

'Juve worries Jose'

AFP, Rome



Juventus coach Ciro Ferrara believes Inter Milan counterpart Jose Mourinho is worried ahead of the new Serie A season, which kicked-off on Saturday.

In his pre-match press conference ahead of Sunday's visit of minnows Chievo, Ferrara said a recent spat between Mourinho and Italy coach Marcello Lippi proved the former Chelsea boss is feeling the pressure.

Lippi predicted that Juve would lift their first title since 2003 this season, after which Mourinho accused the former Juve and Inter boss of lacking respect.

"Last year when Lippi tipped Inter, no-one said anything. This time I was surprised by his prediction about Juventus and Mourinho's reaction," said Ferrara.

"It was just a prediction and for sure he's put a little more pressure on me.

"But Mourinho's reaction has convinced me even more that we are stronger this year. Even the Inter coach is thinking about us."

Ferrara is a virtual novice having taken over

the Juve hot-seat -- his first coaching job -- for the last two matches of the previous campaign.

But despite his inexperience, the general consensus of opinion is that Juve will be a tougher proposition this season having signed Fabio Cannavaro, Diego and Felipe Melo.

And the young coach knows he has a responsibility to bring the glory days back to Juventus, who have won no major trophies since being relegated to Serie B in 2006 for match-fixing.

"We have to start winning again. Expectations around us are sky high and that's how it should be," said Ferrara.

"We finished second last season and we've strengthened. Now I'm going to have to manage the enthusiasm surrounding this club."

Having finished third two years ago and runners-up last season, Ferrara knows his team need to get off to a good start this season if they are to go one better.

They won only two out of their first seven matches last season, meaning they were playing catch-up from the word go.

And they cannot afford to slip up early on against lesser lights like they did last term, drawing this corresponding fixture 3-3.

"We can't afford to mess up in our first home match."



Spanish star Rafael Nadal plays a backhand against Tomas Berdych of the Czech Republic during the Western & Southern Financial Group Masters in Cincinnati on Friday. PHOTO: AFP

Carlo learned a lot

AFP, London



Carlo Ancelotti admits he has learned a lot about English

football during the first few days of the Premier League campaign.

While Ancelotti's Chelsea side have claimed two victories -- a fortunate opening day win against Hull City and a more convincing triumph at Sunderland -- two of their main rivals have stumbled.

The most spectacular of those falls was Manchester United's shock defeat to Burnley and with only two games gone, Chelsea already enjoy a three-point advantage over United and Liverpool.

The Chelsea manager is wise enough to know that a three-point lead counts for nothing at this stage of the season, but will count for an awful lot nine months down the line.

And with a challenging trip to near neighbours Fulham next up on Sunday, Ancelotti acknowledges that it is vitally important his side maintain their steadiness.

"It's normal that you see different results at the start of the season because some

teams are not in the best condition," said the former AC Milan coach.

"So maybe unbelievable results can happen and Burnley's result against Manchester United was an unbelievable result.

"I've learned already in my first matches that every game is difficult. You feel the push of the fans away from home and every game has a very good atmosphere.

"The season is very, very long and what's happened to other teams can happen to us. But I'm not thinking of others' problems, I'm thinking of our own work. And to be top of the table is not bad.

"It's better to be trying to stay at the top of the table, and not be further down trying to get up."

Ancelotti has quickly shown he intends to rotate his squad around and has already employed different formations against Hull and Sunderland.

Having come across Roy Hodgson when the Fulham manager was working in Italy in charge at Inter Milan over a decade ago, the Chelsea coach expects to face well-organised opponents capable of ending the Blues' winning start.

"In Italy Roy has a very good reputation. I know him

because when he was coach of Switzerland I went to watch him coach for a week. I know Fulham will present a more difficult test than Sunderland but we are playing well at the moment and we want to continue in that way.

"Ancelotti will be without central defender Alex who has a groin problem while Russian midfielder Yuri Zhirkov is still struggling with a knee problem.

Hodgson's injury problems are more serious with striker Andrew Johnson having damaged his shoulder in the 3-1 Europa League victory of Amkar Perm of Russia.

Hodgson could at least draw comfort from the fact that Johnson's injury is not as bad as first feared, and now faces a decision over who should partner Bobby Zamora up front.

Norway international Erik Nevland could start if he proves his fitness although US star Clint Dempsey could also be pushed forward from his usual position on the flanks.

Hodgson will hand a first league start to Damien Duff who will have the added incentive of facing his former club.

Duff had three seasons at Stamford Bridge, helping the club to win two titles before switching to Newcastle in 2006.

Argentina recall Coloccini

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentina coach Diego Maradona named 19 overseas players on Friday for next month's World Cup qualifiers against Brazil and Paraguay.

Maradona is expected to add to the squad on Aug. 30, naming players from the Argentine league, which has just begun a delayed season.

Argentina squad for the World Cup qualifiers against Brazil on September 5 and Paraguay on September 9:

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Juan Pablo Carrizo (Real Zaragoza/Spain), Mariano Andujar (Catania/ITA), Sergio Romero (AZ Alkmaar/NED).

Defenders: Javier Zanetti (Inter Milan/ITA), Nicolas Burdisso (Inter Milan/ITA), Nicolas Pareja (Espanyol/ESP), Fabricio Coloccini (Newcastle/ENG), Gabriel Heinze (Marseille/FRA).

Midfielders: Fernando Gago (Real Madrid/ESP), Javier Mascherano (Liverpool/ENG), Maxi Rodriguez (Atletico Madrid/ESP), Jesus Datolo (Napoli/ITA), Jonas Gutierrez (Newcastle/ENG).

Attackers: Carlos Tevez (Man City/ENG), Lionel Messi (Barcelona/ESP), Sergio Aguero (Atletico Madrid/ESP), Diego Milito (Inter Milan/ITA), Lisandro Lopez (Lyon/FRA), Ezequiel Lavezzi (Napoli/ITA).

Chamakh snubs Hammers

AFP, Bordeaux

Bordeaux's highly-rated Moroccan striker Marouane Chamakh has snubbed English Premier League suitors West Ham to stay with the French champions.

In an interview with regional television station France 3 Aquitaine, the 25-year-old said: "From a sporting point of view, I prefer to stay at Bordeaux than go to West Ham."

Chamakh admitted that he was still "in the process of mourning Arsenal" after the Premier League side targeted him at the beginning of August, but that he had been convinced to stay after talks with Bordeaux coach Laurent Blanc.

"Instead of joining another Premier League club, I'm going to opt for the very interesting year which Bordeaux is proposing on a sporting level," he said.

And he rubbished reports that he was planning a visit to London to meet West Ham bosses. "This is just nonsense. I was aware of the West Ham rumours recently but it wasn't a priority."

Big guns face off

Tennis

AFP, Cincinnati

Two-time winner Roger Federer and reigning champion Andy Murray lined up a top-two semifinal showdown at the Cincinnati Masters on Friday.

Federer, the world number one and top seed, never faced a break point as he dismissed former world number one Lleyton Hewitt of Australia 6-3, 6-4.

It was his 13th straight victory over Hewitt, and the 200th Masters series match win of Federer's career.

He fired 11 aces past the Aussie, a two-time Grand Slam winner who is still fighting to regain his top form after hip surgery last year.

Third-seeded Murray, who seized the world number two ranking en route to capturing the Montreal Masters last week, rallied to beat French lucky loser Julien Benneteau 4-6, 6-3, 6-1.

The fight eventually drained away from the 55th-ranked Frenchman after a marathon rally in game three of the second set -- which ended when a Benneteau overhead caught the tape and kicked wide.

"That unbelievable rally, 53 shots or something, that really changed the match for me," said Murray. "Physically he was struggling a little bit after that."

Murray added: "I served terrible in the first set -- six doubles. The ball was blowing all over the place."

"I was hitting the ball really clean from the back of the court but leaving a lot of balls short

so I ended up doing a lot of running, which wasn't really the plan going into the match."

Federer and Murray will meet for the ninth time, and the Scot is one of the few players who can boast a commanding head-to-head record against the mighty Swiss.

Federer beat Murray in the US Open final last year, but Murray has won all four of their meetings since, including two this year.

Federer said Murray's new No.2 status wouldn't make a difference, but Murray's growing pile of credits might.

"He's getting up there in the tournament count, and that makes it more exciting to play a player like him, especially him being on a run like he's on right now after winning in Montreal," Federer said. "It's definitely a good matchup."

Federer is vying to add to the Cincinnati titles he won in 2005 and 2007, while Murray is seeking a second straight after beating Serbia's Novak Djokovic in the final last year.

Rafael Nadal the world number three and second seed, beat unseeded Czech Tomas Berdych 6-4, 7-5 to set up a semifinal rematch with fourth-seeded Djokovic.

Djokovic, who ousted Nadal in last year's semis, beat ninth-seeded Frenchman Gilles Simon 6-4, 7-5.

"I'm improving every day a little bit more," said Nadal, who was sidelined for more than two months after the French Open with tendinitis in both knees.

"This was a very good win for me. When I arrived here, I didn't expect to be in (the semifinals). Being in the semifinal is perfect for me. It will make me more confident for the US Open."

IN BRIEF

Sneijder keen on Real stay

AFP, Madrid

Dutch midfielder Wesley Sneijder says he wants to stay at Real Madrid, which is seeking to offload him to Inter Milan, Spanish sports paper AS said Friday.

Reports from Italy and Spain have said Real and Inter have reached a deal to sell Sneijder to the Italian club for 15 million euros.

But the 25-year-old Dutch international is unwilling to leave, AS said on its website.

"Sneijder is a Real Madrid player and he wants to stay here," said his agent Soren Lerby, who was in Madrid Friday to meet with Real bosses, according to AS.

No room for Ramadan

AFP, Paris

Paris Saint Germain coach Antoine Kombouare has said he will not select any players for match days who decide to respect the holy Muslim observance of Ramadan.

"I have a very simple rule that I've used wherever I've coached: during the week I can accept it but on match days, it's forbidden," said Kombouare, a former French international who played at PSG.

"Whoever wants to respect Ramadan on match day can stay at home."

He added that allowing players who respect Ramadan, which began Friday, to play for the team could endanger their health and put their fellow teammates under extra pressure.

"I'm not going to start playing around with the players' health, or put extra pressure on the others," he added.

"When you don't eat the whole day it complicates things."

Veira staying at Inter

AFP, Paris

French international midfielder Patrick Vieira has ruled out a return to Arsenal saying he has decided to stay for another year in Italy with Inter Milan.

Former boss Arsene Wenger had expressed an interest in bringing the 33-year-old back to the Premier League and there had been interest also from Premier League arch-rivals Tottenham as well as, from Lyon and Paris St Germain in France after Vieira struggled to impress Inter coach Jose Mourinho.

But the player told L'Equipe sports daily that the Portuguese coach had changed his tune and made it clear that he still had a future with the Italian champions.

"Even if you never know what will happen tomorrow, I have decided to stay where I am," Vieira said.

Wenger slams Spanish

Football

AFP, London

Arsenal coach Arsene Wenger on Friday hit out at the "political" nature of Spanish clubs amid attempts by Barcelona to lure their former youth star Cesc Fabregas back to the Nou Camp.

Barcelona president Joan Laporta has a year to go under his current mandate and wants to bolster his chances of retaining his boardroom influence by getting Fabregas back six years after he headed for London as a 16-year-old.

Laporta's rival Sandro Rosell also sees the potential capture of Fabregas as a means of taking boardroom control, but Wenger says it's time the Spanish stopped using high-profile transfers as a means of conducting their internal political battles.

"It does not help football and does not help people to focus on their job and is sometimes destabilising. The way Spanish clubs are run is more political than sport orientated," Wenger opined.

"How much does that harm other clubs? It is difficult to measure, but it does not help other clubs when somebody who has, for example, no chance to be elected next year as president, can announce any name.

"What can you do against him? Nothing. Does that help other clubs? Certainly not."

With Arsenal having not won a trophy since their 2005 FA Cup win eyebrows have been raised in some quarters at Wenger's insistence that he does not brandish his chequebook after the manner of Real Madrid or Barcelona.

Following the sale to new English Premier League moneybags Manchester City of striker Emmanuel Adebayor and Kolo Toure, Arsenal had been expected to struggle to retain their top four status this term.

But they started off by thrashing Everton 6-1 away and are as good as in the Champions League group stage after a 2-0 win away to Celtic in the first leg of their play-off.

"I feel we have started well and we have shown some potential," Wenger noted of his side's good start.

"We are in a marathon here and it just started."

Arsenal's one new signing to date is defender Thomas Vermaelen in place of Toure and the Belgian international promptly scored at Everton and has looked solid.

"He is a player who has intelligence, physical strength and a good technical level.

"If you analyse him well you see that he has all the ingredients needed to be successful in the Premier League," said Wenger of Vermaelen.



Hoffenheim midfielder Carlos Eduardo (L) is slide-tackled by Schalke midfielder Mineiro during their Bundesliga tie in Sinsheim on Friday. The match ended in a 0-0 draw. PHOTO: AFP



Liverpool's new signing Greek international centre-half Sotirios Kyrgiakos (L) poses with manager Rafael Benitez at their training ground in Liverpool on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP

L'pool sign Kyrgiakos

Football

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool completed the signing of Greek international Sotirios Kyrgiakos on Friday in a deal which will help ease the early season defensive worries for coach Rafael Benitez.

The 30-year-old, who has 50 caps passed a medical to finalise his switch from AEK Athens and has signed a two-year deal.

He will go straight into the squad for Monday's Premier League tie against Aston Villa at Anfield where he is likely to

partner Jamie Carragher in the heart of defence, taking the place of teenager Daniel Ayala who made his full debut in Wednesday's 4-0 win over Stoke.

Benitez is already without two key defenders through injury.

Danish centre-back Daniel Agger will have an operation on his back in Germany on Tuesday, and will be out for six weeks.

Martin Skrtel is still struggling with a damaged jaw, sustained at Tottenham last weekend, and is not expected to be fit to face Villa.

The Liverpool boss said

Kyrgiakos will be an excellent signing.

"He is a tough defender who is strong and good in the air," said Benitez. "He has a strong character and we were looking for these things."

"He can score goals and will be a threat from corners and free-kicks. He is very strong in defence but he will need time as always to settle into the Premier League. He will be a very good signing for us."

"We knew the player when he was with Rangers and we've been watching videos of him at Frankfurt and the national team."