

# Bye bye El Diego

**Football**

JOEL RICHARDS

He claimed the Argentina national team was a Rolls Royce in need of a service. He told journalists to suck it and keep sucking it. He said that if Obama was allowed to choose his backroom staff then so should he. He called up 108 players. He lost 6-1 to Bolivia. He told Pele to go back to the museum. He said that Pele "made his debut" with a boy.

He took Ariel Garcé and Martín Palermo to the World Cup. He said the first three names on his teamsheet were Mascherano, Messi and Jonás Gutiérrez. He refused to train in the morning. He brought about the second international retirement of Juan Román Riquelme. He wound up FIFA, his bosses, the media, ex- and not-so-ex-players... Say what you will about Maradona and everybody is saying lots but beyond it being utter mayhem from start to finish, there is one simple inescapable fact: neither Basile, nor Passarella, nor Bielsa, nor Pekerman performed better at a World Cup. None went further than the quarter-finals. Perhaps the problem with Argentine football is not just to do with the coaches...

Maradona opened himself up for criticism, he created several previously non-existent battles and his eccentric decisions were laughed at outside Argentina, making the blood-letting - now that AFA have chosen not to renew his contract as Argentina coach - all the easier.

The initial rumours seemed to suggest that Maradona would stay on



DIEGO MARADONA

despite the embarrassing result with Germany in South Africa, but in Argentine football realpolitik it was just another manoeuvre.

It's convenient and easy to say with absolute certainty that with a more experienced coach Argentina would have reached, at least, the final four in South Africa. That may well be, but it gives whoever replaces Maradona the job of proving all those Diego critics right. The core of Maradona's side is young enough to remain for a number of years to come.

For now the two front-runners - according to the decision-makers at the AFA - are Estudiantes coach Alejandro Sabella and Racing coach Miguel Angel Russo.

Amongst fans, the Boca contingent still want the Viceroy, Carlos Bianchi, to be given a chance. Ramón Díaz features high up in the sur-

veys, thanks to his success at River. Diego Simeone's name has also been mentioned, perhaps more by virtue of being unemployed right now, and then come the rest.

Whoever comes in could follow a similar route paved by Mano Menezes this week. The new Brazil boss axed all but four players from the South Africa group in his first squad. Such wholesale change perhaps isn't needed for Argentina. The likes of Sergio Romero, Nicolás Otamendi (the Germany result wasn't his fault), Mascherano, Di María, Pastore, Tevez, Higuain, Agüero and Messi will all be key players for the coming years.

With the immediate task being winning next year's Copa America on home turf, and then mounting a serious challenge for the 2014 World Cup next door in Brazil, whoever comes in should invest

confidence in a new crop of players that will be of age in four years time.

For Argentina's next outing, against Ireland in Dublin on August 11, we'll have a side chosen by Maradona naming the squad was his last act in charge and coached by Under-20 boss Sergio Batista.

It's only after that when perhaps we will start to see the new-look Argentina. Perhaps it will be more competitive. Perhaps it will play better football. Perhaps it will play worse. Perhaps they will challenge for honours. Perhaps they will end up returning home after the first phase of the 2014 World Cup. Perhaps they will return with the trophy.

Whatever happens over the coming weeks and months, it won't be the same round here anymore. *Chau Diego.* (Joel Richards is a sports journalist based in Buenos Aires)

## Blanc could select troubled duo

REUTERS, Paris

Franck Ribery and Karim Benzema could be selected to play for France despite being under police investigation on suspicion of soliciting sex with an under-age prostitute, coach Laurent Blanc said on Tuesday.

"Criminal investigations are very long. I'm here for two years. Ribery and Benzema are among the key players of the team," said Blanc in excerpts of an interview with Le Parisien posted on the newspaper's website (www.leparisien.fr).

Blanc said in the interview, which will appear in the newspaper on Wednesday that the fact that a player was under judicial investigation did not disqualify him from being selected.

The future of both players had been uncertain after Health and Sports Minister Roselyne Bachelot and junior sports minister Rama Yade said that any player under judicial investigation should not represent France.

Blanc, who replaced Raymond Domenech earlier this month after France's first-round exit from the World Cup, suspended the 23 members of the World Cup squad for the country's next friendly game against Norway in Oslo next month.

Bayern Munich winger Ribery, who was part of the squad in South Africa, will be suspended for the Norway game, but Real Madrid striker Benzema was not in the World Cup squad.

## Few surprises by Argentina

AP, Buenos Aires

World Cup players Lionel Messi, Javier Mascherano and Gonzalo Higuain have been included in Argentina's squad for next month's international friendly against Ireland, just hours after Diego Maradona was dropped as coach.

The squad announced Tuesday, which the Argentine Football Association said was picked by Maradona, have few surprise choices for the Aug. 11 friendly in Dublin.

Several players left off the World Cup team were named, including midfielders Jesus Datolo and Fernando Gago, and forward Ezequiel Lavezzi.

Sergio Batista, a coach of Argentina's youth team, will lead the team.

### SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** Sergio Romero (AZ Alkmaar), Mariano Andujar (Catania). **Defenders:** Martin Demichelis (Bayern Munich), Walter Samuel (Inter Milan), Nicolas Burdisso (Inter Milan), Gabriel Heinze (Olympique Marseille), Fabricio Coloccini (Newcastle), Pablo Zabaleta (Manchester City), Emiliano Insua (Fiorentina).

**Midfielders:** Maximiliano Rodriguez (Liverpool), Javier Mascherano (Liverpool), Angel Di Maria (Real Madrid), Jonas Gutierrez (Newcastle), Mario Bolatti (Fiorentina), Javier Pastore (Palermo), Fernando Gago (Real Madrid), Jesus Datolo (Espanyol), Ever Banega (Valencia).

**Forwards:** Gonzalo Higuain (Real Madrid), Carlos Tevez (Manchester City), Sergio Agüero (Atletico Madrid), Lionel Messi (Barcelona), Diego Milito (Inter Milan), Ezequiel Lavezzi (Napoli).

## Barca audit reveals big loss

REUTERS, Barcelona

An audit of Barcelona's accounts by new president Sandro Rosell has uncovered a post-tax loss of 77.1 million euros (\$99.5 million) for the 2009-10 season compared with a net profit of 11 million reported in June by the previous board of directors.

The loss, which the La Liga champions said was the first in seven years, highlights the financial state of many Spanish clubs, with even wealthy Barca -- second behind Real Madrid in the latest ranking of the richest clubs by revenue by accounting firm Deloitte -- slipping into the red.

# Mano runs the rule

**Football**

REUTERS, Rio De Janeiro

New Brazil coach Mano Menezes made wholesale changes with only four survivors from the World Cup when he named his squad on Monday for next month's friendly against the United States.

Dani Alves, Ramires, Thiago Silva and Robinho were the only members of Menezes' squad who were in South Africa, where Brazil lost in the quarterfinals to the Netherlands.

Santos pair Paulo Henrique Ganso and Neymar, controversially left out of the World Cup squad by Menezes' predecessor Dunga, were among 11 uncapped players included.

The others were goalkeepers Jefferson, Renan and Victor, defenders Rafael, David Luis and Rever, midfielders Ederson and Jucilei and striker Andre.

Menezes recalled AC Milan striker Alexandre Pato who also missed out on the World Cup as well as Liverpool midfielder Lucas.

The list of omissions included goalkeeper Julio Cesar, defenders Maicon, Lucio and Juan, and playmaker Kaka.

"This is a period of recovery, it's not necessary or good for us to use them at the moment," Menezes told a news conference. "It's the start, we're looking ahead, not at what did or didn't happen."

"There are no restrictions although we have to respect age because time goes on and the queue keeps moving."

The 48-year-old named his squad two days after replacing Dunga, who quit following the 2-1 defeat by the Dutch just over three weeks ago.

Dunga was often criticised for his team's lack of style and former Corinthians coach Menezes said he hoped to return to the more attractive game with which Brazil are associated.

"If we can win playing with the sort of football people like to see, that would be the best outcome possible," he said.

Menezes has been appointed to lead Brazil to the 2014 World Cup, which the country will host. He is also expected to coach the under-23 team at the London Olympics.

### SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** Jefferson (Botafogo), Renan (Avaí), Victor (Gremio)

**Defenders:** Andre Santos (Fenerbahce), Dani Alves (Barcelona), Marcelo (Real Madrid), Rafael (Manchester United), David Luis (Benfica), Henrique (Racing Santander), Rever (Atletico Mineiro), Thiago Silva (AC Milan)

**Midfielders:** Carlos Eduardo (Hoffenheim), Ederson (Olympique Lyon), Paulo Henrique Ganso (Santos), Hernanes (Sao Paulo), Jucilei (Corinthians), Lucas (Liverpool), Ramires (Benfica), Sandro (Internacional)

**Forwards:** Alexandre Pato (AC Milan), Andre (Santos), Diego Tardelli (Atletico Mineiro), Neymar (Santos), Robinho (Santos)



Besiktas's new signing Spanish midfielder Jose Maria Guti gives two thumbs up during his presentation at the Inonu Stadium in Istanbul yesterday. Guti has agreed a two-year deal with Besiktas.

# D&G to dress Blues

**Football**

REUTERS, Milan

Italian designers Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana have entered a 3-year deal with English soccer club Chelsea to dress their players, muscling their way in the fashion-hungry soccer market.

The soccer-loving duo, best known for their sharp men's tailoring and southern Italian style, said on Tuesday they would design the official suits and new stadium areas for the Premier League champions over the next three seasons.

"We are big football fans, for us it means healthy competition, intense passion and great discipline," Dolce and Gabbana said in a statement.

The deal marks the first partnership with a foreign top soccer club for the two designers whose suits already dress AC Milan players and Italy's national team. Dolce is an AC Milan fan

and never misses their home matches at Milan's San Siro stadium.

Financial details of the partnership have not been disclosed.

Under the deal, the Premier League champions, including the Italian manager and former AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti, will wear blue suits -- the club's colour -- with two-button jackets and blue jacquard ties.

Dolce and Gabbana -- whose wholesale sales were of 1.379 billion euros in the fiscal year ended in March -- will also design exclusive spaces at the Stamford Bridge stadium for guests attending matches.

For their worldwide appeal to fans, sculpted soccer stars have always been a safe bet for fashion brands such as Dolce and Gabbana, whose business interest in the game dates back to 2003.

The Italian designers also hired five Italian soccer players to strip down for their underwear campaigns ahead of the World Cup in South Africa in June. Italy was knocked out in the group stage.

# Masche wants out

REUTERS, Liverpool

Javier Mascherano wants to leave Liverpool but Fernando Torres is likely to stay, the Premier League club's new manager Roy Hodgson said on Tuesday.

Argentina captain Mascherano has been linked with a move to European champions Inter Milan managed by former Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez.

The 26-year-old midfielder did not return Hodgson's calls while on holiday and has indicated that he sees his future elsewhere.

"He wants to leave the club, he made that perfectly clear. I think he wanted to leave a year ago," Hodgson told reporters on Tuesday.

But Mascherano's departure is not entirely clearcut as he still has two years remaining on his contract.

"He wants to leave now but he has a contract and I expect him to honour that contract," Hodgson said. "I expect him to be a Liverpool player until the day the club chooses to accept

an offer for him.

"I shall continue to treat him as a Liverpool player. The mere fact that the player is a little bit unhappy with his situation does not mean he will leave. It disappoints me but it's not unusual."

Hodgson had brighter news regarding Torres who he indicated would remain at Liverpool next season.

Chelsea and Manchester City are keen to sign the Spanish striker and the speculation about his future refuses to go away.

"As far as I know he is looking forward to coming back here. He is back on Monday," Hodgson said.

"He is enjoying a holiday -- a well-deserved break as he has not had one for three years."

"He is spending a lot of time with his family, keeping a low profile and as far as I know he is not really speaking to anyone."

"But he has told us that he is looking forward to Monday, looking forward to getting back to work and looking forward to playing for Liverpool next season. That is what I know so other reports, I would suggest, are erroneous."

## Bolton snap up Real starlet

REUTERS, London

Bolton Wanderers have signed left back Marcos Alonso from Real Madrid on a three-year contract for an undisclosed fee, the Premier League club said on Tuesday.

"When we are investing money in transfers I want to do it with young, talented players," manager Owen Coyle said on the club's website (www.bwfc.co.uk).

"He isn't the finished article yet -- he's a young player making his way -- but you don't get through at Real Madrid without having a bit about you," Coyle added of the 19-year-old who made his Real debut against Racing Santander in April.

Alonso comes from a footballing family, his grandfather playing for Real in the 1950s and 60s and his father spending five years at Barcelona in the 1980s.

## Raul joins Schalke

REUTERS, Berlin

Real Madrid's talismanic striker Raul, forced out of the Bernabeu after 16 record-breaking seasons, has signed for Schalke at the age of 33, the Bundesliga club said on Wednesday.

Raul, who scored 323 times in 741 games for Real, notched 66 Champions League goals and is Spain's all-time leading scorer with 44 goals, will try to revive his career in the industrial city of Gelsenkirchen after falling out of favour at the club where he made his name.

"This is a great piece of news for Schalke 04," coach Felix Magath told the club's website.

"I'm happy that we've succeeded in inspiring such an outstanding footballer and world class player into changing to the Bundesliga and to Schalke."

Schalke finished as runners-up to Bayern Munich in the Bundesliga last season, qualifying directly for this year's Champions League group stage.

Raul barely featured at Real under Manuel Pellegrini last season and the club have further strengthened the squad for the arrival of new coach Jose Mourinho.

The club said he would sign a two-year contract, assuming he passed a medical.

# Sheva fires Dynamo

REUTERS, Berne



Andriy Shevchenko was on target as Dynamo Kiev pulled off a convincing 3-0 win over Ghent in their Champions League qualifier on Tuesday.

Former Newcastle, Portsmouth and Olympiakos striker Lomana Lua Lua converted a late penalty to give Omonia Nicosia a 1-1 draw at home to Salzburg and Anderlecht won 3-1 at The New Saints in other third qualifying round, first leg matches.

Shevchenko, the third highest scorer in the Champions League, took his overall tally to 58 with his goal for the 13-times Ukrainian champions in Kiev.

Andriy Yarmolenko gave Dynamo a 19th-minute lead when he picked up a loose ball and rounded Bojan Jorgacevic before the Belgian visitors were undone by two goals in the final 10 minutes.

Former AC Milan and Chelsea striker Shevchenko made it 2-0 after playing a one-two with Denys Garmash and slotting the ball past Jorgacevic, then turned provider when he sent Roman Zozulya clear to add the third

in injury time.

Austrian champions Salzburg led for nearly the whole match on a scorching night in Nicosia after Argentine Gonzalo Zarate broke down the right, cut inside and scored with a low angled shot which slipped through Omonia goalkeeper Dragoslav Jevric's hands in the eighth minute.

But Omonia, hoping to emulate local rivals Anorthosis Famagusta and APOEL by becoming the third Cypriot team in a row to reach the group stage, snatched an equaliser at the death when Leandro de Almeida was tripped in the area.

Lua Lua, who has played at three African Nations Cup tournaments for Democratic Republic of Congo, fired home the penalty in stoppage time before the Austrians remonstrated with Almeida at the final whistle.

Romania's Unirea Urziceni, who reached the group stage last year, held on for a 0-0 draw at home to 2008 UEFA Cup champions Zenit St Petersburg despite having Razvan Paduretu sent off in the 36th minute after a clash with Aleksandr Kerzhakov.

Sacha Kijestjan, Jonathan Legear and Matias Suarez shared the goals as Anderlecht made no mistakes in Wrexham against Welsh champions TNS, who replied through Craig Jones.



Schalke 04's newest recruit Raul Gonzalez (C) poses for photographers with the club's President Clemens Toennis (L) and coach Felix Magath in Gelsenkirchen on Wednesday.

# Nadal slams UEFA

**Football**

REUTERS, Madrid

Tennis world number one and Real Mallorca shareholder Rafa Nadal has hit out at governing body UEFA for excluding the financially-troubled La Liga club from European competition this season.

Mallorca finished fifth in the league last campaign and qualified for the Europa League but UEFA ruled last week the Balearic Islands club, who are in administration, had not fulfilled the admission criteria.

UEFA did not publish the reasons behind the decision, which Mallorca have appealed.

"I am like all Mallorca fans," Nadal, who was born on the island, told IB3 TV.

"It's a hell of a blow because playing in Europe fills you with excitement and the players have earned it," the Wimbledon and French Open champion added.

"I don't know the reasons behind the exclusion but if it is for economic reasons there would not be any European competition at all because everyone is in the same situation."

Mallorca said in May they had applied to go into voluntary administration in an effort to sort out their finances.

Like many Spanish clubs, they have been slipping ever further into debt due to surging wage and transfer costs and a recent University of Barcelona study indicated they had debts of around 85 million euros (\$110 million).

Nadal became a shareholder in the club this month and his uncle, former soccer professional Miguel Angel Nadal, is assistant to new coach Michael Laudrup.

Mallorca noted on their website (www.rcdmallorca.es) that La Liga champions Barcelona had admitted earlier on Tuesday to making a loss of almost 80 million euros last season and their gross debt was more than half a billion euros.