

Capello-FA showdown

AFP, London

England manager Fabio Capello was due to meet his Football Association bosses here Wednesday following the Italian's criticism of the decision to strip John Terry of the captaincy.

Capello has faced mounting calls to resign or be sacked following his comments to an Italian broadcaster on Sunday over the Terry affair, which have been portrayed as a direct challenge to the FA.

FA chairman David Bernstein is expected to outline to Capello the reasons for removing Terry from the England captaincy, which took place last week after the Chelsea's defender's trial for racial abuse was delayed until after Euro 2012.

Capello is known to be unhappy at the FA decision, having previously stated Terry should be viewed as "innocent until proven guilty."

The England manager is also reported to have repeatedly assured Terry his position as captain was not at risk, including during a meeting at Chelsea's training ground as recently as a fortnight ago.

While some commentators have speculated that Capello could leave his £6 million-a-year position Wednesday if the talks with Bernstein break down, the wider view is that some sort of conciliatory agreement will be reached.

The Daily Telegraph reported on Wednesday that the FA is in no mood to concede any ground to Capello, who is due to leave the England post after the Euro 2012 finals.

The Telegraph said Bernstein had received backing from FA board members to challenge Capello over his comments on Terry while acknowledging that the body's options were limited.

"The complications of firing him are probably too disruptive to contemplate," The Telegraph reported, citing the "huge cost" of a dismissal as well as the disruption to the England set-up.

The Daily Mail meanwhile reported that a "furious" Bernstein would ask Capello to "show some contrition" before agreeing to issue a joint statement that would enable both sides to draw a line under the affair.



Athletic Bilbao defender Jon Aurensetxe (C) celebrates his goal with teammates during their Spanish Cup tie against Mirandes at the San Mames Stadium on Tuesday.

# Bilbao roar into final

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Athletic Bilbao ended tiny Mirandes's remarkable run with a ruthless 6-2 win in their King's Cup semifinal second leg on Tuesday to set up a final with either Barcelona or Valencia.

Iker Muniain, Markel Susaeta and Jon Aurensetxe scored inside the opening 22 minutes at San Mames, quickly extinguishing any chance of another giant-killing feat from their plucky visitors.

Fernando Llorente scored twice in four second-half minutes, after Mirandes had pulled one back through defender Aitor Blanco, who also grabbed their second near the end.

Cesar Caneda put the ball in his own net two minutes from time as Bilbao, who have won the Cup 23 times, progressed 8-3 on aggregate.

Marcelo Bielsa's side will find out their final opponents on Wednesday, when Valencia visit the Nou Camp to play Barca with the tie level at 1-1.

"It's incredible to be in another final after only a few years, we are delighted," Llorente told Spanish television.

"We knew we couldn't afford to relax at all, and the few times we did, they scored.

"I don't care who we meet in the final as long as we win. I had a bad experience with Barca, but we'll give it our best whatever it is." Bilbao lost 4-1 to Barca in the

2009 Cup final.

Mirandes, who play in Spain's Segunda B, knocked out top-flight sides Villarreal, Racing Santander and Espanyol to reach the last four, and were the second team only from the third tier to do so in the competition's current format.

Bilbao never gave the visitors time to settle, however, and a failure to clear a cross in the 11th minute allowed Muniain to burst through the middle and fire in the opener.

Mirandes were still reeling three minutes later when the hosts strung together a series of passes that pulled the defence apart and Susaeta turned to slot away the second.

Aurensetxe looped in a header to make it 3-0 and Mirandes did not manage to test Bilbao keeper Gorka Iraizoz until the 35th minute when Pablo Infante drilled a shot straight at him.

Mirandes showed some of the courage and talent that have made them headline news in Spain after the break, and were rewarded in the 58th when a rebound from a shot against the post was turned in by Blanco.

They flashed another effort wide of the post before in-form Spain striker Llorente lobbed the visiting keeper from outside the area in the 71st. He then slid in at the far post to notch his eighth goal from the last four matches.

Both sets of fans cheered their teams in the closing stages and Mirandes even hit the post before the referee blew the final whistle.

# Senegal sack coach

AFP, Dakar

Senegal have fired the coach of its national football team, Amara Traore, along with his technical staff, following the team's poor performances at the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN), the national news agency reported.

"It was a failure and it is the coach's responsibility," said Augustin Senghor, president of the Senegalese Football Federation, reported the Senegalese Press Agency.

"Decisions had to be taken and the executive committee has decided to end its collaboration with the coach and his backup staff."

The national team were pre-tournament favourites in the first round of the competition in Equatorial Guinea, but returned home at the bottom of their group after failing to secure a single point.

Traore insisted he would not resign having achieved his initial goal of qualifying the team for the CAN.

# Allegri defends Ibra

AFP, Rome

Massimiliano Allegri stirred the fires ahead of AC Milan's Italian Cup trip to Turin on Wednesday by sticking up for his under-fire striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic while pointing an accusing finger at opponents Juventus.

Ibrahimovic is available to play but will then miss the next three league games -- including the crucial top of the table clash with Juve on February 25 -- as punishment for slapping Napoli's Salvatore Aronica on Sunday.

He was sent off for that, although to Aronica's credit he indulged in no theatrics after the incident.

Quite the opposite, in fact.

Ibrahimovic's slap came as the Napoli defender had Milan's Antonio Nocerino by the throat and Aronica reacted by slapping the diminutive midfielder, whom Ibrahimovic was standing behind when he threw his cheeky blind-sider.

But the linesman saw the first strike and Ibrahimovic was sent packing.

Even so, Allegri stuck up for a player who was also banned last season for punching another opponent in the ribs and another time for abusing a linesman.

"He did something that wasn't very nice but he was defending Nocerino who he saw as the little guy," said a smiling Allegri.

"Similar incidents happen in games and they're not always punished. On Sunday Zlatan paid for everyone so now we'll wait

for his appeal (Milan are hoping to have his suspension reduced)."

Having defended his own player, Allegri turned on Juventus, who have been complaining since Sunday about a possible penalty they weren't given in their 0-0 draw at home to strugglers Siena.

It was a touch-and-go incident but Juve seem convinced they have been robbed and general manager Guiseppe Marotta has been particularly vocal in demanding respect for his team and only the best referees for their games.

"People talk about helping the referees but then as soon as a decision goes against them they kick up a stink," said Allegri.

"At the end the decisions for and against even themselves out, there's no need to reduce matches to single incidents such as a penalty.

"You need to be more serene to help referees. We as a club do things differently (to Marotta)."

As for Wednesday's game, Allegri believes a positive result could also help his side's title quest.

Juve lead Milan in that competition by a point with a game in hand.

"Tomorrow we'll need to work hard because we want to go all the way in this competition," said Allegri.

"We must do well and not compromise (our chance of making) the final. Psychologically it could be a very important key in the league."

# Redknapp not guilty

Football

AFP, London

Tottenham manager Harry Redknapp was found not guilty of tax evasion on Wednesday following a three-week trial into allegations he stashed hundreds of thousands of dollars in an offshore bank account.

Redknapp's co-accused Milan Mandaric was also unanimously acquitted of all charges in dramatic scenes at a packed Southwark Crown Court.

Redknapp and Mandaric hugged each other in the dock following the conclusion of a two-and-a-half-week trial which had seen both men's reputations at stake.

After his acquittal, Redknapp said his case should never have been brought to court, describing his prosecution as a five-year "nightmare."

"I'm looking forward to getting home, and getting away from all this," Redknapp said outside court. "It really has been a nightmare, I've got to be honest. It's been five years and it should never have come to court.

"It's unbelievable really. It was horrendous. But it was unanimous, there was no case to answer. I'm pleased that I can go home."

The most successful English manager currently working in football, Redknapp is regarded as the favourite to replace England boss Fabio Capello later this year with his Spurs side currently third in the Premier League table.

Any guilty verdict against Redknapp would have effectively ended his chances of becoming England boss, a



Tottenham Hotspur manager Harry Redknapp arrives at the Southwark Crown Court in London yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

job he has previously said he would be unable to turn down if offered to him.

But Wednesday's acquittal leaves Redknapp free to pursue his dream of managing England. Bookmakers immediately slashed their odds on him taking over from Capello following the verdict.

"These unfounded allegations should never have been brought to court," Mandaric said in a statement outside court amid a scrum of media.

"I need to go and find somewhere to wake up from this horrible dream."

Redknapp, 64, and Mandaric, 73, had denied two counts of cheating the

public revenue by failing to declare \$295,000 (£189,000, 225,000 euros) kept in a Monaco bank account.

Prosecutors alleged the money was paid to Redknapp by Mandaric when the two men were manager and owner of Portsmouth respectively as part of a bonus arising from the sale of striker Peter Crouch.

But Redknapp said the money was paid by Mandaric to help with investments in the United States, and that he believed any taxes owing on the amount had already been paid by his chairman.

Redknapp's defence barrister John Kelsey-Fry QC had argued the case against the Spurs boss was "repugnant to all our basic instincts of fairness."

Addressing jurors in his closing remarks on Monday, Kelsey-Fry said there was an "inherent absurdity" in the prosecution's reliance on "primarily despicable" evidence gathered by a News of the World reporter.

Lawyers for Mandaric meanwhile argued the prosecution's claim that the money paid into the Monaco account was a bonus "simply doesn't make sense."

"We say the evidence against him is hopelessly weak," Mandaric's barrister Lord MacDonald told the court.

"In Milan Mandaric's mind this was not money for Crouch, this was Milan Mandaric coming through on money he had promised months before - for a portfolio," the barrister said.

After the acquittal, reporting restrictions on an earlier tax evasion case involving Mandaric and former Portsmouth chief Peter Storrie were lifted. Both men were acquitted.

# Jose confident of Jose stay

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid striker Jose Callejon says he is confident under-fire coach Jose Mourinho will stay on at the Spanish giants beyond the end of the season.

Spain's sports media reported last month that Mourinho was fed up with bad relations in the dressing room and repeated losses to Barcelona and wants to leave at the end of the season.

"I don't think he is going to leave because he is happy here," Callejon was quoted as saying Wednesday by sports daily AS.

"He wants to work and do things right. I see him as calm and with the desire to win many titles."

Callejon, a product of Real's youth academy who was brought back to the club from Espanyol this season by Mourinho on a five-year deal, also heaped praise on the Portuguese coach.

"He gives me much security and confidence, since the first day. He is clear, direct, goes face to face and those characteristics are good for footballers."

Mourinho joined Real from Inter Milan in May 2010 on a four-year contract.

Real are at the top of the Spanish league table with 55 points, seven more than nearest rivals Barcelona.

# Abramovich runs the rule

AFP, London



Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich watched his expensively assembled side train Tuesday as he continued to keep an eye on the regime of manager Andre Villas-Boas.

The Russian billionaire made what is thought to be his first training-ground visit of the season on Saturday, spending more than half an hour watching the preparations for Sunday's 3-3 Premier League draw with Manchester United and 20 minutes speaking with Villas-Boas.

Chelsea have denied reports the duo were involved in 'showdown' talks, following a report Abramovich, who is estimated to have invested £1 billion of his own fortune into the London club, had become frustrated with results that have left them 14 points behind leaders Manchester City.

Abramovich did though talk to Chelsea's players after watching them blow a 3-0 lead against United.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Who will you support in this season's BPL?

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

Follow The Daily Star Sport on

twitter

www.twitter.com/dssport

What to WATCH

Channel 9

BPL Opening ceremony

Live at 6:30pm

ESPN

Sportscenter India

Sports News

Live at 8:30pm

TEN Action+

Serie A

Lazio v Cesena

Live from 1:40am (Friday)

DAY'S EVENT

Premier League

Rahmatganj v Sk Russel

Time: 3:15pm

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

BPL Opening ceremony

Time: 6:30pm

Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Mirpur