



Chelsea's new manager Guus Hiddink (L) watches training alongside club owner Roman Abramovic in Cobham on Friday.

## Bent hints at Spurs exit

AFP, London

England forward Darren Bent is ready to quit Tottenham if he doesn't get more first-team opportunities before the end of the season.

Bent has scored 14 times this season but Tottenham boss Harry Redknapp still splashed out to bring strikers Jermain Defoe and Robbie Keane back to White Hart Lane during the January transfer window.

Those signings underlined Redknapp's lack of faith in Bent, who has made just three starts in Tottenham's last 16 matches.

"I've spoken to the manager a couple of times about my position but I can only hear the same thing so many times," Bent told The Sun.

"I'm not one of those players who will just sit back and let his career pass him by."

"I'll bang on his door. I'm only 25 and there is so much more to come from me as a player. I'm not the finished article and I will get better."

"I'd like to think that improvement will be with Tottenham. But if nothing is happening for me by the end of the season then I will look to go elsewhere."

"I need to play more games. I want to play football. I don't want another season where I'm in and out of the team all the time."

## Bulgarelli dies after long illness

AFP, Rome

Former Italy international midfielder Giacomo Bulgarelli has died at the age of 68 following a long illness, his former club Bologna announced on Friday.

Bulgarelli, who played for only one club during a career that lasted from 1959 to 1975 and almost 400 Serie A matches, was a European champion with Italy in 1968.

He played for his country 27 times, scoring seven goals, and played in the World Cups of 1962 and 1966.

He also won the Serie A title with Bologna in 1964.

## Dean Ashton undergoes ankle surgery

AFP, London

West Ham's injury-hit striker Dean Ashton has had another operation on his ankle, the Premier League club confirmed on Thursday.

Ashton has been out of action since September after a previous surgery failed to cure the problem and no date has been set for his return after this latest operation.

"It was disappointing to have another operation. But it had to be done and was only a minor thing, a small problem that had to be dealt with and I am glad it is all done now," Ashton said.

"I was also very pleased to have two of the best ankle specialists in the room at the same time when I had the operation done."

"The feedback I have had from everyone has been great, so that is very good for me."

Ashton is yet to play for Hammers boss Gianfranco Zola but he is hopeful he is now on the road to recovery.

# Guus meets his stars

Football

AFP, London

New Chelsea manager Guus Hiddink met his players for the first time on Thursday at the club's Cobham training headquarters.

Hiddink has replaced Luiz Felipe Scolari, who was sacked on Monday, and although he doesn't officially take charge until next week the Dutchman flew into England ahead of Saturday's FA Cup fifth round tie at Watford to get to know the squad.

He was greeted at Cobham by chief executive Peter Kenyon, who gave the former Australia and South Korea coach a tour of the main building and met some of the players in the treatment room.

Hiddink, who will remain as Russia coach as well as working for Chelsea until the end of the season, was introduced to staff before continuing to the first-team dressing room where he met the remaining first team players.

The Dutchman later told Chelsea TV that club owner Roman Abramovich had played a key role in his decision to come to London.

"When the situation occurred I was asked, because of the relationship with Roman Abramovich as well, and of course it is a big club," said Hiddink. "Let me be honest, I came because he asked me to join the club for the upcoming time."

Hiddink insists Chelsea can still win trophies this

season. "They are in several races. The FA Cup is there, there is the Champions League, but also the league," he said.

"There is a ten-point difference but if you look into the past of this league, and of other leagues as well, some things can happen during the final stages of the championship."

Hiddink accompanied chairman Bruce Buck out on to the training field to watch the main session, led by Ray Wilkins. They were later joined by Abramovich and director Eugene Tenenbaum.

Assistant coach Wilkins, who will lead the team against Watford, chatted with the new coach who will start work with the squad on the training ground from Monday.

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# Klinsi targets leaders

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich coach Jurgen Klinsmann insists his side will give Bundesliga leaders Hoffenheim no peace until they are back at the top of the table - starting this weekend.

With Hoffenheim playing fifth-placed Bayer Leverkusen on Friday, defending champions Bayern can go top if they pick up all three points against Hertha Berlin at the Olympic Stadium on Saturday and Hoffenheim only manage a draw or worse.

Despite being second in the table, Bayern have yet to claim top place in the league this season - mainly due to some erratic form.

Having started the year with a shock defeat at Hamburg which left them fourth, Bayern were the only team in the top five to win last weekend and they are now just one point behind Hoffenheim.

"We're close to Hoffenheim. We'll not leave them in peace now, and we want to overtake them in the next few weeks," said Klinsmann whose side beat Dortmund 3-1 last Sunday.

And the players are getting restless with the situation.

"We're all aware of the standings," said Bayern goalkeeper Michael Rensing.

"We want to go top as soon as possible, as we're tired of playing catch-up. We want the others looking at us."

Klinsmann says his side must ignore results elsewhere and concentrate on their own performance.

"It's only a matter of time. We'll pass Hoffenheim soon," said the ex-Germany boss.

"If we stop dropping points, we'll automatically go top of the pile at some point."

"We've learned from our set-back in Hamburg. We have to follow up after successful displays."

Berlin will have captain and Germany defender Arne Friedrich back after a back injury while Bayern only have defender Massimo Oddo missing, through suspension.

Fourth-placed Hamburg meanwhile are looking to bounce back from their shock

## FIXTURES

**Saturday**  
Hertha Berlin v Bayern Munich, VfL Bochum v Schalke 04, Eintracht Frankfurt v VfL Wolfsburg, Hannover 96 v VfB Stuttgart, Cologne v Karlsruhe, Werder Bremen v Borussia M'gladbach  
**Sunday**  
Borussia Dortmund v Energie Cottbus, Hamburg v Arminia Bielefeld

# Scolari lifts the lid

Football

SOCCERNET

Sacked Chelsea boss Luiz Felipe Scolari admitted that he had no relationship with his players away from training and matches, before he was sensationally axed by Roman Abramovich on Monday.

In an interview with France Football magazine, given before his exit, the Brazilian claimed he was not close to his squad and also that the club badly needed the inspiration of Robinho, who snubbed Chelsea for a lucrative move to Man City in the summer.

He said: "There are egos in the dressing room, but that is normal, isn't it? We all have egos. But my relationships with the players are good on the pitch. It is true that they are not the same as the relationships I had with

my players in Portugal, but I spent five years there."

"In Brazil (as a club manager) it was also easier. I knew everything about the players. Here, I don't have a family relation with the players. Everything is on the pitch. Outside, there is nothing."

Scolari said that he felt the club were missing a creative force who could unlock opposition defences, with Robinho moving to Eastlands for 32 million pounds.

He said: "At Chelsea we don't have the player who can make the difference by himself by producing something magical on the pitch. We miss that. I don't know why. In the past (Arjen) Robben was at Chelsea and he could make the difference. But now there is no one."

"Robinho could have been this player. He is not afraid to dribble, to take a risk, as a

Brazilian. I like this."

"My team isn't Brazilian enough. It is a 'bureaucratic' team. That's the style of my players. That's why Robinho would have done a lot of good for the team."

Scolari went on to explain why he left striker Didier Drogba out of his starting XI even when he regained fitness after injury, and suggested that France winger Florent Malouda was also well below his best form.

He added: "Drogba lacks a lot of confidence at the moment. After two or three big injuries, he is missing something. Drogba doesn't have enough confidence, so I choose (Nicolas) Anelka."

Malouda, at Chelsea, isn't the Malouda from Lyon. He is OK, but he isn't the same that he was with Lyon. He doesn't make the difference in games any longer."

## France to bid for Euro 2016

AFP, Paris

The French Football Federation (FFF) on Friday officially announced its intention to bid for the organisation of Euro 2016.

Candidates for the competition have until March 9 to submit their letter of intention to European football's ruling body UEFA.

France have the backing of French secretary of state for sport, Bernard Laporte, and the country's president Nicolas Sarkozy.

## Spanish lesson worthwhile

AFP, London

Fabio Capello insists England's chastening 2-0 defeat to Spain will play an important part in the development of his team.

Capello's men were outclassed by the European champions in Seville on Wednesday but it wasn't all bad news for the England coach, who claimed he had learned a lot from the way Spain retained possession and made such good use of the ball.

"Spain are the European champions and a very good team. I have learned a lot," he said.

"They are a very difficult team to play against because technically, all their players are very good and it is very difficult to win back the ball from them."

"I needed to understand a lot of things about the characteristics of our players against theirs, who are very small and quick."

"Before the game I said I expected to learn a lot - and I have."

Although Capello was disappointed to suffer only his second defeat as England boss - his first since losing to France in March last year - he believes the team has improved since beating Germany 2-1 in a friendly last November.

"After two months we are not the same team that played against Germany. There is a big difference," he said.

"But people also have to understand the style of Germany and the other teams in Europe is different to that of Spain."

## Kinnear needs triple heart bypass op

AFP, Newcastle

Newcastle manager Joe Kinnear will undergo a triple heart bypass operation on Friday, the Premier League club confirmed on Thursday.

Kinnear's assistants Chris Hughton and Colin Calderwood will continue to look after first-team affairs at St James' Park.

They have been in charge since Kinnear was taken to hospital complaining of pains in his arms ahead of his side's win at West Bromwich Albion last Saturday.

After a series of tests it was decided that the 62-year-old needs the operation immediately.

In 1999, Kinnear suffered a heart attack before a match against Sheffield Wednesday during his time as Wimbledon manager.

# Betis eye Barca scalp

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona's 'bestia negra' or bogey opponent, Real Betis, aim to end the 21-game unbeaten league run of the league leaders on Saturday with Pep Guardiola's side preparing for a testing trip to Seville.

Barcelona have won ten games on the trot and dropped just seven points all season.

But Betis have held the Indian sign over them in recent seasons and all Barca fans will remember last season when Betis came from 2-0 down to win 3-2 and all but end Barca's hopes of wrestling the title from Real Madrid.

This season Barcelona are in control of their own destiny but will be wary of a Betis side on a high after defeating derby rivals Sevilla 2-1 last time out.

It was the first time Betis had won at Sevilla in 13 years and new signing Ricardo Oliveira, a nine million euro purchase from Real Zaragoza, believes they are also capable of turning over the runaway leaders, who sit 12 points ahead of Real.

"The all powerful Barca are coming to play us and they are the favourites but we have home advantage and if we play with intelligence and belief we can upset them," said Oliveira. "How many years had it been since Betis won at Sevilla? We have broken that jinx and we can beat Barcelona too."

Real have collected a maxi-

mum 21 points from their last seven matches but are still not any closer to Barca and were jeered by their home fans who didn't think much of the slender 1-0 win over Racing Santander last weekend.

There is certainly unrest in his camp and Dutch forward Klaas-Jan Huntelaar had to come out in the press this week to deny he wanted to leave the club.

Huntelaar was signed by former coach Bernd Schuster from Ajax for around 20 million euros but has been used sparingly and has yet to score his first goal for the club, although he scored for the Netherlands in Wednesday's 1-1 draw with Tunisia.

"I don't want to leave Madrid," vowed Huntelaar. "Of course you are not happy when you play a quarter of an hour. However, I have to be patient and wait for my opportunity."

Atletico Madrid's recently-installed manager Abel Resino hopes to build on a winning start by downing derby rivals Getafe at the Vicente Calderon on Sunday.

Results went Atletico's way last weekend - with

FIXTURES	
<b>Saturday</b>	Deportivo La Coruna v Osasuna, Real Betis v Barcelona, Valencia v Malaga
<b>Sunday</b>	Almeria v Valladolid, Athletic Bilbao v Recreativo Huelva, Sporting Gijon v Real Madrid, Racing Santander v Villarreal, Numancia v Real Mallorca, Espanyol v Sevilla, Atletico Madrid v Getafe

# Sought after, but unpaid

Football

INTERNET, Madrid

David Villa is a leader in the Spain national team and at Valencia, but he embodies a striking paradox: half of Europe would willingly pay huge amounts of money to sign him, while he is not getting paid by his troubled club. Spain beat England 2-0 Wednesday in a friendly that stretched to 29 games the Spanish team's winning streak, as well as confirming their excellent level of play and Villa's talent as a goalscorer.

The Valencia striker managed to break a record by scoring goals in six consecutive national team games. He opened Spain's count Wednesday in the 35th minute, with a spectacular individual effort in which he left behind two defenders and scored with a classy shot, to deceive England keeper David James.

"I am very happy for having been able to play one more game and I think everyone has enjoyed the team's play. The record is very beautiful. A few years ago I would not even have imagined achieving it. I am very proud of that and I

hope to be able to keep breaking more records," he told reporters after the game.

Villa has become one of Spain's flag-bearers and has scored 17 goals in 21 games in La Liga.

The Valencia forward has



DAVID VILLA

many reasons to smile, but he also has plenty to worry about: the club owes him - and all his teammates - half of his annual salary.

Valencia's situation is dramatic, and recent news from the club say it's debt is close to 600 million euros (almost 770 million dollars), a figure that bears no comparison within Spain.

Champions League rivals Sevilla and Valencia both losing - and Atletico are now just two points off the top four.

"When you change coach it is all new and we have to adapt," explained Atletico defender Tomas Ujfalusi. "A new coach always brings something different. At the moment we are working on the defence although you can't change everything in a week."

The two giants of Spanish football Barca and Real are streaking ahead at the top and it now looks like a four-way duel for the final two Champions League berths with Sevilla, nine points behind Real, Villarreal, Valencia and Atletico in the frame.

Promoted Malaga are just two points off the top four after an incredible first half of the season but qualifying for Europe's premier competition would be nothing short of a miracle.

Valencia, beaten by lowly Osasuna last time out, host the dangerous Malaga on Saturday night and will look to Spanish international striker David Villa for inspiration.

Villa became the first Spanish player to score in six successive internationals following his goal in Spain's comfortable 2-0 friendly win over England on Wednesday that extended their unbeaten run to 29 games.

Sevilla have found goals hard to come by - of the top ten teams only Deportivo La Coruna have scored less - and travel to Espanyol on Sunday with the aim of forgetting the painful Betis defeat.

# Kaka may play derby

AFP, Rome



AC Milan are hoping that Brazil star Kaka makes a miracle recovery in time to play in Sunday's derby against Inter Milan at the San Siro.

The former world player of the year injured his foot in last week's 1-1 home draw with rock-bottom Reggina and was initially ruled out for two weeks, meaning he would miss the clash against the Serie A leaders.

But now Milan's chief doctor Jean Pierre Meersseman is quietly confident that the 26-year-old could indeed play a part.

"Kaka is feeling much better, he is reacting to the treatment in an exceptional manner and he no longer feels pain when he walks," he said.

"He will try to run and then we will see if it's possible to get him ready for the derby, at least for the bench. Right now it's too early to tell."

It's something that coach Carlo Ancelotti, the subject of reported interest from Chelsea, is not banking on.

Of much greater concern to him is Milan's propensity to lose points to lesser opponents, something that has left them eight points adrift of Inter and in third place in Serie A.

It has had vice-president Adriano Galliani fuming, particularly after Milan failed once again to beat one of the

league's minnows.

"I've always said that the problem isn't (playing against) Inter but the matches before and after the derby," he told Mediaset, the TV station owned by Milan president and Italy Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi.

"The repeated negative results against small teams account for the distance between us and Inter."

"That's something the club, Ancelotti and the technical staff have to think about."

"As for (Inter coach Jose) Mourinho I still think he's a good guy and he simply says the truth: well done (David) Beckham, well done Pato, well done Milan but in the meantime Inter were six points ahead and now it's eight."

Milan are paying for draws at Cagliari, Lecce and Torino as well as those at home to Genoa and Reggina.

In three of those matches they conceded late equalisers, something that has riled Ancelotti.

"Even playing well we've lost points in matches that were already won against

FIXTURES	
<b>Saturday</b>	Lazio v Torino, Napoli v Bologna
<b>Sunday</b>	Atalanta v AS Roma, Cagliari v Lecce, Chievo v Catania, Genoa v Fiorentina, Inter Milan v AC Milan, Juventus v Sampdoria, Reggina v Palermo, Siena v Udinese

Lecce, Genoa and Torino," he told La Stampa.

"That's the difference between Inter and us."

Another difference is the form of Inter's Zlatan Ibrahimovic compared to that of Milan's marquee signing six months ago Ronaldinho.

Ibrahimovic has hit the net 14 times in Serie A and is just one goal behind the league's leading scorers, while Ronaldinho has mostly not even been able to force his way into the Milan team recently.

He started against Reggina and largely played well until he was substituted for Filippo Inzaghi.

Ronaldinho has scored half the number of goals as Ibrahimovic in the league and only nine goals in 25 matches in all competitions.

Yet Ancelotti has denied the player is merely a luxury at a club that seem to have performed better with him on the bench and the added steel of Massimo Ambrosini in midfield instead.

While the two Milan giants are occupied with each other, second place Juventus will be looking to make up ground on the leaders as they host Sampdoria.

Juve have been far from convincing recently, losing to Udinese and at home to Cagliari before an injury time winner from Dane Christian Poulsen allowed them to escape from Sicily last weekend without dropping more points as they beat Catania 2-1.