

Barcelona warn Real Madrid

 Football

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona on Thursday warned their great rivals Real Madrid they would be forced to sever ties between the clubs if Real continue to "cross the line" of sportsmanship.

"Real Madrid and FC Barcelona are ancient institutions with many supporters and aficionados," said Barca president Sandro Rosell during a press conference.

"(But if) the line is crossed, we would be forced to break off our institutional relations, which we do not wish to do in any form."

Rosell heralded "the best season in the history of the club," at the end of a campaign in which Barca won their third successive Spanish league title and defeated Manchester United in the Champions League final.

He then turned his attention to Real, and particularly the spiky exchanges between the clubs that accompanied their series of four matches in the space of 18 days in April and May.

"Real Madrid crossed the line of acceptable sporting rivalry by making accusations against our club without any foundation," he said.

"The rivalry will continue next season but we will not allow them to go beyond the bounds of sportsmanship."

Rosell referred to "numerous provocations" stemming from the Madrid-based press and from both the club itself and the Real coach, Jose Mourinho.

Mourinho was handed a five-game ban by UEFA after he made allegations of favouritism towards Barcelona following Real's 2-0 defeat in the first leg of their Champions League semifinal tie.

The Portuguese's appeal against the sanction will be heard on July 29.

The radio station Cadena Cope also made doping allegations against the Catalan club, drawing attention to the "suspicious reputation" of some of its medical staff.

Several Barcelona players subsequently underwent unscheduled doping tests at the request of UEFA, European football's governing body.

According to Rosell, the accusations against his medical staff and players "were premeditated and miserable," as "the club is an example of conduct for millions of people, particularly children".



Italian goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon (R) poses with his wife Alena during their wedding in Prague on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

United to enter Modric chase

ESPNSOCCERNET



Manchester United are considering entering a bidding war with Chelsea for the services of Tottenham's Luka Modric, while it is believed that Manchester City are also keen on joining the race.

Modric would be open to a move to Old Trafford, according to his agent, after an initial offer of £22 million from Chelsea was rejected by Spurs. Harry Redknapp reiterated on Thursday that Modric is not for sale but Sir Alex Ferguson, an open admirer of the player, is reportedly set to enter the market for the midfielder.

The Daily Star claim that United will tempt Spurs with an offer of around £18 million, plus Premier League top scorer Dimitar Berbatov, in the hope of striking a deal. Nikky Vuksan, Modric's representative, said that the Croatian would consider an offer from the Red Devils, but only with Tottenham's approval.

"If that was the Spurs position then we would be happy to sit with the club and discuss for the future," Vuksan told The Guardian. "He's happy at Spurs. Any offer that comes for him, it's up to the decision of Tottenham Hotspur if they want to reject it or accept it. We have a great partnership with Tottenham and there's not been activity on our behalf that we would do on our own."

"Everything is in coordination with Spurs, and it's all up to the chairman, Daniel Levy, to decide. [Luka's] under contract, he's happy there, he's willing to try to win the Premiership with Spurs and play Champions League [the] next season. He loves the Champions League experience, it was a great honour for Sir Alex to say something like this and he uses it only as a motivation to continue on such a level," he said.

Vuksan refused to reveal Modric's reaction to the rejected Chelsea bid when pressed on the issue, but said it would not be to "anybody's surprise" if a bid of around £40 million came in for his client.

"I'm sorry it's inappropriate for me to say what he thinks about it. Obviously he respects the decision of the club," he said. "If you ask me, Modric is one of the best and one of the probably most expensive players in the world. He's going to keep improving and get better and better."

Former United defender Gary Pallister thinks that Sir Alex Ferguson will make a bid for Modric, who he feels would be the perfect man to fill Paul Scholes' boots.

"There seems to be an impending feeling that Modric is going to move and for me he would be an ideal replacement for Scholes," Pallister said.

"The imagination and vision he brings to the midfield makes him a target. He can also score wonderful goals as well, which is part of Scholes' make-up. He maybe doesn't tackle as ferociously as he does but he is a terrific talent."

"I'm sure there are a host of clubs who would love to sign him and I'm sure Harry would love to keep him."

Meanwhile, United are understood to have offered £9.2 million for RC Lens' teenage sensation Raphael Varane, with the French club agreeing to a deal in principal, subject to the player's approval.

Villa appoint McLeish

AFP, London



Alex McLeish vowed to win over Aston Villa's supporters on Friday after being confirmed as the Premier League club's new manager following days of angry protests by fans.

Villa confirmed in a statement they had appointed McLeish with immediate effect just five days after the 52-year-old Scot resigned from bitter local rivals Birmingham City, who were relegated last month.

"I know that some of our fans have voiced concerns and I can understand why," McLeish said.

"It will be up to me to convince you that I am the right man to drive the club forward and I intend to give absolutely everything to prove that I can be a success at the club."

McLeish described the lure of Aston Villa as "irresistible."

"I am honoured to have this opportunity to manage a club with such a fantastic history as Aston Villa's," he said.

"The heritage, the history of success and the tradition of Aston Villa are compelling and irresistible. The challenge for me is to try to add my own chapter."

Villa have not yet confirmed the length of McLeish's contract but have said the Scot will commence duties immediately.

Birmingham were angered when it became apparent McLeish was a contender for the Villa vacancy and accused their rivals of tapping up the former Rangers and Scotland boss.

They also demanded £5.4million (\$8.7m) in compensation to cover the remaining two years of McLeish's contract but threats to report Villa to the Premier League or take out an injunction to block the move were not carried out.

McLeish becomes Villa's third full-time manager in nine months.

Martin O'Neill resigned just five days before the 2010-11 campaign began and his successor Gerard Houllier stepped down at the end of the season for health reasons.

McLeish entered the reckoning after a protracted hunt for a manager saw several high-profile names linked to the job before being ruled.

Wigan manager Roberto Martinez turned his back on talks with Villa last week, while



Mark Hughes, Steve McClaren and Rafael Benitez were all mentioned as possible successors.

Villa chief executive Paul Faulkner described McLeish as the "right man for the job."

"Unquestionably, Alex meets the criteria we set out at the beginning of our search which was based on proven Premier League experience, leadership, a hard-working ethic and, most importantly, a shared vision for Aston Villa," Faulkner said.

"Alex is someone with whom we will work closely and work well together."

"Alex's vast experience and proven abilities demonstrate clearly that he is a strong leader and an ambitious man and we are looking forward very much to the exciting new season about to start."

McLeish enjoyed four years at Birmingham, winning the League Cup this year with a memorable win over Arsenal before a late slump saw them relegated.

Previously he had managed Motherwell, Hibernian, Rangers and Scotland.

Despite the storm of protest which has greeted his move to Villa, McLeish's mentor Sir Alex Ferguson, who managed the player during his years in charge of Aberdeen, backed him to be successful.

"It doesn't matter whether there are 50 against him, 500 against him or five against him because the experience and the ability he has got, believe me, he will prove that he can do the job," the United manager said.

USA face red-hot Jamaica

AFP, Los Angeles

The United States will take on red-hot Jamaica in Sunday's quarterfinal match of the CONCACAF Gold Cup, the most important contest for the US since the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

The Americans have won three of the last five titles in the biennial championship for North America, Central America and the Caribbean.

The US-Jamaica match is one of four quarter-finals on the weekend. On Saturday, Costa Rica will battle Honduras and defending champion Mexico will square off against Guatemala at the New Meadowlands Stadium in New York.

The United States and Jamaica are first up at JFK Stadium in Washington followed by Panama and El Salvador.

The Americans were among the favourites heading into the Gold Cup along with Mexico.

After beating Canada 2-0 in their opening match, the United States was upset 2-1 by Panama. The Americans then edged Guadeloupe 1-0 on Tuesday to avoid getting knocked out.

It was the first time in the event's 21-year history that the Americans failed to win their group.

They will be going up against a skilled Jamaican squad that went 3-0 in the group stage.

Most of the Jamaican stars call Major League Soccer home. Los Angeles Galaxy goalkeeper Donovan Ricketts, New York Red Bulls midfielder Dane Richards and San Jose Earthquakes striker Ryan Johnson are all key parts of the Jamaican team.

With a win over Jamaica, the Americans would advance to the semis and face the winner of the Panama-El Salvador contest.

MU open at West Brom

AFP, London



Champions Manchester United will kick off the defence of their Premier League crown at West Brom before facing Tottenham and Arsenal at Old Trafford, fixtures for the 2010/2011 season showed Friday.

United will travel to The Hawthorns on August 13 before consecutive home games against Spurs and old rivals Arsenal.

Sir Alex Ferguson's team will complete their domestic campaign with a trip to Sunderland on May 13 next year.

Arsenal meanwhile will open their season against Newcastle at St James Park, where the Gunners squandered a 4-0 lead earlier this year as the Magpies battled back to draw 4-4.

Arsene Wenger's men then have a daunting home fixture against Liverpool before travelling to Old Trafford for their tie with United.

Chelsea meanwhile open their campaign at Stoke before facing West Brom at Stamford Bridge.

Liverpool new signing Jordan

Henderson will meet his old club Sunderland on the opening day at Anfield before the Reds travel to London to face Arsenal.

"It's a massive test early on. It's nice to have a home game first," Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard told Liverpoolfc.tv.

"Hopefully we will have a few new signings in and we can start the season with three points which would give us the confidence to then go and get a good result at Arsenal. That is a difficult place to go and we haven't won there for a while."

Newly promoted Swansea have a baptism of fire against Manchester City at Eastlands.

Swansea's first home game will be against Wigan, meaning an emotional return for Latics boss Roberto Martinez who left the club two years ago.

Swansea's season concludes against Liverpool at home on May 13.

Of the other Premier League newcomers, QPR make their return to the topflight after a 15-year absence at home to Bolton while Norwich travel to Wigan.

QPR boss Neil Warnock said he was

relishing the opportunity of leading a team in the Premier League once more.

"It's just fabulous to be involved," he told Sky Sports News. "When you see the fixtures it's so exciting. It doesn't matter who you play, the Premier League is where we all want to be. It's just fabulous to be involved."

"I think the thing is to try to play without fear. We know we're going to have one or two defeats but it's how you bounce back in the Premier League - and our home record's always been good."

"I'm really glad I'm in the Premier League and I've got to make sure whoever plays us it's difficult for them."

Warnock meanwhile is hoping to bolster his playing staff as he seeks to build a squad capable of staying the course.

"The lads that took us up deserve a chance - but I've got to get the right players to make the team better," he said.

In other opening day games, Tottenham and Everton meet at White Hart Lane, Fulham and Aston Villa meet at Craven Cottage and Blackburn entertain Wolves at Ewood Park.

Match-fixers get lifetime ban

 Football

AFP, Seoul

South Korea's professional football league on Friday imposed a lifetime ban on 10 players who have been charged with match-fixing schemes, the toughest penalty in its 28-year history.

"We made the decision, determined that this would be the first and the last match-fixing scandal in the league," Kwak Young-Cheol, head of the K-League's disciplinary committee, told journalists.

"Players must keep in mind that they will be kicked out of the sport permanently if they get caught committing wrongdoing," he said.

The league imposed a life ban on 10 out of 11 players who have been charged by state prosecutors, with the 11th receiving a five-year ban.

The players allegedly accepted money

from fixers in exchange for helping their teams to lose games. Eight of them are from the same club, Daejeon Citizen.

Kwak said that if any of the players were cleared of wrongdoing in future court trials, their bans would be reviewed.

The league imposed separate penalties on the players' teams.

Daejeon Citizen will lose 30 per cent of its annual share from the sales of Sports Toto, the nation's only licensed sports lottery. The loss amounts to about 270 million won (US\$245,000) for the team.

Professional teams regularly receive portions of the sales of the lottery.

Gwangju FC and Sangju Sangmu Phoenix, which each have one player banned, will each lose 10 per cent of their lottery share.

No team officials or coaches have been punished as the players acted on their own, Kwak said. But the K-League will amend its regulations so that teams will be held more accountable for their lack of oversight, he added.

SPORTS POLL

Who do you think will challenge Mushfiqur Rahim?

Dhiman Ghosh 47.3%

Anamul Haque 45.3%

TOTAL VOTES: 349

WEEKLY QUESTION

Do you think match-fixing allegations in the B League are substantial?

Visit the sports page of www.thedailystar.net to cast vote

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STAR Cricket
England v Sri Lanka
Third Test, Day 3
Live from 4:00