

Chelsea hire

AFP, London

Chelsea have appointed FC Porto boss Andre Villas-Boas as their new manager in a record-breaking deal, a club statement announced on Wednesday.

The 33-year-old, who emerged as the front runner for the job after resigning as Porto coach on Tuesday, has signed a three-year contract.

Villas-Boas not only becomes the youngest ever Premier League manager but also the most expensive coaching appointment ever after Chelsea paid Porto £13.3 million (15 million euros, \$21.35m) to trigger the release clause in Villas-Boas's contract.

Chelsea described Villas-Boas who led Porto to a domestic double and Europa League glory last season, as "the outstanding candidate for the job".

"He is one of the most talented young managers in football today and has already achieved much in a relatively short space of time," the club said.

They added: "His ambition, drive and determination matches that of Chelsea and we are confident Andre's leadership of the team will result in greater successes in major domestic and European competitions."

Villas-Boas, who replaces Carlo Ancelotti, is returning for a second spell at Stamford Bridge, having work as an assistant and scout under his mentor, Jose Mourinho.

Chelsea, trophy less last season, noted: "Andre will bring his coaching experience back to a club he is already very familiar with, having previously worked here for three years."

"He has always been highly regarded at Chelsea and everyone here looks forward to welcoming him back and work-

ing with him."

British media reports suggest Chelsea are paying Villas-Boas, who is their seventh manager in eight years, a salary of £4.5 million a year.

One of his first moves as the new Blues boss could be to sign Porto's star striker Falcao, the £25million-rated Colombian who netted the only goal in Porto's Europa League win over Sporting Braga in Dublin.

On Tuesday the way had been cleared for Villas-Boas to move back to London after he sent the club a fax informing them of his decision to join Chelsea.

Turkey coach Guus Hiddink had also been linked with a return to Chelsea, where he won the FA Cup as a caretaker manager in 2009.

Wednesday's announcement brings to an end Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich's search for the man he perceives as the right one to end the club's recent trophy drought and crucially deliver Chelsea a long awaited first Champions League title.

Villas-Boas, who cut his coaching teeth under Sir Bobby Robson at Porto in 1993, served under Mourinho at Porto, then following 'the Special One' to Chelsea and later Inter Milan.

The Porto-born Villas-Boas was appointed manager of Academica in 2009 with the club then bottom of the Portuguese league.

He led them to an 11th-place finish and a cup semifinal.

In 2010 he joined Porto, winning the Portuguese SuperCup in his first term, and then the treble this year.

Porto were unbeaten in the league last season with 27 wins in 30 matches, becoming only the second Portuguese club to finish a league season unbeaten, after Benfica in 1972-73.

Porto have acted quickly to fill the void left by Villas-Boas by naming assistant coach Vitor Pereira as his successor.

Villas-Boas



Roma after Krkic

AFP, Barcelona

AS Roma have made a formal offer to buy Barcelona's 20-year-old striker Bojan Krkic, the Catalan club said Wednesday without disclosing any figures.

"We have received an offer but it is still in a period of study and evaluation," Barcelona board spokesman Toni Freixa told a news conference.

"Clearly when we receive this offer and the club considers it, it is because there is a possibility it could happen," Freixa said, declining to speculate further on the outcome.

The board spokesman said he understood that it was difficult for Roma to make any announcement on the matter while their offer was still being evaluated.

Bojan, born in Spain to a Serbian father and a Catalan mother, made his debut in Barcelona's first team in the 2006-2007 season when he was just 16.

Last December, he signed an extension on his contract with Barcelona until 2015.

Freixa declined to comment on other possible transfers but said the club's aim was to have the most competitive team possible. "If we can do it with home-grown players, so much the better."

Barcelona have 45 million euros (\$65 million) to spend on signings, plus any profits made from sales, he said.

Black Cats grab Ji

AFP, Seoul

South Korean international Ji Dong-Won is to join English Premier League side Sunderland on a three-year deal, his local club Chunnam Dragons announced Wednesday.

The K-League side said the two teams had agreed in principle on the transfer and the forward was expected to sign a contract later this month after a medical. Terms were not disclosed.

Yonhap news agency quoted sources as saying the transfer fee was around 3.8 billion won (\$3.5 million).

Ji, 20, will be the eighth South Korean to join the Premier League and the youngest so far. Manchester United's Park Ji-Sung and Lee Chung-Yong of Bolton Wanderers were the only Koreans still playing in England last season.

Ji is currently with his country's squad in Jordan for the second round in the regional qualifying tournament for next year's Olympics. His club said he would fly to England immediately after Thursday's match.

"I had the impression that Sunderland really wanted me," Yonhap quoted him as saying in Amman.

"I know there will be stiff competition for playing time, and my goal is to become the player that the team wants me to be in six months."

"I am also looking forward to playing against Ji-Sung and Chung-Yong, whom I both admire."

Ji has six goals in 11 international matches. He was runner-up for the K-League rookie of the year in 2010 after scoring eight goals in 26 games.

Ji was first linked to Sunderland earlier this month but another Premier League club, Newcastle United, and Dutch team PSV Eindhoven were reportedly expressing interest.

Wolves punish Diego

AFP, Berlin

Bundesliga side VfL Wolfsburg have hit bad-boy Brazil midfielder Diego with a huge fine of 500,000 euros (720,262 US dollars) for storming out of his side at the end of last season, according to reports.

Having been dropped by coach Felix Magath for the final game at Hoffenheim in May, playmaker Diego quit the team hotel and missed his team's 3-1 victory which ensured their German league survival.

According to German magazine Sport Bild, the 26-year-old has been fined half a million euros -- a month's salary -- and has been reprimanded for his behaviour.

The club confirmed they had hit him with the maximum penalty, but refused to specify the amount.

Argentina seek to end drought

Football

AFP, Paris

Brazil and Argentina - two names that evoke perhaps the hottest rivalry in the history of the global game - will be out to lay claim to continental superiority at the Copa America starting on July 1.

But both will be on slightly different missions.

For fans of Argentina, two consecutive Olympic crowns is scant return for their expectations which have not been met at senior level since their last Copa success back in 1993, while their World Cup slate remains blank since the halcyon days of Diego Maradona at his 1986 peak.

Little wonder, then, that striker Carlos "Apache" Tevez says "we must win it - whatever it takes."

Brazil, in contrast, despite also exiting in the quarterfinals of last year's World Cup, have managed to go on stacking up silverware, following a 2002 World Cup triumph with 2007 and 2004 Copa crowns - both achieved at Argentina's expense.

Yet the pressure is on the samba

stars to deliver just as much as their neighbours, given that this month's tournament will serve, as coach Mano Menezes freely admits, as a dress rehearsal for the 2014 World Cup when the global extravaganza returns to Brazil for the first time since 1950 - when Uruguay stunned their hosts in the Maracana.

Menezes says the onus is really on both pre-eminent Latin American powerhouses to deliver - on Argentina on home soil next month given their trophy drought - and on the Brazilians themselves as they try to hone their game in time for their own showpiece.

Those three years at least give Menezes the comparative luxury of time to draw up a game plan by giving young talents such as Neymar a platform on which to shine now that the old guard encapsulated by the likes of Ronaldo have finally left the stage.

"We are going to use the all opportunities (afforded by their Copa schedule) to prepare ourselves well for the World Cup," Menezes told reporters in Rio on Monday hours before the squad jetted off to Argentina in advance of

their first pool meeting with Venezuela on July 3.

Predecessor Dunga was shown the door after last summer's loss to the Dutch in South Africa and Menezes himself is thus far struggling to give free rein to the flair in abundance which Brazil fans crave.

Ronaldo's swansong against Romania brought an unconvincing 1-0 win and a goalless draw with Holland at the start of June was also not impressive.

But Menezes says he knows essentially who he should have on his team sheet - while indulging in the time-honoured custom of deflecting any pressure onto his main rivals.

"We can say Argentina are the favourites as they are playing at home - by the same token Brazil will be favourites for the World Cup in 2014 - well that's the theory," noted Menezes.

At least Brazil can strut their stuff as defending champions - and without the onus of performing in front of their own fans.

For Menezes' counterpart Sergio Batista, the pressure is certainly on as he tries to steady the ship after the

adrenaline rush of Maradona's spell in the hotseat gave way to despair after last summer's thrashing at the hands of Germany.

Since Alfonso Basile masterminded the 1993 win in Ecuador five coaches have come and gone empty-handed - Daniel Passarella, Marcelo Bielsa, Jose Pekerman, Basile again and Maradona.

But with Lionel Messi in their ranks the gauchos will feel anything is possible.

First, the hosts must get past Bolivia, the unpredictable Colombia and Costa Rica, replacing special guests Japan, who pulled out in the aftermath of the tsunami earlier this year.

The auriverde must see off first the Venezuelans, then Paraguay and Ecuador.

Menezes says his dark horses are World Cup semifinalists Uruguay and they meet Peru, Chile and Mexico - filling their habitual guest slot in the competition - in their pool.

Argentina and Uruguay have won 14 titles each to eight for Brazil, while Paraguay and Peru have netted two each to one for Colombia and Bolivia.

Saritama pulls out

AFP, Quito

Ecuador suffered a blow to their Copa America hopes on Tuesday when winger Luis Saritama had to pull out through injury to be replaced by Giovanni Nazareno, coach Reinaldo Rueda said.

Saritama pulled a leg muscle during a match for his club Deportivo Quito in a win over Liga de Quito on June 15 and the 27-year-old will not make the tournament starting in Argentina on July 1.

Nazareno, a 23-year-old with Barcelona from the southern city of Guayaquil, comes in and joined up with the squad Tuesday afternoon.

"It is really sad and a shame to lose a player. It's tough on the group and for him. He is a great professional who had worked hard to be ready," Rueda said.

Ecuador's best finish in the Copa is two fourth places achieved in 1959 and 1993 - they were hosts on the latter occasion.



Ecuador winger Antonio Valencia practices headers during a training session in Quito on Tuesday.

Messi in the mix of things

Football

APP, Buenos Aires

Argentina have an apparent embarrassment of attacking riches as they embark on the Copa America next month, starting with their opening fixture against makewrights Bolivia on July 1.

Their 2008 Olympics-winning coach Sergio Batista can call on the ultimate ace card in Lionel Messi - even though the Barcelona man has rarely shown his club form in sky blue and white at international level.

But Batista can also turn to Carlos Tevez of Manchester City, Gonzalo Higuain of Real Madrid and Sergio Aguero of Atletico Madrid, hence scoring goals ought on paper to be the least of the hosts' problems.

Then again, there is a school of thought which feels that Tevez and Messi do not comprise a tandem made in heaven - even if Batista insists that "Carlitos is a key man" while Messi "feels totally at ease with how he fits into the scheme of things."

"You have to pick the best players," says Batista, who seemingly has yet to make up his mind 100 per cent.

Referring to Messi, he told broadcaster

TNT on Tuesday that "we will try to set up a team in which he feels comfortable beyond having a plan B for when he is not there."

"But we have the best player in the world and we have to take advantage of that in sending out players who feel football in a similar manner to him," says Batista.

Against a weaker side such as Albania thrashed on 4-0 in a Monday friendly Argentina were able to keep everybody happy as Napoli's Ezequiel Lavezzi scored the opener, Messi added the second, Atletico Madrid's Sergio Aguero netted a third and substitute Tevez completed the rout in injury time.

But against the likes of Brazil, the Albiceleste will be unlikely to afford such space to go on the offensive to such a degree.

As Tevez admitted afterwards: "We can't take that game as indicative of the ones to come - which will be very tough."

Yet Messi says if Argentina, beaten by Brazil in the last two Latin American showpiece finals, go for the jugular they can hope to lift their first major trophy since their 1993 Copa success.

"We have to keep playing in this same vein as we did today (Monday) whoever we are up against," insisted the Barcelona magician.

SPORTS POLL

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

Yes 75.9%

No 24.1%

TOTAL VOTES: 87

WEEKLY QUESTION

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