

Zico quits Iraq

AFP, Paris

Brazilian legend Zico has resigned as coach of the Iraqi national team blaming a dispute over his contract.

"I would like to inform via this website that I have sent a communication to Fifa ... and to the Iraq Football Association declaring that I consider my contract to be void due to the IFA's failure to abide by its terms," he said on his internet website.

The 59-year-old midfielder was put in charge of Iraq in the summer of last year and since then his side have played 21 games, with 10 wins and six draws. Home matches have been played in Doha for security reasons.

The Iraqis are still in the running to qualify for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil and are currently third in Group B of the Asia Zone final qualifiers with five points from five games, trailing second-placed Australia only on goal difference.

The top two teams qualify directly for Brazil in 2014 while the third-place team goes into a playoff system.

Prior to being coach of Iraq, Zico was in charge of several teams including Japan, Fenerbahce and CSKA Moscow.

The head coach position is currently vacant in Brazil, but Zico has always said he had no interest in that job as there was too much pressure involved.

Europa League could be scrapped

AFP, Rennes

European football's governing body are considering scrapping the Europa League in favour of extending the Champions League, UEFA president Michel Platini told Wednesday's edition of the daily Ouest-France.

Asked about possible plans to extend the elite Champions League at the expense of the second-tier Europa League, Platini said: "There is an ongoing debate to determine what form the European competitions will have between 2015 and 2018. We're discussing it, we will make a decision in 2014. Nothing is decided yet."

One of the options being looked at is the possibility of extending the final phase of the Champions League from 32 to 64 teams.

The Europa League generates far lower revenue for clubs than the Champions League and has been criticised since it evolved from the UEFA Cup in 2009.

What to WATCH

TEN Cricket
Sri Lanka v New Zealand
Second Test, Day 5
Live from 10:30am

ESPN
Sportscenter India
Sports News

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh Premier League
Abahani v Brothers Union
Time: 4:00pm
Sk Jamal v Muktiyoddha
Time: 6:15pm
Venue: Bangabandhu National



Real Madrid winger Jose Callejon (R) scores one of his two goals during their King's Cup match against Alcoyano at Bernabeu on Tuesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Fortuna hold Borussia Jose whistled in win

AFP, Berlin



BUNDESLIGA

Borussia Dortmund conceded a late equaliser to draw 1-1 at home to 10-man Fortuna Duesseldorf on Tuesday as Bayern Munich's lead at the top of the Bundesliga leaders remains a commanding eight points.

Bayern host second-placed Dortmund on Saturday in the clash of the Bundesliga titans and with Munich playing on Wednesday night at Freiburg, Dortmund missed both the chance to shorten the gap and earn their fifth-straight victory.

Both Schalke 04 and Eintracht Frankfurt, in the pack chasing Bayern, suffered shock defeats and Bayern can go 11 points clear with a victory at Freiburg.

Dortmund coach Jurgen Klopp left out midfield stars Mario Goetze and Ilkay Gundogan, plus defender Mats Hummels, who were all carrying knocks.

The move back-fired as Stefan Reisinger equalised on 78 minutes from a superb cross by Australia's Robbie Kruse after Poland captain Jakub Blaszczykowski -- Kuba for short -- had put the defending champions Borussia ahead on 43 minutes.

"We did not have many goal chances and we failed to convert the few we had," said Klopp.

"At half-time, I told them any success Duesseldorf had was because we allowed them to counter-attack us.

"Duesseldorf should be happy with the point, they hit us very well on the counter."

Duesseldorf were reduced to 10 men when ex-Dortmund midfielder Ivan Paurevic was shown an 87th-minute red card after earning a second booking when he brought down Borussia defender Lukasz Piszczek.

After the final whistle, Fortuna's jubilant players were banned from giving interviews to German Sky Sports.

"We aren't giving Sky any interviews today, they have belittled us in the past," explained Duesseldorf's director of sport Wolf Werner, while angrily pulling captain Andreas Lambertz away from the cameras.

Schalke suffered a 3-1 defeat at Hamburg as midfielder Maximilian Beister slammed home the hosts' opener -- which was recorded at 117km per hour -- on 52 minutes, then helped set up Latvia striker Artjoms Rudnevs three minutes.

Hamburg defender Dennis Aogo had earlier kept his side in the game when he cleared a shot off the line while Dutch striker Klaas-Jan Huntelaar netted a 79th-minute penalty at the second attempt.

Hamburg midfielder Milan Badelj netted a 92nd-minute penalty to consign Schalke to their third defeat in their last five Bundesliga games as they remain third.

"This phase of the season, where we have so many games, is a factor, but that is no excuse," said Schalke 04 Huub Stevens, whose side have qualified for the knockout phase of the Champions League.

Frankfurt stay fourth despite their 3-1 defeat at Mainz having been out-played and Bayer Leverkusen can jump to second from fifth if they win at Werder Bremen on Wednesday.

Third tier Cacereno came within centimetres of upsetting Malaga in the King's Cup on Tuesday, winning 1-0 at the Rosaleda but going out on away goals after drawing 4-4 on aggregate.

Real Madrid, Real Betis and Osasuna all reached the last 16, while second division Cordoba and Las Palmas claimed the scalps of top-flight sides to progress.

The split among Real fans over their support for coach Jose Mourinho, in the spotlight after his side slipped 11 points behind La Liga leaders Barcelona, was evident at the Bernabeu as some sections whistled when others chanted his name.

Qatar-owned Malaga, who are fourth in La Liga and have cruised into the last 16 of the Champions League, were clinging on desperately at the end of their last-32, second leg but had luck on their side.

Cacereno winger Chapi pounced on a loose ball after a free-kick to put the visitors ahead in the 37th minute and they sensed an upset towards the end of the second half.

Malaga defender Martin Demichelis diverted a goal-bound shot just wide of his own post and goalkeeper Carlos Kameni pushed another shot into the side-netting in the closing stages.

When the visitors did finally bundle the ball home again at a corner the 'goal' was ruled out for offside and Manuel Pellegrini's side hung on to go through.

"Without the correct attitude you cannot play football," Pellegrini, who famously suffered a 4-1 humiliation to third-tier Alcorcon as Real Madrid coach,

told a news conference.

"If we had gone out it would have been fair enough."

Mourinho gave four B team players a start against third-tier Alcoyano, including an official debut for 21-year-old winger Denis Cheryshev, who made his first appearance for Fabio Capello's Russia in a friendly this month.

However, it was the established figures of Jose Callejon with two goals and substitute Angel Di Maria with one who struck late for a 3-0 victory as Real triumphed 7-1 on aggregate.

Mourinho sent out assistant Aitor Karanka to speak to the media after the game and answer questions about the whistles.

"You hear a lot of things in the dugout," he said. "People at the stadium have the right to express themselves.

"There will be people who are in favour and those who aren't but no one can doubt our professionalism."

Cordoba upset Real Sociedad by taking advantage of some poor defending to draw 2-2 at Anoeta and advance 4-2 on aggregate.

The Andalusian club's prize is likely to be a meeting with holders Barcelona, who host Alaves on Wednesday with a 3-0 first-leg advantage.

Las Palmas ousted Rayo 1-0 on aggregate after grabbing a goalless draw in Vallecas where the home side had their goalkeeper sent off for the second time in the tie.

Real Betis, spurred on by their surprise 1-0 defeat of league champions Real at the weekend, overturned a first leg deficit against Valladolid to progress 3-1 on aggregate.

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

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Lazio cement 5th place

AFP, Milan



LEGA CALCIO

Lazio continued efforts to distance themselves from their right wing fan base by wearing 'No Racism' shirts during a dominant 3-0 win over Udinese on Tuesday.

Uruguayan midfielder Gonzalez and Miroslav Klose struck in the first-half to put Vladimir Petkovic's side well on the road to an eighth win of their Serie A campaign.

Brazilian substitute Hernanes then added a third just before the hour to virtually seal the win for the Biancocelesti, who remain fifth but now have 26 points, three more than city rivals Roma and six adrift of leaders Juventus.

With Udinese languishing in the bottom half of the table, much of the build-up to this match focused on efforts by Lazio to send a firm message to fans that racism and violence will not be tolerated.

The club was fined by football's European ruling body earlier this season for racist chanting during a Europa League game at Tottenham, the London club known for its close association with the Jewish community.

But the club's reputation for harbouring right wing elements came

under far more intense scrutiny last week when 10 Spurs fans were attacked by up to 40 thugs at a bar in Rome prior to the return Europa League game.

It later emerged that two of the men arrested by police in connection with the assault have known links with AS Roma. Both have been charged with attempted murder after Tottenham fan Ashley Mills was left with stab wounds in the head and leg.

The incidents shocked Lazio president Claudio Lotito, who visited one unnamed Tottenham fan in hospital Tuesday to show his support and express his sympathies.

"I wanted to express my respect for someone who risked his life to come and see a football match," Lotito told Sky Italia Tuesday.

He added: "I want to affirm that this club is against racism, and so are our supporters. They do not want to be associated with this attack, which had absolutely nothing to do with sport. It was criminal.

"I hope the jersey illustrates how we feel about this issue."

Germany striker Klose now has eight league goals after 14 games, two short of leading scorer Stephan El Shaarawy of AC Milan.



Lazio striker Miroslav Klose celebrates his goal against Udinese during their Serie A encounter at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Scolari set to return

REUTERS, Brasilia

Luiz Felipe Scolari is set to be named as the new coach of 2014 World Cup hosts Brazil on Thursday, a source close to Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) told Reuters on Wednesday.

Scolari, who led Brazil to their last World Cup title in 2002 and was heavily favoured to take over, will replace Mano Menezes who was sacked last Friday.

Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) president Jose Maria Marin confirmed he had chosen a new coach but declined to give a name.

"We did a thorough evaluation and what we need is someone with the right skills, dedication and experience. I am absolutely certain that the fans will be happy with our choice," CBF president Jose Maria Marin told reporters at an event in Sao Paulo.

"Pressure will be great at the World Cup, and that's understandable, and we need someone who can cope with that," said Marin, who added that the announcement would be made on Thursday but did not give a time or place.

"We need everyone to get behind the new coach," he added.

Marin had previously said the coach would be named in January but decided it would be better to make the decision before Saturday's draw in Sao Paulo for the Confederations Cup, which Brazil hosts next year.

"This shows that there is no crisis, that everything is under control," he said.

Brazil will be under huge pressure to win a sixth world title in 2014. Scolari also coached Portugal at Euro 2004 and 2008 and the 2006 World Cup.

While Marin was making the announcement, national teams director Andres Sanchez said in a statement that he had handed in his resignation.

Sanchez had already said he was opposed to sacking Menezes and had not been consulted.

Espanyol appoint Aguirre

AFP, Madrid

Struggling La Liga club Espanyol have appointed Mexican Javier Aguirre as their new coach after Argentine Mauricio Pochettino was sacked on Monday, following a disappointing start to the season.

"Espanyol and Javier Aguirre have reached an agreement for the Mexican to be the coach of the Catalan club until the end of the season," the club announced on their website.

The 53-year-old has a rich pedigree of experience in Spain having previously coached Osasuna, Atletico Madrid and Real Zaragoza and also coached Mexico at the 2002 and 2010 World Cups where they reached the second round on both occasions.

Espanyol, who play in Barcelona, are bottom of the Spanish top flight with just nine points from 13 games, but within three points of five clubs in what promises to be a lengthy battle to avoid relegation.