

Perez employs Zidane

Football

AFP, Madrid

Florentino Perez, the inspiration behind the Real Madrid 'Galacticos', launched his second term as president Monday by naming France legend Zinedine Zidane as his advisor.

Just hours after the being sworn in, the club also announced former Argentine striker and coach Jorge Valdano as its director general.

In a speech on taking office Monday, the 62-year-old Perez vowed to build "the best club of the 21st century."

"We will devote all our effort to building a spectacular team with great players who are role models on and off the pitch. A club where ethics are indelible and where solidarity will be a basic cornerstone of behaviour," he said.

The construction magnate is retaking the reins of Real, Spain's historically most successful team and the world's richest football club by revenues, for the next four years after standing unopposed in elections for president.

Real had been led on an interim basis by Vicente

Boluda after Ramon Calderon stepped down in January following allegations that he rigged voting at the club's last annual general assembly in December.

Perez led Real from 2000 to 2006, when it earned the nickname "Los Galacticos".



ZIDANE

winning the Primera Liga twice and European Champions League with such stars as Zidane, Ronaldo, Luis Figo, David Beckham and Michael Owen.

Zidane's transfer from Juventus in 2000 cost Real a world record 75 million euros.

Perez had promised to give both Zidane and Valdano senior positions at Real if his comeback bid was successful.

Valdano had acted as Real's sports director during his last

term in office.

He has not mentioned any names regarding top signings but Spanish media speculate that Manchester United's Portuguese winger Cristiano Ronaldo, Liverpool's Spanish star Xabi Alonso and AC Milan's Brazilian playmaker Kaka are all his sights for next season.

"We must recover the dreams, stability and lost time," said Perez. "The road ahead will be difficult, but we have the passion and necessary ideas to overcome the great challenges of this complicated time."

Perez had quit Real in 2006 after the club went a third straight season without a trophy, its worst run in more than half a century, but he has remained popular with supporters.

This season, the club's arch-rivals Barcelona won a unique treble of league, Spanish Cup and Champions League trophies under debutante coach Pep Guardiola.

Real finished second in La Liga and exited the first knockout stage of the Champions League for the fifth straight season.

It ended the season on Sunday with a 2-1 loss to lowly Osasuna.

Advocaat set for Belgium

AFP, Brussels

Zenit St-Petersburg coach Dick Advocaat is to be named Belgian national football coach local media reported on Monday.

The 61-year-old former Dutch national coach is to sign a two year contract with the Belgian Federation (URBSFA) and according to 'Le Soir' would take up the post in January 2010 just after his present contract with Zenit finishes.

Francois de Keersmaecker, president of the (URBSFA), told the website of Flemish television channel 'Sporza' the only thing missing was Advocaat's signature but as far as he was concerned negotiations had come to a successful conclusion.

Advocaat, who guided Zenit to the 2008 UEFA Cup trophy, had told the Russian media earlier on Monday that he was going to sign an initial two year contract with the option of an extra two years.

Rene Vandereycken was sacked as coach of Belgium at the beginning of April after three years in the role.

Belgium are currently fourth in World Cup qualifying group five and stand little chance of qualifying for next summer's tournament in South Africa.

They also failed to qualify for the 2008 European Championship.

Barry in Man City talks

INTERNET, undated

England midfielder Gareth Barry is in talks with Manchester City over a move from Aston Villa.

In a short statement on their website, Villa said that their captain was discussing terms with City, indicating that a bid had been accepted.

The 28-year-old, who has one year left on his contract, could command a fee of around £20 million.

Barry came close to joining Liverpool last summer but stayed put after Villa's valuation of the player was not met.

He was stripped of the captaincy after repeatedly stating his desire to leave Villa Park and play for a club in the Champions League. City have not qualified for Europe next season.

Barry regained the armband after Martin Laursen suffered a knee injury that eventually forced his early retirement, and has established himself as a regular in Fabio Capello's England side.

He has played 440 times for Villa in 12 seasons, scoring 52 goals.

Sunderland to appoint Bruce

AFP, Sunderland

Sunderland were close to announcing Steve Bruce as their new manager on Tuesday following talks between the club and the former Manchester United defender on the terms of his appointment.

Bruce is understood to want to bring key members of his backroom team at Wigan, led by assistant manager Eric Black, to the Stadium of Light.

That could trigger a request for increased compensation from Wigan, who agreed a fee for releasing Bruce from his contract at the Lancashire club on Monday.

Bruce is expected to be given substantial funds to strengthen Sunderland's squad this summer following American businessman Ellis Short's acquisition of a controlling interest in the club.

Sunderland are targeting a top 10 finish next season after avoiding relegation on the final day of the just-finished campaign.

Ricky Sbragia stepped down as manager immediately after the final match, admitting that the club needed a bigger name to galvanise an under-performing squad.

Sbragia has been promised a continuing role at the club, which could complicate negotiations on the make-up of Bruce's coaching staff.



PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid's new coach Manuel Pellegrini listens during a press conference at the Santiago Bernabeu on Tuesday.

Real hire Pellegrini

Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's new coach Manuel Pellegrini will be under pressure to achieve some early success for new president Florentino Perez, who has vowed to build the "best club of the 21st century."

The Chilean, 55, a qualified civil engineer, replaced Juande Ramos on Monday as Real's seventh manager in the past decade.

He was named on the day that Perez, the inspiration behind the 'Galacticos', began his second term in charge of Real, one of the world's most successful clubs but which finished last season without silverware and amid a cloud of corruption involving its former president, Ramon Calderon.

Pellegrini arrives in the Spanish capital after five years at Villarreal, during which time he maintained the small club in the top flight of the Primera Liga.

In his first season there, Villarreal finished third in La Liga and achieved their first direct qualification for the European Champions League going on to the semi-finals before losing narrowly to Arsenal.

Last year, the club, based in a town of just 48,000 inhabitants, achieved its best ever season, finishing as runner-up to Real Madrid.

The Champions League will be the main objective next season for Pellegrini and Real, whose last European title was in 2002.

That was during the first term of Perez, from 2000 to 2006, when Real team earned the nickname "Los Galacticos", winning the Primera Liga twice as well as the European Champions League with such stars as Zinedine Zidane, Ronaldo, Luis Figo, David Beckham and Michael Owen.

Perez has not mentioned any names regarding top signings but Spanish media speculate that Manchester United's Portuguese winger Cristiano Ronaldo and Liverpool's Spanish star Xabi Alonso are both in his sights for next season.

Known for his attention to detail and careful planning, those around Pellegrini, a father of three, describe him as intelligent, religious and reserved.

"He takes care that the players are happy and relaxed so that they can perform well," said Mario Lepe, the captain of Chile's Catholic University team, which

Pellegrini coached from 1994 to 1996.

In presenting Pellegrini to the press Tuesday, Perez described him as "an intelligent professional, a worker, well-balanced... who always tries for elegant and tasteful football."

The fifth of eight brothers, Pellegrini played almost his entire career with the Deportivo Universidad Catolica, one of Chile's most successful clubs, from 1973 to 1986.

Success as a manager with LDU Quito in Ecuador (1999-2000) and in Argentina with San Lorenzo (2000-2002) and River Plate (2002-2003) brought him to the attention of Villarreal.

The Spanish press said he is a personal gamble for Real's new director general Jorge Valdano, also named on Monday.

At Villarreal, he was under little pressure from fans or the press. But that will be quite different at Real, especially with Perez hungry to "return Real Madrid to its rightful place."

"I feel emotion and pride to be chosen to lead the most important club in the world," Pellegrini said Tuesday.

"When I started my career 23 years ago I said that I would end it by leading Real Madrid. Now that I have accomplished that, I can say that it is a dream."

Aguero vows to stay

Football

AFP, Madrid

Atletico Madrid's gifted Argentine striker Sergio Aguero has vowed to stay at the club after they secured Champions League football, but urged the paymasters to spend some of the financial windfall to help Atletico compete for honours next season.

"I am at Atletico at the moment and, as I have said, I want to continue but fighting for titles," explained Aguero.

"Diego (Forlan, his strike partner) has been here two years and I have been here three. We have been in the UEFA Cup and the Champions League."

"Now is the time for reinforcements to arrive and contribute a lot to this team. We have to think about winning some sort of trophy. We have to start fighting for the league title at some stage."

Atletico have not won a major trophy in over two decades, with their last success back in 1996 when they won the league and King's Cup double.

In recent seasons the club have splashed the cash to try and get back into the big-time, paying 23 million euros for Aguero, 21 million euros for Forlan and 20 million euros for Portuguese winger Simao.

Hanging onto former Manchester United man Forlan and Aguero, who scored 17 goals this season, is the first challenge, with the vultures ready to pounce.

Aguero, still only 20, has long been linked with a move away from the Spanish capital and admitted his Argentina national coach Diego Maradona - who is also his father-in-law - had said he would thrive at Italian champions Inter Milan.

"Maradona says I would make a great partner for



PHOTO: AFP

Uruguay striker Diego Forlan who plays for Atletico Madrid passes the ball during a training session in Montevideo on Monday. Uruguay will face Brazil next in a World Cup qualifier on Saturday.

(Zlatan) Ibrahimovic," said Aguero. "People are saying I am leaving for Inter but I have not had any offers and I want to stay here at Atletico."

Forlan, 30, has also pledged his future to the club with his 32-goal haul - making him the top scorer in Spain - attracting attention from abroad.

"I feel fine here and I have always said that," said Forlan.

Atletico have already signed 19-year-old goalkeeper Sergio Asenjo from Valladolid for a reported fee of 4.5 million euros and a busy summer is expected.

Who the coach will be is anyone's guess with Abel

Resino, regarded as a stop-gap when he took over from Javier Aguirre, doing his chances no harm by guiding Atletico into the Champions League.

"As of Monday we will hold talks to see if I continue here or not," said Resino.

"What I have done is clear to see. When I arrived we were far from our objective (the Champions League) but step by step we worked towards our goal and deserve our reward."

If Resino isn't kept on Atletico may opt for a bigger name with Real Madrid's outgoing coach Juande Ramos one name in the frame.

Terry backs Ancelotti

AFP, London



Chelsea captain John Terry admits Carlo Ancelotti's first job at Stamford Bridge is to ensure the Blues are serious challengers for the Premier League title.

Ancelotti signed a three-year contract worth 6.5 million pounds a year on Monday to succeed Guus Hiddink as manager of the west London club.

The Italian was targeted by Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich because of his impressive pedigree in the Champions League. Ancelotti reached the final three times with AC Milan, winning twice, and also won the competition twice as a Milan player.

But England defender Terry is more concerned with Chelsea's league form after his side finished outside the top

two for the first time since Abramovich bought the club in 2003.

After Guus Hiddink left Chelsea with an FA Cup triumph to celebrate on Saturday, Ancelotti will take over a squad confident they can end Manchester United's three-year reign as champions.

Terry, who believes Chelsea should settle for nothing less than a sustained run at the title, hopes Ancelotti is the man to bring the title back to the Bridge.

In an open letter to Chelsea fans, Terry wrote: "He (Hiddink) came at a difficult time when things looked like they were slipping away from us, so to lead us to an FA Cup final and within a whisker of the Champions League final is a great achievement."

"That said, third place in the league isn't good enough for Chelsea anymore. It's our worst finish since Mr Abramovich bought the club

and we all know we need to do better."

"It is fantastic to win the FA Cup but we want more and that's the way it needs to be for us these days."

"We will all enjoy the time we have off now and come back for pre-season as determined as ever and of course looking forward to achieving great things with the new manager Carlo Ancelotti."

With spells at Milan and Juventus on his CV, Ancelotti has experience of the pressure to deliver success at the highest level.

But, although he survived in the San Siro for eight years, Ancelotti only won the Serie A title once with Milan.

He will also take over an ageing squad that Hiddink claimed needed an infusion of fresh blood to keep pace with United.

Inevitably Ancelotti has already been linked with a host of big-money transfers.

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Barca's new dream team

Football

AFP, Madrid

The 2008/09 season will live long in the memories of Barcelona fans as Pep Guardiola guided the club to a unique league, Kings Cup and Champions League treble in his debut season.

Barcelona had gone two years without a trophy but swept all before them to seal a historic treble that no Spanish team, not even the great Real Madrid, had previously managed.

With Spain's Euro 2008 heroes Xavi and Andres Iniesta feeding the striking trio of Lionel Messi, Samuel Eto'o and Thierry Henry, Barcelona destroyed teams at home and abroad with a scintillating brand of football that harped back to Johan Cruyff's 'Dream team'.

Every Barca side since has been measured against Cruyff's great side, captained by Guardiola, that won four successive league titles between 1991 and 1994 along with the 1992 European Cup.

However, Guardiola wrote his own history by guiding Barcelona to the treble, leaving Real Madrid and Manchester

United in their wake.

"We have demonstrated that we are the best," said Messi. "I'm also happy because everyone seems to enjoy our football, whether or not they are Barca fans."

"All over the world, I've heard people saying that they have been enchanted by us. This type of football deserves to be rewarded with titles."

"I think it will be very difficult for something like this (the treble) to be repeated."

Real Madrid were humiliated 6-2 by Barcelona at their Santiago Bernabeu and the result summed up a nightmare season.

Starting off as double champions Real had high hopes of a third successive title and having an impact on Europe but from the get-go they were clinging to Barcelona's coattails.

Bernd Schuster, moaning about referees and injuries, was axed in December and Juande Ramos came in with the task of freeing the leaders.

Ramos helped claw Real back into the title race but when it mattered most his team were outplayed with Barca running rings around them in that 6-2 win and they were hopelessly outclassed by Liverpool in the last 16 of the

Champions League, losing 5-0 on aggregate.

With Barcelona playing sensational free flowing football, Real's jeering fans wanted the same but instead they got a pragmatic approach.

Even Real's players didn't like what was on show with French winger Julien Faubert, on loan from West Ham, pictured sleeping on their 3-2 defeat by Villarreal.

From an early stage it was clear that it would be a two-horse race with the other big sides competing for the Champions League.

Sevilla's approach, specialising in 1-0 wins, won points if few plaudits for coach Manolo Jimenez who guided the club into the top four and secured Champions League qualification to earn a new contract extension.

Atletico Madrid had another inconsistent season with their defence a shambles but their prolific forward line of Sergio 'Kun' Aguero and Diego Forlan bailed them out, firing the club into fourth and a second successive season in the Champions League.

Forlan took the 'pichichi' crown for the league's top-scorer with 32 goals after netting in the final eight games of the season.

Valencia and Villarreal both had chances to make fourth their own but paid the price for poor run-ins and had to settle for a place in the Europa League, the re-branded UEFA Cup.

Valencia must now try to persuade Spanish stars David Silva and David Silva, both bound by long contracts, to stay at the club and forego another season in the Champions League.

At the bottom of the table, Espanyol produced a minor miracle to stay up winning eight of their final ten games to climb off the foot of the table and survive when everyone had written them off.

Numancia and Recreativo Huelva were relegated from the top-flight along with Real Betis who dropped into the second division on the final day of the season as Osasuna and Sporting Gijon both won to save their skins.

Dzeko best in Germany

AFP, Berlin

Wolfsburg striker Edin Dzeko has been named Germany's footballer of the year, the magazine Kicker reported on Tuesday.

Dzeko, the second top goalscorer in the Bundesliga with 26 goals, was voted to the title by his fellow players in the league, the magazine said.

The 23-year-old Bosnian international has been with Bundesliga champions Wolfsburg for two years and has recently been the focus of interest from clubs elsewhere in Europe including AC Milan and Arsenal.

Fellow Wolfsburg player, the Brazilian, Grafite, came second in the professional poll. Grafite was top-scorer in the Bundesliga this season with 28 goals.

Another Brazilian, Diego, who played with Bremen last season before announcing a move last month to Juventus in Italy, was third.

In fourth place was Mario Gomez of Stuttgart, ahead of another Wolfsburg player, Zvezdan Misimovic.

The 264 professionals who took part in the vote also chose Hanover's Robert Enke as best goalkeeper.

The title of best club manager was won by Felix Magath of Wolfsburg.

Daum to replace Aragones

AFP, Istanbul

Turkish side Fenerbahce are to dismiss their Spanish coach Luis Aragones and replace him with German Christoph Daum, press reports said on Tuesday.

Aragones, who joined the Istanbul side last year after leading his country to the Euro 2008 title in Vienna, has had a disappointing season with Fenerbahce finishing only fourth in the first division.

Daum is no stranger to Turkish football having already been in charge of Fenerbahce from 2003 to 2007 during which time they won two league titles.



PHOTO: AFP

Portugal star Cristiano Ronaldo (R) kicks the ball during a training session in Praia d'El Rey on Monday.