

Jupp backs Roberto

RUETERS, Munich



Whether or not Bayern Munich beat Chelsea in Saturday's Champions League final, their coach Jupp Heynckes urged the English club to stick with Roberto Di Matteo so the Italian does not suffer the experience he went through in 1998.

Heynckes guided Real Madrid to victory in the Champions League final over Juventus 14 years ago and duly left the club within 48 hours.

Di Matteo has transformed Chelsea's season since taking over as caretaker manager after Andre Villas-Boas was sacked in March, but there is no guarantee he will be offered the job permanently even if Chelsea are crowned European champions for the first time.

Although Chelsea won the FA Cup earlier this month and are now within 90 minutes of what would be their greatest triumph, the signals emanating from Stamford Bridge indicate that the club's billionaire owner Roman Abramovich wants a more glitzy, bigger name to fill the role.

Heynckes, 67, one of Europe's most experienced and successful coaches, who would become only the fourth man to guide two clubs to European Cup success, thinks letting Di Matteo go would be a mistake.

"I think the position of Chelsea and Di Matteo can be understood. Chelsea are a huge club, a top club in Europe, and you will try to find the best possible coach, someone who has already won something and already brought titles and has all the attributes you

need for this kind of job," he said.

"But Di Matteo makes an excellent impression on me and if I was Abramovich, I would continue with this young man.

"He led Chelsea to the final with a calm head, and step by step he established contact with the players. I think really, until today, his work has been outstanding and no matter if they win or not, I hope he stays there because there is a need for continuity."

Heynckes thought there were differences between his departure from Real in 1998 and the situation Di Matteo is now in, saying he knew from the previous December he was going to be sacked and would have left anyway.

Di Matteo's position has been strengthened since he began to breathe new life into Chelsea's season after Villas-Boas's departure, and all he has said in response to hundreds of questions about his future is: "lets wait and see."

Although Chelsea finished sixth in the Premier League, their lowest position for a decade, and will miss out on the Champions League next season if they lose on Saturday, he has certainly restored their pride and self-belief.

They have lost only three times in 20 matches in all competitions since Di Matteo took over and he gained widespread respect for masterminding their semi-final victory over Barcelona.

For that alone, besides being a former Chelsea player, many fans believe Abramovich should at least give him a chance in the role permanently. Clearly, so does Heynckes.

Fabianski wants out

REUTERS, Warsaw

Poland's goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski wants to leave Arsenal after months of watching his compatriot Wojciech Szczesny from the bench, a Polish daily quoted the 27-year-old as saying.

"I hope that my adventure with Arsenal has come to an end," Fabianski told Friday's Gazeta Wyborcza. "I intend to leave and play in a strong league. I wanted to leave in the winter, too, but (Arsenal manager) Arsene Wenger did not give a green light."

Fabianski, who has 20 caps, was named the Polish league's top keeper in 2006 and 2007 during his time with Legia Warsaw.

He joined Premier League Arsenal five years ago but has not been able to secure his position due to injuries and some conspicuous errors.

Poland coach Franciszek Smuda has called him up to the provisional 26-man squad for the Euro 2012 championship, co-hosted by Poland and Ukraine starting next month, but he is expected to play second fiddle to Szczesny again.

'Psychic' pig to make tips

REUTERS, Kiev



A psychic pig is set to take over where Paul the Octopus left off at the 2010 World Cup by predicting the results of matches at the European championships in Ukraine and Poland.

Kiev's city government said on Friday it would wheel out the porky tipster to give daily forecasts once the tournament kicks off next month.

"A unique oracle hog, a real Ukrainian pig and a psychic which knows the mysteries of football," a statement said. "Every day at 16.00 it will predict the result of the upcoming match."

Paul, who has since passed away, shot to fame at the 2010 World Cup after his feeding behaviour was used to correctly predict the winner of each of the Germany's seven matches.

He also tipped World Cup winners Spain to beat the Netherlands in the final in South Africa from his tank at an aquarium in Oberhausen.

Kiev officials said they wanted to bring similar excitement to Ukrainians by bringing the telepathic pig to the city's fan zone before matches.

'Psychic' creatures have become the rage since Paul blazed his tentacled trail.

A rare two-headed tortoise called Magdalena embarked on a new career as a tipster at last year's ice hockey world championships in Slovakia.

Germany discovered a cross-eyed opossum called Heidi, who made an appearance on American television earlier this year to predict the Oscar winners. She died last September.

The hog will be eager to sniff out the correct result himself to avoid the chop as pork is a staple of the local cuisine.



Dutch striker Robin van Persie plays with his daughter Dina Layla in Lausanne yesterday after a training session ahead of the Euro 2012.

PHOTO: AFP

Rodgers snubs L'pool

AFP, London



Liverpool's search for a new manager suffered a setback on Friday when Swansea City coach Brendan Rodgers rejected the chance to talk to the Anfield club.

Rodgers is regarded as one of the best young managers in the Premier League and was high on Liverpool's list of potential candidates to replace Kenny Dalglish, who was sacked on Wednesday following a disappointing league campaign.

Fenway Sports Group, the Merseyside club's owners, have had an approach to speak to Wigan Athletic manager Roberto Martinez accepted and were also keen to interview Rodgers, but the 39-year-old Northern Irishman turned down the opportunity to speak to the Reds.

A Swansea statement read: "Swansea City can confirm that an approach from Liverpool FC to speak to manager Brendan Rodgers was officially received by chairman Huw Jenkins this morning (Friday).

"The club is pleased to confirm that Brendan has declined the current opportunity to speak to the Anfield club about the vacant position.

"The Swansea manager is currently working hard to strengthen the squad in readiness for the new Premier League campaign."

The Guardian reported that Rodgers believes Liverpool should already know enough about his qualities to offer him the job if they feel he is the right man, rather than involve him in a drawn-out interview process that may feature several managers.

He is also said to be keen not to be seen to chase other jobs out of respect for Swansea.

Rodgers, who signed a new three-and-a-half-year deal in February, has previously been linked with Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspur after making a huge impression by guiding Swansea to an 11th-place finish in their debut Premier League campaign.

Swansea were applauded off the pitch by Liverpool supporters after their impressive passing caught the eye in a 0-0 draw at Anfield earlier this season.

Rosicky regains steam

AFP, Prague



Plagued by injuries that all but marred the star career many had envisioned, Czech Republic captain Tomas Rosicky is

back in shape in time to lead his team at Euro 2012.

The 31-year-old Arsenal midfielder has won over Gunners' fans who named him the player of the month in both March and April, calling him "Arsenal's most creative force for much of April" on the team website.

The redress of months spent sidelined by injury or struggling for a place on the Gunners' roster seems to come at the right time for Rosicky and his national team, which faces Euro 2012 hosts Poland, plus Russia and Greece, in Group A.

"When somebody writes you off, it doesn't mean you can't achieve your goal," says Rosicky, who has scored 20 times in 85 games for the national team he has captained since 2006.

"I still believe I have plenty in me -- we'll see how it all goes but right now I feel great and want to continue this way," Rosicky told the official Arsenal magazine.

The Euro 2012 in Poland and Ukraine marks a comeback for the player who started his international career at Euro 2000 at the age of 19.

Four years later, the Czechs stunned Europe with an offensive drive led by a star-packed midfield -- Pavel Nedved, Karel Poborsky, Vladimir Smicer and



Rosicky himself -- that was only stopped by defence-happy Greece in the semifinals.

At the time, Rosicky was already an icon at Bundesliga side Borussia Dortmund, to which he had moved in 2001 from Sparta Prague to win the German title and a spot in the UEFA Cup finals in 2002.

In 2006, the player dubbed "Little Mozart" moved to Arsenal to put some spice in his career.

But the plan did not quite work out as injuries struck -- groin first, and then a knee tendon injury from January 2008, which sidelined the player for 18 months and kept him out of Euro 2008.

Rosicky recovered in time to lead the Czechs through their Euro 2012 qualifying campaign, watching the team to take on a completely different shape in a radical rejuvenation cure.

"We will be an unpleasant rival for everyone," Rosicky said after leading the Czechs to their fifth straight Euro tournament.

With the departures of Cesc Fabregas and Samir Nasri from Arsenal, Rosicky took on the role of a mastermind in his club, too.

"When he plays, he's always one of the best. This is why he now plays regularly for Arsenal," Czech manager Michal Bilek said recently.

"I have never doubted Tomas and if he goes on like this we definitely have a leader for the national team," he added.

Rosicky was born on October 4, 1980 to father Jiri, a former Sparta Prague footballer, and mother Eva, a former table-tennis player.

His older brother Jiri, also a footballer, made it as far as Atletico Madrid.

Milan snap up midfielders

REUTERS, Milan

AC Milan have strengthened their midfield with the signing of Italy's Riccardo Montolivo and Mali's Bakaye Traore who were both free agents, the Serie A runners-up said on Thursday.

Montolivo, 27, spent seven years at Fiorentina, where he was club captain, scoring 17 goals in 230 appearances, while 27-year-old Traore, who has joined from AS Nancy, scored 11 goals in 72 games in all competitions for the French Ligue 1 side.

Montolivo has signed a four-year deal, while Traore has joined on a three-year contract.

Milan are rebuilding having last week said goodbye to seasoned campaigners Gennaro Gattuso, Filippo Inzaghi, Gianluca Zambrotta, Alessandro Nesta and Mark van Bommel.

Midfielder Clarence Seedorf has also been linked in the Italian media with a move to Brazilian side Botafogo.

Milan added on their website (www.acmilan.com) that Massimo Ambrosini, who signed a one-year contract extension on Wednesday, will keep the captain's armband next season.

Thank you Del Piero

SALMAN KHAN

As the football season draws to a close, I am overjoyed with Juventus winning the Serie A title. It has been a long wait and after the calciopoli scandal, Juventus have finally earned the respect of the footballing world again. It was a great battle all season long with Milan and in the end the better team ended up winning the title. With the league title already in the bag, Juve could be in for a memorable double as they face Napoli in the Coppa Italia final tomorrow night.

As happy as I am about the great end to the season, I am also seriously sad at Del Piero leaving the club. Of course this is not a new development and every Juve fan knew this was going to be his last season. However, as the reality dawns on me, it is seriously making me upset and I don't know how I can even watch a Juve game where the legendary number 10 isn't with the team. Of course teams move on and get new players and this is a good move by Juventus because Del Piero's time is done and I am the first to say that. The team is now looking forward and there are some great number 10s up for sale and I am sure a few great future players are also being developed at the Juve academy. However, Del Piero represents something more for me and I would think for most Juve fans.

Firstly, he is an amazing footballer and at his peak he was simply the best. His touches, receiving the ball to

perfection, free kicks, penalties, "that goal against real madrid", and even a fair few headers are all unforgettable. Del Piero on his day was a complete number 10. He has won everything there is to win with his club and national team. Every player who has played with him and every

coach who has coached him have said what a great professional and role model he is on and off the pitch, which finally brings me to my point. Although I have never met the man, I was lucky enough to watch two games of his LIVE. One of them was the world cup final in Berlin and the other was a friendly against Fiorentina in Toronto. In both the games, every fan from of both sides gave Del Piero a fantastic ovation when he came on and off. Even after the penalty loss, France supporters kept on talking about how nicely Del took his penalty and some of them even gave me the "thumbs up" when they saw I was wearing his jersey. In Toronto, there were thousands of fans waiting for him at the hotel to get a picture or an autograph and in the stadium there was at least 90% juve jerseys with his name and number. He is loved by every football fan and in most away stadiums he gets an amazing ovation.

Del Piero leaving Juventus will be a big loss for Juventus and for Italian football. To sum up, after Juventus got relegated, Del Piero had many offers from all over Europe. He didn't leave the club and instead played in Serie B and then struggled in the Serie A and finished 7th twice in the last two seasons. He stayed positive and helped Juventus transition into what we have seen this season. He didn't play a big role as a player on the pitch, but he was a source of inspiration and many players signed with Juventus knowing Del was still there. He came as a champion and leaves as a champion...

Thank you Del Piero.



SALMAN KHAN is our first guest contributor to Third Eye. If you have any interesting pieces, please direct them to sports@thedailystar.net

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

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

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