

Conte under investigation

REUTERS, Rome

Juventus manager Antonio Conte appeared before Italian football federation prosecutors on Friday to answer questions about match-fixing that took place while he was in charge of Siena.

Conte spent three hours 40 minutes answering questions about allegations of sporting fraud during his time at the then Serie B club Siena in 2011, brought by former player Filippo Carobio. Carobio claimed that he knew that one game at least between Siena and Novara in April last year was rigged.

"There isn't much to say, finally the day arrived where I could tell the truth in a calm environment," Conte told reporters after leaving court.

"I restate my contentment at being able to tell my side of the story, this evening I'm returning to Valle D'Aosta (the base of Juventus' pre-season training camp) to do what I do best, win and be a coach."

Siena have already been fined 50,000 euros (\$61,200) in the latest Italian match-fixing scandal.

'Capello given Russia reins'

REUTERS, Moscow

Former England manager Fabio Capello, tipped to become Russia's new coach, has already been given the job, according to national team captain Andrei Arshavin.

"Russia's national coach has been appointed - he is Fabio Capello. We wish him success in his new job," Arshavin wrote on his personal website (www.arshavin.eu).

The 31-year-old Arsenal player, widely considered Russia's most influential footballer, could have had inside information into the affairs of the Russian FA (RFU).

However, the Arsenal forward might have jumped the gun announcing Capello's appointment as according to the official RFU line, talks with the 66-year-old Italian will continue next week.

Capello, who quit as England boss in February, came to Moscow on Thursday to meet Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko and acting RFU chief Nikita Simonyan.

Mutko, who described the talks as "productive", said the RFU would name a new coach early next week.

Local media reports on Saturday claimed RFU would hold the final round of negotiations with Capello on Tuesday.



PHOTO: AFP

Shanghai Shenhua's latest signing Ivory Coast star Didier Drogba holds his new jersey at a press conference after his arrival in Shanghai yesterday.

'Spain set new benchmark'

Football

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Spain have surged ahead of Brazil to become the new benchmark for world football, and the only way to make up ground on the world and European champions is to follow their example and adopt a long-term approach, coach Mano Menezes told Reuters in an interview.

However, the Arsenal forward dismissed the idea that the five-times world champions would copy Spain by playing without a recognised striker, pointing out that the number nine shirt was part of Brazilian football culture.

Menezes, however, dismissed the idea that the five-times world champions would copy Spain by playing without a recognised striker, pointing out that the number nine shirt was part of Brazilian football culture.

It's a different type of football, they have worked on it for years and found their way of doing things," Menezes said of Spain. "Before they became successful, they prepared hard and were already winning matches.

"It's obvious that there is a distance between them and us. We have started

afresh in Brazil.

"The champions are always a benchmark and Spain are outlining the way football is played in the world. They make the rules today in the way Brazil have done in the past," he added.

"Nobody can take on Spain on equal terms."

Menezes also dismissed suggestions the Spanish passing game had become dull to watch.

"If they can beat everyone playing this way, it's up to the others to find a way of overcoming it," he said

"Lots of teams have played possession-based football in the past, but in the way they do and the way that they keep the ball, nobody has done that."

Brazil have drifted away from their swaggering, attacking style over the last few years, opting for a more physical and direct approach which reached its zenith under Dunga at the last World Cup.

Brazil's quarterfinal exit at the hands of the Netherlands in 2010 prompted a reaction against that type

of play and Menezes decided it was time to implement a new philosophy.

"We mustn't copy Spain, we have to study how to play against them," said Menezes.

One aspect of Spain's game that Brazil would not be copying was the so-called "false number nine" which basically involved playing without a recognised forward.

From the lumbering Serginho Chulapa in 1982 to the clinical brilliance of Ronaldo between 1998 and 2006, the striker has always been key figure for Brazil and Menezes said it would stay that way.

"Our football has always been based on the forwards, and culturally that is the way our fans want to see the team play. I don't see why we should give up on this simply because Spain were successful."

"We have to find a way of winning with forwards."

Although Menezes talks of long-term planning, he faces a race against time with Brazil to host the 2014 World Cup.

Hero's welcome for Drogba

Football

AFP, Shanghai

Didier Drogba was given a hero's welcome as he arrived in China on Saturday to start a two-and-a-half-year contract that is expected to make him one of football's highest-paid players.

Hundreds of fans, many clad in "Drogba 11" shirts, greeted the former Chelsea star at Shanghai's Pudong airport, some carrying flowers, others brandishing his name in English on placards and many jostling to touch him.

"What I experienced at the airport this morning was unbelievable. Even when I was at Chelsea I never experienced anything like this," the 34-year-old told reporters at a press conference to launch his career with Shanghai Shenhua.

The Ivory Coast striker sealed a deal that Chinese and British media have said is worth 200,000 pounds (\$314,000) a week, making him the highest-paid player in China and in the top bracket globally.

But he insisted money was not the reason he had moved to a side languishing near the bottom of China's Super League, just weeks after he scored the penalty that won Chelsea the European Champions League.

"China is a big sports country and it is a big challenge. For me it would have been easy to go to another team in Europe but I chose China because of the challenge," he said.

"The money is not the most important, everybody knows that I give a lot of money to my foundation... I didn't come to China with the idea of making a lot of money."

Drogba joins a fast-expanding group of foreign stars who have been lured to China on enormous salaries, which are typically funded by Chinese business titans.

Drogba will play alongside French striker Nicolas Anelka, who signed with Shenhua in January on a deal believed to be worth nearly as much.

The pair will work under former Argentine coach Sergio Batista, who joined the

club in May. Shenhua are bankrolled by high-profile video-game tycoon Zhu Jun.

In the far south of the country, World Cup-winning coach Marcello Lippi is at the helm of league-leaders Guangzhou Evergrande, and Nigerian striker Ayegbeni Yakubu has just signed with cross-town rivals Guangzhou R&F.

Shenhua are just one point off the bottom of the 16-club Chinese Super League, halfway through the season, and there are huge expectations on him being able to lift the team.

"These legs may be 34 but they still feel 26 and I am not thinking about retiring anytime soon," Drogba said.

Shanghai Shenhua play Beijing Guoan on Saturday night at home in what is regarded as one of the biggest fixtures on the Chinese domestic football calendar.

Drogba will not play and said he was not yet sure when he would represent Shenhua for the first time.

"I've been on holiday for three weeks and put on a little bit of weight so I will need to train a little bit. I'm going to speak with the manager, he has to make the right decision," he said.

The Chinese Football Association believes the domestic game, which has endured years of corruption and repeated failures by the national team, is set to take off thanks to the infusion of expensive talent such as Drogba.

The high-level world-class players and coaches will be able to provide a learning opportunity to our domestic players and coaches," CFA spokesman Dong Hua told AFP.

Critics say the money is being wasted, with the foreigners sometimes getting paid more than the salaries of the rest of the players combined, while grassroots football is being ignored.

However for Chinese football fans, having Drogba is purely a cause for celebration.

"Let me tell you something, now we have Drogba, Shanghai is not a common city anymore, Shanghai is a world mega-city now," said one elated fan, Lu Xiaobo, who went to greet him at the airport on Saturday morning.

Borini in, Maxi out

Football

REUTERS, London

Liverpool signed AS Roma's Italy forward Fabio Borini while Argentina midfielder Maxi Rodriguez left Anfield for Newell's Old Boys as new manager Brendan Rodgers began reshaping his squad on Friday.

Borini, who worked with Rodgers on loan at Swansea City last year, has joined on a long-term deal after passing a medical at the Premier League club. No fee was given but British media said the deal was worth up to 11 million pounds (\$17.10 million).

The 21-year-old, who scored 10 goals in 26 appearances for Roma last season, was part of Italy's Euro 2012 squad which reached the final before losing 4-0 to holders Spain although he did not play in any of the matches.

"Fabio fits the model of what we're trying to do in building not only for now, but also for the future," Rodgers said of his first signing for the Anfield club who will wear the No. 29 shirt after asking for his lucky number.

"He's a big talent, 21 years of age, he scores goals, and his passion, focus and concentra-

tion is a very important part of his game - and a big part of what you want from a player.

"He's technically strong, he's a good finisher with both feet, he can play central or on the sides in a 4-3-3 up front, he's quick, and he's tactically very good," said Rodgers.

Borini added on the club's website (www.liverpoolfc.com): "It's a top club that has won a lot of trophies in the past - and will do so in the future we hope as well."

"I've got the trust of the manager and the club, which for me is very nice and I'm proud to be here."

Asked if Rodgers was the key reason for joining Liverpool Borini said: "He was very important. I wouldn't say it was the key, but most of it came from him."

Maxi, who moved to Anfield from Atletico Madrid in January 2010, netted 17 goals in 73 appearances for Liverpool.

"I have tried to give everything every day that I was wearing the LFC crest," he said. "It has been a great honour to defend this shirt during two and a half years."

The 31-year-old international began his career with Rosario-based Newell's before joining Espanyol in Spain.

Ferdinand stays silent

AFP, Kota Kinabalu

Anton Ferdinand declined to comment Saturday on John Terry being cleared of racially abusing him, as the QPR defender arrived in Malaysia with his team-mates for a pre-season tour.

Chelsea captain Terry was found not guilty on Friday at a court in London, in a high-profile trial that overshadowed the English Premier League and the national team for months.

Ferdinand -- younger brother of Terry's former international team-mate Rio Ferdinand -- and the Queens Park Rangers squad touched down in Kota Kinabalu, the capital of Sabah state, on Borneo island.

Met by a throng of reporters at the airport, Ferdinand said "no comment" when asked about the not-guilty verdict.

QPR chief executive Philip Beard added: "We have nothing to comment on Anton, except that he is part of the squad that is travelling with us. We shall see how things take shape over the next few days."

Ferdinand's parents on Friday also declined to comment as they left court.

The trial related to an incident involving Terry and Ferdinand during a Premier League match on October 23 last year. Terry was stripped of the England captaincy in February over the allegations.

As a consequence, Fabio Capello resigned as England manager, just months before England -- defender Terry included -- competed in the European Championships.

Terry could yet face disciplinary action from England's Football Association despite being cleared in court. The FA said it would continue its own disciplinary process, which was suspended so as not to prejudice the trial.



Tennis superstar Rafael Nadal, the official flag bearer for Spain at the London Olympics, speaks during a handover ceremony in Madrid yesterday.

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