

Desiring Blue blood

AFP, London



Jose Mourinho says he has returned to Chelsea because he wants to leave a long-lasting legacy for the first time in his managerial career.

The 50-year-old Portuguese has achieved success wherever he has coached, but he has never remained with a club longer than the three years and three months he spent at Chelsea in his first spell between 2004 and 2007.

He returns to Stamford Bridge, on a four-year contract, having won a further eight trophies with Inter Milan and Real Madrid, but says he now wants to sow the seeds of long-term success.

"You need stability for identity, and I think identity becomes more important in football," he told reporters after being officially presented to the media on Monday.

"You need stability if you want to go in this profile direction. If Chelsea bought lots of young players, those players need to be developed."

"With Financial Fair Play, and Chelsea wants to go in that direction, you also need

stability. You cannot change manager and philosophy every few years.

"It's more difficult to keep trying to win and trying to be successful, while at the same time developing young players while giving an identity to the team."

"But it's something I want at this stage of my career. Titles I have. Money I have. I need challenges."

While Mourinho was at Madrid, Chelsea ended owner Roman Abramovich's nine-year quest for Champions League glory by prevailing over Bayern Munich in the 2012 final.

They followed that up with success in the Europa League under interim coach Rafael Benitez, but Mourinho says the club must aim higher.

"I think Europa League winners can be analysed in two ways: one way, you won it; the other way, why did you win it? Because you didn't get through the group phase of the Champions League," he said.

"The point is we have to prepare ourselves to win, or not to win, but our target level is not Europa League. It's the Champions League and the Premier League."

Guus extends Anzhi contract

AFP, Moscow

Dutchman Guus Hiddink has extended his contract with Russia's big spenders Anzhi Makhachkala, the club said on Tuesday, after they achieved their best finish with third place in last season's championship.

Anzhi said they had exercised their option to keep the 66-year-old coach for another year but provided no financial details.

"Both sides exercise the old contract's option to their mutual satisfaction. I am glad," Anzhi board director Konstantin Remchukov tweeted.

Anzhi have gone through great expense to attract international talent such as their Cameroonian captain Samuel Eto'o to finish third.

'Abidal was hard done by Barca'

AFP, Madrid



Former Barcelona president Joan Laporta has attacked the current Barca board on a number of issues, including their decision not to renew defender Eric Abidal's contract.

"I feel prepared and every day I am more excited to return to being president of Barcelona," he told a press conference on Monday.

"To present yourself for elections you have to be motivated and I am. But I have to wait until there are elections. When they are close I will reflect more."

Abidal was signed during Laporta's previous reign as president in 2007 and he claimed that not renewing the contract of the Frenchman after he had returned to playing following a liver transplant had damaged the image of the club.

The 33-year-old was instead offered an ambassadorial role in Barca's football schools rather than another playing contract, which he has refused at least until he has finished his playing career somewhere else.

"The Abidal case has not been handled well. It has damaged the image of Barcelona and disappointed the player."

"The club has shown a contradictory attitude and I think they should have extended Eric Abidal's contract for another year."

Ronaldo's holiday gift

AFP, Geneva



Real Madrid star Cristiano Ronaldo gave his homeland some welcome joy on their national holiday as his first-half strike gave Portugal a 1-0 win over Croatia in a friendly

played in Geneva on Monday.

Paulo Bento's side enjoyed their second victory in just three days as they followed their much more important World Cup qualifying win over Russia on Friday with another successful evening's work thanks to Ronaldo's 39th international goal.

Croatia meanwhile suffer back to back defeats after their shock 1-0 home loss against Scotland which leaves them three points back of Belgium in Group A and the automatic berth for next year's finals in Brazil.

Ronaldo fired home the only goal of the match 10 minutes before the break and

celebrated exuberantly in front of the Croatia fans after being on the receiving end of constant abuse and chants of "Messi" from the travelling supporters.

Having said how he was "proud to play in front of the Portuguese community in Switzerland", the atmosphere was in stark contrast to the Santiago Bernabeu as a half empty stadium of some 13,000 in the Swiss capital provided the support for the two World Cup hopefuls.

After a couple more half chances for the former Manchester United striker, he was taken off at half-time by Bento as both coaches made a series of changes.

Croatia had a golden chance to draw level with 20 minutes remaining when Hrvoje Milic struck a fierce drive but Portugal survived the scare and can now look forward to their next qualifier on September 6 when they travel to Northern Ireland, who held them to a surprise draw in their home match.

Benzema has knee op

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's French international Karim Benzema has undergone a surgical procedure in France to drain liquid from his right knee, the club said on its web site.

Benzema was admitted on Monday afternoon to an orthopaedic clinic in Lyon, southeastern France, where a ganglion, or mass, on his right knee was treated.

The 25-year-old striker had a "CAT-guided aspiration", the club said late Monday, a procedure in which surgeons use a CAT (computer axial tomography) scanner to guide them as they insert a needle and then drain liquid.

The player himself is confident that he will be fit in time for the start of pre-season training next month.

Zico gives up on Brazil

THE GUARDIAN



Many condemn the current squad as Brazil's weakest in more than 60 years. Does Zico, member of the brilliant Brazil World Cup teams in 1978, 1982 and 1986, agree? "Yes, in terms of results. It's because there is no continuity."

Some upheaval was inevitable after the last World Cup, he says, because the previous crop of national team players all declined in form at about the same time, meaning there was no core of experienced players to build a new team around.

"The Brazil team is still very young. A whole new generation came in at once. So now you get all the responsibility on a player like Neymar, who is only 21 and has never even played in a World Cup qualifier before."

"We need some players who have been

there and done that so the spotlight is on them rather than the young, up and coming players."

He is critical of the Confederation of Brazilian Football for sacking manager Mano Menezes late last year and replacing him with

Luiz Felipe Scolari. "They switched at the wrong time; just as Menezes's team was starting to come together. Now Scolari is having to start all over again," he said.

On current form, he tips Argentina as favourites next year, because they have built a strong side around Lionel Messi and come out on top in recent encounters with Brazil.

"If they win, I just hope it is

not in the final against Brazil, or we will suffer just like we did against Uruguay in 1950. Then the Maracana [stadium] will seem a cursed place."

The former Brazil playmaker is also concerned that a gulf may be opening up between the fans and the higher echelons of the sport before next year's World Cup.

The decline in Brazil's form, scandals surrounding the football authorities and scepticism about the value of stadium construction have eroded trust in the people's game, he said. "The population of Brazil seems distant from the World Cup," he said.

"Because of what people see as corruption and the overspend on the stadiums and the lack of transparency."



'Higuain worth over €30m'

INTERNET

Real Madrid have told Italian champions Juventus that they'll have to dig deep into their pockets if they want to sign Gonzalo Higuain.

The Old Lady are apparently preparing a 22m euro offer for the Argentine striker who wants to leave the Spanish capital.

However, Real President Florentino Perez insists the 25-year-old is worth much more than such a figure.

"If Juventus are thinking about offering 30m euros for him then it would be better if they don't even turn up," Perez is quoted as saying by Mediaset.

"That amount will not be enough."

"Saying that, we have not received any requests for the player -- not even from Juventus."

Lebanese ref jailed

Convicted for accepting sexual bribe

REUTERS, Singapore

A Singapore court jailed a Lebanese referee for six months on Tuesday for accepting sexual favours to fix a soccer game, a day after two fellow countrymen were jailed for the same offence amid an international investigation into soccer corruption.

Ali Sabbagh, a FIFA-accredited referee, had admitted having sex with a woman hired by accused Singapore match-fixer Ding Si Yang, who has denied wrongdoing.

Ali Sabbagh and two Lebanese assistant referees were convicted of accepting sexual bribes to fix a future match, but no specific game was identified by the prosecution.

"You actively allowed yourself to be cultivated by Ding," Singapore's Subordinate Courts Judge Low Wee Ping told Ali Sabbagh before announcing the jail sentence.

"If you had not been arrested by the CPIB (Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau) and convicted in this court, one wonders how many international football matches you would have gone on to fix."

Singapore prosecutors had described Ali

Sabbagh as "the most culpable" of the three Lebanese since he had more influence on the outcome of a match as referee. He also influenced the two assistants into accepting the sexual bribes, prosecutors said.

Ali Eid and Abdallah Taleb, who are also FIFA-accredited, were released on Monday after being granted time off their sentence for good behaviour, Singapore authorities said.

In Ali Sabbagh's case, prosecutors said he first made contact with Ding in June 2012 at a cafe in Beirut.

Then the three Lebanese met Ding in Singapore on April 2 "to discuss their preference for girls" one day before the match between the Singaporean and Indian teams, the prosecution said, adding that the Lebanese referee expressed his preference for "tall Asian girls" to Ding during one of their meetings.

Ding subsequently arranged for the women to be sent to their hotel rooms in the early hours of April 3, the prosecution said.

Lawyer Gary Low, who acted for the three Lebanese, said in a mitigation plea that the "acceptance of the gratification... did not result in any actual football match being fixed".

Cesc may leave

INTERNET

Josep Bartomeu has revealed that Cesc Fabregas could be allowed to leave Barcelona if the midfielder wants to move on this summer.

The Spain international has been linked with a return to Arsenal on more than one occasion, while Denis Irwin revealed this week that Manchester United are keen to lure the 26-year-old back to England, too.

Fabregas has a contract with Barca until June 2016, but the Blaugrana's vice-president has insisted that they will not keep the midfielder at the club against his will.

"Cesc will only leave the club if he himself wants to move on," Bartomeu said when questioned about Fabregas' future at a fan event in Arenys de Munt.

The midfielder himself, meanwhile, has downplayed rumors that he could leave the Camp Nou side ahead of the 2013-14 campaign.

"I'm very happy, it's taken a lot to get where I am and I don't plan on throwing that away for anything," Fabregas told Onda Cero.

Fabregas scored 11 goals in 32 appearances for Barca this season.

Lewandowski not giving up

INTERNET

Robert Lewandowski has not given up hope of joining Bayern Munich this summer despite Borussia Dortmund's declaration that it will not sell the striker to its Bundesliga rival.

Dortmund CEO Hans-Joachim Watzke revealed earlier this week that BVB will not allow the 24-year-old to join the treble-winner, before adding that it could cash in on the striker if a different club matches its valuation of Lewandowski.

However, the Poland international is confident that Dortmund will change its stance on his future and let him move to the Bavarians after all.

"I do not think that this is the final decision of the board of directors and I expect the situation to change shortly," the striker was quoted as saying by DPA.

"I am enjoying my holiday for now, but I hope things move forward pretty soon and the situation changes. I do not get upset about anything."

Lewandowski's contract with Dortmund runs until June 2014.