

Capello almost England's

Football

THE GUARDIAN

Fabio Capello's appointment as England's coach is expected to be confirmed, after face-to-face talks with the Football Association chief executive, Brian Barwick on Wednesday concluded with the Italian agreeing in principle to succeed Steve McClaren.

The former Milan coach has not formally been offered the post but, subject to approval from the FA board and final negotiations between the FA and his advisers, his appointment appears a formality.

He returned to Italy last night to fulfil a prior commitment having arrived earlier in the day for three hours of talks at Wembley with Barwick and the FA's director of football, Trevor Brooking, which left both parties in little doubt that a formal agreement can be reached rapidly.

Capello's son Pierfilippo and another lawyer representing the Italian remained in London last night to work through the fine print of his contract, thought to be a 2½-year deal worth about 4m pounds a year, with the FA's company secretary, Simon Johnson.

The FA's director of communications, Adrian Bevington, confirmed that talks had taken place and had gone well. "I'm pleased to say that these discussions were extremely positive and without any problems," he said. "Fabio has returned to Italy to honour a prior

commitment. Understandably, further talks are now taking place between Fabio's advisers and ourselves."

Barwick is expected to propose Capello formally to the FA board via a conference call today. The board retains the power to veto any appointment but key board members, including the Manchester United chief executive, David Gill, Sir Dave Richards and Lord Mawhinney, have been kept informed throughout the process and it is highly unlikely there will be any objections.

The FA party was hugely impressed by Capello's plans for the job and the freshness of his ideas for the first-team set-up. And he made it clear to his advisers that he was similarly enthusiastic about the opportunity being offered to him.

One of his first tasks will be to ensure the players perform as well for the national team as they do for their club sides. "How can players of the level of [David] Beckham or [Michael] Owen have performances so different when they play for their national team?" Capello said.

"It's clear the shirt is very heavy even for those great champions. The manager has a fundamental role to play in this situation. He has to be more of a psychologist than a tactician. It's clear they have a mental block, otherwise how can you explain their elimination from Euro 2008?"

Sources close to Capello indicated that his assistant is likely to be Italo Galbiati, who has been at

his side in all four of his club jobs at Milan, Roma, Juventus and Real Madrid. The goalkeeping coach Franco Tancredi, is also favoured, as is the fitness trainer Massimo Neri, who is notorious for his tough regime.

Franco Baldini, Capello's general manager at Roma, may also be considered but he is understood to be considering an offer to become director of football at a Premier League club and it is unclear what role he would play within the England set-up.

Whoever Capello brings in from Italy will have to work alongside an English coach, a condition the FA has made clear. Yesterday's smooth proceedings owed much to the work done before the meeting by the FA and Capello's advisers, led by the Italian agent Giovanni Branchini.

The FA will be delighted if a deal is concluded today, only three weeks after McClaren was sacked, but the underperforming England players may be anxious. Capello is indulgent of superstars and his preference for a holding midfielder guarantees there will be casualties.

Frank Lampard, one who might pay the price, was quick to welcome Capello's imminent appointment, however.

"It is a job which needs a big personality and Capello certainly is that," he said. "There are not many coaches in the world with Capello's track record in the Champions League, the Spanish league and Serie A. Maybe he is the kind of manager who can take us forward."

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE TABLES

AFP, Paris

European Champions League group table Wednesday after final round of group fixtures (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):

Group E
Barcelona 6 4 2 0 12 3 14
Lyon 6 3 1 2 11 10 10
Rangers 6 2 1 3 7 9 7
Stuttgart 6 1 0 5 7 15 3
Group F
Man United 6 5 1 0 13 4 16
Roma 6 3 2 1 11 6 11
S Lisbon 6 2 1 3 9 8 7
Dynamo 6 0 0 6 4 19 0
Group G
Inter Milan 6 5 0 1 12 4 15
Fenerbahce 6 3 2 1 8 6 11
PSV 6 2 1 3 3 6 7
CSKA 6 0 1 5 7 14 1
Group H
Sevilla 6 5 0 1 14 7 15
Arsenal 6 4 1 1 14 4 13
Slavia 6 1 2 3 5 16 5
Steaua 6 0 1 5 4 10 1

N.B. Top two teams from each group qualify for the round-of-sixteen.

Injuries, arrests after Rome clash

AFP, Rome

Nine people ended up in hospital and five were arrested following clashes between Roma and Manchester United fans at the Stadio Olimpico here, Italian news agency Ansa reported on Thursday.

Seven Manchester United fans and two Roma fans were taken to hospital, most believed to be due to stabbing incidents, but none of them were in a serious condition, Ansa said.

Of the five fans arrested, four were supporters of the English club and one a local.

There were fears before the game that there would be a repeat of the violence that marred the match between the two teams last season but the incidents on Wednesday were generally less dramatic than back in March when Italian riot police baton-charged United fans inside the stadium.

Both Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson and Roma coach Luciano Spalletti expressed their disappointment at the repeat of such violence.

"This is something we hoped wouldn't happen. We wanted a quiet night and everyone to go home," said Ferguson.

"These incidents are disappointing. I don't know all the details but I hope all the fans are okay."

Spalletti suggested he thought the trouble was caused by United fans.

"I was told that there were incidents but I don't know all the details. I know that some Manchester United fans don't behave the way they should in the street," he said.

"I don't know what triggered this but what I do know is that we've lost another opportunity to play a fair game and it's a shame that this behaviour is attached to this great sport."

Groups of supporters threw bottles, chairs and tables at each other as fans packed bars close to the Stadio Olimpico.

There were reports of clashes on a bridge close to the stadium with police baton-charging both sets of fans to disperse the troublemakers.

Kanoute saves mosque

AFP, Madrid

Mali international footballer Frederic Kanoute has saved a mosque from closure in Seville, the ABC newspaper reported on Thursday.

Kanoute paid 510,860 euros so that fellow muslims in Seville would not find themselves without a mosque.

Kanoute, who plays for Sevilla in the Spanish league since moving from French champions Lyon in 2005, has also created a foundation in Mali to help children, particularly orphans.

Dutch plan friendlies

AFP, The Hague

The Netherlands will play five friendly matches as part of their build-up to the Euro 2008 finals, the Dutch football federation announced on Wednesday.

They will face fellow finalists Croatia in Rijeka on February 6, replacing the planned game with Italy which was called off after the world champions were drawn alongside the Dutch in the same group for the Euro 2008 finals.

A clash with Euro 2008 co-hosts Austria will take place in Vienna on March 26 with home friendlies against Ukraine in Rotterdam on May 29, Denmark on May 29 in Eindhoven with Wales the visitors to Rotterdam on June 1.

Netherlands will face Italy, France and Romania in Group C at Euro 2008.



PHOTO: AFP

Lyon vanquish Rangers

Fenerbahce spring surprise

AFP, Paris

and Roma, who had already secured qualification from Group E, drew 1-1 but the game was overshadowed by fighting between fans before kick-off.

In Group H, Arsenal and Sevilla had also already made sure of going through but the Spanish side finished top with a 3-0 win over Slavia Prague while the Gunners were runners-up after seeing off Steaua Bucharest 2-1.

Rangers were attempting to join city rivals Celtic as well as English giants Manchester United, Arsenal, Liverpool and Chelsea in the knockout stages but they were undone by the classy French champions who snatched the runners-up spot behind Barcelona in Group E.

Meanwhile, Turkish side Fenerbahce grabbed the final remaining place in the last 16 when a 3-1 win over CSKA Moscow guaranteed them the runners-up place in Group G behind Inter Milan.

In Rome, Manchester United

red card in injury time for a foul on Kim Kallstrom.

"It was a disappointing night and a disappointing performance overall," said Rangers coach Walter Smith whose side will now slip into the UEFA Cup.

"I felt Lyon were wilting late in the game but we gave away a bad second goal. We'll play in the UEFA Cup but that's not a consolation at the moment. Maybe it will be in a

TOP SCORERS

(from group stages)

5 goals - Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Inter Milan), Cristiano Ronaldo (Manchester United)

4 goals - Liedson (Sporting Lisbon), Luis Fabiano (Sevilla), Didier Drogba (Chelsea), Goran Pandev (Lazio), Steven Gerrard (Liverpool), Ruud van Nistelrooy (Real Madrid), Filippo Inzaghi (Milan), Robinho (Real Madrid), Lionel Messi (Barcelona)

few days' time."

Ronaldinho returned to scoring form in Europe with a goal in Barcelona's 3-1 win over VfB Stuttgart. Samuel Eto'o was also on target to bag his first goal since his return from injury.

Eto'o, playing only his third match of the season said his biggest thrill was to feel that he is regaining full fitness.

"It's nice to score, but it's not the most important for me. The crucial thing for me is getting back to full fitness after being out so long," said the Cameroonian striker.

Fenerbahce qualified for the last 16 for the first time while Italian champions Inter Milan completed their campaign with a 1-0 win at 10-man PSV Eindhoven.

Fenerbahce went a goal down after half an hour when their Brazilian defender Edu diverted a cross from Cengiz Erkin past his own goalkeeper Volkan Demirel.

SEE PAGE 22 COL 6

Ferguson has faith in youth

AFP, Rome

allowed the match to be played in an open and attacking manner.

Roma coach Luciano Spalletti set out his intention to win at kick-off by naming a side that included captain and talisman Francesco Totti, flying Brazilian winger Sidney Govou's early opener, proved decisive.

But Rangers were left to rue an astonishing miss from their French striker Jean-Claude Darcheville.

He had the chance to level in the 79th minute but he managed to scoop his shot from inside the six-yard box onto the crossbar with the goal at his mercy.

To complete a miserable night Darcheville was shown a straight

United went ahead 10 minutes before the break when Pique headed home a corner from young Portugal winger Nani, who was probably United's best player on Wednesday night.

They're improving. They're training with the first team all the time which is helping them although I don't think there will be enough football for them," said Ferguson.

"But we can be assured that if we do play them we won't be afraid simply because they have the temperament and ability to do that."



PHOTO: AFP

Milan thank Seedorf

AFP, Yokohama

Italian powerhouses AC Milan lived up to their pre-tournament promise by beating Urawa Red Diamonds 1-0 to reach the final against Boca Juniors in the Club World Cup on Thursday.

Brazilian striker Kaka, who won the prestigious French Ballon d'Or for the Player of the Year, produced a pin-point cross from the left for midfielder Clarence Seedorf's goal in the 68th minute.

Roared on by a partisan home crowd, Urawa fought back bravely before the break, but Takahito Soma's shots were too long and Keita Suzuki's shot from the edge of the area was saved by Brazilian keeper Dida.

AC Milan dominated the second half, attacking the Japanese goal repeatedly with shots by Marek Jankulovski, Seedorf, Kaka and Alberto Gilardino.

And it was just a question of when the Italians would score the first goal.

"The game would have been different if we scored earlier," Seedorf said. "Urawa did a good job against us. They made our life difficult."

Kaka said he saw Seedorf and striker Flippo Inzaghi in front of the goal. "I fed the ball to Seedorf because he was more ready to catch it."

"We must prepare ourselves for anything that could happen," he said. "We made a few mistakes and we need to readjust our tactics."

Urawa's German coach Holger Osieck was proud of his team's performance despite the defeat, saying: "I congratulated my players in the dressing room for their gutsy

and good performances."

"I think basically we represented the Japanese football well in this tournament, particularly in this game. Now we have another incentive, another game on Sunday. Of course, we want to finish third. That's our target, so we are looking ahead, we are not looking back. We'll see what Sunday brings."

Africa shortlist five for award

AFP, Lagos

Mali internationals Mahamadou Diarra and Frederic Kanoute Wednesday made the five-man shortlist of nominees for the 2007 African Footballer of the Year Award organised by the Confederation of African Football (CAF).

Both Diarra and Kanoute have been in fine form for their Spanish clubs as well as for their national team which has qualified for their fifth African Cup of Nations in Ghana next year.

Togo star Emmanuel Adebayor, Michael Essien from Ghana and Ivory Coast striker Didier Drogba, who won the award last year, are the other players on the shortlist announced on Wednesday.

They will face fellow finalists Croatia in Rijeka on February 6, replacing the planned game with Italy which was called off after the world champions were drawn alongside the Dutch in the same group for the Euro 2008 finals.

A clash with Euro 2008 co-hosts Austria will take place in Vienna on March 26 with home friendlies against Ukraine in Rotterdam on May 29, Denmark on May 29 in Eindhoven with Wales the visitors to Rotterdam on June 1.

Netherlands will face Italy, France and Romania in Group C at Euro 2008.

Three-time winner of the award Samuel Eto'o of Cameroon and Barcelona was not on the shortlist spending several months on the sidelines as a result of injury.

"It was a shock more than anything. I don't think they were ready at that stage. They had no football behind them," he said.

"They forgot the golden rule of cup football that if you're in a cup game you have to play a cup game. If they fight you have to fight them back. (This time) they were better prepared mentally."