



BATISTA

booted out

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentina's Copa America flop has cost coach Sergio Batista his job as the Argentine Football Association said Monday they were parting ways with the manager.

AFA's Ernesto Cherquis Bialo confirmed Batista's departure after a meeting of the AFA executive committee on Monday.

Although Batista only officially replaced Diego Maradona six months earlier, his days had appeared to be numbered after Argentina exited the Copa on home soil after a quarterfinal shootout loss to old rivals Uruguay -- who went on to win the title.

Batista was vilified in the press for not seeming to know his best team -- he chopped and changed after a poor start before Carlos Tevez, whom he dropped after two games, returned to miss the decisive spotkick against Uruguay.

There was no immediate word on a successor, although the main candidates appear to be Alejandro Sabella and Paraguay coach Gerardo Martino.

As a player, Sabella had brief stints with Sheffield United and Leeds. He is set to take charge of Al Jazira in the United Arab Emirates. Sabella won the Copa

Libertadores with Estudiantes two years ago.

Cherquis Bialo insisted that Batista "wasn't sacked" but in fact the AFA unilaterally decided to cut ties with the coach who before taking the helm of the national team had guided Argentina to Olympic gold at the Beijing Olympics.

Batista, 48, took over from Maradona after the 2010 World Cup finals initially on a temporary basis, but landed a permanent role just three months into the job.

During his tenure, Batista guided Argentina in 17 matches, with eight victories six draws and three defeats.

In discussing a future trainer, Cherquis Bialo said the decision would be taken calmly and probably announced in the coming week.

The departure of "Checho" is another in a string of managerial changes for Argentina since the 2004 exit of Marcelo Bielsa. He was succeeded by Jose Pekerman (2004/06), Alfio Basile (2006/08), Maradona (2008/2010) and Batista.

In announcing the move, the AFA also announced the cancellation of a friendly scheduled against Romania on August 10 in Bucharest.

With that cancellation, the next scheduled fixtures for Argentina are tune-ups before they begin 2014 World Cup qualifying in October against Chile.

Brazil name team

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Brazil coach Mano Menezes on Monday named a 23-man squad for the friendly with Germany in Stuttgart on August 10, as he looks to turn the page on his side's Copa America quarterfinal exit.

Bidding for what would have been a fifth title in the last six tournaments, Brazil were sent packing by Paraguay after losing on penalties following a 0-0 draw in their last-eight encounter.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers

Julio Cesar (Inter Milan/ITA), Victor (Gremio)

Defenders

Andre Santos (Fenerbahce/TUR), Daniel Alves (Barcelona/ESP), David Luiz (Chelsea/ENG), Dede (Vasco de Gama), Lucio, Maicon (both Inter Milan/ITA), Thiago Silva (AC Milan/ITA)

Midfielders

Elias (Atletico Madrid/ESP), Fernandinho (Shakhtar Donetsk/UKR), Ganso (Santos), Lucas Leiva (Liverpool/ENG), Lucas (Sao Paulo), Luis Gustavo (Bayern Munich/GER), Ralf (Corinthians), Ramires (Chelsea/ENG), Renato Augusto (Bayer Leverkusen/GER)

Forwards

Alexandre Pato (AC Milan/ITA), Jonas (Valencia/ESP), Fred (Fluminense)

Torres vows to score

Football

AFP, Hong Kong

Chelsea's misfiring striker Fernando Torres on Tuesday swatted away fears over his form since his £50 million (\$82 million) switch from Liverpool, vowing to end his goal drought in the new season.

Torres, who scored once in 18 appearances in a miserable four months last season, remains a concern for Chelsea after failing to find the target in the club's two Asia tour outings ahead of their Premier League start on August 14.

Critics have questioned whether the Spaniard, recruited for a British transfer record, has the ability to help the west London outfit win trophies under new manager Andre Villas-Boas.

But speaking to reporters in Hong Kong, where Chelsea end their tour this week with two games in the Barclays Asia Trophy, Torres hit back at his doubters.

"I'm 27. Don't worry I don't forget to score goals... I will score," said the World Cup-winning Spain international.

"It's going to be a big season. My form is ok, it's time to be fit and ready. We're trying to get into the best form. We have got big expectations and I can see the winning mentality we have (at Chelsea)."

But his dry spell has prompted speculation that Chelsea may have bought a striker on the wane and leaves Villas-Boas, who arrived from Porto for £13.3 million, with a dilemma over whether the star forward merits a starting spot.

Chelsea captain John Terry defended his

under fire team mate against comparisons with Andriy Shevchenko, who flopped at the club after a big money transfer.

"I think that's unfair, actually," said Terry. "Naturally there's a bit of pressure on him. But that's why you want the best strikers in the world because they can deal with it."

Terry said the Spaniard's relatively poor form last season was due to an injury that he picked up during Spain's victorious World Cup campaign in South Africa but added that he has enjoyed a better pre-season this year.

"He is looking sharp in the training," Terry said. "He is hungry as well."

Villas-Boas also attempted to deflect the criticism from the Spanish striker.

He has yet to pair Torres with Didier Drogba on the tour, and there is likely to be only one slot up front in Chelsea's typical 4-3-3 formation, with Nicolas Anelka and Daniel Sturridge also competing for that position.

"We are focusing a lot on one player -- for us it is not focusing only on one player," Villas-Boas said. "We are trying to create relationships between the players so they can perform better as a group."

Chelsea play Hong Kong champions Kitchee on Wednesday and, if they win, they face either Aston Villa and Blackburn in the final of the Barclays Asia Trophy on Saturday.

Earlier Torres, Frank Lampard goalkeeper Petr Cech and forward Salomon Kalou took part in a football 'clinic' at Chelsea's Hong Kong soccer school, sharing skills and tips in a short session with young fans.

A smiling Torres failed to hit the back of the net in four attempts.

Henry rules out Europe return

AFP, London

Former France international Thierry Henry has ruled out a return to Europe and plans to finish his football career in the United States, it was reported here Tuesday.

The 33-year-old former Arsenal and Barcelona star told the Daily Express he had no plans to emulate David Beckham, who has periodically returned to Europe for loan spells with AC Milan during his time in the United States.

Henry, who joined the MLS side the New York Red Bulls last year, said he plans to see out his playing days in the United States.

"No, I'm done with Europe. In my career over there, I won everything with my team at club and international level," Henry told the Express.

Henry meanwhile sympathised with former Arsenal team-mate Cesc Fabregas, who is currently locked in a stand-off with the club over a possible return to his boyhood club Barcelona.

"It's difficult for both Cesc and the club. But I made my decision and we'll see what Cesc will do."

No special plan

Football

AFP, Hong Kong

Chelsea manager Andre Villas-Boas said Tuesday he has no "secret formula" for bringing the Premier League title back to the London club beyond relying on the talent of his squad.

"It's not a question of me bringing strategies," Villas-Boas said Tuesday. "There are no magicians in this game."

His comments came after captain John Terry spoke of the pain of watching Manchester United lift the Premier League trophy last season.

"Not winning makes you very hungry," Terry said. "We have seen other teams lift it. It definitely burns inside, it hurts, and that's what drives you on."

The pair were speaking in Hong Kong on the third leg of Chelsea's Asian pre-season tour. Chelsea play local champions Kitchee in the Barclays Asia Trophy on Wednesday.

Villas-Boas, 33, who worked at Chelsea under Jose Mourinho, as well as at Porto and Inter Milan, said he has spent the trip getting to know the squad since completing his £13.3 million transfer to Chelsea from Porto last month.

"No one brings secret formulas to this game," he said. "The players we have are successful because they were successful before, and they want to be successful again."

The new manager said he has some

tough decisions to make, with five central defenders and three left backs vying for playing time in the squad.

With Didier Drogba, Fernando Torres, Nicolas Anelka and Daniel Sturridge all fighting for what is typically a single striker position in the club's favoured 4-3-3 formation, it is also crowded up front.

"We are trying to get on board as much information as possible," Villas-Boas said. "It doesn't mean these players are under assessment. They are not."

They are successful on their own." But he did not rule out entering the transfer market before the season starts.

"On that front we are pretty happy. In August we will take decisions for the first day of the season."

Villas-Boas is aware of the expectations owner Roman Abramovich, with the achievements of Mourinho's tenure, which brought back-to-back Premier League titles in 2005 and 2006, setting the bar.

"It's pretty straight-forward what you have to achieve, isn't it, in terms of trophies," he said. "You have to challenge for the Premier League, and a continued process for other trophies. I do not see why this cannot happen."

With Chelsea losing in the Champion's League final in 2008 and the semi-finals in 2009, "you can see a pattern," Villas-Boas said.

Winning the Champion's League "is one more step. Are we able to do that in the three years I have a contract? I don't know."

Villa agree N'Zogbia fee

AFP, Hong Kong

New Aston Villa boss Alex McLeish on Tuesday said French midfielder Charles N'Zogbia will join the club for £9.5 million (\$15.5 million) pending a medical.

Villa have agreed the price with Wigan for the winger, after improving on an initial bid of £9 million, leaving McLeish excited at the prospect of adding quality on flanks after the departures of Ashley Young and Stewart Downing.

"We believe everything else is there," McLeish said in Hong Kong. "I believe he's a great addition to the squad." He is an explosive player and gives us a little bit of quality that replaces one or two of the guys that have left the squad."

Having seen a deal to bring N'Zogbia to Birmingham City fall apart last summer over personal terms, McLeish is glad to be closing in on his man at a second club.

Villa captain Stilian Petrov said N'Zogbia has always been a tough opponent who seems to have played particularly well against the club he's now set to join.

"He is able to take players on," Petrov said. "He's an exceptional talent. I think he will adapt well."

Petrov noted that the Frenchman, who is on an extended leave after duty with the French national team, is much sought after.

"He is a name that a lot of big clubs have been chasing, and we managed to land him before anyone else was able to get to him first," Petrov added.

With the addition of new No. 1 Shay Given, who has completed his £3.5 million move from Manchester City, the manager hopes the Birmingham club will get off to a flying start.

McLeish admitted it is hard for clubs like Aston Villa to compete for British players, and he played down the prospects of Villa improving on last season's ninth-place finish.



Real Madrid players Cristiano Ronaldo (R) and Pepe (L) warm up during a training session in Madrid yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

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DAY'S EVENT

Sk Kamal Int'l Basketball

India v Malaysia
Time: 9:30am
Maldives v Bhutan
Time: 4:00pm
Malaysia v Bangladesh
Time: 6:00pm

Venue: Dhanmondi Indoor Basketball