



Inter Milan coach Jose Mourinho acknowledges the crowd after being awarded the academic degree of Doctor Honoris Causa, in recognition for his achievements as a football coach, by the Lisbon Technical University on Monday.

Jose causes new storm

Football

SOCCERNET

Inter Milan boss Jose Mourinho has infuriated his peers by strongly hinting that Italian coaches are influenced by their club presidents when making team selections.

Mourinho, whose Inter Milan side are well on their way to capturing a fourth straight Scudetto, said: "When I mentioned coaches that lose their own dignity, what I wanted to state is that while I choose the team that goes out on the pitch, other coaches don't do that, and in the world of football it's full of them."

"If anyone told me what to do with my line-up, the next day my office would be empty and I would have my suitcases packed."

Renzo Ulivieri, the presi-

dent of the Italian Football Coaches Association, said: "Mourinho is a member of our association and we are happy that he is but this time, he has gone too far."

"Ask (Fabio) Capello, (Marcello) Lippi, (Luciano) Spalletti, (Cesare) Prandelli, (Massimiliano) Allegri to name a few, if their teams are selected by someone else."

AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti, who has exchanged barbs with Mourinho in the media all season, said: "I am the one (Mourinho) is referring to, then I can only say that I have won two cups under (AC Milan owner Silvio) Berlusconi as a player and the other two as assistant coach!"

Agliari coach Massimiliano Allegri labelled the Inter coach's comments "pathetic", adding: "To step on other coaches shows a lack of respect. With club president

Massimo Cellino, I have had several discussions during the year, but never has he gotten involved in team selection."

Mourinho, meanwhile, is in the Portuguese capital today to receive an honorary degree from the University of Lisbon.

"For my first degree I had to study a lot," said Mourinho, who majored in sports science at the Technical University of Lisbon. "For the one I'm receiving today, I haven't done anything."

Mourinho joked that there had not been much opposition to him being presented with an honorary degree.

He said: "Some people have questioned this choice. I don't know, but having read the official reasons from the university, all but one have voted for me to receive this."

"I have no problem in being criticised, I still live well."

Schumacher to aid Ferrari

INTERNET, Melbourne

Ferrari will be calling on the experience of seven-time world champion Michael Schumacher for the start of the Formula One season. For the first time since his retirement at the end of the 2006 season, Schumacher will be with his former team for the season's start in Melbourne on Sunday.

The 40-year-old German will also be acting as an adviser for the following week's Malaysian Grand Prix.

Schumacher's spokeswoman Sabine Kehm said Tuesday the former champion would be working "in the background" but will attend team meetings.

"His knowledge and experience will be of great use to the team there," she said.

Schumacher's manager Willi Weber told Germany's Bild newspaper: "For the last two years it wasn't so important for Michael to be in the pits. But now with all the rule changes he can help the engineers understand the car better."

Schumacher has been following testing closely but has not driven the new Ferrari.

On his homepage last week following tests in Barcelona he was upbeat on the chances of Ferrari's Felipe Massa and Kim Raikkonen.

"The last impressions were showing that we look pretty good and should be in the position to fight for the world championship titles," he said.

Schumacher also singled out the new Brawn GP team, run by Ross Brawn, the man who accompanied Schumacher to five titles with Ferrari and two with Benetton.

Renault, Toyota, BMW and Williams had also done well but "McLaren at the moment looks pretty bad," he said.

Klinsi hungry for more

Football

SOCCERNET

Bayern Munich coach Jurgen Klinsmann claims he has already fulfilled the main target he was given when he took over at the German champions, but knows he cannot afford to rest on his laurels.

Klinsmann took over from Ottmar Hitzfeld last summer with success in the Champions League the priority and, having reached the last eight, where Bayern will face Barcelona, he has already achieved that.

Yet that no longer seems enough as Klinsmann still struggles to win over the critics.

"The task the board gave me was to get this team back among the best in Europe," he revealed. "Together with

Barcelona, we have so far made the most convincing impression."

"We are on an incredible streak in the Champions League and are playing quick, attacking football. If we can beat Barca now, then nobody will be moaning anymore."

But the fans' main gripe is with Bayern's league form. They have yet to sit atop the Bundesliga this season and this is why Klinsmann, despite his successes in Europe, including a record 7-1 win over Sporting Lisbon in the last round, cannot feel so comfortable in his position.

"We cannot find consistency and the mental approach we need to be able to play our best in the league," he admitted in an interview with Kicker magazine.

"We are only managing to do that when we are under real pressure and it appears to be

our last chance. After every defeat, everything is called into question."

But Klinsmann still fancies his side's chances of winning the league and is rolling his sleeves up for the final nine games of the season.

"I would be unhappy if we did not win the league and I can say that openly," he added. "The countdown begins now and this is when the titles are decided."

Bayern travel to Wolfsburg in their next Bundesliga fixture to face a side who have yet to lose in 2009 and are currently level on points and goal difference with them in second place.

But the likelihood is the title will go down to the wire with Bayern facing fellow challengers Bayer Leverkusen, Hoffenheim and Stuttgart in their last three games of the season.

Nobel meeting postponed

AFP, Johannesburg

A planned South African peace conference involving Nobel laureates has been postponed over Pretoria's refusal to grant a visa to Tibet's Dalai Lama, organisers said Tuesday.

"The convenors have therefore decided in the spirit of peace to postpone the South African peace conference to ensure it is held under conducive conditions," said Irvin Khoza, a top official for the South African organisers of the 2010 World Cup which was sponsoring the conference.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu and former South African president FW de Klerk withdrew from the peace conference on Monday after the Tibetan spiritual leader was denied a visa.

The laureates were meant to discuss how soccer can help fight racism and xenophobia, as South Africa gears up for next year's World Cup.

"In processing of the visa application by the Dalai Lama the South African government persuaded the Dalai Lama to postpone his visit to South Africa at this stage," Khoza told reporters at a press conference in Johannesburg.

"Given that the purpose of the conference is peace the convenors do not wish to put the Nobel peace committee under circumstances that would create conflict between the committee and its laureates."

The Nobel peace prize committee also said it would boycott the conference unless South Africa reconsidered its decision to deny the Dalai Lama a visa.

Cambiasso extends with Inter

AFP, Rome

Argentinian defensive midfielder Esteban Cambiasso has extended his contract with Inter Milan until 2014, the Italian league leaders announced Monday.

Cambiasso, 28, arrived at Inter in 2004 after two years at Real Madrid.

This season, he has played 26 matches (2 goals) in Serie A and eight in the Champions League.

Abete re-elected as president

AFP, Rome

Giancarlo Abete was on Monday re-elected as president of the Italian Football Federation at a general assembly of the sporting body here on Monday.

Abete, 58, was the sole runner for the four-year post and received 98.42 percent of the votes.

Rooney escapes further action

AFP, London

England striker Wayne Rooney will not face further disciplinary action following the red card he received against Fulham last weekend.

The Manchester United forward was sent-off for two bookable offences during the Premier League champions' shock 2-0 defeat.

Although he had words with Phil Dowd after being shown the red card, the official has confirmed he was not sworn at by Rooney, an offence which could have led to a longer ban.

However, the Football Association (FA) are to write to Rooney, whose temper has been a worry to some within the English game, about his conduct after the former Everton favourite punched a corner flag while leaving the pitch.

An FA spokesman said here on Monday: "We have clarified with Phil Dowd that there was no abuse from the player after he was dismissed."

"In relation to the incident when he punched the corner flag, the referee did not see that and we have written to Wayne Rooney reminding him of his responsibilities."

Rooney will now be suspended for one match, the Premier League fixture against Aston Villa at Old Trafford, United's home ground, on April 5.

Cech best Czech footballer

AFP, Prague

Chelsea goalkeeper Petr Cech was named best Czech footballer of 2008 here on Monday evening, following a poll of players, coaches, officials and journalists.

The 26-year-old international finished ahead of veteran Juventus midfielder Pavel Nedved, who won the European Footballer of the Year award in 2003, and Atletico Madrid defender Tomas Ujfalus.

The former Rennes keeper has won 65 caps for the Czech Republic since making his debut in 2002 and was also named best player in his country in 2005.

Karel Jarolim, coach of 2007-08 Czech champions Slavia Prague, was named coach of the year.

'Sacking Gareth won't help Boro'

AFP, London

Middlesbrough chairman Steve Gibson has said sacking manager Gareth Southgate won't be the cure-all in the north-east club's battle to avoid relegation from the lucrative English Premier League.

Fans have started to question whether former Middlesbrough and England centre-back Southgate, who at 38 is the youngest manager in English football's top-flight, is the right man to help their side avoid the drop.

Boro are currently second-bottom in the table and four points adrift of safety but Gibson told the club's official website on Tuesday: "I have spoken with a lot of fans over the last few weeks and they ask me about Gareth Southgate."

"But the magic wand in our situation isn't sacking Gareth Southgate."

"Of course, everybody has their opinion in football and I understand the frustration of the fans."

"I have always said that we have a knowledgeable crowd at Middlesbrough and you have to respect that."

Pressure on MU: Riera

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool winger Albert Riera believes the pressure is getting to Manchester United now the Anfield club have turned what seemed like a procession for the English Premier League title into a true race.

Riera scored his fifth goal of the season in a 5-0 thrashing of Aston Villa on Sunday which, combined with United's shock defeat against Fulham, saw the Merseysiders close to within a point of the leaders and reigning champions.

Liverpool's victory came hot on the heels of their win at Old Trafford, United's home

ground, and Riera said Sir Alex Ferguson's team, bidding to win an unprecedented five major trophies in the one season, now knew they would have to fight hard to retain their English title.

"After the game against United last week when we won at Old Trafford (4-1 to Liverpool), we showed them that we are still fighting and that we will be until the very end," Riera said Monday.

"Now after winning against Villa and with United losing (at Fulham) I think that they can feel us near to them."

"There are a lot of matches to be played in the Premier League and the Champions League and there will be a lot of pressure and I believe that they can feel this," he added.

Riera, reflecting on the

Villa match, said: "It was a great performance from everybody in the team and the most important thing is that we had to win, and we did."

Meanwhile Riera himself won praise for his display against Villa from Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez, his fellow Spaniard.

"Riera has had his up-and-down moments since joining the club, but his form has improved," Benitez said. "He is now showing the consistency you need to perform in the Premier League."

He is starting to show the form I knew he had when we bought him to the club," added Benitez, who signed Riera for eight million pounds from Spanish club Espanyol in September.

Moratti doesn't want Ibra to leave

Football

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan president Massimo Moratti tried to dampen down speculation that striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic might leave at season's end by saying he couldn't imagine the club without the Swedish star.

Ibrahimovic scored two goals in Inter's 3-0 win over Reggina on Sunday, taking his personal goals tally for the season to 19, as the Milan club moved seven points clear at the top of Serie A.

After his star performance, Ibrahimovic, who signed for Inter from Juventus in 2006, hinted that he may be considering a future away from the San Siro.

"I'm totally focused on winning the title but as for next season, we'll see," he said. "I'm very happy to be at Inter but next year we'll see."

But Moratti said Monday: "I can't imagine Inter without Ibrahimovic."

"But if that were to happen, it would not stop the club from carrying on."

According to the Italian press, Ibrahimovic could be targeting a club which has more success in Europe. Inter have been eliminated in the last-16 stage of the Champions League three times in the last three seasons.

"And if Ibrahimovic leaves, and we win the Champions League? In life, we change and

then afterwards we regret it," said Moratti.

"He was only upset as I was after (elimination at the hands of) Manchester United (earlier this month). He has ambition but it's not as easy as that to pick a team that, in one fell blow, can win the Champions League."

"In any case, it's not a question of money or a problem of understanding with the team," Moratti added.

Inter coach Jose Mourinho added: "Like all of us, he's very disappointed about the Champions League elimination, but he has replied on the pitch, transforming his frustration into good performances."

"I'm not worried. (Being top of) the scorers list is an extra motivation for him and who knows if it will help him win the Silver Ball, seeing as the Golden one will go to Cristiano Ronaldo or Messi if they keep doing well in the Champions League."

Asked if convincing a player to stay had ever happened to him before, Mourinho said: "Yes, with Deco. He wanted to leave Porto after the UEFA Cup victory but he stayed and we won the Champions League the following season. So he left Porto with an even better CV."

Immediately after Ibrahimovic's comments on Sunday, Mourinho reacted by suggesting that the Milan club would survive without the Swede.

"Ibrahimovic is a great

player but no player is bigger than a club. He has become very important to Inter but certain clubs are bigger than any player or coach," said the former Chelsea coach.

Bayern hunt McGeady

SOCCERNET

Republic of Ireland boss Giovanni Trapattoni has revealed that Bayern Munich are tracking Celtic winger Aiden McGeady.

The 22-year-old, who came through the youth ranks at Parkhead, has admitted an interest in experiencing life outside Glasgow at some point in his career and he may get the chance with the Bundesliga giants in the summer.

Trapattoni, McGeady's national manager, revealed that Bayern boss Jurgen Klinsmann, whom he coached at both Inter Milan and Bayern, is keeping tabs on the Glasgow-born player.

"I met my old Bayern assistant in Germany recently and he asked me what I think about McGeady because they are following him," Trapattoni told the Scottish Sun.

"They wanted my opinion and I said McGeady is one of our most important players. With more confidence, he has the possibility to improve even further."



Italy defenders Fabio Cannavaro (L) and Gianluca Zambrotta (R) warm up with teammates during a training session at the National Technical Centre in Florence on Tuesday.