



Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho is pictured here gesturing towards fans to keep their chins up following their draw at Arsenal in the Premier League on May 6 a result that saw them relinquish the league title. Mourinho yesterday shocked the football community by announcing his resignation from Chelsea.

Jose AKA controversy

Football

AFP, London

Jose Mourinho was only ever going to leave Chelsea one way and so it proved on Thursday morning as the Portuguese coach departed in a blaze of controversy.

Mourinho's brash personality ensured he quickly became the Premier League's most talked-about figure after his arrival three years ago.

At the press conference to announce his appointment at Chelsea, Mourinho insisted his impressive achievements at Porto meant he should be seen as 'a special one'.

That tongue in cheek comment set the tone for one of the most dramatic managerial reigns in the history of English football.

In the space of three seasons, Mourinho ended Chelsea's 50-year wait for a league title, won it again 12 months later and added two League Cups and an FA Cup to the Stamford Bridge trophy room.

Arsenal 'nearly perfect'

AFP, London

Arsene Wenger declared his Arsenal team better equipped to win the Champions League than at any time in the last two years following a "near perfect" start to the group stage.

Wenger praised his team's attitude after a stylish 3-0 win over highly rated Spanish outfit Sevilla at Emirates Stadium on Wednesday which sent them to the top of Group H.

The former Monaco coach hinted that the departure of star player Thierry Henry to Barcelona in the summer may have helped his team. He said: "I want to reiterate, I did not want Henry to leave, he decided."

"We lost a world class player but

it gives the other players a challenge and pushes some of the players to take more responsibility," he added.

The Frenchman implored his young squad not to get carried away, but the rest of Europe will have taken note after the demolition of a team that Wenger himself had tipped as a potential dark horse.

He said: "We have improved from two years ago without a doubt; we look a lot more mature technically. There's a real spirit in the team and it's fantastic."

Wenger insisted that his players were under no pressure to win the tournament, saying: "The main challenge of this season is to show how far we have come."

The renewed spirit and maturity of the Gunners was epitomised by Spanish youngster Francesc Fabregas, who has now claimed six goals during his scintillating start to the domestic and European season.

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Arsenal midfielder Aleksandr Hleb (C) takes on two Sevilla players during their Champions League clash at the Emirates Stadium in London on Wednesday.

Mourinho deserts Chelsea

Football

AFP, London

Chelsea on Thursday put former Israeli coach Avram Grant in charge of their first team as English football reeled at Jose Mourinho's shock departure from Stamford Bridge.

Grant, previously the director of football at Stamford Bridge, will take charge along with Mourinho's former assistant Steve Clarke.

It was not clear if Grant, a close friend of Chelsea's Russian owner Roman Abramovich, will be given the manager's job on a long-term basis.

But the Israeli will be in charge when Chelsea face champions Manchester United at Old Trafford on Sunday.

The 51-year-old's promotion came hours after Mourinho's trophy-laden three-year reign at Stamford Bridge ended with the announcement that he was leaving the club "by mutual consent".

The self-described "special one" paid a brief visit to the club's state-of-the-art training complex to the west of London on Thursday morning to say his goodbyes to the players he guided to five trophies in three seasons, before driving away for the last time.

Mourinho's time in charge ended in

the early hours of Thursday morning, his fractious relationship with Abramovich having finally reached breaking point over the manager's failure to deliver the kind of flamboyant football craved by the Russian billionaire.

Manchester United's stylish reclamation of the Premier League title last season increased Abramovich's disillusionment with Mourinho's pragmatic approach and Tuesday's disappointing 1-1 Champions League draw with Norwegian side Rosenborg -- watched by fewer than 25,000 fans -- proved to be the final straw.

With hindsight, Mourinho's pre-match comments about the need to buy the best eggs to make the best omelette -- a clear dig at Abramovich's transfer policy -- were a clear signal that simmering tensions behind the scenes were about to boil over.

Mourinho came close to being ousted last season when Abramovich failed in an attempt to persuade former Germany coach Jurgen Klinsmann to succeed the Portuguese.

Although Grant has been put in the hot-seat now, a fresh move to lure Klinsmann, who is based in California, back to Europe cannot be ruled out.

Russia manager Guus Hiddink,

who knows Abramovich well, and the former Monaco and Juventus boss Didier Deschamps, who briefly played for Chelsea towards the end of his illustrious career, have also been touted as possible long-term successors to Mourinho.

Grant's introduction to the back-room staff, initially resisted by Mourinho, had apparently been accepted by the Portuguese as part of a summer truce between him and the club owner.

But it now appears that tensions over Abramovich's desire to interfere in team affairs had continued to fester, culminating in a terse statement posted on the club's website.

It read: "Chelsea Football Club and Jose Mourinho have agreed to part company today (Thursday) by mutual consent."

With both sides keeping quiet on the precise nature of the dispute that triggered the final meltdown in relations, negotiations over compensation for the remaining three years on Mourinho's five-million-pounds-a-year contract were continuing.

Grant was recruited from Portsmouth partly with the aim of improving the performances of Andrey Shevchenko, whose presence in the Chelsea squad was a running sore in the relationship between Abramovich and Mourinho.

The manager had never made any secret at his frustration with the Ukrainian striker's failure to make an impact in the English game following his 30-million-pound (60 million dollars) move from AC Milan at the start of last season.

Shevchenko, once regarded as the deadliest finisher in European football, was widely seen as Abramovich's signing and the Russian reportedly holds Mourinho responsible for his failure to get the best out of him.

Mourinho made his reputation by guiding FC Porto to Champions League glory in 2004 and then transformed the English football landscape after taking over at Stamford Bridge in June 2004.

In his first season in charge he ended the club's 50-year wait for an English title, a feat he repeated the following season as well as delivering the FA Cup last season and the League Cup in 2005 and 2007.

Although he has been generally bankrolled by Abramovich, Mourinho's record backs up the "special one" claim he made at his first press conference in England.

In his 185 games in charge, Chelsea won 124, drew 40 and lost 21, a record that includes a 60-match unbeaten run in Premier League matches at Stamford Bridge.

Scolari handed 4-match ban

AFP, Paris

Portugal's Brazilian coach Luiz Felipe Scolari has been banned for four matches by UEFA after a violent altercation with Serbian player Ivica Dragutinovic.

Scolari and Dragutinovic were caught up in a pitch-side flare-up after a hot-tempered Euro 2008 qualifier which ended 1-1 on September 12 and led to Scolari lashing out at the Serbian with his fist.

The ban will rule Scolari out of being on the touchline for Portugal's remaining four qualifiers. The Brazilian was also given a 12,120 euros (17,000 dollars) fine.

Dragutinovic has been handed a two-match ban by UEFA, European football's ruling body, for his role in the incident ruling him out of qualifiers in Armenia and Azerbaijan on 13 and 17 October respectively.

Scolari said after the match that the Sevilla player had insulted his family.

"Words in Spanish directed at

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Wilkins predicts Chelsea struggle

INTERNET, undated

Former Chelsea captain Ray Wilkins believes the club could struggle following the departure of manager Jose Mourinho.

The Portuguese left Chelsea in the early hours of this morning 'by mutual consent', according to a club statement, and Wilkins fears for their future.

I'm absolutely astounded at what's happened,' he told Sky Sports News.

I don't really see the sense in it to be honest, let's hope they've got someone lined up.'

Asked if he agreed Mourinho was the best manager in the game, Wilkins added: 'I would say that would be a fair comment - obviously they will have to look for someone who can hold the reins.'

Winning football matches is what the game's about and he is a winning manager who puts a

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Barcelona forward Lionel Messi (C) is in full flow and too hot to handle for Lyon midfields Bodmer (L) and Jeremy Toulalan during their Champions League tie at the Nou Camp on Wednesday.

GOOD DAY FOR BRITS

Barca off to a flier

AFP, Paris

Barcelona striker Thierry Henry would be forgiven for having a sly look at results elsewhere in Europe despite the Catalans' convincing 3-0 Champions League group E win over Lyon Wednesday.

After one of the biggest transfer deals of the summer, and a subsequent long wait to find his scoring boots, Henry finally ended his Spanish goal drought with an injury-time goal that moved Barcelona top of their group.

Henry has now scored 43 goals in the Champions League and sits fourth in the competition's all-time list behind Raul (57), Ruud van Nistelrooy (50), and Andrei Shevchenko (47).

But loyal fans would be quick to point out that most of Henry's goals were scored with Arsenal, who at Emirates stadium continued to impress in his absence with a 3-0 win over Sevilla in group H.

Buoyed by manager Arsene Wenger's further two-year commitment to the club in spite of Henry's departure in the summer, the Gunners were fully deserving of the win over the two-time defending UEFA Cup champions.

Premiership rivals Manchester United were not to be outdone, securing a precious 1-0 away win at Sporting Lisbon, the first for an English club at Sporting, courtesy of their former starlet Cristiano Ronaldo.

And another British team, Rangers, were celebrating with a deserved 2-1 win over German champions VFB Stuttgart.

The blue half of Glasgow will undoubtedly awake with a smile on its face following arch rivals Celtic's 2-0 humbling at Shakhtar Donetsk on Tuesday.

One of the biggest shocks of the night came in Istanbul, where Fenerbahce found delight in a 1-0 victory over Italian champions Inter Milan.

Inter coach Roberto Mancini said: "They were better throughout the 90 minutes and deserved to win. We didn't really play well and should have done better."

PSV Eindhoven's 2-0 win at home moved them top of group G ahead of the Turks, who had striker Deyvid to thank for their 43rd minute winner for which Inter had no response.

Elsewhere Serie A leaders Roma continued their impressive form, moving top of group F ahead of United thanks to a 2-0 win over Dynamo Kiev.

Slavia Prague made a positive start to their first appearance in the group stages, the Czechs' 2-1 win over Steaua Bucharest moving them to second in group H behind Arsenal.

Barcelona meanwhile were given a boost by their French rivals, who have slowly begun to find their rhythm on the domestic front but just couldn't muster an attacking formation against the Spanish league giants.

The hosts' first goal came thanks to a deflection from a Lionel Messi cross which was turned up by French defender Francois Clerc.

Lyon re-emerged from the dressing rooms more alert, but they were outdone by a tactical switch on the part of Rijkaard who replaced Ronaldinho with Andres Iniesta.

The diminutive midfielder first had a shot blocked, and as the hosts continued to frustrate Lyon with their short, sharp passing game Iniesta set up their second goal.

With eight minutes on the clock Deco flicked the ball to Iniesta, whose square pass to the unmarked Messi allowed the Argentine ace to slot home from close range with ease.

Henry then opened his scoring

account; the French international stroking the ball into an empty net after Remy Vercoutre had saved Giovanni Dos Santos' initial effort.

Rijkaard hopes this goal will ease the pressure on Henry, whose goal-scoring touch at Arsenal was legendary.

"I'm happy with the third goal we scored because Thierry worked hard throughout the whole match, and I think this will spur him on for the matches to come," said the Dutch coach.

Lyon manager Alain Perrin meanwhile felt his rather disorganized side did not deserve to concede as many goals.

"The score doesn't reflect our performance in this match. We defended well for an hour at the Camp Nou but we conceded the second goal at a time when we should have been scoring ourselves."

Klasnic gets green light

AFP, Bremen

Werder Bremen striker Ivan Klasnic has been given the all clear to compete six months after undergoing a successful kidney transplant.

The 27-year-old had a failed transplant in January, but a second operation two months later using his father as donor was successful and, over the summer, the Croatian international extended his contract with Bremen until 2008.

"According to the doctors I'm in good health again," said Klasnic. "I never considered giving up and I'm convinced I'll return to competition," added the player who has scored 42 goals in 135 games with Werder.

"Of course I have to be careful with my blood tests but I feel good. It's like being born again."

Maldini hits out at Milan fans

AFP, Rome

AC Milan captain Paolo Maldini has hit out at a section of the San Siro faithful who no longer support the reigning European champions during matches, the Italian international said Thursday.

"Like all my team mates, I'm very angry," Maldini, 39, told La Gazzetta dello Sport. "After all we have given, done and won, we deserve better treatment."

On Tuesday, despite a 2-1 victory over Benfica in the Champions League, a section of the supporters in the San Siro's "southern curve" remained silent and clapped only for Rui Costa, the Benfica midfielder who played for AC Milan between 2001 to 2006.

Asked why the fans were reacting in this way, Maldini said it was "difficult" to explain but that there

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Reds duo suffers broken foot

AFP, London

Liverpool's Daniel Agger and Xabi Alonso are facing a six-week lay-off after it was confirmed that both had broken metatarsal bones while involved in international duty.

Denmark international Agger has been playing with the foot injury, but complained of soreness ahead of Tuesday's Champions League draw in Porto and was consigned to the bench.

Spain midfielder Alonso missed Saturday's draw at Portsmouth and aggravated the injury in training in Portugal on Monday and was also left out.

Both had scans in Liverpool on Thursday and can now expect to miss games against Birmingham, Everton, Tottenham, Arsenal and the home European ties with Marseille and Besiktas.

Club spokesman Ian Cotton told Liverpoolfc.tv: "Neither player

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