

FA turns to Hodgson

AFP, London

Roy Hodgson became the favourite for the vacant England manager's position when the Football Association confirmed Sunday they'd made an official approach to speak to the West Bromwich Albion boss.

Tottenham manager Harry Redknapp had long been regarded as favourite for a role left open when Fabio Capello resigned in February in protest at the FA's decision to strip John Terry of the England captaincy.

But in a stunning development, the FA have turned to Hodgson who has a wealth of international experience having coached the likes of Switzerland and Finland.

FA chairman David Bernstein, thanking West Brom counterpart Jeremy Peace, said: "I'm grateful to Jeremy and all at West Bromwich Albion for their co-operation in allowing us to approach Roy, who I have since spoken with."

"Roy is the only manager we have approached and we remain on course to make an appointment within the timescale we set-out soon after Fabio Capello's departure."



Barcelona forward Pedro Rodriguez (R) celebrates his goal with teammate Lionel Messi during their Primera Liga encounter against Rayo Vallecano at the Vallecas Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Barca destroy Rayo

REUTERS, Madrid

Barcelona kept Real Madrid's La Liga title celebrations on hold for a few days at least with a crushing 7-0 victory at Rayo Vallecano on Sunday after Real had cruised to a 3-0 home win over Sevilla.

Two days after Pep Guardiola announced his decision to step down as Barca coach at the end of the season, World Player of the Year Lionel Messi scored two goals and had a hand in four more including two for Pedro.

Barca were playing at Rayo's compact stadium just a short distance away from Plaza de Cibeles in Madrid where everything was in place for the mass festivities expected when Jose Mourinho's side win a first league title in four years. Real maintained their seven-point lead with three games left after Karim Benzema bagged a double and Cristiano Ronaldo racked up his 43rd league goal of the campaign to crush Sevilla.

Mourinho's side have 91 points and can secure their 32nd league title with victory at Europa League finalists Athletic Bilbao on Wednesday, regardless of what Guardiola's side do at home to Malaga.

Big-spending Malaga strengthened their chances of a first venture into the Champions League next season when a cross looped in off Ignacio Camacho's shoulder for a 1-0 home win over Valencia.



RESULTS

Real Madrid 3 (Ronaldo 19, Benzema 48, 52) Sevilla 0
Real Zaragoza 2 (Edu 28, Apono 51) Athletic Bilbao 0
Malaga 1 (Camacho 27) Valencia 0
Real Betis 2 (Pozuelo 86, Pereira Rodriguez 88) Atletico Madrid 2 (Koke 62, Falcao 90+3)
Rayo Vallecano 0 **Barcelona 7** (Messi 16, 90, Correa Silva 26-og, Keita 38,

third for Seydou Keita after a mazy run before halftime.

Messi's shot came back off the bar for Pedro to volley the fourth and Thiago Alcantara headed a fifth.

Messi chipped over the top for Pedro's second and the Argentine fired in the last himself for his 43rd league goal and 65th overall this season.

Advocaat to quit after Euro 2012

AFP, Moscow

Russia coach Dick Advocaat has revealed he will step down after the end of the European football championships to be co-hosted by Ukraine and Poland from June 8 to July 1.

"It's true, I will resign after the end of the European championship," local media quoted Advocaat as saying. "I don't want to disclose the reasons for my decision but money wasn't the issue," he said. "I didn't tell the players that I'm going to resign but I'm confident it will not affect our preparations for the Euro."

"We'll all do our best to perform well at the championships."

The 64-year-old Dutchman took over in 2010 from compatriot Guus Hiddink, who led Russia to the Euro 2008 semifinals. Advocaat had signed a two-year deal with an option to extend for another two years.

Reports said that Advocaat has already received offers from clubs including Dutch league giants PSV Eindhoven, where he worked from 1995-98, and Russian top-flight side Dynamo Moscow, who are battling for a spot in the Champions League next year.

The Russian Football Union (RFU) refused to comment on the case.

Spurs back in fourth

AFP, London

Tottenham Hotspur returned to fourth place in the Premier League with a 2-0 win over Blackburn Rovers at White Hart Lane here on Sunday.

Rafael van der Vaart struck in the 22nd minute before Kyle Walker's brilliant free-kick 15 minutes from time sealed Spurs' victory as Harry Redknapp's men won for just the second time in 10 league games.

Tottenham return to fourth place by virtue of better goal difference than Newcastle while Chelsea - 6-1 winners over QPR earlier on Sunday - are a point behind them.

Only the top four clubs at the end of the Premier League season are due to qualify for next term's Champions League, although that number will be reduced to three if Chelsea beat Bayern Munich in this season's final.

Defeat left Rovers in the relegation zone, three points from safety, with just two games of the season left.

Podolski joining Arsenal

AFP, Berlin

German international striker Lukas Podolski will leave Cologne for English Premier League side Arsenal at the start of the 2012/2013 season, the Bundesliga club announced on Monday.

Podolski, 26, joined struggling Cologne from Bayern Munich in 2009.

No details of the contract were given by Cologne who are 16th in the Bundesliga, however press reports estimate the transfer at 13 million euros.

No let-up from Kenny

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool manager Kenny Dalglish has insisted he will field a strong line-up for the Premier League meeting with Fulham at Anfield on Tuesday, even though the fixture comes just four days before the showpiece FA Cup Final clash with Chelsea at Wembley.

The Merseyside club made five changes for Saturday's league visit to Norwich where they recorded an impressive 3-0 win thanks to a hat-trick from controversial Uruguay striker Luis Suarez.

Forward Andy Carroll was left out of the Liverpool squad entirely at Carrow Road with a slight injury as Dalglish clearly kept an eye on Wembley where Liverpool have the chance to put a dismal league campaign behind them by adding the FA Cup to the League Cup they have already won this season.

Suarez's devastating performance at Norwich must surely mean he has a chance of being rested against Fulham, although his manager was adamant that whatever line-up he fielded on Tuesday would represent a strong side.

"I just know he played very well," Dalglish said of Suarez. "He scored three fantastic goals and we get three well-deserved points."

"Other people can catalogue his performances, and put them in level of importance for us, but it's just important that he plays for this football club," the Liverpool and Scotland great added.

"He's a fantastic footballer, nothing he does surprises you, whether it's his vision or passing, his shots or his goals. It doesn't surprise you. We're just delighted that we have him playing for us."

"We'll pick a side on Tuesday night that does this club justice. I think we have conducted ourselves well in all the league games and cup competitions that we've played and I see no reason why that would change."

Given Liverpool's wretched home league form -- just five wins from 17 games this season and, now, more points on their travels than at Anfield -- Dalglish is presumably desperate to win their remaining two home fixtures, against Fulham and Chelsea.

And Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard recognised the importance of taking on the Champions League finalists Chelsea at Wembley on Saturday with the confidence of another victory behind them.

"We want to go into the final in good form," Gerrard told the club's website. "We've got a game against Fulham now which we want to win and then we can get ready for Chelsea."

Juventus inch closer to league glory

AFP, Rome



Juventus remained on course for their first Serie A crown in nine seasons after crushing relegation-threatened Novara 4-

0 on Sunday as AC Milan stayed three points adrift with a 4-1 win at Siena.

A brace from Mirko Vucinic and goals from Marco Borriello and Arturo Vidal helped unbeaten Juventus record their eighth success in a row to reach 77 points with three matches left.

The Bianconeri, who have a better head-to-head record against Milan, could clinch the title as early as Wednesday should they defeat Lecce and Milan lose to Atalanta.

Despite the heavy defeat Novara, eight points adrift of safety, were not condemned to Serie B after third-from-bottom Lecce were beaten 2-1 at home by improving Parma.

At Novara, Borriello almost gave Juve a second-minute advantage with a left-foot shot that flew just the wrong side of the far post.

But with the away side piling forward the lead arrived soon after when another former Roma striker, Vucinic, cleverly steered home Andrea Pirlo's 16th-minute free kick.

The Bianconeri doubled their lead five minutes before the break when an unmarked Borriello headed home Emanuele Giaccherini's inviting centre.

Chilean midfielder Vidal made

sure of the points five minutes after the restart, stroking the ball home after goalkeeper Alberto Santana had halted Vucinic's charge, before the livewire Vucinic struck his second of the afternoon on 64 minutes.

RESULTS

Bologna 3 (Portanova 24, Ramirez 37, Garics 67) Genoa 2 (Palacio 59, Jorquera 77)
Atalanta 2 (Denis 11, Bonaventura 51) Fiorentina 0
Inter Milan 2 (Obi 58, Zarate 72) Cesena 1 (Ceccarelli 56)
Siena 1 (Bogdani 83) **AC Milan 4** (Cassano 26, Ibrahimovic 29, 90+4, Nocerino 90)
Novara 0 **Juventus 4** (Vucinic 16, 64, Borriello 40, Vidal 50)
Lecce 1 (Tomovic 83) **Parma 2** (Giovinco 67, Paletta 78)
Udinese 2 (Di Natale 69,

Milan kept pace with Juve after frontmen Antonio Cassano and Zlatan Ibrahimovic struck in three first half minutes to defeat Siena.

Cassano swept home on 26 minutes after home goalkeeper Zeljko Brkic could only parry an Ibrahimovic strike before the Swede struck with a left-foot blast to double the lead on 29 minutes after being played in by his Italian strike partner.

Substitute Erjon Bogdani pulled a goal back for the home side with

seven minutes to play but Antonio Nocerino made the game safe for Milan with a last-minute strike with Ibrahimovic plundering his 26th Serie A goal of the campaign in stoppage time.

Cassano's goal was his first since returning from heart surgery. The 29-year-old international, who underwent surgery on November 14, last found the net against Palermo on October 15.

Inter Milan moved level on 55 points with Napoli, Lazio and Udinese in the battle for the third Champions League spot after coming from behind to defeat relegated Cesena 2-1.

Luca Ceccarelli gave the visitors a surprise 57th-minute lead before Nigerian midfielder Joel Obi equalised two minutes later with substitute Mauro Zarate grabbing a 72nd-minute winner for the Nerazzurri.

In Sunday's late match, Udinese defeated fading Lazio 2-0 for their first win in four matches. Antonio Di Natale blasted home a trademark volley with 20 minutes - his 21st goal of the campaign - before substitute Roberto Pereyra added a second in stoppage time in bizarre circumstances after the Lazio defence stopped playing.

Brazilian centre-back Andre Dias, who motioned he had heard a whistle, was sent off in the dying stages for protesting.

In other games, Atalanta defeated Fiorentina 2-0 and struggling Genoa lost 3-2 at Bologna.



Harry bears no grudges

REUTERS, London

Tottenham Hotspur manager Harry Redknapp has said he bears no grudges towards the English FA for overlooking him in favour of Roy Hodgson as preferred candidate for the England job.

"No problem," Redknapp told reporters at the Premier League club's training ground on Monday.

"I wish him (Hodgson) all the best. He's a great guy. I've got a great job here. I don't hold grudges. I'm very fortunate to be working with fantastic players here every day."

West Bromwich Albion manager Hodgson was due to meet FA officials on Monday before any final decision is made on appointing a successor to departed Italian Fabio Capello.

The FA have said Hodgson, a former national manager of Switzerland, Finland and the United Arab Emirates, is the only candidate they have approached despite Redknapp being a popular favourite.

Redknapp said his focus was on securing a Champions League spot for Spurs, currently fourth in the league and four points behind third-placed Arsenal but with a game in hand, and his future at the north London club.

"I suppose it's dragged on but I just get on with my job here," he said of the drawn-out deliberations over who will take England to Euro 2012 in Poland and Ukraine in little more than a month's time.

"We'll really try to get that Champions League spot now... that's always been the focus. I bear no grudge against the FA and will continue to focus on Tottenham," Redknapp added.

"I like Roy, he is a top man and I'm sure he'll be a success."

"I'm looking forward to the European Championship, I'm looking forward to watching it."



Juventus striker Mirko Vucinic is ecstatic after scoring his second goal against Novara during their Serie A clash at the Novara Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

SET Max (TUESDAY)
Indian Premier League
Deccan v Pune
Live from 4:30pm
Rajasthan v Delhi
Live from 8:30pm
(WEDNESDAY)
Indian Premier League
Bangalore v Punjab
Live from 8:30pm
ESPN (TUESDAY)
Sportscenter India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm
English Premiership
Liverpool v Fulham
Live from 1:00am (Wednesday)
(WEDNESDAY)
English Premiership
Chelsea v Newcastle
Live from 1:00am (Thursday)
STAR Sports (TUESDAY)
English Premiership
Stoke City v Everton
Live from 1:00am (Wednesday)
(WEDNESDAY)
English Premiership
Bolton v Tottenham
Live from 1:00am (Thursday)
TEN Action (TUESDAY)
La Liga
Getafe v Racing
Live from 4:00pm
Granada v Espanyol
Live from 10:00pm
Sporting Gijon v Villarreal
Live from 12:00am (Wednesday)
(WEDNESDAY)
La Liga
Barcelona v Malaga

SPORTS POLL

Who has impressed you the most in the IPL?

Gayle 44.2%
Rahane 26.8%
du Plessis 15.2

TOTAL VOTES: 138

WEEKLY QUESTION

Do you think BFF president Kazi Salahuddin can make a difference to Bangladesh football in his second term?

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