

Brazil sack Menezes

Football

AFP, Sao Paulo

Mano Menezes was sensationally sacked as coach of five-time world champions Brazil on Friday, dealing a hammer blow to the misfiring hosts of the 2014 World Cup.

"I gave him the news myself," said Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) national squad director Andres Sanches.

"Nobody likes to receive news of these kind of things in any circumstances, but everyone in football knows that these things happen. A new coach will be announced in January."

Menezes, 50, took over from Dunga following the team's elimination in the quarterfinals of the 2010 World Cup finals in South Africa.

But he had come under intense pressure after the team's failure at the 2011 Copa America, where they lost in the last-eight to Paraguay, and at the Olympic Games in London this

summer where they finished runners-up.

Menezes, who was axed after a meeting with the CBF president Jose Maria Marin, oversaw 21 wins in his time at the helm, six draws and five defeats.

His job had been on the line since Brazil's latest attempt to win Olympic gold ended in humiliation after a lacklustre 2-1 loss to underdogs Mexico at Wembley in August.

Media speculation has already linked former Selecao boss Luis Felipe Scolari with a return to the hot-seat after he guided Brazil to World Cup glory in 2002.

Despite the setback at the Olympics, Menezes appealed to Brazil's football federation chiefs not to be panicked into sacking him.

"Any coach must be ready to suffer the consequences of their results," Menezes said.

"Even when teams win tournaments people (in Brazil) don't always praise the coach so imagine what it is like when you lose.

"But defeat in one match should not have a decisive influence. Had we won that would not have solved all of our problems either. Lessons must be learned from every match."

Menezes said he believed that the Olympic loss could have been used to inspire Brazil to a sixth World Cup on home soil in 2014.

"The important thing is the right corrections are made so the next time we can win," he said in London.

"You learn from defeats as well as victories."

Menezes had previously coached Brazilian club side Gremio from 2005 until 2007, leading the team to the final of the Copa Libertadores where they were defeated by Boca Juniors.

He then took charge of Corinthians with whom he won the 2009 Brazilian Cup.

While Scolari remains the favourite to take over, some reports have linked Corinthians coach Tite and Santos boss Muricy Ramalho with the job.



West Brom go third City test for Benitez

AFP, Sunderland



West Bromwich Albion took advantage of a howler from Sunderland goalkeeper Simon Mignolet to move up to third place in the Premier League with a 4-2 win at the Stadium of Light on Saturday.

Steve Clarke's side were leading through Zoltan Gera's blistering first half strike when Mignolet allowed the ball to slip from his grasp and Shane Long tapped in to cement Albion's lead.

Craig Gardner got one back for Sunderland in the second half before a penalty from Albion forward Romelu Lukaku.

Stephane Sessegnon struck late for the hosts, but Marc-Antoine Fortune sealed the Baggies' fourth successive win in stoppage time.

West Brom's victory lifted the season's surprise package above Chelsea and within two points of leaders Manchester City, while Sunderland lie only three points above the relegation zone.

Black Cats defender John O'Shea, who

had already been booked, was involved in an early flashpoint when he challenged Long just outside the Sunderland penalty area.

Initially it seemed Mike Dean was about to show the former Manchester United star a second yellow card, but instead the referee booked Long for diving.

Albion snatched the lead against the run of play in the 30th minute when Gera pounced on Adam Johnson's poor control 25 yards from goal and unleashed a superb shot that had too much power and movement for Mignolet to keep out.

Martin O'Neill's side suffered a blow when midfielder Lee Cattermole was forced off with an injury. And it got worse for Sunderland when Mignolet's blunder gifted Albion their second goal in the 44th minute.

Chris Brunt's over-hit through pass should have been easy for Mignolet to collect, but the Belgian somehow let the ball escape and Long was on hand to pounce as the Irish strikers slotted into the empty net.

AFP, London



Rafael Benitez's hopes of winning over the Chelsea supporters face a stern test when his new side take on champions Manchester City at Stamford Bridge on Sunday.

Chelsea fans have not universally welcomed Benitez's appointment as Roberto Di Matteo's interim successor, after the frequent spats that accompanied clashes between Benitez's Liverpool and Jose Mourinho's Chelsea.

The Spaniard's response has been to confidently declare he will gain acceptance through success on the pitch and there is no doubt victory over the reigning Premier League champions would be a step in the right direction.

Benitez has been appointed until the end of the season but has talked of impressing the Chelsea hierarchy sufficiently to convince them to

shelve any plans of pursuing former Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola, who has also been linked with a move to City.

And the new manager has already received first-hand experience of dealing with the kind of off-field issues that have become a feature of life at Stamford Bridge in recent years.

The announcement by the Football Association that referee Mark Clattenburg had been cleared of racially abusing Chelsea midfielder John Obi Mikel threatened to overshadow the new manager's first media briefing on Friday.

Mikel is now facing a charge relating to his behaviour after the 3-2 home defeat by Manchester United, but is available for the visit of City.

Benitez must tighten up a defence that has looked shaky without John Terry -- missing again with a knee injury -- and, perhaps more dauntingly, attempt to coax striker

Fernando Torres back into the form he showed when they worked together at Liverpool.

The manager insists, though, that only minor tweaks are needed to a side that lost 3-0 at Juventus this week -- a result that triggered Di Matteo's departure and seriously undermined their hopes of progressing in the Champions League.

Describing his first meeting with his players, Benitez said: "We didn't talk about the Champions League or the next game but about little things I saw and we could improve a bit, and things they were doing well, which Roberto Di Matteo was doing."

"It's a good squad, a good team. If I'm here, it's because I think we can win with them. If we can improve by training hard, we will."

The events at Chelsea this week have helped deflect some of the attention away from City's failure to reach the Champions League knockout rounds for the second successive season.



West Bromwich Albion striker Shane Long (L) scores the second goal after Sunderland goalkeeper Simon Mignolet spilled the ball during their Premier League clash at the Stadium of Light yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Mourinho rues penalty loses

Football

REUTERS, Lisbon

Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho cannot understand why his sides consistently fail to deliver in penalty shootouts after revealing it took extraordinary circumstances for him to shake off his bad luck in his only final shootout win in 2008.

"I only won one title on penalties. I always lose. I don't know why. If you ask me why, maybe because I don't take them or save them myself," the famously confident Mourinho said with a smile in an interview with Portuguese television station TVI on Thursday.

While at Chelsea, Mourinho was eliminated on penalties by Liverpool in the 2007 Champions League semi-finals and last season Sergio Ramos missed as his Real side lost to Bayern Munich in the last four.

Spanish titleholders Real Madrid qualified for the Champions League last 16 on Wednesday after a 1-1 stalemate at Manchester City.

QPR appoint Harry

AFP, London



Queens Park Rangers confirmed on Saturday that Harry Redknapp has been appointed as their new manager, replacing the sacked Mark Hughes.

The former Tottenham boss will take up a two-and-a-half year deal at Loftus Road with QPR bottom of the Premier League ahead of their match against Manchester United later Saturday.

The 65-year-old Redknapp, who will be in the stands at Old Trafford to watch his new side, told the club's official website: "I'm delighted to be back in the managerial hot-seat at QPR."

"When I spoke to the shareholders and they told me about their plans I knew this was too good an opportunity to turn down."

"There's no doubt there's a lot of ability in the squad, but for one reason or another things haven't gone as well as everyone expected since the start of the season."

"I can't wait to get to work and get the results necessary to kick-start our season."

Redknapp's appointment come just a day after the sacking of former Manchester United striker Hughes, who had been in charge for only 10 months.

He managed to stave off relegation for QPR on the final day of last season, but the club have struggled this year, failing to win any of their opening 12 league games and they are currently four points adrift at the bottom of the table.

QPR chairman Tony Fernandes said: "Harry was our number one target, the unanimous choice of the board and we're delighted we've been able to attract him to the club."

"He has a proven track record in the Premier League and has all the characteristics we were looking for to get us out of the current situation we find ourselves in."

"His man-management skills are second to none and we are confident he is the right man to lead us away from the bottom of the table."

Redknapp was immediately installed as odds-on favourite for the QPR job as soon as Hughes was dismissed on Friday morning and he left no doubt that he would be up for taking on the challenge of reviving the fortunes of the London side.

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