant coach Sinisa Mihajlovic after the pair became embroiled in an ugly pitchside row during a Champions League match.

The duo were "banned by UEFA from exercising functions for two UEFA club competition matches."

In the 85th minute of the Group B game between Inter and Bayern in Milan on September 27, "an aggressive verbal confrontation took place between Hoeness and Mihajlovic, following the red card given to Inter's Fabio Grosso", UEFA said.

Both moved out of the technical zone and were sent to the stand by referee Steve Bennett.

Grosso, who was dismissed after seriously fouling Bayern defender Willy Sagnol, was given a two-match ban, while Inter striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic, who was sent off for two yellow-card offences in the match, which Bayern won 2-0, was suspended for one game, UEFA said.

"It's not secret that this week we've had two (training) sessions working on a 3-5-2 using different personnel," he said. "We may see it this weekend, we may see it on Wednesday, we may see it in the future, who knows?"

McClaren also spoke on Manchester United striker Wayne Rooney, who has been criticised recently for a slump in form and has not scored an England goal for over two years.

I'm in charge: McLaren

Football

INTERNET, undated

Steve McLaren hit back at his critics after claims the England manager is not in control of team selection.

"The players do not pick the team," a visibly annoyed McLaren told a press conference ahead of the Euro 2008 qualifying match against Macedonia.

Friday reports suggested that the England players had held a meeting to discuss tactics for the match.

"I can categorically say that the players did not have a meeting," McLaren countered.

"Yes, we will ask the players (but) I, along with the coaches, pick the team, the tactics, the formations and the gameplan."

The former Middlesbrough boss refused to clarify whether he will adopt an experimental 3-5-2 formation for the Old Trafford clash or Wednesday's away match in Croatia.

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McClaren also spoke on Manchester United striker Wayne Rooney, who has been criticised recently for a slump in form and has not scored an England goal for over two years.

"I am sure Wayne will explode back

6x2

Gallas promises video nasty

INTERNET, undated

William Gallas has threatened to lift the lid on his bitter bust-up with Chelsea by taking part in a television interview.

After leaving The Blues to join Arsenal on transfer deadline day Gallas was criticised heavily by the Premiership champions as they released an extraordinary statement.

Chelsea stated that Gallas threatened to score an own goal or make deliberate mistakes if he was not allowed to leave the club, as well as claiming the French international initially refused to play for Jose Mourinho before last season's FA Cup semifinal.

Country comes after club!

Football

REUTERS, Milan

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Representing your country is routinely described as the greatest honour in a footballer's career but more players seem to be turning their backs on international teams, a trend which risks devaluing a competition.

This weekend's Euro 2008 qualifiers will take place without several well-known players who have turned down call-ups, raising the question of whether international football has now become an 'optional extra' for top performers.

Italy coach Roberto Donadoni would love to have playmaker Francesco Totti lining up against Ukraine at his home ground, the Olympic stadium in Rome.

But although Totti is fit enough to be featuring for his club, he says he wants a break from the national team until 2007.

Totti's decision has been taken with remarkable ease by Donadoni and the rest of Italian football.

While the muted reaction may reflect the player's limited contribution to Italy's World Cup triumph, it surely also reflects a mood of resignation among most national coaches.

Sweden coach Lars Lagerback is without one of his best players this weekend after striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic rejected a call-up.

Lagerback disciplined Ibrahimovic last month, sending him home along with defender Olof Mellberg and midfielder Christian Wilhelmsson for staying out too late ahead of the qualifier against Liechtenstein.

Ibrahimovic believed the sanction was too harsh and decided not to respond to the call-up for Saturday's home game against Spain and the match in Iceland four days later.

Netherlands coach Marco van Basten has also been unable to persuade Ruud van Nistelrooy and Mark van Bommel to play this weekend.

In Brazil, Dida has retired from the national side despite being only 32, arguably the perfect age for a goalkeeper.

What is notable in all these cases is there no longer appears to be anger or particular surprise when players reject an international call.

"I do not think I can persuade someone to play in the national side or, based on FIFA's rules, make them play," said Lagerback in a statement.

Van Basten agreed, saying: "Van Bommel called me and made it clear he was no longer available. He was so determined that it was no use trying to persuade him."

In one sense the coaches are right, there seems little point in enforcing call-ups on unwilling players.

"We don't want any player who doesn't want to represent Brazil, who doesn't have any pleasure in being here," said Brazil coach Dunga.

"The player has to put his heart and soul with the team as well as his body."

France coach Raymond Domenech takes a different view.

Domenech told Chelsea's Claude Makelele he must carry on playing for France even though the midfielder wanted to retire from the international stage.

Under FIFA rules, if Makelele had refused to turn out for France he could have been suspended from playing for Chelsea.

Domenech's determination to keep Makelele has resulted in a compromise, the player agreeing to stick with France until qualification is assured for Euro 2008.

If Domenech's hardline approach pays off, other national coaches may follow suit and insist call-ups are heeded or suspensions imposed.

The Lagerback and van Basten attitude, while it has a certain logic and avoids club v country conflicts, could lead to the erosion of the status of national teams.

Tributes flow Barthez way

Football

THE GUARDIAN

Former teammates and coaches have paid tribute to Fabien Barthez after he announced his retirement from football.

"Fabien informed me of his decision 10 days ago. To me, he is the greatest goalkeeper France have had," the Toulouse coach, Elie Baup, who gave Barthez his debut in 1990, told L'Equipe on Friday.

The former Manchester United goalkeeper, 35, was without a club after leaving Marseille at the end of last season but played through the World Cup where France lost to Italy on penalties.

Barthez, who also played for Monaco, is France's most-capped goalkeeper after playing 87 times, the last in that World Cup final.

"He broke new ground thanks to his ability to play as an out-field

player. Let's be positive -- he ended his career with a World Cup final," Baup added.

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"I will always remember the way he used to joke in match warm-ups. In 1998, before the World Cup final, he just fell down and told me his knee was hurting," said the former France goalkeeper coach Philippe Bergeroo.

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"I panicked and he just burst out laughing, saying: 'It's all right, don't worry. We're going to play this final and we'll win it.'"

"He is among the geniuses," said Marseille's chairman, Papé Diouf. "Losing (Zinedine) Zidane and Barthez in the same year, it's very moving."

"We will miss him but in the meantime I am happy for him because he assuaged his passion," said the former France captain Marcel Desailly, who won the Champions League with Barthez in 1993 when Marseille beat Milan 1-0 in the final.

Parreira still optimistic

Football

REUTERS, Lusaka

Carlos Alberto Parreira said on Saturday he was still optimistic over taking charge of South Africa even though he faces the possibility of starting the job next year with this new side in a precarious position.

The Brazilian said the challenge of leading the team at the 2010 World Cup finals filled him with optimism but conceded there was concern about the country's chances of qualifying for the 2008 African Nations Cup finals.

After being called to a draw at home in their first qualifier last month, South Africa now face the possibility of going five points behind main rivals Zambia if they lose in their crunch Group 11 game

in Lusaka on Sunday.

Parreira, who is in Lusaka to watch the game ahead of taking over the South Africa post in mid-February, said the country faced a massive challenge if they were to be competitive at the 2010 finals, which they will be hosting.

"I am still optimistic and still positive for my work which starts next year. But we have to work a lot in South Africa on creating the right infra-structure and organisation.

"We won't reach the heights we want to if good ground work is not laid down," he said in an interview.

Parreira said he would not be involved in preparations for Sunday's game in Lusaka, preferring only to observe.

"But I'm picking up a lot about the players, about the culture, about the behaviour."

"When I do get involved, then I'll

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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