

# Al Wasl to give Diego 'farewell ceremony'

**Football**  
REUTERS, Dubai

Diego Maradona has been invited to a 'farewell ceremony' by United Arab Emirates club Al Wasl after they sacked him as coach, a senior official said on Wednesday.

The club added that the ceremony would "reflect the unique and strong relationship" between them and the mercurial Argentine.

The 51 year-old World Cup winner's two-year contract, signed in May 2011, was terminated on Tuesday by the club's board after a trophy-less season that saw Al Wasl finish eighth in the 12-team UAE Pro League.

"We have not decided on a timeframe (for the ceremony) and it depends on Maradona's response," club vice-chairman Mohammed bin Dokhan told reporters through an interpreter.

He said Maradona, who was sacked with all his support staff, had not yet replied.

Some hours later, however, Maradona published a statement on his personal website (www.diegomaradona.com) thanking Al Wasl for the chance they had given him to be their coach and suggesting they could still reach an agreement about signings to strengthen the team.

"It was always my wish to stay in that wonderful land that so welcomed me and I am totally grateful to the sheikh,

especially for having received me and given me the opportunity to coach a team from the Emirates," he said.

"Unfortunately, the club made a statement that I don't agree with, because my wish was and is to carry on coaching Al Wasl and if it is impossible for the club to buy players, due to a lack of budget, there will also be the possibility to discuss that together with the board and seek solutions," he added.

"I hope to have a meeting soon with the board...(and) I am quite sure they will be well disposed to do so and we will come to a good agreement."

Bin Dokhan said four or five names were on the table to replace Maradona and an announcement was likely within a week.

One of them was Bruno Metsu, who coached the UAE to victory in the 2007 Gulf Cup and won the AFC Champions League with Al Ain in 2003. Metsu also coached Senegal to a notable win over France in the opening match of the 2002 World Cup.

Defending the decision to terminate Maradona's contract, bin Dokhan said the time had been right.

"We cannot deny Diego Maradona is the best technical footballer all over the world and he is a qualified coach but we are looking for someone to win a championship for Al Wasl in the next stage," he added.

"We are not happy to terminate the contract but we should always keep away emotion and work for the sake of Al Wasl. "The Board acts for the sake of Al Wasl and in the interests of Al Wasl to

put Al Wasl back on the right track."

The closest Al Wasl, which last won the domestic league title in 2007, came to success last season was in reaching the final of the Gulf Champions League.

However, having won the first match against Bahrain side Al Muharraq 3-1, Maradona's side capitulated in the second leg in Dubai, having two players sent off en route to a 3-1 loss before defeat on penalties.

"Maybe it was a reason to terminate, the result of that match," said bin Dokhan.

Maradona's sacking came a month after he received a vote of confidence from the chairman of a newly constituted board, appointed after the mass resignation of the previous one following the lack of on-field success.

Bin Dokhan denied that Tuesday's announcement was a U-turn.

Maradona's sacking continues his modest record as coach, one that is in complete contrast to his time as a player.

In addition to his World Cup-winner's medal, Maradona enjoyed league title successes in Argentina, Italy and Spain but as a coach he has yet to achieve any such highs.

He had brief spells with Mandiyu and Racing Club in his home country in 1994 and 1995 respectively but neither proved successful. Although he led Argentina to the World Cup finals in 2010, his side lost 4-0 to Germany in the quarterfinals.



Brazil star Neymar controls the ball during a training session ahead of the London Olympics in Rio de Janeiro on Wednesday. PHOTO: AFP



Manchester United's latest signing Japanese midfielder Shinji Kagawa (L) holds his new jersey during a press conference with team manager Sir Alex Ferguson at Old Trafford yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

# 'Reputation not tarnished'

REUTERS, London

Andre Villas-Boas knows he has a "massive opportunity" at Tottenham Hotspur but denied he was on a mission to restore his reputation after being sacked as Chelsea manager in March.

Speaking to reporters for the first time at the plush new 45 million pounds Spurs training complex in north London on Wednesday, the Portuguese also accused Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich of "breaking promises".

Bristling at suggestions that his short tenure at Stamford Bridge had been a failure, the 34-year-old did not hold back when discussing his hasty exit from Stamford Bridge.

"I respect the decision of the owner of Chelsea but I will never accept it," he told reporters.

"I told him that it was him quitting on me when he had been so much involved in the beginning in bringing me in and he was the one who was not putting up to the things he promised."

"I cannot assume that failure on my own, I have to disagree with you," the former Porto coach added.

"It's never a one-person failure, I could never take it like that, there were mistakes that I have made which I have learned but the decision to terminate the project is not mine, it is a decision from the owner of Chelsea Football Club."

Redknapp's sacking by Tottenham was a surprise after leading them to fourth place in the Premier League and only missing a Champions League berth because Chelsea took the last qualifying place as European champions.

The decision to replace Redknapp with the relatively inexperienced Villas-Boas also raised concerns among fans, some of whom regarded it as a backward step.

"It's not a mission of restoring my reputation, it's a mission to put Tottenham back on track with titles," he said.

"I think the dimension of the club speaks for itself."

"It was a massive, massive opportunity for me and I'm extremely privi-

leged to have been given that opportunity, so it's fantastic to come to a club which such high ambitions towards the future," he added.

Asked if Tottenham would be title challengers, he said: "It's a proposition I put to the players on the first day that we met. We have to see, of course, whether it's realistic or not. Other squads are evolving and you can't always compete with Chelsea and Manchester City for players."

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After Villas-Boas was sacked, Roberto Di Matteo took over in a caretaker role at Chelsea and won the FA Cup and Champions League - a feat that hardly helped Villas-Boas's standing.

However, he said he should take some of the credit.

"For Chelsea to have won the Champions League and to have won the Cup was because we were still in those competitions," he said.

# Havelange took bribes

AFP, Paris

Former world football chief Joao Havelange received enormous bribes from FIFA's discredited former marketing company, court documents released in Switzerland reveal.

The 96-year-old Brazilian, FIFA president for 24 years before Sepp Blatter stepped into the hotseat in 1998, pocketed at least 1.5m Swiss francs (£986,000) and FIFA executive committee member Ricardo Teixeira at least 12.74m.

The bribes, made by International Sport and Leisure (ISL), were detailed in documents made public by Switzerland's supreme court and published by the BBC on Wednesday.

FIFA's discredited Swiss-based marketing partner collapsed in 2001 with debts of around \$300 million.

FIFA published the Swiss court's report on its website and in a statement world football's governing body emphasised that while Havelange and Teixeira were identified Blatter was not.

"The decision of the Swiss Federal Court also confirms that only two foreign officials will be named as part of the process and that....the FIFA president is not involved in the case," the statement stressed.

# Russia hold Capello talks

AFP, Moscow

Russia's football bosses on Thursday held talks with ex-England manager Fabio Capello in the hope of luring one of the sport's biggest names to revive the flagging fortunes of the national team.

"They (Russian Football Union officials) received Capello today. They conducted negotiations," Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko was quoted as saying by the RIA Novosti news agency.

"From here, we move on to the next candidate," Mutko added.

"I think that over the course of a week -- certainly by next Tuesday -- all the consultations with the managers on our list... will be held."

Capello's name was one of 13 to feature in an extraordinary list of possible managerial targets that Russia was forced to release to dispel rumours that it had already secretly hired a coach.

The wish list includes such giants as ex-Barcelona boss Pep Guardiola and one-time Liverpool chief Rafael Benitez as well as former Tottenham manager Harry Redknapp.

The Englishman for one wasted no time brushing off the Russian approaches but telling The Sun that "I haven't been contacted but I'm sure it's a fantastic job for someone."

But Capello's name has clearly interested suffering fans the most. The ex-England manager was rumoured to be the Russian Football Union's first choice and reportedly eager to accept the lucrative and high-profile assignment.

Mutko added to the speculation of an imminent Capello hire by putting the Italian on a par with Guus Hiddink -- a legend in Russia who showed flashes of coaching brilliance while guiding the unfancied side to the Euro 2008 semi-finals.

Capello "would be a good option for Russia. He knows how to win," Mutko told reporters earlier.

"You only have to look at his record," it said of a man who won five title trophies in Italy's Serie A -- seven save for two that were stripped from Juventus -- and who twice led Real Madrid to the top of La Liga.

"When we were making a decision on Hiddink, we first and foremost looked at the manager's ability to win," the Russian sports minister added. "And in the end, we were right."

The post became vacant when Dick Advocaat left for the Dutch league after the much-vaunted team's meek first round exit from Euro 2012.

Russia's shock failure to qualify out of what many thought was the event's weakest group left the team low on morale and limited in choices as it assumes the challenge of making it to the 2014 World Cup.

# West Brom sign starlet

AFP, Birmingham

English Premier League side West Brom strengthened their forward line on Wednesday as they signed highly-rated Belgian international Yassine El Ghanassy on a season-long loan from Belgian outfit Gent.

The 22-year-old - capped twice - is awaiting international clearance after passing his medical.

El Ghanassy has played in the Champions League and the Europa League since joining Gent from La Louviere in 2008.

El Ghanassy scored seven goals in his 37 club appearances last season as Gent - who won the league and cup double in 2010 - finished third in the league.

West Brom head coach Steve Clarke, who replaced Roy Hodgson was delighted to have secured his services.

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