



Sevilla players parade the Kings Cup trophy during a photocall in the city on Sunday. Sevilla beat Getafe in the final.

PHOTO: AFP

Schuster must handle exit

INTERNET, undated



Real Madrid have told Bernd Schuster that he must smooth his own path out of Getafe if he wants to be considered for the Real Madrid job this summer.

The German coach is not keen on quitting the club that he has coached for the past two seasons on bad terms and is ready to hold talks.

A public spat between the two presidents, Ángel Torres and Ramón Calderón, has also upset the board at the Bernabéu and has led to the club holding off on making a formal

approach for Schuster.

Torres hit out last week after it was claimed that Madrid had already worked out a pre-contract deal with Schuster and threatened to report los Merengues to UEFA.

The Getafe coach has a buy-out clause of only 1 million euro, but he does not want to leave under a cloud and is determined to negotiate his way out of his current contract, which runs for one more season.

Calderón is keen to stay on good terms with Torres too and has held off from using any heavy-handed tactics to force Getafe to release the trainer.

Predrag Mijatovic has been given the responsibility of deciding who will be the coach of Madrid next season, but he has yet to make a decision.

A meeting was due to be held on

Monday evening, but was called off after the club's basketball team won the ACB League against arch rivals FC Barcelona.

Getafe have suggested that they would be more willing to allow Schuster to step down if Madrid were to ease the deal by including players.

Roberto Soldado was top of the list, but that was rejected out of hand as he is set to feature in the Madrid first-team next term.

Torres is still hopeful that he can land Javi García or Rubén De la Red on loan from the Madrid B team, but that matter is still under discussion.

The onus is now on Schuster to calm the situation and persuade Getafe to let him leave if Madrid do make a formal approach to hand him the reins in the next few weeks.

Hagi confirms Steaua job

AFP, Bucharest

Romania's most famous footballer, Gheorghe Hagi, known as the 'Maradona of the Carpathians' during his 16-year international career, confirmed Monday he has signed a three-year contract to coach his former club Steaua Bucharest.

"I've signed for three years and I hope to succeed as coach of Steaua where I had some of my best years as a player 17 years ago," said 42-year-old Hagi, who takes over from Cosmin Olariu, who left for Saudi club Al Hilal.

Local press reported that his salary will be in the region of 400,000 euros (538,000 dollars) annually.

"My main aim will be to win the Romanian title," said Hagi, adding that he will also be targeting the Cup double as well as European success.

Steaua finished runners-up this season behind city rivals Dinamo Bucharest.

Hagi arrived in the Bucharest team aged 18 years, and later played at Real Madrid, Brescia, Galatasaray and Barcelona.

He won the European Cup with Steaua in 1986.

OM confident over Cisse

INTERNET, undated

Marseille president Pape Diouf has assured the club's fans that they will negotiate a deal with Liverpool for striker Djibril Cisse.

Reds manager Rafael Benítez said recently that the club would only sanction a sale and not allow Cisse to move out on loan following his temporary stay at the Stade Velodrome last season.

"With Liverpool discussion is always possible," Diouf told La Provence. "Djibril does not wish to play anywhere other than with Marseille."

The Ligue 1 outfit were on the verge of buying France international Cisse before the World Cup when he broke his leg in a warm-up match.

The loan deal was subsequently agreed and he came back ahead of schedule to feature for IOM last December.

Cream of the crop (part III)

Here is the top 20 of the fifty players that journalist **Gabriel Marcotti** picked as his best in the planet. They are the real cream of the crop.



Football

20. Iker Casillas (Real Madrid)

Already a legend, and he only turned 26 last month. He's an agile, fearless shot-stopper who, if Raul ever retires, will captain Real for years to come.

19. Daniel Alves (Seville)

Rarely does a single man dominate an entire flank the way he does. He combines the skills of a winger with the grit of an old-style hard man. His mere presence on the pitch forces the opposing side to readjust everything defensively.

18. Cesc Fabregas (Arsenal)

If you could open his skull, you'd find the brain of a 30-year-old. Few players are so mature and so aware at such a young age, while also being totally undaunted by the task in front of them.

17. Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Inter)

Admittedly, he's one of the more volatile heads on this list. But creativity and vision like his rarely come in 6ft 5in packages, which makes him one of the most difficult players to defend against in the game.

16. Frank Lampard (Chelsea)

Let's let the numbers do the talking, shall we? He has missed five league games in the past six seasons at Chelsea, while hitting double figures in league goals in each of the past four. Plus, he never slows down and is genuinely adored by his teammates. What more do you want?

15. Ruud van Nistelrooy (Real Madrid)

And to think some numpies thought he was finished. He and Thierry Henry are the only strikers to have scored 20 or more goals in a major European league in five of the past six seasons. Put the ball anywhere near him and he'll score. Simple as that.

14. Petr Cech (Chelsea)

Go ask Jose Mourinho and he'll tell you that, had it not been for Steven Hunt's boot, Chelsea would have won the treble this year. That's how important Cech is. With a guy like him, you can just stick him in goal,

stop worrying about the defensive aspect of the game and focus instead on the other end of the pitch.

13. Sergio Ramos (Real Madrid)

The highest ranked defender on this list and with good reason. He's big, strong, fast and gifted. He held Real's defence together this season, while chipping in at the attacking end as well. And he's still only 21...

12. Thierry Henry (Arsenal)

Would have ranked higher, if not for the fact that he hasn't played since early March and it remains to be seen in what condition he'll return. Beyond that, he's a sure thing. Not only does he scare the bejesus out of defenders, he is also one of the most prolific forwards around today. Had he been around all year, it's unlikely the naysayers would have mocked Arsenal's lack of finishing the way they did.

11. Wayne Rooney (Manchester United)

Another who had a mediocre season (by his standards). You notice how important he is when he is not there. His workrate and ability are hard to replace and he is quickly becoming indispensable, both for club and country.

10. Francesco Totti (Roma)

His job is to create, not finish, and yet he won the European Golden Boot this season with 26 league goals: a total made all the more remarkable when you throw in the fact that he uncharacteristically missed six penalties along the way. (At least he made the ones that mattered in the World Cup.) That alone should get him on the list - his vision and phenomenal range of passing are bonuses.

9. Leo Messi (Barcelona)

Leave Maradona out of it for a minute. Focus instead on that when the ball is at his feet, unless you're Nostradamus, you have absolutely no idea what will happen next. There is no legislating for unpredictability in football and Messi has bags of it. Plus, his 14 Liga goals last year show that he has added a healthy scoring dimension to his

game as well.

8. Carlos Tevez (West Ham)

A single-minded winner, who has carried whole clubs on his back in Argentina, Brazil and England. Tevez's contribution isn't measured in just goals and assists, but in self-sacrifice and heroism. With a season of European football under his belt, there is no telling how much better he's going to be next year.

7. Steven Gerrard (Liverpool)

Speaking of heroics, he's done it so many times, it's easy to lose track. If Gerrard were a few inches taller and a few pounds more slight, we would marvel at his pure technical ability. Instead, we focus on his bruising workrate and other more obvious qualities. Don't worry about fitting him into your side. Just do what Rafa does. Line up your nine other outfield players and let Gerrard do whatever he likes.

6. Gigi Buffon (Juventus)

Simply put, he's a freak of nature. No man his size should be so athletic. His agility belies the laws of physics and he is about as unflappable as they come. Having a guy like him in your side means that defeats turn into draws and draws into victories. That alone is worth an extra ten to 15 points at the end of a season.

5. Michael Essien (Chelsea)

A one-man wrecking crew. Is there anything he can't do? You could probably let the rest of the team go off for a bag break in the middle of the game and let him man the fort in midfield. Terrifyingly gifted already and, if given more responsibility, likely to get even better.

4. Samuel Eto'o (Barcelona)

He's tired of playing second fiddle to Ronaldinho and with good reason. If he were anywhere else, people would be writing odes and sonnets to him. Eto'o is freakishly quick, an outstanding finisher, with a supernatural eye for goal. Plus, he's happy to do the dirty work when the other side have possession. Just make sure you continue to massage his ego.

3. Cristiano Ronaldo (Manches-

ter United)

In the P.C. era (pre-Cristiano) wingers were slight, nippy and small. He redefined the position marrying size and brawn with pace and trickery. You get the sense that, when he's running at defenders, he could go around them or straight through them. As an added bonus, he's also an aerial threat on set pieces.

2. Ronaldinho (Barcelona)

There's a reason he's always smiling. You'd be smiling all the time too if you knew that you were the best player on the pitch and you were about to make some poor defender look a jackass. He is the poster child for Brazilian football, the proud heir of those who came before him. He didn't adapt to the European game, he forced it to adapt to him. Put him on the team sheet, sit back and enjoy the show.

1. Kaka (Milan)

The top four are incredibly tight, but he just edges it for one simple reason: he combines Brazilian flair with European directness like nobody else. He truly is a product of two footballing cultures, a man who has all the virtues and none of the vices of either. Speaking of vices, he really, really doesn't have any. A committed Christian, he announced proudly that he was a virgin on his wedding night. He likes to parade around in his favourite T-shirt, the one that reads "I belong to Jesus" (thereby opening a whole can of worms regarding third-party ownership). And that's another reason he tops the list - with Kaka in your team, odds are, the big fella upstairs will be on your side as well...

Branding it like Beckham



Football

AP, New York

It's already time to brand it like Beckham.

Adidas is launching an advertising campaign this week featuring English soccer star David Beckham and New Orleans Saints running back Reggie Bush swapping sports during practice in "Futbol vs. Football."

"There's very few people whose names transcend their own sports. People know the name of David Beckham, whether they follow soccer or not," said Stephen Pierpoint, vice president of brand marketing for Adidas America.

After helping Real Madrid win the Spanish League title for the first time in four seasons with the club, Beckham joins Major League Soccer's Los Angeles Galaxy next month, a major injection of star power for a league whose talent has steadily been rising but has lacked a marquee mainstay.

The 32-year-old midfielder, who has had as many hairstyles as goals, is to join up with the Galaxy next month and be a halftime guest on the telecast of the MLS All-Star game in Denver on July 19, perhaps making a cameo appearance in the match. His first game in the Galaxy's

redesigned uniform figures to be a July 21 exhibition against England's Chelsea at Carson, Calif. -- where Beckham already has a youth soccer academy. After that, his likely MLS debut would be Aug. 5 at Toronto.

That all will be accompanied with a lot of advertising.

"It will be a coordinated blitz, if you will," Galaxy president Alexi Lalas said. "We want to make sure that we're not duplicating efforts. So there will be obviously stuff from Adidas, the Galaxy, ESPN and a bunch of other ones."

Sponsors are counting on Beckham to reach out beyond the soccer field in a way the United States hasn't seen since Pele was with the Cosmos from 1975-77.

"It's almost the same," Pele said. "There are a lot of similarities."

Ahead of last year's World Cup, Nike erected a 70 1/2 -foot high billboard near New York's Madison Square Garden and a nearly identical 40-foot high ad in San Francisco featuring London Donovan, DaMarcus Beasley and Eddie Johnson. And yes, Adidas has a relationship with Claudio Reyna, the U.S. captain at the 2002 and 2006 World Cups, but he had little buzz outside the soccer crowd.

European and Latin American stars only go so far in America's mainstream market.

To mark Beckham's arrival,

Adidas retaped its "Impossible is Nothing" commercial with him to make his soccer past understandable to an American audience.

"Soccer's appeal is still behind some of the major U.S. sports in this country. We're excited about the growth opportunity that we have there," Pierpoint said. "Within the soccer community, everybody is very well aware of and really looks up to some of those MLS players, national team players, as icons. As we spread outside the soccer community, those names become lesser known. And David's name we feel really travels further, and that's an opportunity for us to draw more people into the sport of soccer, draw whole families into the sport of soccer."

Beckham was a star of England's national team at the last three World Cups and its captain from November 2000 to last July. With 96 international appearances, he is fifth on the career list behind only Peter Shilton (125), Bobby Moore (108), Bobby Charlton (106) and Billy Wright (105). And with coach Steve McClaren's decision to recall Beckham last month, the player celebrated for his curling free kicks is expected to commute back to England for European Championship qualifiers this fall and top the century mark.

But, perhaps more importantly for sponsors, he is married to

Victoria Adams, the former Posh Spice, and is friends with Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes. Galaxy games could be a big celeb ticket, much like the Lakers.

European Web sites track his hairstyles. Paparazzi list Becks and Posh, the most celebrated of England's WAGS (wives and girlfriends).

And the corporate world wants to cash in.

"As wonderful as this is, we don't want to saturate and we don't want to duplicate when it's not necessary," Lalas said. "So there is a specific Los Angeles-based platform, there's the regional, there's the national and then there's the international. And it's a combination of the Galaxy, the league -- MLS -- Adidas, ESPN. All of those different entities are targeting different areas."

Until now, Adidas' biggest sales of licensed soccer merchandise in the United States have involved Mexico's national team, which it regained from Nike last October, and Real Madrid. With Beckham, selling MLS has taken a new twist.

"We've enjoyed some success of AC Milan and Real Madrid jerseys in America," Pierpoint said. "Now, for the first time, we see global demand for the LA Galaxy jersey."

Emre staying with Magpies

INTERNET, undated



Newcastle midfielder Emre has committed himself to the club after rejecting a move away from Tyneside.

The 26-year-old, a 4 million pound signing from Inter Milan two summers ago, had been linked with former club Galatasaray and rivals Fenerbahce in Turkey, while German sides Bayern Munich and Hertha Berlin have also been touted as possible destinations.

However, Emre has signalled his intention to return to Tyneside and fight for his place under new boss Sam Allardyce, the third under whom he will have worked since leaving Italy.

He told the Turkish press: "I am very happy in England and I am not

thinking about leaving Newcastle. "I know all the Turkish newspapers will write my name in their headlines during the transfer window.

"But although I have received serious offers from Galatasaray and Fenerbahce, I want to continue my career in England.

"The Premier League is famous all over the world and that's why I wanted to move there.

"I will stay at Newcastle. I have great respect for Sam Allardyce, the new coach."

Emre's future in England was placed under serious threat last season when he was hit with a racial abuse charge by the Football Association following a stormy encounter at Everton.

However, his club, and in particular, then manager Glenn Roeder, stood by him and he successfully fought against the charge.

Even so, it appeared the Turkey

international's days at Newcastle could be numbered as Roeder planned for the new campaign.

But the manager's departure was quickly followed by that of skipper Scott Parker for West Ham, and although Roeder's successor Allardyce has already recruited Joey Barton, news that a player of vast experience is keen to stay and be part of his plans will come as a boost.

The manager will now hope for similar news from strikers Michael Owen and Obafemi Martins, who both have escape clauses in their contracts.

Thierry Henry's exit from Arsenal for Barcelona is certain to add velocity to the transfer merry-go-round and with Arsene Wenger an acknowledged admirer of both players, uncertainty persists at St James' Park

Frisk slams Mourinho



Football

INTERNET, undated

Ex-ref Anders Frisk has hit out at Jose Mourinho for stirring up trouble ahead of big games.

Frisk quit in 2005 when he received death threats after a run-in with the Blues boss.

Mourinho claimed that Barca boss Frank Rijkaard had tried to influence Frisk in a half-time meeting at the Nou Camp.

But UEFA found that a meeting never took place and found Mourinho guilty of bringing the game into disrepute.

The Swedish official's latest outburst is sure to re-ignite the feud.

Frisk said: "Mr Mourinho has to take responsibility for his actions. "He should maybe analyse what things could happen if he did things differently.

"If he changed then I'm sure he would have much nicer meetings than he does at the moment.

"There are a lot of coaches who behave well and I think that most of them have been very, very good. "But there is a trend that has been set over the last three years by some managers that is not good for football.

"It is not good for the image of football and I suffered because of that. A lot of people are still suffering from that.

"Every week we can see them building conflicts up before a football match. "It is as if it were a boxing match coming up.

"I would like to see that kind of

communication being taken away from football."

Frisk - in an interview with feelfootball.com - has also slammed footie stars for diving.

He believes this can make a referee's job almost impossible.

Frisk has called on UEFA to bring in retrospective punishments for anyone is caught cheating.

He added: "The behaviour of some players - if they get a little touch they dive and act as if they are dead.

"I think it is important in these situations that the football authorities get involved and say 'we will investigate this match and then bring the player to justice' to try and ensure he does not do it again.

"As a referee, if you whistle for a penalty and afterwards see that the other player was not near him, then of course you have made a big error.

"And you know that if you make such big mistakes then you will be suspended for several fixtures.

"This creates problems for referees because in situations like this it's sometimes impossible for a referee, in a split second, to be able to say whether an injury is genuine or fake.

"So what I would like to see is for the football authorities to get involved afterwards - watch the video footage and condemn such actions.

"They need to send out the message: 'This is not OK, and we as a football authority have banned this player for two matches'."

Frisk used the example of Maradona - who famously scored

the 'hand of God' against England in 1986 - for modern stars who choose to cheat.

He said: "I think Maradona is one of the most brilliant football players, but sadly he was also a cheating football player.



PHOTO: AFP

Uruguay defender Diego Lugano speaks to the press on Sunday. Uruguay are set to take on Peru in the opening match of the Copa America on Tuesday.