



Germany coach Joachim Loew (C) puts pen to paper on a new contract beside DFB president Theo Zwanziger (L) prior to a news conference at the DFB headquarters in Frankfurt yesterday.

Loew staying till 2012

Football

AGENCIES

Joachim Loew on Tuesday renewed his contract as Germany coach until Euro 2012, less than a fortnight after leading a young and widely acclaimed team to third place at the World Cup.

German football federation supremo Theo Zwanziger told a news conference at the Frankfurt DFB headquarters of that Loew, general manager Oliver Bierhoff, assistant coach Hansi Flick and goalkeeper coach Andreas Koepke had put pen to paper earlier in the day.

"I have good news for all German football fans that we have renewed the contracts ... Joachim will continue his great work. We have young and talented players and we have the coach who fits this team," said Zwanziger.

Loew said: "We have a very good basis of young players who can blossom further. We see great potential ... The motivation is extremely high to further develop this team."

Loew, 50, became assistant coach under Jurgen Klinsmann in 2004 and was promoted to head coach when Klinsmann stepped down after coming third at the 2006 home World Cup.

He led Germany to the Euro 2008 final where they lost against Spain. At the recent World Cup in South Africa, Loew's young team claimed big wins over Australia (4-0), England (4-1) and Argentina (4-0) before losing in the semifinals to eventual champions Spain.

With captain Michael Ballack and others injured, youngsters like Mesut Ozil, 21, and Thomas Mueller, 20, rose to the occasion as Germany impressed with fast attacking football. Mueller became tournament top scorer and was named best young player.

Zwanziger and the vast majority of the German football community had asked Loew to stay on and to further develop the team which appears to have a bright future.

But Loew had his future open through the World Cup after earlier contract talks broke down in February when Loew and Bierhoff, who has been on the job since 2004, were unhappy that details were leaked to the media.

The final decision was reached on Friday when Loew, Bierhoff, Flick and Koepke met to discuss the future. Loew and Zwanziger said that the deals were then finalized from Saturday onwards without major complications.

"Thanks to the excellent youth sector of the Bundesliga clubs and the junior DFB teams we are convinced that the national team can further raise its international value with modern and attractive football," said Loew.

Germany's next match is an August 11 friendly in Denmark and Euro 2012 qualifying starts in September 3 with a game in Belgium. Germany's other opponents are Turkey, Austria, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, with only the group winner qualifying directly for the finals in Poland and Ukraine.

Ballack, 33, who missed the World Cup with an ankle injury and has moved from Chelsea to Bayer Leverkusen, was among those who welcomed the contract renewal.

"I am happy that the whole team continues. It is done a great job. The team has faith in Joachim Loew," said Ballack.

But Loew neither wanted to promise Ballack a swift return into the team nor that he would be captain again. Philipp Lahm wore the armband at the World Cup and said he would not volunteer to give it up again.

"Michael was always an important and a player of outstanding merit. But for me it is important that he gets into a rhythm again and gets over his injury. Then we will talk," Loew said.

"The (captain) decision is with the coach. I have not reached a final decision yet ... I will make the announcement before nominating the team for the Denmark game."

Guitarist to masseur

AFP, London

Former Simply Red guitarist Sylvan Richardson has swapped his six strings for hamstrings, joining Liverpool as their new masseur, the English Premier League side said Tuesday.

Richardson was part of the British soul band's original line-up in the mid-1980s but quit after two years and trained as a physiotherapist.

He has joined up with new Reds manager Roy Hodgson's side on their pre-season training camp in Switzerland.

"They have been giving me a lot of stick," said Richardson. "Especially (assistant manager) Sammy Lee."

"I am a professional producer and musician but I was always interested in medicine, and when I left the band in 1987, that's the path I went down."

"To work for Liverpool is a great honour and when I got the call I was really excited."

"My role is to prepare the players and deal with their recovery after training. I am used to working with top athletes and so am very much looking forward to this opportunity."

Richardson has previously worked with British Olympic cycling champion Chris Hoy.

He played on Simply Red's first album "Picture Book" (1985), which contained the hits "Money's Too Tight (to Mention)" and "Holding Back the Years", and follow-up album "Men and Women" (1987).

The move may not please Simply Red frontman Mick Hucknall. The singer is an avid fan of Liverpool's northwest England rivals Manchester United.

Spain to push for 2018 WC

AFP, Madrid

Buoyed by their win in the World Cup this summer, Spain are set to push for co-hosting the 2018 tournament with neighbouring Portugal, Secretary of State for Sports Jaime Lissavetsky said Tuesday.

"Spain's next challenge is to organise the 2018 World Cup," Lissavetsky said in an address to the Spanish Football Federation's (RFEF) general assembly meeting.

Spain and Portugal hope to pool their resources - as Japan and South Korea did in 2002 - for 2018 after Brazil hosts the next edition in 2014.

Belgium and the Netherlands are also preparing a joint 2018 bid and other candidates are England, the United States, Russia and Australia.

FIFA is to elect the winning bid on December 2 at a meeting of its executive committee.

FIFA's inspection committee started Monday looking at the bidders' dossiers, starting off with Japan, a candidate for 2022.

Gerrard lured Cole

Football

INTERNET

New Liverpool manager Roy Hodgson hailed the signing of England forward Joe Cole on Tuesday, saying that Steven Gerrard and Jamie Carragher had played a key role in convincing him to move up north.

Cole agreed a four-year contract on Monday, joining the club on a free transfer having left Chelsea at the end of last season.

The 28-year-old Cole had been linked with both Tottenham Hotspur and Arsenal, but chose to join Liverpool and will be seen as a natural replacement for Yossi Benayoun, who has moved to Chelsea.

Cole spent time with Gerrard and Carragher with England during the World Cup and it seems they helped convince him to leave London for Liverpool.

"Jamie Carragher and Steven Gerrard did a good job in selling the club to Joe at the recent World Cup," Hodgson told tSPORT.

"He was undecided about what he wanted to do and to be fair it takes a bit more selling to persuade a Londoner who has played all his life in London to move up to Liverpool. The simple solution would have been to stay in the

London area."

Hodgson, who replaced Rafael Benitez after the Spaniard left to join Inter Milan at the end of the season, said Cole was a more than useful addition to his side.

"I am pleased to get the player because it is very important to try to improve our squad as much as we can in order to reach the high goals we have set ourselves," he said.

"It is also pleasing the reaction of the fans has been as positive as our reaction, so at the moment that is perfect. Now it is up to Joe to show on the field he is the right man."

Carragher told the Liverpool website that the signing of Cole showed Liverpool were determined to bounce back after a poor season in which they finished seventh in the Premier League.

"It's great news and it is a message that Liverpool mean business," Carragher said. "We have signed a top international player who has been really important for Chelsea."

"A lot of clubs wanted to sign him but it is a real coup that he has chosen to come here and you have got to give the manager and the board a pat on the back for convincing him to come here."

"Every supporter that I have spoken to is absolutely delighted and all the players are the same - it's given everyone a boost, just at the right time."

Filipe ready for Atletico switch

INTERNET

Europa League winners Atletico Madrid have signed Filipe Luis from Deportivo Coruna, according to media reports on Tuesday.

These reports claimed that Atletico will pay around 12 million euros (15.54 million dollars) for the Brazilian left-back.

Filipe Luis, 24, will undergo medical checks in Madrid later on Tuesday and, providing they go well, will sign a four-year contract with Atletico.

He started his career in Brazil with Figueirense Brasil before joining Axax in 2004. He was loaned out to Uruguayan club Rentistas then signed for Deportivo in 2006.

He was about to sign for Barcelona in 2009 but Deportivo president Augusto Lendoiro demanded 20 million euros from the Catalans, who ended up signing Maxwell from Inter Milan instead.

Filipe Luis suffered a horrendous injury in January, breaking his right shin and ankle in a collision with Athletic Bilbao goalkeeper Gorka Iraizoz. He returned to action in May but failed to convince Brazil manager Dunga that he was fit enough to be considered for the World Cup.

Jose pushing us hard, says Marcelo

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's new coach Jose Mourinho is training the squad hard, the Spanish club's Brazilian defender Marcelo said Monday.

"Mourinho makes sure that we know we cannot ever relax during training and we are very happy with him," the 22-year-old told a news conference.

"We train aggressively and with everything we've got. In order to win we must suffer in training. Mourinho is a good person. He speaks to all of us and doesn't give anyone preferential treatment," he added.

The squad started training under Mourinho's guidance on Friday although the bulk of the team is still on leave after the World Cup.

During a practice match on Monday, Marcelo scored the opening goal after blowing past his marker and beating keeper Jerzy Dudek with a precise shot. Alex Fernandez pulled his team level after an assist by Karim Benzema.

"Our goal has always been to win titles and this season is no different. We train hard to win titles," the Brazilian players said.

Mourinho has arrived in a blaze of glory after leading Inter Milan last season to the treble of domestic league and cup in Italy as well as the Champions League.

The Portuguese coach has been given a four-year contract and the brief of winning the Champions League within the next two years.

'I nearly quit'

Football

INTERNET

Roma captain Francesco Totti has revealed that he almost retired following the polemic over his kick at Inter striker Mario Balotelli in last year's Coppa Italia Final.

Totti was sent off for violent conduct, but more angry was to follow afterwards when Balotelli accused him of making racist comments.

"There was a moment in which I thought about quitting because of what happened, but in the end after speaking with people who are important to me, I changed my mind because when there is the passion it's right to go forward," Totti said.

"I thought about what happened both on and off the pitch. Every time that something happens with me it's blown out of proportion 10 times more. I have asked myself why on many occasions."

"Perhaps it's envy, or perhaps it happens because in the end I am a good person. But I'm probably unlikeable to many because I am Roman."

"I have always said that I am proud to be Roman, I have always said it. Unfortunately there will always be envy between Rome and the North, but I think that people should think more about Italy than



FRANCESCO TOTTI

about what I say or do or what the Romans do. There are more important things."

The 33-year-old veteran swiftly moved on to talk about the club, which is up for sale after 16 years with the Sensi family at the helm.

"I have full confidence in this club. I will always thank this family. If Rosella stays or other people arrive, the important thing is that they do it with their heart. If a sheikh, an Arab or whoever were to arrive and they put a lot of money in then that's fine."

"As a team we are already top, but if quality players were to

arrive in a team that's already well stocked it would be a jump in quality. Having a Roman President and a Romanista in charge is gratifying, but a sheikh who can put in 200 million euros to buy players would make everyone happy."

"We are always looking to realise important objectives, but winning a Scudetto in Rome is too important and too beautiful, but also too difficult. Adriano can win games by himself, he is physically and technically strong. If we all want to play together, with Vucinic, in a trident, we must help the team."

City dismiss Drogba link

Football

AFP, Manchester

Claims by Didier Drogba's agent that Manchester City had held talks about signing the Chelsea superstar were dismissed out of hand by a City spokesman on Tuesday.

Drogba's agent Thierno Seydi had suggested in a radio interview that Drogba could leave Stamford Bridge before the transfer deadline and said there had already been dialogue with City.

Yet City, who have spent around 60 million pounds on Jerome Boateng, David Silva and Yaya Toure this summer, insisted there was no truth in Seydi's remarks.

A City spokesperson said: "There has been absolutely no contact. We have not spoken to him and there is no foundation to this."

Drogba, 32, was the Premier League top goalscorer with 29 as Chelsea won the title last season.

The Ivory Coast international has scored 84 goals for the club since his 24 million



DIDIER DROGBA

pound signing from Marseille six years ago.

Seydi said the player was happy to remain with the Blues but, at his age, had to consider good financial offers from elsewhere.

"Today he is at Chelsea," Seydi told French station RMC. "There might be surprises before August 31."

"I have not talked to just anybody. The only contact I have had, directly, was Manchester City."

Seydi also opened up the possibility of a return to

Marseille for his client.

Drogba only spent a year with the French club but is still revered at the Stade Velodrome.

Seydi added: "Didier has always said that he dreams of ending his career at Marseille. But there is a gulf between dreams and reality."

"What is certain is that at the present time he is very happy at Chelsea."

"That said, it is not forbidden for us to lend an ear to what is being said and written."

Cops query French duo

Football

REUTERS, Paris

French police investigating a prostitution network questioned soccer stars Franck Ribery and Karim Benzema in custody on Tuesday about the alleged soliciting of sex with a minor, police said.

The police had postponed the hearings at the headquarters of the Paris vice squad until after the World Cup, in which Ribery, a winger for Bayern Munich, was part of France's disastrous campaign.

Ribery was France's most popular player before the World Cup fiasco, in which France were eliminated in the first round without winning a match, and he took part in a revolt by players who boycotted a training session before their final game. French media have suggested the players were clients of a nightclub in Paris's

posh Champs-Elysees district that allegedly featured escorts, including the under-18 girl at the centre of the affair.

Ribery was questioned in April about his ties with the boss of an escort girls' network, according to his lawyer. The player himself has made no comment about the affair.

Real Madrid striker Benzema's agent has previously told Reuters his client had never been to that nightclub, and the player himself told French television he had done nothing wrong.

The scandal, which gripped France ahead of the World Cup, took a new twist in late April when the young woman at the centre of the case gave a lengthy interview to Paris Match magazine, implicating several footballers and denying being a prostitute.

France striker Sidney Govou, who has just moved from Lyon to Panathinaikos of Greece, was also questioned by police in April about the incident.

Football

AFP, Barcelona

Newly recruited Barcelona utility player Adriano Correia said Monday he did not hesitate when the Spanish champions offered to sign him from La Liga rivals Sevilla.

"I was very excited. I didn't think twice about it and now I'm really pleased to have the chance to defend the Barca colours. This was something I couldn't let pass by," he said during his official presentation.

"I'm very happy. I have worked hard to achieve this," the 25-year-old Brazilian added.

Barcelona completed the signing of Adriano, who can play at full-back or as a wide midfielder, on a four-year deal on Saturday



THE PUNISHER: Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola barks instructions to his players during the team's first training session at the Ciutat Esportiva Joan Gamper in Barcelona yesterday.