

Capello's reign over

Football

AFP, London

Fabio Capello resigned as manager of England on Wednesday following the Football Association's decision to strip John Terry of the captaincy, the FA confirmed.

In a remarkable twist to one of the most dramatic days in English football history, Capello's resignation was confirmed just hours after his likely successor -- Tottenham manager Harry Redknapp -- was cleared of tax evasion charges.

Capello's departure from the post followed talks with FA officials reported to be furious at the Italian coach's public criticism of last week's decision to axe Terry as captain.

Capello's position had come under scrutiny after he told an Italian broadcaster on Sunday that he disagreed "absolutely" with the dismissal of Terry, who faces a criminal

trial for allegations of racially abusing QPR defender Anton Ferdinand during a Premier League match in October 2011.

Although senior FA officials were known to be unhappy with Capello's comments, the former AC Milan and Real Madrid coach was expected to remain for the final few months of his contract, which would expire after Euro 2012.

However in a bombshell announcement released shortly after 7.20pm (1920 GMT), the FA confirmed that Capello's four-year reign was over.

"The Football Association can confirm that Fabio Capello has today resigned as England Manager," the statement said, following discussions between Capello, FA chairman David Bernstein and FA General Secretary Alex Horne.

"The discussions focused on the FA Board's decision to remove the England team captaincy from John Terry, and Fabio Capello's response through an Italian broadcast inter-

view.

"Fabio's resignation was accepted and he will leave the post of England manager with immediate effect."

Capello was not immediately available for comment. FA officials have scheduled a press conference at Wembley on Thursday.

The 65-year-old took over as England coach in December 2007 following the country's failure to qualify for the Euro 2008 final, signed a lucrative £6 million-a-year contract with a brief to halt years of English footballing underachievement on the international stage.

His hardline disciplinarian approach reaped impressive results during an initial two-year honeymoon period, when a revitalised England qualified for the 2010 World Cup with ease.

Capello won praise for his handling of the first controversy involving Terry's captaincy, when he summarily dismissed the Chelsea

defender following allegations about his private life in early 2010.

However the bubble burst after a disastrous campaign in South Africa, which saw England draw with the United States and Algeria, scrape a 1-0 win over Slovenia before suffering a humiliating 4-1 thrashing by Germany.

Capello, who had controversially been given a contract extension just prior to the World Cup finals, managed to cling on to his position but in many respects was battling the perception of being a lame duck manager.

His clumsy handling of the decision to reappoint Terry last year -- replacing Rio Ferdinand without informing the respected Manchester United defender first -- was sharply criticised.

With the FA letting it be known that they would prefer Capello's successor to be English, Tottenham manager Redknapp emerged as the overwhelming favourite to take up the post.



Fabio Capello leaves his central London home yesterday, a day after resigning from his England manager's post.

PHOTO: AFP

Redknapp tight-lipped

AFP, London

Harry Redknapp remained tight-lipped about becoming the next England manager Thursday despite being installed as the overwhelming favourite to succeed Fabio Capello following the Italian's shock resignation.

"I don't know anything about the England job, Tottenham Hotspur manager Redknapp told Sky Sports on Thursday. "I've not even thought about it, I've got a job to do for Tottenham... Tottenham is my focus."

Capello quit on Wednesday following a row with the Football Association over the decision to strip John Terry of the England captaincy.

His exit capped an extraordinary day for English football, coming just hours after Redknapp was cleared of all charges following a trial for tax evasion.

Redknapp said he was stunned by the Italian's decision, made after Capello criticised the FA for stripping Terry of the captaincy on the grounds the Chelsea defender still faces criminal charges of racially abusing QPR's Anton Ferdinand in a case that won't be settled until after Euro 2012.

"I was shocked, I was surprised, I didn't expect that to happen," said Redknapp. "We knew he (Capello) was going to leave in the summer (after Euro 2012), but I didn't expect it to happen now."

Bastian out for weeks

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich's German international Bastian Schweinsteiger's season took another bad turn with news he will likely be out for several weeks with right ankle ligament damage.

Having only just returned to league action following surgery on a broken collarbone, the 27-year-old turned his ankle after 17 minutes of Wednesday's German Cup 2-0 victory over Stuttgart.

"To say when Bastian will be able to train or play, we'll have to say later," Bayern doctor Hans-Wilhelm Muller-Wohlfahrt said.

Gervinho sinks Mali

Football

AFP, Libreville

A contender for the goal of the competition from Arsenal striker Gervinho against Mali here Wednesday put Ivory Coast into the Africa Cup of Nations final.

Gervinho's solo moment of brilliance deep into the first half gave the Elephants a 1-0 win and left them on a collision course with Zambia, shock winners over Ghana in the day's other semifinal.

The pair meet back at Libreville's L'Amitie stadium on Sunday.

For the Ivorians this will be their first appearance in the Nations Cup climax since they were beaten by Egypt in Cairo in 2006.

They are seeking their second continental title after a lone success 20 years ago.

Mali had struggled manfully to keep the orange tide at bay in a frenetic first half, until Gervinho made his mark with a little help from some slack defending.

Depriving Mali back Ousmane Berthe of the ball bang on the halfway line the Gunners star scampered hare-like down the left wing, leaving Malian pursuers in his wake to shoot right-footed past Soumaila Diakite and into the far corner.

The Eagles coach Alain Giresse pounded the dug out with his fist in frustration.

The Ivorians went into this semifinal looking to avoid the same fate as Ghana, the Black Stars having been knocked out by so-called minnows Zambia across the border in Bata earlier.

The hot favourites switched three from Saturday's last eight win over Equatorial Guinea - Salomon Kalou, Cheik Tiote and PSG's Siaka Tiene in for Arthur Boka, Kafoumba Coulibaly and Max Gradel.



PHOTO: AFP

Juventus defender Martin Caceres (L) celebrates one of his two goals with teammate Alessandro Del Piero during their Italian Cup semifinal against AC Milan at San Siro on Wednesday.

Juve dent Milan

Football

AFP, Rome

Juventus have one foot in the Italian Cup final after Martin Caceres scored a brace to hand them a 2-1 win over AC Milan in the semifinal, first leg at the San Siro on Wednesday.

Italian youth international Stephan El Shaarawy replied for the hosts but it wasn't enough.

The victory maintained the Serie A leaders' unbeaten run this season in league and cup.

It was the second time in this campaign the champions have lost to their bitter rivals but Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri denied his side's chances of reaching the final had been diminished.

"We have to accept the defeat knowing that nothing has been compromised," he told Rai.

"We were naive in conceding the second goal and that's disappointing in a game such as this.

"Those are errors we need to cut out but we'll stay serene. We had many players out injured but we don't have time to blame anyone," added Allegri in a reference to Juve's complaints at the weekend that the referee had cost them a win against Siena.

"I know my team's strengths with many strange injuries. We have to remain calm and continue to work hard."

The first half was a tentative and tight affair with few chances for either side, both of whom had rung the changes, resting several first choice regulars.

Clarence Seedorf lashed a dropping ball wide for Milan for whom El Shaarawy then beat Andrea Barzaglie with a clever touch only to fire his shot from a tight angle across the six-yard box.

Juve didn't create a decent chance until after the half hour mark when Marcelo

Estigarribia thrashed wide from 15 yards.

Emanuele Giaccherini hit a shot from outside the box that took a wicked deflection but Milan goalkeeper Marco Amelia stretched out a hand to tip it over bar.

The second half was a much more lively affair thanks to the visitors taking an early lead.

Former Milan forward Marco Borriello wriggled free in the box to get off a shot that Amelia could only push out and Caceres was quickest onto the loose ball to finish on 53 minutes.

Juve threatened to run away with it and captain Alessandro Del Piero fizzed a shot wide of the upright.

But the hosts started to come back into it and following a cross from Luca Antonini, captain Massimo Ambrosini teed up El Shaarawy to fire home a crisp finish on 62 minutes.

Zlatan Ibrahimovic then had the ball in the net but it was ruled out for a somewhat obvious handball.

Milan appeared the more likely and Ibrahimovic had another chance that Giorgio Chiellini blocked with a dramatic full-length dive.

Juve went close when Amelia pushed out Mirko Vucinic's shot only for Fabio Quagliarella to arrive too late to knock home the rebound.

But seven minutes from time Giaccherini beat the offside trap to escape down the left and cross for Caceres to take a touch and plant an unstoppable curler into the top corner that left Amelia rooted to the spot.

There was an ugly finish to the game as Ibrahimovic, sent off and banned for three league games for slapping Napoli's Salvatore Aronica at the weekend, clashed with Juve goalkeeper Marco Storari while Chiellini also flared up with Milan assistant Mauro Tassotti.

Bayern seal Shaqiri deal

AFP, Berlin

FC Basel's Swiss international midfielder Xherdan Shaqiri has signed a four-year deal for Bayern Munich from next July, the Bundesliga club announced on Monday.

"We're delighted with Xherdan Shaqiri to be able to sign one of the most sought-after talents in Europe," said Bayern sporting director Christian Nerlinger.

Shaqiri signed until 2016 for an undisclosed fee which local media have estimated at between 12 and 13 million euros.

Cesc inspires Barca

Football

AFP, Barcelona

A superb performance from Cesc Fabregas guided Barcelona to a 2-0 win over Valencia here on Wednesday in their Spanish Cup second leg clash and a place in the final as they won 3-1 on aggregate.

The former Arsenal captain - who achieved his dream move back to the club where he started as a youngster last summer - scored a goal and set up Xavi for the second to round off a show-stealing performance.

Barca - beaten in last year's final by bitter rivals Real Madrid - will play Athletic Bilbao in the final after they trounced third division Mirandes 6-2, 8-3 on aggregate, on Tuesday.

Fabregas opened the scoring in sublime fashion

in the 16th minute, when he was found by a perceptive pass by Lionel Messi.

The Spaniard then looked up and from a tight angle lobbed keeper Diego Alves.

Valencia pressed forward and while they gave the hosts some problems it was two good saves from Alves that kept them in the match.

However, their hopes disappeared completely nine minutes from time as Chilean wing Alexis Sanchez twisted and turned and picked out Fabregas in the middle of the penalty area, but he had the selflessness and vision to realise Xavi

was better placed.

Thus Fabregas produced the faintest of touches to slide it across to Xavi, who without hesitating lashed it into the far corner.



Barcelona forward Cesc Fabregas (L) scores the opening goal during their Spanish Cup semifinal against Valencia at Nou Camp on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

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What to WATCH

Channel 9

BPL T20

Barisal Burners v Sylhet Royals

Live from 2:00pm

Chittagong Kings v Duronto Rajshahi

Live from 6:30pm

STAR Cricket

Australia v Sri Lanka

Cwealth Bank Tri-Series

Live from 10:20am

ESPN

Sportscenter India

Sports News

Live at 8:30pm

DAY'S EVENT

Premier League

Arambagh v Abahanis

Time: 3:15pm

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

BPL T20

Barisal Burners v Sylhet Royals

Time: 2:00pm

Chittagong Kings v Duronto Rajshahi

Live from 6:30pm

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