

Raymond trims squad

AFP, Paris

France coach Raymond Domenech on Monday announced his World Cup squad from which only one player, likely to be a defender, will be omitted in the coming days.

A 24-man squad, whittled down from a list of 30 revealed last week, will next week take part in a three-day training camp at altitude in the French ski resort of Tignes.

Domenech is scheduled to announce his definitive 23-man squad on May 27, prior to their departure for a second training camp in Tunisia.

Among the most notable absentees from the 24-man squad are Marseille striker Hatem Ben Arfa and Lille goalkeeper Mickael Landreau.

Defenders Adil Rami and Rod Fanni, midfielder Yann Mvila and striker Jimmy Briand were also among the six players stripped from the 30-man squad.

Among those retained were Marseille midfielder Mathieu Valbuena, Bordeaux defender

Marc Planus and Bordeaux 'keeper Cedric Carrasso.

Valbuena, known for his workmanlike qualities and diminutive size -- he stands only 1.63m tall -- was called up

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Hugo Lloris (Lyon), Steve Mandanda (Marseille), Cedric Carrasso (Bordeaux)

Defenders: William Gallas (Arsenal/ENG), Eric Abidal (Barcelona/ESP), Bakary Sagna (Arsenal/ENG), Patrice Evra (Manchester United/ENG), Gael Clanchy (Arsenal/ENG), Marc Planus (Bordeaux), Anthony Reveliere (Lyon), Sebastien Squillaci (Sevilla/ESP)

Midfielders: Abou Diaby (Arsenal/ENG), Alou Diarra (Bordeaux), Lassana Diarra (Real Madrid/ESP), Yoann Gourcuff (Bordeaux), Florent Malouda (Chelsea/ENG), Jeremy Toulalan (Lyon)

Strikers: Nicolas Anelka (Chelsea/ENG), Djibril Cisse (Panathinaikos/GRE), Andre-Pierre Gignac (Toulouse), Sidney Govou (Lyon), Thierry Henry (Barcelona/ESP), Franck Ribery (Bayern Munich/GER), Mathieu Valbuena (Marseille)

for the first time in March 2008 before being sidelined by injury.

His achievement this time is all the more notable as he began the French league season mostly warming the Marseille substitutes bench.

The absence of Rami and the inclusion of only four central defenders suggests Domenech may call upon defensive midfielder Jeremy Toulalan to drop back a notch if needed.

If that is Domenech's long-term strategy Bordeaux defender Planus could become the 24th man and miss out on the trip to South Africa where each team has a maximum squad of 23.

Landreau meanwhile misses out for the second major tournament in a row, having been among the seven squad players dropped prior to the start of the Euro 2008.

Carrasso now officially replaces Landreau as France's third choice goalkeeper after Lyon stopper Hugo Lloris and Marseille 'keeper Steve Mandanda.

France, who lost to Italy in the 2006 World Cup final, are in group A with hosts South Africa, Mexico and Uruguay.



Inter Milan players celebrate their fifth successive Serie A title win on top of a bus at Piazza Duomo in Milan on Sunday.

Pep salutes his players

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola saluted his players for retaining the La Liga title, but admitted he felt his team should also be in Saturday's Champions League final at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Barcelona crushed Valladolid 4-0 on Sunday at Camp Nou to lift their fourth league title in six seasons and celebrate their title triumph with their jubilant fans.

Barcelona followed up last season's historic treble with four trophies with the league, the Spanish and European Super Cups and World Club Championship but Guardiola felt the absence of the Champions League left a bitter taste.

"This is a day for great celebration and after winning three titles last season we have won four more," said Guardiola.

"It was a really tough season and small details stopped us getting through to the Champions League final in Madrid. We owe the fans. We had to be in the final on Saturday but we aren't and we will try to win it next season."

Holders Barcelona were eliminated 3-2 over two legs by Inter Milan at the Champions League semifinal stage to miss out on a dream final at the Santiago Bernabeu, the home of bitter rivals Real Madrid.

"As the coach said we owe you (the fans) one and we hope to celebrate a Champions League win again in Wembley (the venue for the 2011 final) next season," said midfielder Xavi.

Guardiola praised the fans for picking the

team up after that setback as they went on to notch a league record 99 points to finish three points ahead of Real Madrid in the league title race.

"I would like to thank the fans for how they helped us after we lost that tie," added Guardiola.

"Real had an exceptional season with a lot of points and we had to get 99 points to win the title."

"I would like to congratulate Real for a great season. They have a great squad and are capable of reinforcing the team for next season so it will be difficult for us."

Captain Carles Puyol also praised arch-rivals for Real for their own league record of 96 points.

"We have to congratulate Real for a great season but there can only be one team that can be champions," said Puyol.

"Real made life tough for us but we fought hard to win this title with a huge points tally."

"It is really nice to celebrate this title in front of our fans. We have had some difficult moments and they really helped us get through them."

Guardiola has now won two league titles in his two seasons in charge but there will be change in the summer with president Joan Laporta, the man that hired him, leaving after seven years at the helm.

Laporta has put the emphasis on bringing players through the youth system and called on the club to follow the blueprint for future success.

"This is the model that works and has been proven," said Laporta. "I hope it is followed for many more years."

Spain hails Barcelona

AFP, Madrid

The Spanish press hailed Barcelona on Monday as the "best team in the history of La Liga" after they won a second consecutive title with a record 99 points.

"In seventh heaven," headlined the Catalan daily El Periodico.

"Champion of champions," said El Mundo. "Barcelona was crowned as the best team in the history of La Liga."

Barcelona retained its Liga crown on the final day of the season Sunday with a 4-0 home win over Valladolid, finishing the season with a record 99 points out of a possible 114, three ahead of big-spending arch rivals Real Madrid.

The club also won the European Super Cup, Spanish Super Cup and a first ever World Club championship this season under coach Pep Guardiola.

"The Guardiola era continues," said Publico.

"Title with record," headlined the sports newspaper AS.

"Barca wins the best league," was the headline in Spain's leading daily El Pais, while the Catalan paper La Vanguardia said "Barca conquers the league of records."

"Barca, the legitimate champions of La Liga," said sports daily Marca, which also took aim at its favorite target, Real Madrid coach Manuel Pellegrino.

"You are fired Manolo," it said.

Real had splashed over 250 million euros to take the lime-light away from Barcelona but ended up empty-handed this season.

Japan's global 3-D telecasts promise

AFP, Tokyo

High-tech Japan has promised to treat football fans worldwide to ultra-realistic live 3-D telecasts of World Cup matches should it win the right to host the 2022 edition.

The 550 billion yen (six billion dollar) "Universal Fan Fest" project is part of Japan's bid submitted to football's world governing body FIFA on Friday, the Japan Football Association said Monday.

The matches would be viewed by some 360 million people at nearly 400 select stadiums in FIFA's 208 member countries, said JFA general secretary Kohzo Tashima, chief executive officer of the bid committee.

The images would be captured from 360 degrees by 200 high-definition cameras during each match, to be transmitted as three-dimensional images, a technology that has been driven in large part by Japan's electronics giants.

The matches would be shown on giant screens or, if technological advances in coming years allow, projected like a real match onto the pitch itself, giving viewers the illusion of watching the real thing.

Jose focused on Inter

AFP, Rome



Inter Milan boss Jose Mourinho distanced himself from speculation linking him to Real Madrid after securing his second Serie A title on Sunday, insisting he's 'very far from becoming the coach' of the Spanish giants.

Mourinho has now led Inter to two out of three trophies as he goes in search of a historic treble this season, with the Champions League final in Madrid on May 22 to come.

But Mourinho denied that following the final he would be staying put in the Spanish capital, although he did suggest that he has yet to make up his mind about where his future lies.

"In this moment I'm not selfish enough to be thinking about myself, I'm thinking only about Inter and my players," he said.

"After Madrid there will be time to be selfish for one, two or three days and to think about what will make me happiest from a professional point of view."

"But right now I can tell you 100 per cent that it's not true that I have one and a half feet at Real. Quite the contrary, I'm very far from becoming the Real coach."

However, he repeated he was unhappy with life in Italy.

Real spending in vain

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid spent in excess of 250 million euros on new talent in the summer with the target of dethroning Barcelona in La Liga and re-establishing themselves in Europe by winning the Champions League at their Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

But the Spanish giants failed on both counts with a last 16 exit to Lyon ending their hopes of a dream European final at their Bernabeu stadium as the nine-time champions have failed to get past the first knockout stage for six successive seasons.

Defeats to Barcelona in both Clasicos - meaning they have lost the last four - were pivotal in the title race as Barcelona notched a record 99 points to retain their crown and Real's own points record of 96 was not enough.

After watching arch rivals Barcelona win an historic League, King's Cup and Champions League treble in 2009, Real turned to the chequebook with incoming president Florentino Perez sanctioning an unprecedented spending spree.

Portuguese striker Cristiano Ronaldo was the big summer signing arriving for a world record 94 million euros from Manchester United as Real finally landed their man after 12 months of trying.

Ronaldo, 25, justified his fee with 26 goals and came the end of the season the media were talking about "Ronaldo Dependency" saying he had become a one-man team.

"There is no Cristiano (Ronaldo) dependency. We are a team rather than individuals,"

"I didn't feel at home here but then there was no more time to think about it."

"Now, though, we have a historic week for Inter and I want to prepare the team as best I can and then to take a deep breath, to think about myself and what will make me happiest."

While winning is not new for Mourinho, claiming a title on the final day of the season was, and he said it was something he doesn't want to repeat.

In his six championship wins (two each with Porto, Chelsea and Inter) over the last eight years, his teams had always secured the title before the final day.

"I'd never won in the last match. I'd never got to the final day of the championship and it really was the last minute because if Siena had scored it would have been over," he said before reiterating his claims that the powers that be had tried to prevent Inter from winning.

"We had the title in our pockets, we had a huge advantage but for different reasons everything changed."

"Us (coaches) and the players have some responsibility in losing the lead but not only us."

He also explained why he had decided to keep quiet for so long and boycott the press.

"It was better not to speak because it always ended in disciplinary action. Even in this match I was at risk of not finishing it on the bench for something that was only a joke."

IN BRIEF

Russia appoint Advocaat

AFP, Moscow

Russia on Monday named Dutchman Dick Advocaat as its new football coach, handing him the mission of overcoming the bitter disappointment of failing to reach the World Cup finals.

Advocaat replaces fellow Dutchman Guus Hiddink, who became a national hero in Russia for the team's stellar performance in the 2008 European Championships but then could not guide the team towards the South Africa World Cup.

"Dick Advocaat will be appointed as the head coach of the Russian national side," the federation head Sergei Furzenko said in comments broadcast on state television.

"He is flying to Moscow and on Tuesday will present his proposals for working with the Russian football team," Furzenko said at a news conference in the southern city of Rostov-on-Don.

Mexico edge Chile

AFP, Mexico City

Alberto Medina scored a first half goal to give Mexico a 1-0 win over Chile in their final World Cup warm-up match at home before heading to Europe to prepare for the finals which start on June 11 in South Africa.

Medina found the target in the 13th minute at the Azteca Stadium in front of a 100,000 crowd.

Mexico coach Javier Aguirre fielded a strong team, led by veteran playmaker Cuauhtemoc Blanco and Javier Hernandez, who recently signed for Manchester United.

Chile coach Marcelo Bielsa chose to go with a more experimental lineup, including fringe players such as goalkeeper Luis Marin and forward Jaime Valdez.

Chile were reduced to ten men in the 60th minute when Manuel Iturrutia took down Andres Guardado from behind. Referee Mark Geiger red carded Iturra who had come on as a substitute only two minutes earlier.

Maniche quits Cologne

AFP, Cologne

Portuguese midfielder Maniche will leave Cologne after just one season, the Bundesliga club's director of sport Michael Meier said on Sunday.

"Maniche wanted to go back to Portugal with his family and we accepted his demand," said Meier.

The 32-year-old has been released from his contract, which was due to run until 2011, and is expected to join Sporting Lisbon.

He played 30 games in the Bundesliga last season and scored two goals.

Despite having made 52 appearances for Portugal, Maniche has not been included in the squad for next month's World Cup in South Africa.



PHOTO: AFP

Bayern Munich star Franck Ribery (L) sits beside club chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge (C) on the opening day of his appeal hearing at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in Lausanne on Monday.