

Enrique quits Roma

REUTERS, Rome

Luis Enrique has quit as manager of AS Roma, putting an end to a troubled reign in charge of the Serie A side, the club's general director confirmed on Friday.

"His work was good. At a certain point it wore him out and he felt the need to stop," general director Franco Baldini told Sky. "He won't be training anywhere next season."

"We invited him to take all the time he needed to decide, hoping right until the end that he would stay."

Italian media had reported Luis Enrique's departure on Thursday, after a video surfaced of him apparently saying goodbye to the players at the club's training ground, but neither Roma, nor the coach himself, confirmed the news.

The season has been a tough one for Roma, whose new owners, led by American Thomas DiBenedetto, put the Spaniard in charge of a long-term project that they hoped would make the club as successful as the big three of AC Milan, Juventus and Inter Milan.

However, the club have suffered 14 defeats, are seventh in the league with one game to play and may not qualify for Europe next season.

The club remained publicly supportive of Luis Enrique but it was clear that pressure from fans and the local media irritated him.

Baldini said the club was committed to a flamboyant style of play which would continue under the new manager.

"The project hasn't failed, we want to carry on playing a certain type of football, and from league statistics Roma is the team that has had more possession than any other, and is third behind Juve and Milan for territorial dominance and pass completion."

"This says a lot about the quality of play. The failure has been how our league campaign went, but the style of play was what we wanted from the beginning."

Former Roma striker Vincenzo Montella, who coached the club in the second half of last season after Claudio Ranieri's departure, has been tipped to take Luis Enrique's place but Baldini said the club had not yet lined up anyone.

SPORTS POLL

Do you think Salahuddin can make a difference in his second term as BFF president?

No 54.6%

Yes 45.4%

TOTAL VOTES: 108

WEEKLY QUESTION

Do you think Richard Pybus is a good choice as Bangladesh coach?

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

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What to WATCH

SET Max

Indian Premier League

KKR v Mumbai

Live from 4:30pm

Chennai v Delhi

Live from 8:30pm

TEN Action

La Liga

Real Betis v Barcelona

Live from 2:00am (Sunday)

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh Premier League

Arambagh v Brothers Union

Time: 4:15pm

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium



Atletico Madrid players celebrate with the Europa League Cup in Madrid's Neptuno square on Thursday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Plenty to play for

AFP, Madrid



LFP

The Spanish league season reaches its climax on Sunday and, while Real Madrid have already wrapped up the title, there is plenty still to play for at both ends of the table.

Madrid ended Barcelona's run of three consecutive championships by clinching the 32nd Liga crown of their history with three rounds of games remaining, but Jose Mourinho's side will still have plenty of motivation for their final game of the season at home to Mallorca.

If they win on Sunday, they will break a new Spanish league record in reaching the 100-point mark - Barcelona holding the record of 99 set in 2009/10.

Meanwhile Barcelona go to Betis on Saturday with Lionel Messi looking to take the 'pichichi' award as La Liga's top scorer -- currently on 50, he is five ahead of Cristiano

Ronaldo.

Valencia will finish third and are guaranteed Champions League football again next season, but the remaining European places are still up for grabs.

Two points clear in fourth, Malaga can seal Spain's final Champions League berth by beating Sporting Gijon at a sold-out La Rosaleda.

The southern side have never featured in Europe's elite club competition before and defender Jesus Gamez is clear what the objective is.

"We need those 3 points that will give us glory, everyone involved at this club has dreamed about this moment, the time has come and now we have a fantastic opportunity to get into the Champions League," he said.

Waiting for any slip-ups will be fifth-placed Atletico Madrid, who are fresh from beating Athletic Bilbao 3-0 to win the Europa League in midweek.

However, unless they win at Villarreal and Malaga fail to win, the capital club will have to settle for defending their trophy in the Europa League next season.

Barca defend Messi

AP, Barcelona

Barcelona staunchly defended Lionel Messi over a claim he racially abused a black Real Madrid player several seasons ago, calling it "well wide of the mark."

Dutch midfielder Royston Drenthe, on loan to Everton, was quoted in a Dutch magazine as saying he was taunted by the three-time FIFPro player of the year during several of their Spanish league encounters.

"The player has always shown a maximum respect and sportsmanship towards his rivals, something which has been recognized by his fellow professionals many times, and we are sure that any accusations to the contrary are well wide of the mark," Barcelona said in a statement Thursday. "His behavior throughout his career has always been exemplary."

'Confidence is high'

REUTERS, London



UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Chelsea have nothing to fear when they face Bayern Munich in the Champions League final next week as their semifinal win over Barcelona proved they can beat the best in Europe, caretaker boss Roberto DiMatteo said.

Chelsea are the underdogs going into the final at Munich's Allianz Arena as they bid to become European champions for the first time.

But DiMatteo, who has turned the club's fortunes around since taking over from Andre Villas Boas in March, said his players were brimming with confidence.

Speaking at the club's Player of the Year awards night he said: "If you manage to go through two legs against Barcelona, I think then you can beat anybody in European football."

"They're supposed to be the best team and I think we have a fantastic group of players with tremendous quality and belief. "The confidence is very high. The spirit is very high."

Chelsea know that if they do not beat Bayern they will not take part in next season's Champions League as they cannot

finish higher than sixth in the English Premier League.

Disappointment in the league, where they will finish outside the top four for the first time since 2002, has been tempered by their FA Cup final win last week and they now stand poised for a cup double and their greatest triumph.

"We've enjoyed a good eight, nine weeks. The players have been fantastic with me," he said. "They've performed at the highest level possible and we've found ourselves in a great position now to win the biggest trophy in European football."

Chelsea will be without suspended skipper John Terry as well as Branislav Ivanovic, Ramires and Raul Meireles against the Germans.

Terry said missing their biggest game was hard to swallow.

"For myself and the guys who are going to be suspended, obviously we're bitterly disappointed," he said. "But we'll be there to support the players as we always are. We've got a fantastic group of players."

"Big nights need big players and we've certainly got loads of them."

Spaniard Juan Mata was named Chelsea's Player of the Year after his first season at the club.



Croatia legend and UEFA ambassador Davor Suker carries the Euro 2012 trophy during a meeting with young Ukrainian footballers in Kiev yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Terry still to hear from Hodgson

AFP, London

Chelsea captain John Terry said Thursday he is still to hear from new England manager Roy Hodgson regarding his possible participation at Euro 2012.

Hodgson is set to end the guessing game over whether Terry and Manchester United's Rio Ferdinand, long regarded as England's premier central defensive pairing, will play together at the European Championships in June when he names his squad for the tournament in Poland and Ukraine next week.

Terry faces a court case in July over allegations he racially abused Ferdinand's younger brother Anton during a Premier League match against Queens Park Rangers in October. Terry denies the charges.

Speaking at his appointment last week, Hodgson said he planned to hold face-to-face talks with Terry and Ferdinand to gauge whether the two could still feature in the same squad.

"I've not had any call yet but I'm focusing on the league and Chelsea at the moment," Terry said at Chelsea's Player of the Year awards on Thursday.

"Hopefully, I get the call and I'm in the squad - and that goes for many of us here. "I'll always be there for my country."

Hodgson was only thrust into the England position a few weeks before Euro 2012 after Italian manager Fabio Capello resigned from the job in protest at the Football Association's decision to strip Terry of the England captaincy.

The man who kept his promise

FARAZ IHTEHAM

In 2010 Jose Mourinho the self-proclaimed 'Special One' was handed his toughest assignment yet when he took over the reins of Real Madrid, the biggest club in Spain if not the world. Real Madrid trophy less since 2008 and playing second fiddle to eternal rivals Barcelona was an unacceptable outcome for the Madrid hierarchy and the Special One was specifically brought in to address the situation.

Mourinho promised silverware but he knew that it was a mission impossible to better Barcelona not only the best team in Spain or the world, possibly the best club side of all-time. So understandably in his first season as Real manager, Jose struggled to keep pace with Barcelona in the Spanish League that included a humiliating 5-0 drubbing at Nou Camp. The league was lost.

In the Champions League Real and Barca faced off in the semifinals. Mourinho's troops were again second best losing the first-leg 2-0 at Bernabeu. Though Real managed to earn a credible 1-1 draw at Nou Camp in the second-leg it was not enough. Barca went on to lift the trophy.

They met once again in the *Copa del Rey* (Spanish Cup) final. Jose's men delivered this time around edging Barca 1-0 in the extra-time and Madrid had their first trophy in three years. The fans were delirious as Mourinho kept his promise but only just. He knew that

much work lay ahead to challenge for the league title in the following season.

The 2011-2012 has probably been one of the finest seasons in Jose Mourinho's career as a manager. Real were the early pace-setters in the league and were probably the best team in the Champions League (unfortunately not to win it). Unimaginably Barcelona struggled to keep up with Real Madrid and at one point Real opened up a ten-point lead.

Barca clawed their way back but the knock-out blow came at the Nou Camp as Real ran away 2-1 winners. Thus

Mourinho fulfilled his obligation as Real lifted their 32th *La Liga* title and ended Barcelona's three year reign. The better team won the league.

In the Champions League Mourinho was unlucky as Real Madrid lost out to Bayern Munich in the tie-breaker. Mourinho failed to cross the semifinal hurdle again but he would be satisfied to see arch-rivals Barcelona crash out at the same stage to Chelsea.

The last time Real Madrid won the Champions League was back in 2002. It has been a decade since then. Barcelona have won it three times during this period.

As Jose Mourinho enters his third year at the helm more success is anticipated. His next difficult task would be to win the ultimate prize and break the Champions League jinx for Real Madrid. After all, impossible is nothing for the Special One.



Do you think that Jose Mourinho will continue to enjoy success with Real Madrid? Write in with your views and opinions to sports@thedailystar.net