

Chelsea discard Di Matteo

AFP, London



Chelsea manager Roberto Di Matteo has been sacked after the European champions were left facing elimination at the group stage of the Champions League, the club said on Wednesday.

"Chelsea Football Club has parted company this morning with Manager Roberto Di Matteo," a statement said, following Tuesday's 3-0 defeat by Juventus.

Chelsea said the team's "recent performances and results have not been good enough".

"The club faces a difficult task ahead in qualifying for the knockout stages of the UEFA Champions League as well as maintaining a strong challenge for the top of the Premier League while competing in three other cup competitions," they added.

Tuesday's loss in Turin means Chelsea are poised to become the first ever Champions League winners to be knocked out in the group phase the following season.

Even victory at home to Danish side FC Nordsjaelland in their final group match may not be enough, as a draw between Juventus and Shakhtar Donetsk in the other Group D game would take both sides into the last 16.

Di Matteo was only appointed on a permanent basis in June, having led Chelsea to their first

ever Champions League title after replacing his sacked predecessor Andre Villas-Boas in March.

Chelsea beat Bayern Munich on penalties in the Champions League final in May, two weeks after defeating Liverpool 2-1 in the FA Cup final.

"The owner and the Board would like to thank Roberto for all he has done for the club since taking over in March," Chelsea added, saying the Italian "will always be welcome at Stamford Bridge".

The statement continued: "The club will be making an announcement shortly regarding a new first team manager."

Di Matteo, 42, is the seventh coach to have been sacked by owner Roman Abramovich since the Russian billionaire bought the club in 2003.

Former Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez was immediately installed as the bookmakers' favourite to succeed Di Matteo on a permanent basis.

Speaking during a coaching seminar in Abu Dhabi, he confirmed his interest in the position, but did not say whether or not he had been approached by Chelsea.

"What I will say is that I am looking for a club that can challenge for trophies, so Chelsea is one of these clubs," he told newspaper The National.

Pep Guardiola, the former on Barcelona coach, and ex-Tottenham Hotspur manager

Harry Redknapp were also rumoured to be in the running.

Chelsea had made a superb start to the season, but since losing 2-1 at Shakhtar on September 23, their campaign has come off the rails.

They won seven and drew one of their opening eight league games to move four points clear at the Premier League summit but a 3-2 loss at home to Manchester United last month marked the start of a run of four games without a win.

Saturday's 2-1 defeat at West Bromwich Albion, Di Matteo's former club, left Chelsea four points behind leaders Manchester City in third place.

The loss to United was surrounded by controversy, after Chelsea's claim that referee Mark Clattenburg racially abused midfielder John Obi Mikel prompted a Football Association investigation that is yet to conclude.

A former Chelsea player, who scored in two FA Cup final successes, Di Matteo had been trying to revolutionise the club's playing style by introducing a more attacking approach.

Chelsea spent over £80 million (\$127 million, 100 million euros) on new players in the close season, notably bringing in Belgian winger Eden Hazard from Lille and Brazilian attacking midfielder Oscar from Internacional.

Although the quality of their football drew praise from pundits in the season's early months, that



initial momentum appears to have disappeared.

Di Matteo, who was born in Switzerland but represented Italy at international level, was in only his third senior managerial position.

He started his coaching career with third-tier MK Dons in 2008 before joining West Brom a year later.

MANAGERS UNDER ABRAMOVICH

Claudio Ranieri - Sept 2000 to May 2004: No trophies under Abramovich

Jose Mourinho - June 2004 to Sept 2007: Premier League 2005, 2006 FA Cup 2007 League Cup 2005, 2007 Community Shield 2005

Avram Grant - Sept 2007 to May

2008: Took Chelsea to first Champions League final in 2008, where they lost 6-5 on penalties to Manchester United

Luiz Felipe Scolari - July 2008 to Feb 2009: No trophies

Guus Hiddink - Feb to May 2009: FA Cup 2009

Carlo Ancelotti - June 2009 to May 2011: Premier League 2010 FA Cup 2010 Community Shield 2009.

Andre Villas-Boas - June 2011 to March 2012: No trophies

Roberto Di Matteo - March to Nov 2012: FA Cup 2012, Champions League 2012

C'Ron donates to children in Gaza

INTERNET, Undated

Real Madrid iconic forward Cristiano Ronaldo has donated €1.5 million to Palestinian children in Gaza, the Arabic version of the club's Classico network reports.

The star forward gave his Golden Boot which he earned in 2011 to the Real Madrid foundation. The Spanish giants in their turn sold it at auction and will now donate the funds to schools in Gaza.

According to various reports, the Real Madrid Foundation has helped to build 167 schools in 66 countries.

It's not the first time Ronaldo has given to charity. Last year he sold most of his sports shoes at a Real Madrid Foundation auction which was also dedicated to raising funds for schools in Gaza.

PSG rule out Becks move

REUTERS, Paris

Paris St Germain have ruled out a move for David Beckham after the former England midfielder announced he was leaving LA Galaxy after next month's Major League Soccer Cup final.

Beckham has said he has plenty of "exciting opportunities" to consider once his six-year playing career with the LA Galaxy ends but PSG coach Carlo Ancelotti said the French club had no plans to open the cheque book for the 37-year-old.

"Beckham? We have not made an offer," Ancelotti was quoted as saying by sports daily L'Equipe on Wednesday. "We're done (recruiting). Good luck to him for the future."

Sports director Leonardo echoed Ancelotti's view, saying: "There is nothing."

It was only in January that Beckham signed a new deal with the Galaxy but his departure, announced on Monday, paves the way for him to enjoy a last hurrah elsewhere.

Barca, Bayern thru'

AFP, Paris



Barcelona and Bayern Munich qualified for the Champions League last 16 on Tuesday but Chelsea were in danger of picking up the dubious honour of becoming the first title-holders to crash out in the first round.

Joining Barca and Bayern into the knockout stages were Valencia and Shakhtar Donetsk while Celtic still have work to do to book their ticket after defeat at Benfica.

Frustratingly for Chelsea their fallow spell in the Premier League spilled over to Turin where Roberto Di Matteo's men were swept aside 3-0 by Juventus.

With Shakhtar seeing off Danish minnows Nordsjaelland in Copenhagen the Londoners slipped to third in Group E, with their fate now out of their hands going into the final roll of the group stage dice next month.

"Last season the Champions League was like a dream, now this is like, not a nightmare, just very disappointing," said Chelsea keeper Petr Cech.

He added: "We said before the game that we have our destiny in our hands, not any more. Now we need to do our bit, we need to win our last game and hope our fate is kind."

"Being realistic Juventus played very well and they need a point and Shakhtar are already through. It is a very sad moment."

Barcelona kept the wheels firmly on their pursuit of a fourth European crown, bouncing back from defeat at Celtic in their last run out to see off Spartak Moscow 3-0 in the Russian capital.

Lionel Messi was the hero of the night, scoring twice and setting up Dani Alves for the opener to maintain Barca's control of Group G with 12 points.

Messi, who moved level with Ruud van Nistelrooy on 56 Champions League goals but behind Raul, the competition's all-time scorer with 71, was as unassuming as ever after the game.

"My aim was just to get the ball, create chances and that we win the game, that is what is important," said the Argentine icon.

"We knew we couldn't afford to make mistakes after what happened against Celtic and that we had to go out strongly even though it is difficult to play away in this competition."

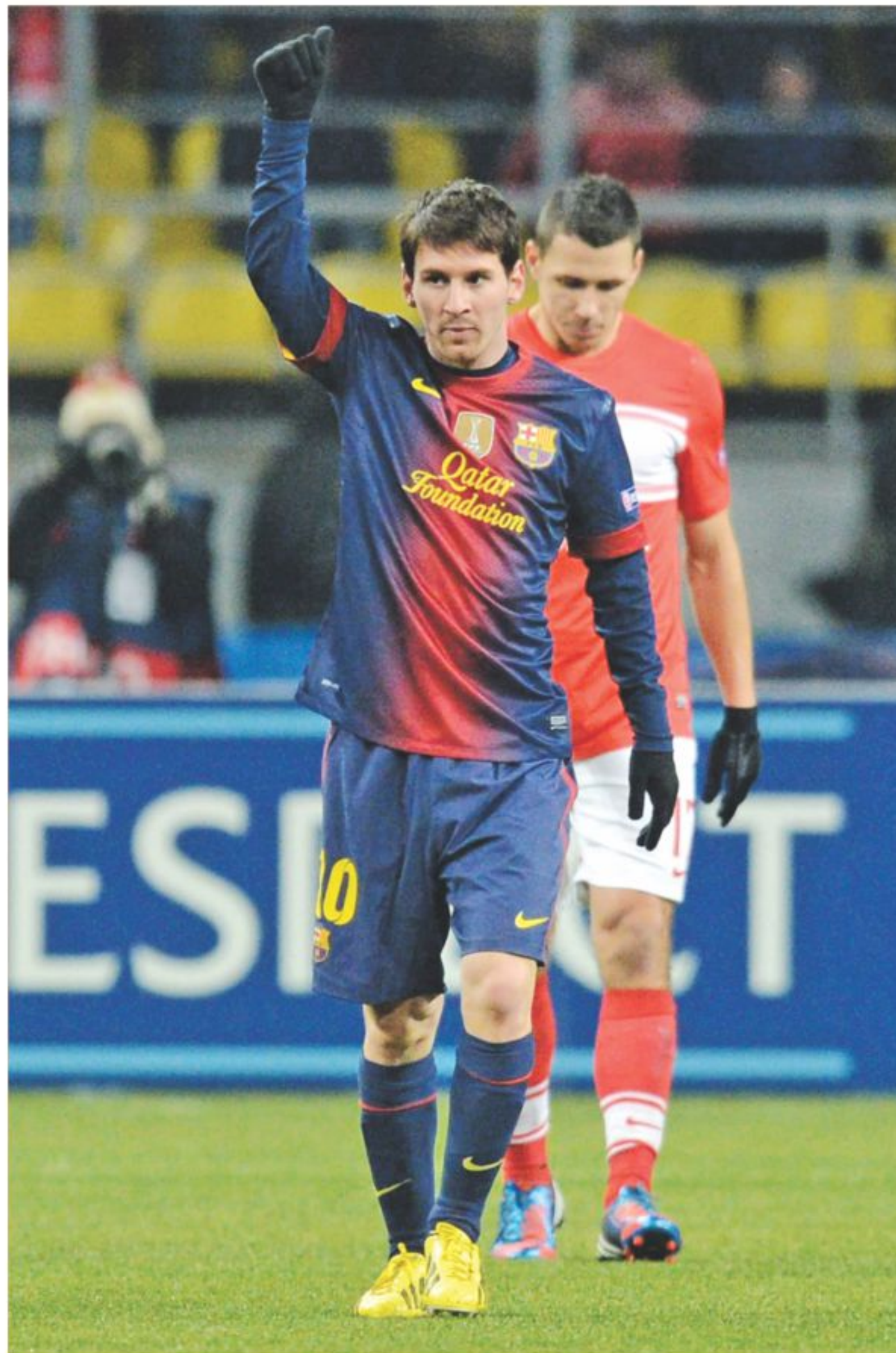
Barca had lost their previous away match at Celtic 2-1, despite dominating possession but were unable to make the most of their chances.

| RESULTS | |
|---|--|
| Nordsjaelland (DEN) 2 (Nordstrand 24, Lorentzen 29) | Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR) 5 (Luiz Adriano 26, 53, 81, Willian 44, 50) |
| Juventus (ITA) 3 (Quagliarella 38, Vidal 61, Giovinco 90+1) Chelsea (ENG) 0 | BATE Borisov (BLR) 0 Lille (FRA) 2 (Sidibe 14, Bruno 31) |
| Valencia (ESP) 1 (Feghouli 77) Bayern Munich (GER) 1 (Mueller 82) | Spartak Moscow (RUS) 0 Barcelona (ESP) 3 (Alves 16, Messi 27, 39) |
| Benfica (POR) 2 (John 7, Garay 71) Celtic (SCO) 1 (Samaras 32) | Galatasaray (TUR) 1 (Burak Yilmaz 53) |
| Manchester United (ENG) 0 | Ciuj (ROM) 3 (Rui Pedro 7, 15, 33) |

"Against Celtic we had the same number of opportunities but sometimes they go in and sometimes they don't," said coach Tito Vilanova.

"Everyone talks about Leo, the goals and the records but it is more his awareness and tactics. The way he defends and attacks and helps the team in all areas."

Barca qualify as Group G winners



Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi celebrates one of his two goals against Spartak Moscow during their Champions League encounter in Moscow on Tuesday.

on 12 points, with Celtic and Benfica fighting it out for the all-important runners-up spot with both teams on seven points after the Portuguese side's 2-1 win in Lisbon.

In Celtic's favour however is the fact that in the closing games Benfica are at the Nou Camp to take on Barca while Celtic have a potentially easier assignment against already eliminated Spartak.

"I'm disappointed with the two goals we conceded. There was a lack of composure, a nervousness about us at times on the ball. It is a young team and this is a difficult place to come and play football," manager Neil Lennon said.

"We have one more crack at it against Spartak and we live to fight another day," added the Northern Irishman.

In Group F, Valencia took to the pitch against Bayern in the happy knowledge that they were through to the next round as a result of Lille's earlier 2-0 win at BATE Borisov.

AFP, Istanbul



Galatasaray ended Manchester United's perfect start to this season's Champions League with a 1-0 victory in Group H in Istanbul on Tuesday.

Burak Yilmaz scored the only goal of the game at the Turk Telekom Arena when he headed in a corner in the 54th minute to take the hosts to the brink of qualification for the knockout stages.

But with United already through to the second phase, this match allowed manager Alex Ferguson to give several younger players some valuable European experience in front of some of the continent's most passionate fans.

"The possession was good and the attacking play was good," Ferguson told Sky Sports. "We had one or two good opportunities in both halves."

"They had a few strikes from outside the box and our goalkeeper did well. Otherwise we coped well."

Such United stars as England striker Wayne Rooney, top scorer Robin van Persie, Rio Ferdinand, Patrice Evra, Paul Scholes and Ryan Giggs, the only survivor from the 1993 'Welcome to Hell' trip to

Istanbul, stayed in Manchester.

By contrast Tuesday saw Nick Powell, at 18 years and 242 days, become the second youngest Englishman to feature for United in the Champions League.

The fact that record is held by Kieran Richardson should warn Powell that Tuesday's appearance is no guarantee of Old Trafford stardom.

Meanwhile Phil Jones made his first United appearance of the season and Powell his first start.

A first half of few chances saw United keeper Anders Lindegaard make just the one save, turning away a curling Hamit Altintop shot.

But the match livened up considerably after the interval with former Liverpool player Albert Riera testing Lindegaard from long range before the Dane did well to tip Felipe Melo's header over the bar.

But the ensuing corner saw Filmaz find space on the edge of the six-yard box before steering in a header.

The margin of defeat could have been worse for United, with Altintop's powerful long-range shot rattling the crossbar.

Ferguson tried to conjure an equaliser by introducing Ashley Young, Federico Macheda and Joshua King off the bench but it made no difference to the result.

Messi now 2nd in scoring chart

REUTERS, Undated



Rather like tennis's serial record breaker Roger Federer, Barcelona striker Lionel Messi cannot seem to finish a soccer match without ticking off another milestone.

The Argentine was at it again on Tuesday with two goals in his side's 3-0 victory over Spartak Moscow which put the Catalans through to the last 16 of the Champions League.

His brace took his tally in Europe's flagship competition to 56, putting him level in second place on the all-time scoring list with former Dutch marksman Ruud van Nistelrooy. Only Spain's Raul has more with 71.

Messi also equalled Raul's record of scoring in 19 different cities in the Champions League and surpassed the former Real Madrid player's mark of scoring two goals or more in 14 matches in the competition.

Messi moved to within five goals of Gerd Mueller's calendar-year scoring record of 85, set in 1972.

Typically, he was quick to play down his goalscoring feats, but his team mates clearly appreciated them.

"Leo is breaking all the records, he's spectacular, impressive; it's a pleasure to have him with us," Pedro told Barcelona's website.

Messi has been the top scorer in the Champions League for the past four seasons and last season's tally of 14 was the highest total scored in one campaign.

"Everyone talks about Leo, the goals and the records but it is more his awareness and tactics, the way he defends and attacks and helps the team in all areas," coach Tito Vilanova told reporters.



Channel 9
Bangladesh v West Indies
Second Test, Day 2
Live from 9:30am

ESPN
Australia v South Africa
Second Test, Day 1
Live from 6:00am
Sportscenter India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm

TEN Sports
UEFA Europa League
Rubin Kazan v Inter Milan
Live from 11:00pm
Newcastle v Maritimo
Live from 2:00am (Friday)

TEN Action
UEFA Europa League
Lazio v Tottenham
Live from 12:00am (Friday)
Liverpool v Young Boys



Day's Event
Bangladesh v West Indies
Second Test, Day 2
Time: 9:30am
Venue: Sk Abu Naser Stadium,