



French coach Gerard Houllier is displayed on screens as he delivers a press conference on Friday in the central town of Lyon, to announce his decision to quit French champions at the end of the season.

Deschamps resigns!

INTERNET, undated

Sky TG24 claims that Juventus Coach Didier Deschamps has resigned, although he will be on the bench against Mantova.

The tactician's future at the club has been up in the air for several weeks, as different members of the Board of Directors gave opposing comments on whether he was the right man for the job.

Deschamps took the Bianconeri to promotion despite a nine-point penalty, but has reportedly clashed with director of sport Alessio Secco, disagreeing over transfer policy.

A meeting with general manager Jean Claude Blanc seems to have tipped the situation over the edge and his resignation was verbally accepted, according to Sky TG24.

So far there is no official confirmation, but the reports claim that they failed to agree over extending his contract, which runs until June 2008.

With what was essentially a season to deliver or be fired, Deschamps chose not to enter into a campaign with such uncertainty hanging over his head.

Spanish newspaper reports this week suggested that Fabio Capello was preparing to return to the Juventus bench, but considering the brusque manner in which he left after the Calcipoli scandal broke and the bad blood with the fans and captain Alessandro Del Piero, this seems highly unlikely.

World Cup winning Italy boss Marcello Lippi is another potential candidate, although French newspaper L'Equipe insists he is in fact challenging Deschamps for the role of coach at Lyon following Gerard Houllier's resignation.

Alonso races to Monaco pole

INTERNET, undated

I wanted Milan: Beckham

INTERNET, undated

David Beckham told the 'Gazzetta dello Sport' that the toughest decision of his career was turning down Milan to join LA Galaxy and explains why Antonio Cassano is 'crazy.'

The Real Madrid man's contract expires next month and in January he was free to negotiate with a number of clubs.

Milan announced they had been his number one option if Becks had decided to stay in Europe and the player admits that is true.

"It was not easy to say no to Milan, one of the best clubs in the world. The squad, the coach, the president, the city and then Ronaldo went there too. It was a very tough choice," said the England international who today gave a surprise recall from Steve McClaren for the friendly against Brazil and Euro 2008 qualifier in Estonia.

"I was honoured, flattered and tempted. But I had to think about my family and wanted a different challenge."

"I am well aware that football in the States cannot be compared to that in Europe, but I see it as a challenge. I am not just going there to play, I am an ambassador for a move-

ment.

"I would have liked to play in Serie A. Italy is a country I love because it has everything - great football, great players, the best food in the world, wine, fashion, countryside. Last year I was in Portofino and have often gone to Tuscany. We even thought of getting a house there."

Former Real teammate Ronaldo was celebrating the Champions League trophy in Athens and Beckham could have been there with him.

"It was a deserved success, especially considering everything they did during the season. The second leg against Manchester United was the perfect performance. Milan play great football, work hard, score fantastic goals and have extraordinary talents like Kaka."

Liverpool felt they were unfortunate after losing the final 2-1 on Wednesday, but Beckham does not see that it was that way.

"Liverpool know it too, Milan played better in Athens and they won. Filippo Inzaghi has scored extraordinary goals, important goals and fortunate goals. But you cannot talk about luck really in his case -- he has been hitting the back of the net all the time and is to be admired."

The race for the Ballon d'Or is Milan-heavy this year and captain Paolo Maldini is in the running.

"He deserves to challenge for it with Kaka and Cristiano Ronaldo. Anyonewho at the age of 39 is playing in a club like Milan and has the respect that Maldini commands deserves to win. But it will be difficult."

Beckham is a teammate of current European and World Player of the Year Fabio Cannavaro and another Italian talent, Antonio Cassano, is real.

"They are very different, both great lads. Cassano is crazy, but he's also one of the nicest people I've ever met. He is always happy, ready to laugh and joke around, not to mention a real talent. I'd like him to play more."

"Cannavaro is one of the best defenders I have ever known. We got on well off the field as well, we're good friends."

The same cannot be said of Coach Fabio Capello, who often clashed with Beckham at the Bernabeau and froze him out after he signed for LA Galaxy.

"He is one of the greatest managers in the world. Whatever you may say about him, his career speaks for itself. He is a winner, someone who believes in his players and is on our side. These are qualities you could see despite the problems within the club."

Blades at loggerheads

INTERNET, undated

The Premier League have told Sheffield United their share in the top flight will be taken from them next week if the club fail to relinquish it voluntarily.

Relegated United are refusing to relinquish their Premiership share as the Carlos Tevez saga rumbles on.

However, Premier League officials have said if the Blades maintain their stance their share will be taken from them.

If Sheffield United do not return the share, Premier League rules mean that it will be unilaterally transferred to a promoted club and this will happen at our AGM this coming Thursday," a

Premier League spokesman told PA Sport.

The Premier League this week agreed to set up an arbitration tribunal to rule on United's complaints over the Tevez affair.

They have conceded the Blades do have the right to call for an arbitration panel - but told the relegated club they are wasting their time and money.

The Blades, relegated on the final day of the season after a home defeat to Wigan, responded today by refusing to return their share of the Premier League which all top flight clubs are entitled to.

'Sheffield United has confirmed that it has refused a request by the Premier League to deliver up its share in the Premier League,' said a club statement.

'All Premier League clubs are entitled to a share in the League itself, and Sheffield United's

position is that until the arbitration looking into the Tevez matter is resolved, it remains a Premiership club.'

The club believes if it gives up its share the Premier League cannot be guaranteed to fulfil its promise to return the share should the arbitration reinstate Sheffield United to the Premier League.'

The row is over an independent commission's decision to fine West Ham 5.5 million pounds rather than dock the club points for signing third-party agreements in contravention of league rules.

The Premier League say they are satisfied West Ham ended those agreements as soon as they were ordered to do, and that the independent commission's decision cannot be appealed against by anyone except West Ham.



Spanish McLaren-Mercedes driver Fernando Alonso celebrates in the Monte Carlo racetrack on Saturday after finishing on pole for the Monaco Grand Prix.

Houllier to leave Lyon

AFP, Lyon

Club coach Gerard Houllier will leave six-time French champions Lyon at the end of the season, Lyon president Jean-Michel Aulas announced Friday.

Aulas praised Houllier for the work he had done during the last two years to ensure Lyon continued to be one of Europe's top clubs.

"Gerard (Houllier) asked me on Wednesday night to let him leave so that he could take a sabbatical," Aulas said at a press conference.

"On reflexion, I accepted his decision to go."

Saturday's match against relegated Nantes will be his last at the helm of the team.

The former Lens, Paris Saint Germain and Liverpool manager led Lyon to two French league wins and to last year's quarterfinals of the Champions League.

Houllier himself said: "I think we have done very well but it has come to the point where I would need to commit for another three years and it doesn't feel right."

"I think it's better to leave now for a lot of positive reasons rather than to hang on."

Houllier, who denied there was any tensions within the club which brought about his departure, added: "This separation has been amicable and I would like to confirm I have a good rapport with Jean-Michel Aulas."

He said he would not be going to another club. "My decision to leave has nothing to do with people or my health," he continued. "I'm in top form and Lyon has been rejuvenated me. I just need to take stock and I will not be going to other clubs."

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Spurs sign Bale

Football

THE INDEPENDENT

Tottenham Hotspur last night confirmed the signing of Wales left-back Gareth Bale from Southampton for an undisclosed fee.

The 17-year-old was close to joining Spurs during the last transfer window but stayed at St Mary's and helped George Burley's side into the Championship play-offs.

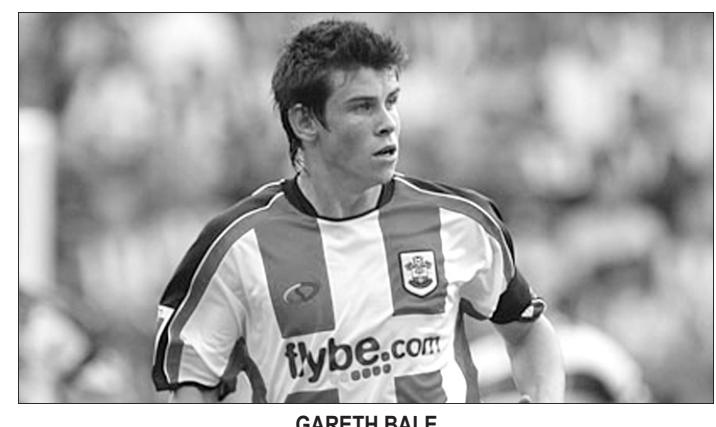
Manchester United had expressed an interest in the Wales teenager in January, with their manager, Sir Alex Ferguson, admitting Spurs were ahead of them in the race for Bale's signature.

Although Bale had been linked with United, and also Arsenal, since Southampton's promotion hopes ended, Spurs have moved quickly following the completion of the season as they did a year ago when signing the Bulgarian striker Dimitar Berbatov.

"I want to play in the Premiership, Tottenham is a club a step forward and I want to be part of its future," said Bale.

Bale put himself in the spotlight at the start of the season with a stunning free-kick against Derby County, followed up with another set-piece against Coventry three days later.

He is the youngest player to have been capped by Wales and, despite being deployed at full-back so far in his fledgling career, has



GARETH BALE

been tipped to emulate Ryan Giggs if he is developed into a winger.

The Tottenham manager, Martin Jol, is looking to strengthen the left flank of his team, so Bale could be played in defence or midfield. Bale's instinct to push forward made him Southampton's most influential attacker as they sought promotion.

Burley, the Southampton manager, wanted to keep Bale at the club for another year to ensure he gets regular first-team football.

"He is a player of great quality and, as we always say, our aim in each window is to improve the quality of the squad.

"Gareth has great physical attributes, he is tall, good in the air and has a fantastic left foot. He is very good on set pieces, he is clever on the ball and his passing selection is excellent. He has the ideal combination to become a top, top player and he is only 17."

Ambrosini seeks apology

Football

INTERNET, undated

Massimo Ambrosini has apologised for holding a banner insulting Inter as Milan staged a huge celebration at San Siro on Friday night.

The club continues its festivities after beating Liverpool 2-1 to lift the Champions League for the seventh time on Wednesday in Athens.

Upon their return to Milan on Thursday, the team paraded through the city in an open top bus and Ambrosini was spotted holding a banner urging Inter to 'Stick your Scudetto...'

"Those who have celebrated straight after a great sporting success know that you can let yourself go and fall into a climate of fun," wrote the midfielder in an open letter of apology on the club's

official website.

"That is absolutely all it was, good natured fun. Football is not just official statements and good manners spoken through gritted teeth. Between lads who play football there is often an exchange of joky insults that is never meant to be offensive."

"I am perfectly aware that I was silly and apologise to everyone. It was a gesture made in a moment of euphoria and I hope it will not cancel the image of a fair and correct professional that I have always had in my 15-year career."

The rivalry between the 'Cugini' rose to new heights this month when Inter fans including coach Roberto Mancini, president Massimo Moratti and captain Javier Zanetti said they would not support Milan in the Champions League and that they would be 'irritated' to have their Scudetto party 'ruined' by a European Cup celebration.

They at first turned their backs on the party, then left the area. They were protesting at the arrest this week of seven Milan Ultras, accused of attempted extortion against the club.

Bayern set to take Ribery

Football

AFP, Berlin

French midfielder Franck Ribery is set to join Bayern Munich this summer, a source close to the club revealed on Friday, in a deal believed to be worth 15 million euros (20 million US dollars).

The attacking midfielder, 24, could switch from Marseille to the German giants and the holder of 16 caps earned his reputation as one of the star performers at last year's World Cup, when the French made the final.

Bayern denied on Friday afternoon they had agreed terms with Ribery, but they acknowledged interest in the former Galatasaray star.

"We are interested in signing him, but there is no agreement either with him or with the club," said Bayern manager Uli Hoeneß.

The player's agent Alain Migliaccio flatly denied a deal had been struck, but Bayern have been known to be chasing the Frenchman for several weeks.

After Bayern finished fourth in the Bundesliga last season, their worst performance for more than ten years, coach Ottmar Hitzfeld has promised sweeping changes in a bid to bring success back to the German giants.



FRANCK RIBERY

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------|-----------|--------------------|----------------------|----|----|
| ACROSS | 31 | Weak and unsteady | 54 | Wipe out | 6 | College chief (SL) | 7 | 13 | 14 |
| 1 | Trade-mark | 35 | Military letters | 55 | Explosive | 17 | Variety of plum tree | | |
| 2 | symbols | freshman | 56 | "Catcher" | 19 | Slip | | | |
| 3 | "Awe-some!" | 37 | Zilch | 57 | "Hello" | 21 | Ahs' mates | | |
| 4 | e.g. | 38 | Passenger | 58 | Thick | 22 | Meadow | | |
| 5 | ruins | 40 | payments | 59 | Young | 24 | Mess up | | |
| 6 | 12 | 41 | Important | 60 | number | 26 | Hinge (on) | | |
| 7 | Got out of bed | 43 | | | | | | | |