

# C'Ron wants Mourinho

Football

SOCCERNET

Cristiano Ronaldo has revealed he would be happy to see Inter Milan boss Jose Mourinho take charge of Real Madrid next season.

In 2007, while Mourinho was with Chelsea and Ronaldo with Manchester United, the duo had a public disagreement. After Mourinho complained that Chelsea did not receive as many penalties as United, Ronaldo hit back by saying:

"He always has to say something because he can't admit his failures."

Mourinho responded by saying Ronaldo - who had a poor background - lacked "maturity and respect" because of his "difficult childhood, no education".

Ronaldo was known to have been upset by the remarks and Sir Alex Ferguson said it was "really below the belt to bring class into it".

However, Ronaldo had since spoken positively of Mourinho and recent reports suggest Madrid are now considering bringing the Portuguese to the Bernabeu after a disappointing first season for Manuel Pellegrini.

Mourinho has indicated that he is unhappy in Italy following a series of disagreements with the press and rival managers, and Ronaldo has said he would be more than happy to work under his compatriot.

"He is a special coach," he said on Sky Sports News. "He has shown that he is one of the best in the world so maybe the people don't like him because he is top, his character, he is a special person."

"I know him very well. I like him a lot. I know his character - he is a winning guy. This is why the people don't like him. Madrid he'd change a lot - he'd buy new players, new coach."

Pellegrini now looks certain to leave after last week's defeat by Barcelona left the club three points adrift at the top of the Primera Division. Their Champions League campaign was ended by Lyon in the second round, while they were dumped out of the Copa del Rey by Alcorcon.

As a result, Ronaldo acknowledges that it will be very difficult for him to finish his first season in Madrid with silverware.

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Inter Milan fullback Maicon (C) scores the opening goal from a stunning volley during their Serie A encounter against Juventus at San Siro on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

# 'Sale is positive move'

AFP, Liverpool



Rafael Benitez believes the decision to put Liverpool up for sale is a positive step to help restore the club to its former glory.

Reds boss Benitez woke on his 50th birthday on Friday to hear confirmation that Liverpool's co-owners Tom Hicks and George Gillett were ready to sell up after a controversial three-year reign which has left the Liverpool outfit 237 million pounds (366 million dollars) in debt.

British Airways chairman Martin Broughton has been appointed as Liverpool's chairman with the remit of overseeing the sale with advice from Barclays Capital.

Benitez has yet to meet Broughton, but the Spaniard has long been critical of Liverpool's American owners for failing to give him enough support in the transfer market.

So it was hardly surprising he gave a cautious welcome to the news that new investment is on the way, while insisting he was more concerned with the fitness of his star

forward Fernando Torres than off-the-field matters.

"It seems the club is moving forward and so that is positive," Benitez said. "It is important for the club to move forward. It could be good news."

"It is positive he said he wants me to stay but I've not spoken to him yet so in our first meeting we can talk about everything."

"I am sure we will have a very good conversation about the present and the future but at the moment I am more concerned about things like Torres."

Broughton has said Liverpool's current disappointing campaign, which looks set to end with the failure to qualify for the Champions League, will have no effect on the value of the club and Benitez is adamant the future remains bright.

"The chairman can talk about investment and I can concentrate on the games we have left," Benitez added.

"My responsibility is to do the best for the team and on the pitch is where I can make a difference."

"Liverpool is a massive club with massive fans and the future is really good."

## IN BRIEF

### Perez honoured to host final

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid chairman Florentino Perez insisted Friday that he is honoured to host the Champions League final, even though his side will not be there and rivals Barcelona are on course for a second straight title.

"We will do everything we can to make this final a success," and to make Barcelona "feel at home," if they reach the final, he said Friday.

The Champions League final is scheduled for May 22 at Real's Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

### Glitches mar WC ticket sales

AFP, Johannesburg

FIFA's World Cup ticketing partner apologised to South Africans on Friday after computer glitches marred the first day of direct ticket sales, government media reported.

"We want to extend our apologies to the general public, who tried to obtain tickets, and we want to thank them for their patience and understanding," said Jaime Byrom of MATCH, FIFA's ticketing partner.

"We have already been able to identify the challenges," South Africa's government news agency BuaNews quoted him as saying.

Thousands of South Africans queued Thursday for the half a million over-the-counter tickets available, but the day was marred by problems with the computerised ticketing system and fan frustration.

In Pretoria, police and security officials used pepper spray on fans who were reportedly pushing in the queue.

# Inter's hard-fought win

AFP, Milan



Maicon scored a dazzling volley as Inter Milan went back to the top of the Serie A table with a hard-fought 2-0 victory over 10-man Juventus at the San Siro on Friday.

AS Roma can regain top spot on Sunday if they beat Lazio in the Rome derby.

The stuttering champions won for only the fourth time in 12 league matches but the first-half sending off of Mohamed Sissoko proved crucial as Juve finally wilted under the nerazzurri's second period onslaught.

Two goals in the final 15 minutes did for the visitors with Cameroon forward Samuel Eto'o tapping home an injury time second.

Juve coach Alberto Zaccheroni was incensed with the referee over Sissoko's dismissal.

"Sissoko's red card changed the match but tell me, what was his first yellow for? If the rules had been applied he would have got nothing," moaned Zaccheroni.

"We started the game well. We had prepared to not give anything away but then there was this incident."

"I never talk about referees but I'm in favour of common sense and a game of this magnitude shouldn't be influenced over something so trivial. Let the players

play as much as possible."

Sixth-placed Juve could now find themselves six points off a Champions League qualification position with four games to play if Sicilian club Palermo win at Sardinian outfit Cagliari on Sunday.

Juventus may have been the underdogs but they made the brighter start with Inter goalkeeper Julio Cesar forced into saves from Vincenzo Iaquinta and Alessandro Del Piero in the first two minutes.

And on four minutes Claudio Marchisio was given space outside the area to set his sights but fired over the bar.

Inter's first chance came on 12 minutes as Wesley Sneijder blazed a free-kick over before Thiago Motta tried from distance but Gianluigi Buffon plunged to his right to beat away the effort.

Inter looked destined to score on 26 minutes as Eto'o escaped down the left on the counter-attack but he cut inside on his right and Sissoko made a last ditch sliding tackle to block.

The Mali midfielder then got in the thick of things for all the wrong reasons. First he was booked for a pushing match with Thiago Motta and then on 37 minutes he received his marching orders following a second yellow for a rash challenge on Javier Zanetti.

After a pretty dire first half Eto'o had a great opportunity to open the scoring early in the second but after he'd bundled past Fabio Cannavaro, the ball took a

nasty bobble and he ballooned his shot high over the bar.

Maicon then robbed Fabio Grosso in the box and crossed for Diego Milito but Inter's top scorer flicked his shot from inside the six-yard box wide of the far post.

Inter were dominant against the 10 men but Juve almost sprung a surprise as Cannavaro met Diego's corner eight yards out only to direct his header straight at Julio Cesar before up the other end Walter Samuel headed wide from similar range.

Milito then headed wide from barely a yard out after Mario Balotelli had flicked on Sneijder's corner as the champions pushed ever closer to the opener.

And the goal duly arrived a quarter of an hour before the end as Maicon juggled the ball past a weak Amauri challenge on the edge of the box and slammed a stunning volley past a helpless Buffon.

Balotelli was a lick of paint away from adding a second as he thumped a free-kick onto the bar 10 minutes from time.

Juve did have a late chance to salvage something when Giorgio Chiellini came up from the back to earn a free-kick just outside the box but Julio Cesar saved Diego's curler.

In injury time Ghana midfielder Muntari Sulley crossed for the unmarked Eto'o to stroke home into an empty net from six yards.

# Race all but over

AFP, Wigan



With Arsenal's chances of winning the Premier League now more theoretical than realistic, Arsene Wenger's thoughts have been drawn to next season as well as Sunday's trip to Wigan.

Wenger's side are six points behind leaders Chelsea with just four games to play and the Arsenal manager all but conceded the race is over for his club after Wednesday's 2-1 defeat Tottenham.

The Frenchman knows he must make several signings if the Gunners are to mount a more convincing challenge to Chelsea and Manchester United next term, while he will also have to fight off any attempts to lure captain Cesc Fabregas away from the Emirates Stadium.

Once again the Spain midfielder has been linked with a return to Barcelona and Wenger is adamant not only that it would not be allowed to happen but that it would be a mistake for the player to want it himself.

"I cannot see anybody who has a competi-

tive edge going to Spain," Wenger said. "They have two good teams, I confess that but the number three team is 24 points behind. This weekend the players planned to go on strike because they are not paid."

"It is a league that is in complete disarray. If you are really competitive, you stay in England. That is where the competition is and that is where the best players want to be. I have so many calls from Spanish players who want to join us and want to come here."

"We want to keep this team together and improve from season to season. I believe we have made a big step forward considering last season and we want to do that again next season."

Wenger must also decide whether to hand a start to Robin van Persie at the DW Stadium after he returned to action on Wednesday for the first time since suffering an ankle injury in November.

The Dutch forward impressed on coming off the bench in the defeat at Tottenham, a result that all but ended the Gunners' title hopes at a time when Thomas Vermaelen, Alex Song and Andrey Arshavin are all out injured.

# Vettel seizes China pole

AFP, Shanghai



Sebastian Vettel underlined the strength of his world championship bid with another stunning performance on Saturday, outpacing his rivals to grab pole position for the Chinese Grand Prix.

A flawless and brilliant lap in the final seconds of an absorbing and closely contested session enabled the 22-year-old German wunderkind to beat his Red Bull team-mate Australian Mark Webber into second place.

It brought Vettel's third pole in four races this year, the Red Bull team's third straight front row lockout and fourth straight pole and the eighth pole of his career.

"Yeah baby!" he screamed from his cockpit on the team radio after his pole lap in the car he has nicknamed "Luscious Liz". "Wow."

His Red Bull team chief Christian Horner congratulated him on his perfect drive and asked: "Who needs ride height controls?"

This was a tongue-in-cheek reference to unfounded speculation that the dominant Red Bull team may have held a technical advantage over their rivals in the early rounds of this year's 19-race title race.

Horne added: "What a lap by Seb! He has struggled a bit this weekend and then that. I have no idea where that lap came from!"

Webber had snatched the fastest lap time with barely a minute remaining when, in a final flurry of activity, both McLaren drivers made bids to take pole, but failed before Vettel took over.

Vettel, who won the Malaysian Grand Prix two weeks ago to move to third in the world championship standings, was understandably delighted with his efforts.

"It was tough. I was not so happy yes-

terday and this morning especially when Mark was quite a bit quicker than me. We did some changes and went a little bit in Mark's direction but it was extremely difficult."

"We are proving we have a very good car independent of the circuit type. We are always up there. Special thanks to the mechanics because they had zero lunch as we required a lot of changes that they had to work from free practice to qualifying," he added. This all left the Red Bulls on the front row ahead of two-times champion Spaniard Fernando Alonso for Ferrari, German Nico Rosberg in the leading Mercedes, defending world champion Briton Jenson Button and his McLaren

team-mate Lewis Hamilton, the 2008 champion.

Hamilton, who had been fastest for much of the weekend in practice, was disappointed and baffled by his slip to sixth.

He said: "We were doing so well in practice, Q1 and Q2, and then the car started bottoming a lot more in Q3. I really don't understand what was wrong with the car. We have to go and analyse it. But the race will be different."

Button was equally frustrated despite out-qualifying his team-mate.

"I struggled with just getting a whole lap. I couldn't get a whole lap with the tyres -- they were either not warm enough at the start of the lap or they were overheating at the end," Button told reporters.

Alonso was satisfied to take third for the third time in four races.

"I think once again this is the maximum of our potential in qualifying. We know the race pace is a little bit better for us and we feel a bit more comfortable with more fuel in the car -- and more longer runs," he said.

He added: "Tomorrow's race will be determined by the weather. When it rains, if it is wet all race then maybe the first car can lead until the end, but in those races you can make a good choice or a bad choice and lose 10 seconds per lap. It is nice to watch on television, but very risky for us."

Brazilian Felipe Massa, leading the world championship, was seventh in the second Ferrari, Pole Robert Kubica eighth for Renault, German Michael Schumacher ninth for Mercedes and German Adrian Sutil 10th for Force India.

Seven-times champion Schumacher, 41, making his comeback after a three-year break, looked relaxed despite being comprehensively out-paced again. "It was very tricky out there and I just couldn't find the right balance for the car," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

Sebastian Vettel of Germany drives his Red Bull-Renault car during the final qualifying session for the Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai on Saturday.