

Chelsea appoint Guus

Football

AFP, London

Chelsea have appointed Russia manager Guus Hiddink as their temporary coach until the end of the season, the Premier League club announced here Wednesday.

"Chelsea Football Club is delighted to confirm Guus Hiddink will become temporary coach until the end of the season," a club statement said.

"He is due to meet the players later this week.

"The club would like to take this opportunity to thank the Russian Football Union for their understanding and cooperation."

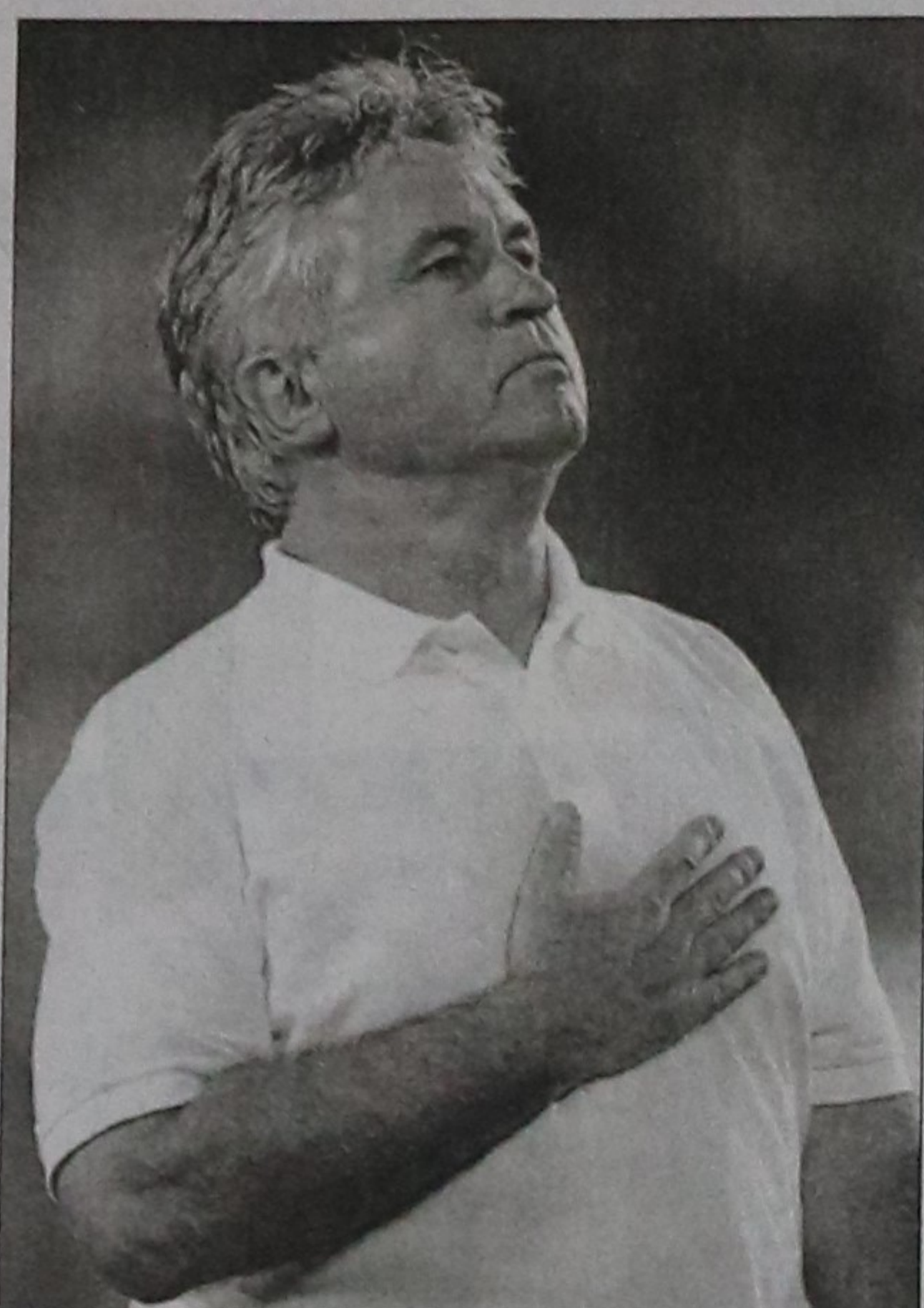
The Dutchman, who will remain in charge of the Russian national side, takes over from Luiz Felipe Scolari after the Brazilian was sacked as Chelsea's manager on Monday.

Hiddink is now set to attend Chelsea's FA Cup tie against Watford on Saturday with a watching brief, with his first game in charge the league match away to Aston Villa - the side that have leapfrogged the Blues into third place in the table - on February 21.

The 62-year-old, who knows Chelsea's billionaire owner Roman Abramovich well from his time with Russia, could yet become a permanent fixture at the London club.

However, he has repeatedly stressed he remains committed to taking Russia to the 2010 World Cup finals in South Africa.

"I will not quit my work with Russia's national side," Hiddink, who in 2002 stunned



GUUS HIDDINK.....CHELSEA'S NEW MANAGER

the football world by steering unfancied co-hosts South Korea to the semifinals of the World Cup, told the ITAR-TASS agency on Tuesday.

Scolari, who guided Brazil to World Cup glory in 2002, was sacked after Chelsea had slipped down the table to fourth place in the Premier League and seven points behind leaders Manchester United.

Assistant manager Ray Wilkins, a former Chelsea captain, was put in caretaker charge after Scolari was

sacked and now seems set to pick the side for the Cup tie against Watford.

As well as Hiddink, currently in Turkey with the Russian national side, others linked with the Chelsea job on a long-term basis include AC Milan manager Carlo Ancelotti and former Barcelona boss Frank Rijkaard.

There have even been suggestions Avram Grant, sacked as Chelsea manager last year, could return in some capacity.

Real Madrid will borrow 70 million euros (90 million dollars) from Spain's largest bank Santander to help finance the purchase of Portuguese winger Cristiano Ronaldo from Manchester United, Spanish radio said Wednesday.

Real to borrow 70m euros for C'Ron

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid will borrow 70 million euros (90 million dollars) from Spain's largest bank Santander to help finance the purchase of Portuguese winger Cristiano Ronaldo from Manchester United, Spanish radio said Wednesday.

But the loan will not be enough to cover the transfer fee, private radio Cadena Ser said.

"Cristiano Ronaldo already has an agreement with Manchester to leave for Real at the end of the season for a reasonable sum," the radio said, without indicating its sources.

Spanish sports media have said for several weeks that the 23-year-old was set for a move to the Spanish champions, despite repeated denials.

Real tracked Ronaldo all of last summer following his Champions League and English Premier League triumphs with the English club before United boss Sir Alex Ferguson stepped in and emphatically vetoed his departure.

But the AS daily, a newspaper close to Real, said last month that Ronaldo will join the club in the summer for 85 million euros (110 million dollars) under a secret pact made between then Real president Ramon Calderon, the player and his agent Jorge Mendes.

After picking up the 2008 FIFA World Footballer of the Year award last month, Ronaldo told Spanish public television station TVE that he was learning Spanish, a comment that further fuelled speculation over a possible move.

Kinnear set for heart surgery

AFP, London

Newcastle United manager Joe Kinnear is set to undergo a heart operation that could sideline him for two months, according to a report in Britain's Sun tabloid here on Wednesday.

Kinnear was admitted to hospital on Saturday after complaining of feeling unwell. Newcastle later released a statement saying initial tests had shown he was "okay" and that he would be detained for further observation.

The 62-year-old suffered a heart attack when in charge of Wimbledon in 1999, later resigning from that post due to poor health.

Kinnear was drafted in to Newcastle by owner Mike Ashley in September, initially as a stand-in boss after fans' favourite Kevin Keegan quit the club.

Newcastle's win over West Brom was their first Premier League victory since December 21, where assistant manager Chris Hughton was in charge.

Kinnear had hoped to be back in charge by the time Newcastle play Everton at St James' Park on February 22 but his health problems now appear to have ruled this out.

Newcastle are currently 13th in the table, four points above the top-flight relegation zone.

FIFA mulls more substitutes, longer interval

AFP, Paris

FIFA's International Board, world football's rule-making body, is to study proposals to increase substitutes to four should extra time be needed and for the interval to be increased to 20 minutes.

The board, which will announce the proposals in its General Assembly on February 28, said the plan to increase substitutes to four was down to "the increased number of matches" and the "huge efforts players are asked to put in," according to the agenda of the General Assembly published by FIFA.

The idea to increase the half-time break to 20 minutes, drawn up by FIFA itself, was because of the long distance to the changing rooms in some stadiums.

Dunga, Lippi at loggerheads

Football

AFP, London

Brazil coach Dunga insisted his war of words with Italy's Marcello Lippi and Gianluca Zambrotta won't take the gloss off his side's impressive 2-0 win over the world champions.

Dunga became embroiled in an unseemly spat with Italy defender Zambrotta as he came to the touchline to protest about a series of fouls on his players during the friendly international at Arsenal's Emirates Stadium on Tuesday.

Both teams were fiercely competitive throughout the match, with Brazil also guilty of over-zealous challenges. So it was hardly surprising that Dunga came under fire from Lippi, who said: "If we had complained like that about some of the strong fouls they did in the first half there would have been all sorts of confusion. To get up off the bench like that is just not right."

But Dunga refused to apologise for his touchline outburst after goals from Elano and Robinho clinched the best result of his time in charge of the Selecao.

"It was Zambrotta who started to talk to me. About what Lippi said, to be honest, if I had to say something every time Italy made a foul we wouldn't even have played. Unfortunately that is the way football is," he said.

After struggling to win over the critics who feel his cautious tactics betrayed Brazil's legacy as guardians of the beautiful game, Dunga was entitled to feel his team's dismantling of Italy had made an eloquent point about his philosophy.

But with tricky World Cup qualifiers ahead, Dunga refused to gloat and emphasised that this result must be the springboard for a successful year for Brazil.

"We played against Italy who hadn't lost for 38 matches, so it was one of the best wins," he said. "We finished last year well and have started this year very well."

"I talked to all the players and told them in order to be a good team we need to be humble."

"Everybody knows there are always difficulties in qualifying games, more than in friendlies."

"People are sentimental and emotional when things go well. When things go down a bit people talk more. Every time I say people blow it up."

"But with the squad we had against this opposition, I am happy."

Dunga was happy to praise the contribution of Manchester City forward Robinho, who outshone even rejuvenated teammate Ronaldinho by setting up the first goal and scoring a sublime second.

"Everyone knows what the qualities of Robinho are. I like he showed good personality and I think he fits well in the Brazilian team," Dunga said.

Lippi conceded that his side had been beaten by a better team, but he was adamant his decision to field a relatively inexperienced line-up was the right one.

Lippi wanted to run the rule over talented prodigies Simone Pepe, Riccardo Montolivo and Antonio De Natale, but the young trio suffered a case of stage fright.

"In this moment it is clear they played technically better than us," Lippi said. "We are at a moment when we are rebuilding our team. We struggle and we suffer. Of course we can't debate the supremacy of Brazil."

"The thing I liked least was the fear. We were a little bit intimidated. Obviously Brazil is one of the best but if you want to be strong and competitive, even against the best in the world, we need to show a different mentality, an improved mentality."

Lippi sees no reason to panic though. After all, this was his first defeat at Italy coach since 2004.

"I don't think this hurts. Obviously I am not used to losing but we lost against Brazil, not the worst team in the world," he said.

"I'm not concerned. It is a normal step in the construction of a new team."

"We started rebuilding the team six months ago. Step by step we will do it. We have to give experience to the young ones or they will never improve."

"Now what is important is the qualifying games for the World Cup."

N Korea upset Saudis

AFP, Tokyo

Japan and Australia shared the spoils in Asian World Cup qualifying on Wednesday but there was a crucial win for North Korea, who beat Saudi Arabia to leave Nasser Al Johar's side in serious trouble.

In Tehran, Manchester United star Park Ji-Sung came to South Korea's rescue with an 81st minute strike to cancel out Javad Nekounam's goal to give them a battling 1-1 draw with Iran.

The Socceroos will feel fortunate to come away from Yokohama with a 0-0 draw after soaking up long periods of pressure, but it leaves them well positioned in Group 1 with 10 points from four games.

Japan remain hot on their heels with two wins and two draws for eight points, while Mahmood Abdulrahman scored a 94th minute winner for Bahrain in their 1-0 victory over Uzbekistan in Tashkent.

It leaves the Uzbeks virtually out of the running with just one point, while Bahrain

remain alive on four points, alongside Qatar.

Only the top two teams from each group qualify for South Africa while the third-placed teams play each other with the winner facing Oceania champions New Zealand for the final World Cup berth.

On a chilly night in Yokohama, the home team got off to the better start, with Celtic midfielder Shunsuke Nakamura a lurking danger, unleashing a trademark shot midway through the first half only to see it go just over.

The Australians surprisingly had to wait until first-half injury time for their first clear-cut shot when Everton dangerman Tim Cahill went close.

But they came out with a more aggressive attitude after the break and piled on the pressure before Japan fought back with substitute forward Yoshito Okubo and Yasuhito Endo hitting sizzling shots to keep Mark Schwarzer busy.

In Pyongyang, North Korea's drive towards their first World Cup finals since 1966 stayed on track with a vital 1-0 win over Saudi Arabia, leaving their opponents with a massive uphill task to qualify.

Mun In-Guk was the Korean hero, toe-poking the ball under Saudi keeper Waleed Abdullah in the 29th minute to put his side on seven points in Group 2 after four games.

The Saudis, who have made the last four World Cup finals, are now in big trouble with just four points and four games to play, starting with a tough trip to Tehran next month to face Iran in a must-win match.

Played on an artificial surface in freezing temperatures at the Kim Il-Sung Stadium in Pyongyang, the Saudis had the opening chance when Tassier Al Jassim picked up the ball in the box but failed to produce the killer touch.

The Koreans soon woke up and were dangerous on the break.

Their patience paid off when captain Hong Yon-Jo's lovely backheel found Mun, with the midfielder making no mistake to put his team 1-0 in front, a lead they defended admirably.

Group leaders South Korea now have eight points after their 1-1 draw with Iran, who slip to third place on six points behind North Korea.

Traore joins Birmingham

AFP, London

Birmingham City signed Djimi Traore on Tuesday from Premier League strugglers Portsmouth on a three-month emergency loan deal.

The 28-year-old Mali defender has failed to nail down a first-team place at Fratton Park since moving to the south coast club in January 2007.

Traore made more than 160 appearances for Liverpool and was in the Reds side that won the Champions League against AC Milan in 2005.

He will join second-tier Birmingham for the full 93-day period allowed under the rules of an emergency deal.

Earthquakes sign Convey

AFP, San Jose

US midfielder Bobby Convey, who spent the past four seasons with English side Reading, signed Tuesday with the San Jose Earthquakes of Major League Soccer.

Convey, 25, netted eight goals in 112 appearances with Reading and played a key role in the club's promotion to the Premiership for the first time in history in 2006.

"It is rare to be able to acquire a US international in the prime of his career," San Jose general manager John Doyle said.

"When he became available we jumped at the opportunity to add him to our team. He is a great attacking player who will make an immediate impact, and our fans will enjoy watching him."

Convey has one goal in 46 caps with the US national team.

Ribery wants to fulfil contract

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich midfielder Franck Ribery said Wednesday he wants to see out his contract with the German giants, which finishes in 2011, despite interest from several top European sides.

Several top European clubs including Spanish giants Real Madrid, Chelsea, Manchester City and Barcelona are all reported to have expressed an interest in the French star.

But Ribery says he wants to fulfil his contract in Munich. "I have a contract and intend on seeing it through," the Frenchman told magazine Sport Bild here.

Ribery says he is aware other clubs have expressed an interest in signing him, but has never actually said he wants to leave Bayern.

"Whether it is Real Madrid, Barcelona, Chelsea or Manchester City, I have never said I want to go anywhere."

And the 25-year-old insists whether he extends his contract past June 2011 depends on negotiations with Bayern.

"It depends completely on the discussions, which my adviser and the club will conduct, so far there has been no signal from Bayern," said Ribery.

But the midfielder has hinted he would like to play for a top European club in the future and told French newspaper Le Monde on Monday that playing for Real Madrid would be a "dream come true."

Terry hints at revolt

Football

AFP, Seville

Chelsea captain John Terry has dropped a strong hint that a revolt by some of the club's players triggered the dismissal of Luiz Felipe Scolari.

Although he insisted that he personally had been shocked by Scolari's sacking and described the Brazilian as a "great man", Terry made it clear Tuesday that not all of the Chelsea squad were of the same opinion.

Against a background of reports that Michael Ballack, Petr Cech and Didier Drogba had agitated for Scolari to be sacked, Terry pointedly stressed that he and a "few

other Chelsea stars had been behind the Brazilian.

"I got the call yesterday afternoon and I was very shocked at the time and disappointed because myself and a few of the players at the club were fully behind the manager," Terry told reporters, later putting the number of Scolari loyalists at just "two or three players."

"So we're shocked to see him go but that is the people in charge at Chelsea who make their decisions."

Terry's comments will inevitably be interpreted as a sign of deep divisions within the Chelsea dressing room but the club captain said the entire squad had to accept that they had let down the man who

guided Brazil to World Cup glory in 2002.

"I'm disappointed because we have not been performing as well as we can do and getting the results for the manager," Terry said. "It is a shame because it falls on his head when we should be looking at ourselves. We should have won a lot more games under the manager."

Scolari was sacked on Monday after Chelsea slipped to fourth place in the English Premier League table, with no realistic chance of reclaiming the trophy.

Terry, Frank Lampard and Ashley Cole were all with the England squad on Monday when Chelsea's decision to sack Scolari was announced.

Adebayor Africa's best

Football

AFP, Lagos

The Confederation of African Football (CAF) picked Togo international Emmanuel Adebayor as the continent's best player for 2008 at an elaborate awards ceremony here Tuesday night.

Adebayor, 25 later this month, beat final nominees Mohamed Aboubrika of Egypt and Ghana's Michael Essien in a vote that involved the national team coaches of CAF's 54 member-nations.

The Arsenal star, accompanied by his mother, took home a crystal trophy and a cash prize of 20,000 US dollars.

It was the first time a Togolese took the accolade as Africa's best player.

"This is a special night for me. I dedicate this award to my mum, without her, I would have been nothing. My father is no more but wherever he is, he will be proud of me," said Adebayor.

"The 2010 World Cup will be in Africa for the first time and we as Africans can achieve a lot if we believe."

Adebayor's exploits of the

past year were mainly with his English Premier League club. In the absence of France international Thierry Henry, who departed for Spanish club Barcelona, the Togo star stepped up to finish the season with an impressive tally of 30 goals in 49 matches.

The former AS Monaco ace also inspired the Hawks of Togo to reach the final qualifying round for the 2010 World Cup and Africa Cup of Nations.

The awards night was graced by many dignitaries including FIFA President Joseph Blatter and CAF President Issa Hayatou.

Ahly's Aboubrika got a consolation prize as the Inter-Club Player of the Year.

Several other Egyptians won various award categories. Egypt coach, Hassan Shehata was Africa's Coach of the Year, and the team he led to successfully defend the Nations Cup in Accra last year were picked as the best national team on the continent.

Ahly were crowned Club of the Year ahead of Tunisia's CS Sfaxien, who defended the CAF Confederation Cup, and beaten CAF Champions League finalists, Cotonsport from Cameroon.

Salomon Kalou of Ivory Coast and Chelsea was the CAF Young Player of the Year ahead of Cameroon's Stephane Mbia and Nigerian forward Victor Obinna Nsofor.

The previous year's winner was Zambia's Clifford Mulenga, who now features for South African Premier Soccer League club Thanda Royal Zulu.

Former Nigeria skipper and coach, Christian Chukwu was awarded the African Legend prize.



PHOTO: AFP

Arsenal and Togo striker Emmanuel Adebayor poses with his trophy after being named African Footballer of the Year at the Confederation of African Football award ceremony in Lagos on Tuesday.



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