

Porto lift Europa title

AFP, Dublin



Porto manager Andre Villas-Boas insists it would cost Europe's super-powers a fortune to break up his Europa League winners.

Villas-Boas and several of Porto's squad will be highly prized after a triumphant campaign reached a new high with a 1-0 victory over Braga in the Europa League final on Wednesday.

Colombia striker Falcao scored the winner with a superb header on the stroke of half-time at the Aviva Stadium in Dublin as Porto added Europe's second tier trophy to the Portuguese title they won without losing a single match.

At just 33, Villas-Boas is the youngest coach to win a UEFA club competition and his meteoric rise has drawn admiring glances from Chelsea, Juventus, Inter Milan and Roma.

It would be no surprise if Porto receive an official approach for Villas-Boas, as well as Falcao and fellow forward Hulk, before next season.

But Villas-Boas revealed the buy-out clause in his contract and those of Hulk and Falcao may prove prohibitive.

"The speculation is normal with managers and players all around the world. Porto has such an incredible year that people speculate about exits," he said.

"But Porto has the highest release clauses in the market so it is not easy for these talents to leave us."

"Hulk has a release clause of £100 million. It is not easy for any club to pay and Falcao has a release clause of £30 million, which is not easy to pay either."

"My release clause is very high. It is something that is not normal. I am proud to have that because it reflects on Porto."



Porto star Radamel Falcao (C) celebrates with the Europa League trophy following their victory over Braga in the final at the Dublin Arena on Wednesday.

"Of course you can say that is a number that doesn't scare people but there is not a lot of money in peoples' pockets. It is not impossible but let's hope we can keep everyone for next year."

Villas-Boas did acknowledge that he would love to test himself in one of world's top leagues eventually, but he plans a short career in the game and would happily retire to a life of motorbike riding within 10 years.

"I have an ambition to leave a mark in the game and to win much more. The greatest leagues in the world are the Spanish, English and Italian leagues and one day I hope to be part of it," he said.

"But I am happy in Porto, it is

my home town. I want to have a short career because it is very stressful."

"Normally it would be 10 years. I am crazy about motorsports so maybe I will buy a new car or bike and jet off."

After spending several years as Jose Mourinho's opposition scout at Porto, Inter Milan and Chelsea, Villas-Boas has inevitably been compared to the Special One.

In truth his relationship with Real Madrid coach Mourinho has fractured since they parted ways at Inter.

He was willing to dedicate the trophy to his compatriot but was far more glowing in his tribute to the influence Barcelona coach

Pep Guardiola has had on his career.

Villas-Boas is huge admirer of Guardiola's attacking principles and he said: "I should pay a compliment to Pep Guardiola. He was always an inspiration for me because of his methodology and the way Barca play fantastic football."

"I had the chance to meet him this year. He is an inspiration everyday. His philosophy is Barcelona's philosophy."

"The other I should mention is Jose Mourinho, he introduced me to professional football and gave me a lot. I would like to dedicate the trophy to him and also to my family and to Bobby Robson, who gave me my start."

While Villas-Boas can justifiably contemplate a bright future, Braga coach Domingos Paciencia is also expected to go onto greater things.

Paciencia had already announced he would leave after the final, with Sporting Lisbon mooted as his likely next club.

"I'm sad because this team has been working together for two years. We went through unique moments," Paciencia said "It is a cycle that has been broken. I hope Braga will grow stronger."

"We reached the final and that shows this team has lots of qualities. It's normal that there is a bit of frustration but we should be proud of reaching a final of this magnitude."

Macheda in limbo

Football

AFP, Rome

Two seasons ago Federico Macheda was the new darling of the Stretford End and seemed on the verge of becoming the next great Manchester United striker.

Making his debut as a substitute for Nani in a crucial Premier League match against Aston Villa with United trailing 2-1, he scored an injury-time winner and the Red Devils went on to win the title.

Macheda was just 17 at the time but already seemed to have the big-game mentality the sport's top-level players possess.

But two years on and Macheda, although still only a teenager, seems to be stuck in limbo.

When he arrived at United he was behind Wayne Rooney, Dimitar Berbatov and Carlos Tevez in the pecking order.

Tevez left but Michael Owen was brought in and Macheda was still at best fourth-choice striker, although with Danny Welbeck and Mame Biram Diouf also on the club's books, there was no certainty of that.

The Rome-born forward seemed to be making steady progress and was a more regular member of the first-team squad in his second season but then, prior to last year's World Cup, United bought Javier Hernandez.

Welbeck and Diouf were sent out on loan for the whole season but with Hernandez making a positive early impact, Macheda was now fifth choice out of the five strikers left at the club.

A January loan move to Sampdoria seemed just the tonic, both for United and Macheda.

Macheda's goalscoring feats at United had received a lot of coverage in Italy, where he was considered one of the country's leading young talents.

And when Samp sold their two best forwards Antonio Cassano and Giampaolo Pazzini, there was not just one void to fill, but two.

He made his debut in a 2-1 victory over Roma and then got his first start, and first goal, in the Italian Cup win over Udinese 10 days later.

But the move quickly turned sour.

That was the first of four games in a row in which he started but in a 4-0 defeat at Napoli he was replaced early in the second half and thereafter lost his placing in the starting line-up.

Macheda had a couple of unconvincing performances where he showed lots of desire and industry but not enough technique and composure.

He would start only one more game, in the home defeat to Genoa in the city derby, where again he was replaced before the hour mark.

Prince's future unclear

AFP, Rome



AC Milan midfielder Kevin-Prince Boateng on Wednesday admitted he is unsure of where he will be playing next season.

Boateng has one more match to play for Milan before the end of the season when his current club and Genoa will have to thrash out his future.

The Ghana midfielder is part-owned by both clubs but was bought by Genoa from Portsmouth at the beginning of the season.

Genoa and Milan had come to agreement that Genoa would buy the 24-year-old and loan him for one year to Milan, who would then buy him for more than the six million euros Genoa had paid for him.

However, they then renegotiated and he was registered with the Italian League as part-owned by the two clubs.

The deal involved a payment of one million euros from Milan to Genoa plus the exchange of various players.

However, already earlier this week officials from the two clubs revealed that for Boateng to make a permanent move to

Milan, the two clubs need to come to an agreement over the second half of his contract, which has not yet happened.

And with Inter Milan allegedly interested in buying the combative German-born player, Boateng himself says he doesn't know where he will be next year.

"I know absolutely nothing, in football anything can happen," he said during a publicity event in the Milan city centre.

"I'm happy at Milan, this is a great moment because we've just won the title, my colours are (Milan's) red and black."

"Of course I want to stay at Milan even though I can't be 100 per cent sure I will."

"I know there are ongoing discussions. It would give me great pleasure to say definitely I'm a Milan player but at the moment I'm only half one."

Having wrapped up their first Serie A title in seven years, Boateng feels next season Milan will be able to challenge the cream of Europe.

"The only thing that was missing in Europe was a goal and a little bit of luck in London," he said of their elimination at the last 16 stage against Tottenham.

"Getting knocked out of the Champions League was the saddest part of the season."

Diego thrilled

Football

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Diego Maradona said he was thrilled to resume his coaching career in the United Arab Emirates where he would have no restrictions in signing players for his new club AlWasl.

The Dubai-based club confirmed a deal with Maradona on Monday but gave no details. Before returning to Dubai Maradona will be going home to Buenos Aires later this week.

Local newspapers quoted an official at the club saying that "Maradona would return in due course and "throughout the year" implying his involvement is of a more long-term nature than a short visit.

"It's a marvellous experience that I went looking for. I didn't need any recommendation," Maradona, who had been linked to several jobs since his contract as Argentina coach was not renewed after last year's World Cup, said on Wednesday.

"I'm happy because I saw the opportunity to be able to coach in a country which maybe doesn't have all the stars but a team to lead, good money, (a club) who give you the players you ask for," he told TyC Sports by telephone from Spain.

Maradona said his assistant coaches would be the same two men on his staff at the World Cup in South Africa where his Argentina team were knocked out by Germany in the quarterfinals, Hector Enrique and Alejandro Mancuso.

"There is a signed pre-contract which needs polishing and then we'll have to start thinking about the work," said the 50-year-old 1986 World Cup-winning captain.

Bastian faces fitness race

AFP, Berlin

Germany star Bastian Schweinsteiger faces a race against time to be fit for the friendly against Uruguay on May 29 and next month's Euro 2012 qualifiers, it was revealed on Wednesday.

The 26-year-old broke a toe in his right foot in Bayern Munich's 1-1 draw with Eintracht Frankfurt on April 23 in the German league, but the club kept the injury a secret to ensure he could finish the season.

Schweinsteiger sat out Bayern's 4-2 win at Russia's Zenit St Petersburg on Wednesday in their final friendly before breaking up for summer and Germany's vice-captain is battling to be fit to add to his 87 caps for his country.

"I do not know yet (if I can play)," he told German daily Bild.

Inzaghi staying, Pirlo leaving

AFP, Rome



Veteran forward Filippo Inzaghi on Wednesday signed a new one-year contract with AC Milan tying him to the club until the end of next season.

But midfield playmaker Andrea Pirlo revealed that he would be leaving Milan after 10 years.

"I'm here to say goodbye," Pirlo told reporters when he arrived at the club's headquarters in Milan. "After 10 unforgettable years I want to thank the club and the fans for their affection."

He said the decision to part company was mutual but that he had yet to decide on his next destination.

"I haven't yet spoken to Juventus and we (with Milan) didn't speak of any offers," he added. "It was already in my mind to leave, it was a mutual decision."

Pirlo, who turns 32 on Thursday, joined the club in 2001 after three years at cross-town rivals Inter Milan.

He started his career at Brescia and moved to Inter in 1998 but was only a bit-part player and had loan spells at Reggina and back at Brescia.

He won two Champions League crowns and two Serie A titles with Milan and the World Cup with Italy in 2006.

Inzaghi missed most of this season due to a cruciate knee ligament injury.



SET Max

Indian Premier League
Mumbai v Rajasthan
Live from 8:30pm

ESPN

Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm

TEN Cricket

West Indies v Pakistan
Second Test, Day 1
Live from 8:00pm



Bangladesh League

Muktijoddha v SK Ruseel
Time: 4:15pm
Venue: Bangabandhu
National Stadium

Inter-District Cricket C'ship

FINAL

Rajshahi v Mymensingh
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National
Cricket Stadium, Mirpur



Real Madrid captain Iker Casillas (L) and Mayor of Lorca Francisco Jodar hold an autographed club jersey during Real's visit to the town ahead of a charity match against Murcia on Wednesday.

Real play quake benefit match

Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid drew 2-2 on Wednesday with a team of players from the Murcia region in a benefit match for victims of last week's earthquake in southeastern Spain.

Some 32,000 people packed Real Murcia's Nueva Condomina stadium for the match, the club said on its website.

French striker Karim Benzema and Portuguese star Cristiano Ronaldo scored for Real. The Murcia team benefited from an own goal from Pepe as well as one from Meca.

Proceeds from the match went to victims of the May 11 earthquake that struck the Murcia town of Lora, killing nine people in the injuring at least 100 and leaving thou-

sands homeless.

"This kind of gesture during hard times can cheer people up and bring them hope," Real's Xabi Alonso said after the match.

"We lend our support by playing football, which is the best way we know how. With this little bit of help and the vitality and enthusiasm of this city, they will overcome this. This was a nice, entertaining match and we all had fun playing."

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

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