

Dawn of the Jose era

AFP, Madrid



Jose Mourinho embarks on his new adventure as Real Madrid coach making his bow with a tricky trip to islanders Real Mallorca on Sunday as he begins his quest to bring the glory days back to Real.

Mourinho has been typically bullish in the press talking up his team's chances of silverware this season and hopes his team do their talking on the pitch as expectant Madrid fans yearn for a trophy after finishing the last two campaigns empty-handed.

Thursday's Champions League draw saw Real paired with AC Milan, Ajax and Auxerre in the group stage and Mourinho is expected to compete on all fronts.

"I have won 17 titles in 10 years and I am one of three coaches (along with Ernst Happel and Ottmar Hitzfeld) to win the Champions League with two different teams, I hope to have more success at Real Madrid," declared Mourinho.

New signings Angel di Maria, Mesut Ozil, Sami Khedira, Pedro Leon and Sergio Canales are all hoping to make their debuts while veteran defender Ricardo Carvalho is almost certain to make his bow as Real have a defensive crisis.

Centre-halves Pepe, Ezequiel Garay and Raul Albiol are all out injured so Spain World Cup winner Sergio Ramos could move into the centre alongside new summer signing Carvalho.

Mallorca have a new coach in former Real Madrid man Michael Laudrup and finished

TOP TEN LA LIGA TRANSFERS

Players	New Club	Old Club	(million £)
1. David Villa	Barcelona	Valencia	36
2. Angel de Maria	Real Madrid	Benfica	22.5
3. Mesut Ozil	Real Madrid	Werder	16.2
4. Sami Khedira	Real Madrid	Stuttgart	12.6
5. Filipe	Atletico	Deportivo	10.6
6. Robert Soldado	Valencia	Getafe	9
7. Pedro Leon	Real Madrid	Getafe	9
8. Adriano	Barcelona	Sevilla	8.5
9. Diego Godin	Atletico	Villarreal	7.2
10. Ricardo Carvalho	Real Madrid	Chelsea	7.2



fifth last season largely on the back of a formidable home record at their Onstad stadium.

Reigning champions Barcelona begin with a trip to Racing Santander on Sunday with Spain World Cup star David Villa poised to make his league debut following his 40 million euro move from Valencia.

Barcelona picked up their first trophy of the season by lifting the Spanish Super Cup with a 5-3 aggregate win over Sevilla and are targeting a third league crown.

Lionel Messi top-scored with 34 league goals last season and netted a hat-trick in the 4-0 second leg drubbing of Sevilla in the Super Cup to move onto 130 goals for Barcelona putting the 23-year-old level with club legends Samuel Eto'o and Rivaldo.

Liverpool's tough-tackling midfielder Javier Mascherano is due to arrive at Barca this weekend after a deal was concluded Friday.

Despite his arrival Barcelona have been quiet in the transfer market in comparison to Real and could even let record signing Zlatan Ibrahimovic leave for AC Milan

if a deal can be struck.

Midfielder Sergi Busquets however believes the squad is deep enough.

"Real Madrid have signed more players but we probably have a more complete squad and settled team so don't need as much fine-tuning," explained Busquets.

Sevilla have had a torrid start to the season losing in the Super Cup and then missing out on millions by going down to Sporting Braga in their Champions League qualifier.

Coach Antonio Alvarez is under early pressure after that failure and could do with an opening win at promoted Levante on Saturday to keep the fans off his back.

"I am not the type to hide," vowed Alvarez.

"There are bad results and the best way to fix things is by getting good results starting with the first league game of the season."

Atletico Madrid are one side hopeful of a top four finish and the Europa League winners are in action on Monday at home to Sporting Gijon as they face Inter Milan on Friday in the European Super Cup.

"I think we are stronger than last season," said Portuguese midfielder Tiago.

"Big players have come in and the Champions League must be the minimum target as we have the quality."

Valencia, grouped with Manchester United in the group stage of the Champions League, open their season at Malaga on Saturday and it will be interesting to see how they cope with the departure of Villa to Manchester City.

FIXTURES

Saturday
Hercules v Athletic Bilbao (1700 GMT), Malaga v Valencia (1900 GMT), Levante v Sevilla (2100 GMT)

Sunday
all 1600 GMT unless stated
Espanyol v Getafe, Deportivo La Coruna v Real Zaragoza, Osasuna v Almeria, Real Sociedad v Villarreal, Racing Santander v Barcelona (1800 GMT), Real Mallorca v Real Madrid (2000 GMT)

Monday
Atletico Madrid v Sporting Gijon

Ballack left out by Loew

AFP, Berlin

Germany captain Michael Ballack has been dropped by national coach Joachim Loew for next month's Euro 2012 qualifiers.

The 33-year-old midfielder's name was conspicuous by its absence from Loew's squad released Friday for the games against Belgium in Brussels on September 3 and Azerbaijan in Cologne four days later.

Ballack is still working his way back to fitness after suffering an ankle injury in May which ruled him out of last month's World Cup.

Loew said in a statement: "Michael is going the right way after his injury and everyone is satisfied with the healing process. The important thing is that he rediscovers his best form at Leverkusen."

According to the German Football Association Loew told Ballack of his decision by telephone.

With Ballack absent defender Philipp Lahm is likely to retain the captaincy having led Germany to third at the World Cup.

Loew was in Dortmund last Sunday to see Ballack make his first appearance back in the Bundesliga after four years in the Premier League with Chelsea as his side Bayer Leverkusen beat Borussia Dortmund 2-0.

After his injury, Ballack only returned to training at the start of August and has played only a Bundesliga and Europa League match.

As expected Loew has called up 17 members of his World Cup squad.

Out of contention are the injured Arne Friedrich, Jerome Boateng, Piotr Trochowski and Dennis Aogo, but back after missing the World Cup are goalkeeper Rene Adler and defender Heiko Westermann.

Looking ahead to the two Euro 2012 qualifiers Loew said: "We want to win our first two games with the same football that we played at the World Cup."

SQUAD

Goalkeepers:
Manuel Neuer (Schalke 04), René Adler (Bayer Leverkusen), Tim Wiese (Werder Bremen)

Defenders:
Holger Badstuber (Bayern Munich), Marcell Jansen (Hamburg), Philipp Lahm (Bayer Munich), Per Mertesacker (Werder Bremen), Sascha Riether (Wolfsburg), Heiko Westermann (Hamburg)

Midfielders:
Sami Khedira (Real Madrid/ESP), Toni Kroos (Bayern Munich), Marko Marin (Werder Bremen), Mesut Ozil (Real Madrid/ESP), Bastian Schweinsteiger (Bayern Munich), Christian Träsch (Stuttgart)

Forwards:
Cacau (Stuttgart), Mario Gomez (Bayern Munich), Stefan Kiessling (Bayer Leverkusen), Miroslav Klose (Bayern Munich), Thomas Müller

Chelsea in hot form

AFP, London



Chelsea midfielder John Obi Mikel insists the free-scoring Premier League champions will be happy to win ugly against Stoke on Saturday.

Carlo Ancelotti's side have made an astonishing start to their title defence after following their 6-0 rout of West Brom on the opening day with another 6-0 victory at Wigan last weekend.

The Blues, who scored a Premier League record 103 goals last season, have picked up where they left off in May, when an 8-0 win against Wigan clinched the title.

Stoke's defenders, who conceded seven goals at Stamford Bridge last season, could be forgiven for experiencing a few sleepless nights at the prospect of facing Chelsea in this mood.

But Nigeria international Mikel knows there is little chance the league leaders will continue to beat teams with such ease.

As a defensive midfielder, Mikel takes as much satisfaction from a hard-fought 1-0 win as his team's forwards do from a high-scoring victory.

"We all have a good understanding at the moment. I think it's pretty much working out as we want it to all the time," Mikel told Chelsea's website.

"We know we're not going to score six every game, if you manage one and get three points it's all we need, but at the moment it is enjoyable to be a part of it and playing, and I hope it keeps going like this."

While Chelsea are clearly in the groove, Manchester United gave a less convincing display in their 2-2 draw at Fulham last weekend.

It is still early days in the title race, but United boss Sir Alex Ferguson was unimpressed with the way his team twice squandered the lead at Craven Cottage to fall two points behind the Blues.

FIXTURES

(1400GMT unless stated)

Saturday

Blackburn v Arsenal (1145GMT), Blackpool v Fulham, Chelsea v Stoke, Man Utd v West Ham (1630GMT), Tottenham v Wigan, Wolves v Newcastle

Sunday

Aston Villa v Everton (1500GMT), Bolton v Birmingham (1230GMT), Liverpool v West Brom,

Ferguson will expect a far more dominant performance against West Ham, who have lost their first two league matches, at Old Trafford on Saturday.

Tottenham, fresh from qualifying for the Champions League proper for the first time in nearly 50 years, travel to bottom of the table Wigan with boss Harry Redknapp looking forward to a few days off during next week's international break.

Redknapp led his side to victory over Young Boys in the Champions League play-off round in midweek, but he has no plans to strengthen his squad before the window shuts on Tuesday. Instead he will go on holiday with his wife Sandra.

How Liverpool manager Roy Hodgson must wish he could say the same.

Hodgson's team host West Brom on Sunday looking to bounce back from a 3-0 defeat at Manchester City which raised serious questions about morale at Anfield.

City will aim to build on that Liverpool win when Roberto Mancini's expensively assembled squad travel to Sunderland, while new Arsenal defender Sebastien Squillaci, signed from Sevilla on Thursday, won't feature when the Gunners take on Blackburn at Ewood Park.

Contenders open easy

AFP, Rome



Inter Milan's main Serie A rivals AS Roma and city neighbours AC Milan have both been given a great chance to open the new season with a bang, beginning against newly-promoted teams.

Roma host Cesena on Saturday while Milan entertain Lecce on Sunday, in games both sides will be expected to win comfortably.

And for two sides who a year ago stumbled out of the blocks, it is possibly the perfect tonic to launch a bid to dethrone Inter, who have won the last five titles.

Cesena are probably the rank outsiders this season having arrived in Serie A after successive promotions from the third tier of Italian football.

They have not played in Serie A since 1991 and with the exception of newly-acquired Stephen Appiah, the Ghana captain, their team is made up largely of unknowns.

It means Roma will be expected to get off to a flyer and avoid the dire start that befell them last season when they lost their opening two matches and had already dropped to 14 points behind Inter a third of the way into the season.

Roma will have to cope without new signing Adriano, once the most feared striker in Serie A before reported problems with alcohol and depres-

sion saw him lose form, shape and motivation and eventually resulted in a move back to his homeland in Brazil.

However, Adriano would have been unlikely to start anyway and Roma will be close to full strength.

Milan also have what on paper looks an easy game against a Lecce side that have been something of a yo-yo team between Serie A and Serie B in recent years.

Like Roma, Milan started badly last season, scoring only six goals in their first nine matches in all competitions, winning just three.

Both Roma and Milan fought back from their poor starts to get into the title race but while the capital based team took Inter to the wire, Milan fell away over the last month of the season.

Both, though, had the problem of playing catch-up, whereas this season the schedule, and Inter's participation in the European Super Cup, means they could steal a march on the champions.

FIXTURES

Saturday

Udinese v Genoa, AS Roma v Cesena

Sunday

Bari v Juventus, AC Milan v Lecce, Chievo v Catania, Fiorentina v Napoli, Palermo v Cagliari, Parma v Brescia, Sampdoria v Lazio

Monday

PHOTO: AFP

Rapid Vienna's Mario Sonnleitner (2nd from R) scores against Aston Villa during their Europa League play-off at Villa Park on Thursday.

Marwijk makes 7 changes

REUTERS, Zeist

Netherlands coach Bert van Marwijk made seven changes to the squad that finished runners-up at the World Cup when he named his 23-man line-up for the Euro 2012 qualifiers against San Marino and Finland.

Giovanni van Bronckhorst, Andre Ooijer and Sander Boschker retired have retired as internationals but Ryan Babel, Stijn Schaars and Edson Braafheid were dropped for the matches on Sept. 3 against San Marino and Finland four days later.

Winger Arjen Robben is sidelined with a hamstring injury.

"That I did not invite Babel and Braafheid is a combination of last season and the recent situation at their clubs," Van Marwijk told reporters.

"Edson (Braafheid) hardly played last season and now it is not looking any better and that is the same for Ryan (Babel)."

Van Marwijk added central defender Ron Vlaar, while Erik Pieters and Vurnon Anita are vying for the vacant left back spot.

Jermain Lens replaces Robben as winger and Theo Janssen and Hedwiges Maduro are the new names in midfield.

John Heitinga, who was sent off during the 1-0 defeat by Spain in last month's World Cup final, was included.

Villa crash out

AFP, Paris



Troubled Aston Villa suffered another damaging setback on Thursday when they crashed out of the Europa League with Scottish hopes also suffering a triple wipeout.

Villa, who saw Martin O'Neill quit as coach on the eve of the Premier League kick-off and James Milner sold to Manchester City, were beaten 3-2 by Rapid Vienna in their play-off second leg.

That gave the Austrians a 4-3 aggregate win to follow up their victory over the Midlanders in last season's tournament.

Villa twice led on Thursday and also missed a penalty as they joined the Scottish trio of Celtic, Dundee United and Motherwell in being forced to write off their European hopes for another season.

Liverpool and Manchester City were left as Britain's only representatives in Friday's draw for the group stages of Europe's second tier tournament.

Roy Hodgson's Liverpool overcame a disastrous start to score twice in the last seven minutes to defeat Trabzonspor 2-1 for a 3-1 aggregate victory while City saw off Timisoara of Romania 2-0 at home for a 3-0 triumph.

At Villa Park, Gabriel Agbonlahor gave Villa an early lead but Vienna hit back through Atsheh Nuhui.

Emile Heskey then restored Villa's lead with 13 minutes remaining after Stilyian Petrov had missed a penalty.

But Mario Sonnleitner headed Vienna level a minute

later before substitute Rene Gardler put the visitors through in the 81st minute.

Playing without Steven Gerrard and Fernando Torres, Liverpool saw their 1-0 first leg advantage last just four minutes in Turkey when Colombian international Teofilo Gutierrez put the home side in front.

He had been set up by Gustavo Colman who had pounced when Dirk Kuyt had given the ball away.

But Hodgson's side regained the initiative in the 83rd minute when Trabzonspor's Giray Kacar diverted a Glen Johnson cross into his own net.

Kuyt then added the second

Diego seals Wolfsburg move

AFP, Wolfsburg

Brazilian midfielder Diego has finally completed his on-off transfer from Juventus to Wolfsburg, the buying club announced on Friday.

The 25-year-old back has signed a four year contract estimated by Juventus to be worth around 15 million euros bringing to an end a move that has been on the cards for several weeks.

The Brazilian, who passed a medical on Wednesday, joined Juventus a year ago from Werder Bremen for 25 million euros, but struggled to score goals.

From 2006 to 2009, he scored 38 goals in 84 league games for Werder, yet at Juventus he scored just five goals in 33 games.

on the night for Liverpool in the 88th minute after goalkeeper Onur Kivrak could only parry Joe Cole's shot into the Dutchman's path.

"A lot of people have said a lot of things about my future, but for me it is at Liverpool. I like it here at the club and I want to stay here and win things," said Kuyt.

Shaun Wright-Phillips scored his first goal of the season to help Manchester City overcome Timisoara at Eastlands.

The England winger produced a calm finish in the 43rd minute to open the scoring for Roberto Mancini's side as the brave resistance of the Romanian minnows was eventually broken.

Dedryck Boyata made it 2-0 in the second half with a close range header to score the first goal of his professional career.

Celtic, who had already been knocked out of the Champions League qualifiers, surrendered a 2-0 first leg lead to go down 4-0 in Utrecht in Holland.

Ricky van Wolfswinkel scored a hat-trick for the Dutch side with Barry Maguire adding a fourth as Celtic's dismal away record in Europe continued, with just one win in 28 games on the road. Motherwell lost 1-0 at nine-man Odense, who won the first leg 2-1, at Fir Park last week. Peter Utaka claimed the only goal in the 28th minute.

Dundee United drew 1-1 against AEK Athens but went out 2-1 on aggregate in a match where the venue had to be moved several times.

Elsewhere, Juventus made sure of their place in the next round when Alessandro Del Piero netted a 53rd-minute winner against Sturm Graz of Austria for a 3-1 aggregate victory.

Hercules to lift Trezegol

AFP, Madrid

French striker Diego Trezeguet is set to leave Italian club Juventus for newly-promoted Spanish outfit Hercules Alicante, Spanish media reported Friday.

"Hercules is one step away from carrying out one of the 'coups' of the summer: the transfer of Trezeguet," the sports newspaper AS said.

Trezeguet's agent, Antonio Caliendo, said he was "optimistic" about a deal for the 32-year-old, who has previously been linked with Liverpool and West Ham.

The Frenchman of Argentine parentage joined Juve from Monaco in 2000 after scoring the golden goal winner for France in the European Championship final against Italy that summer.

Trezeguet, who won the World Cup with France in 1998, holds the record as the club's top foreign striker, with 172 goals in 10 seasons in all competitions.

Hercules return to Spain's Primera Liga this season after 13 years.

The club had been suspected of buying matches in order to gain promotion, but the case was dropped after judicial authorities refused to hand over telephone wiretaps to the Spanish football federation that could have served as evidence.



PHOTO: AFP

(L-R) Inter Milan quartet Dutch midfielder Wesley Sneijder, Brazilian goalkeeper Julio Cesar, Argentinian striker Diego Milito and Brazilian defender Maicon pose with their trophies after being awarded best players at their positions during the Champions League draw ceremony in Monaco on Thursday.

Masche offer accepted



AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool announced on Friday they had accepted a new improved offer from Barcelona for Argentina midfielder Javier Mascherano, with a deal set to be concluded this weekend.

"Liverpool Football Club have agreed terms for the transfer of Javier Mascherano to FC Barcelona," a Liverpool statement confirmed.

"The Spanish club have now been given permission to speak to the Argentina midfielder."

Mascherano has been desperate to leave Anfield but up to now Barcelona had failed to meet or come close to the 25 million pound price tag Liverpool had put on the Argentina captain.

valuation.

The player, bought for 18m from West Ham over three years ago, had sat out Liverpool's defeat to Manchester City on Monday.

This week Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola admitted he was in the market for a defensive midfielder having been thwarted in his attempts to sign primary transfer target Cesc Fabregas from Arsenal.

Reports in the Spanish media earlier this week claimed Mascherano had already agreed a four-year, 85,000-pound-a-week contract.

A statement from Barcelona read: "FC Barcelona and Liverpool FC have reached an agreement in principle for the transfer of Javier Mascherano to the club for the next four seasons."

"The deal was closed after intensive efforts made by the club in the final hours and through the player himself in the negotiations."

"Barcelona will report the details of the operation once the player passes the medical and the transfer is concluded."