

## REAL MADRID, REAL MEAN

The Real Madrid squad held their Christmas dinner on Wednesday night and did not invite boss Rafa Benitez nor his coaching staff to the event. The players took advantage of having no commitments in the Copa del Rey, by dining at the Spanish capital's trendy Fox restaurant. All the Madrid players, with the exception of Toni Kroos, attended the get-together along with some members of the reserve team. However, the absence of the coach is not unusual on these occasions as former boss Carlo Ancelotti was not invited last year, despite him having an excellent rapport with the



## Suarez leads Barca

### Messi misses match due to kidney stones

AFP, Yokohama



Luis Suarez fired a hat-trick as Barcelona overcame the loss of Lionel Messi to kidney problems by beating China's Guangzhou Evergrande 3-0 to reach the Club World Cup final on Thursday.

The Spanish giants will face Argentine side River Plate in Yokohama on Sunday as they look to become the first team to win the tournament three times.

The European champions were rocked before the semifinal when Messi was sidelined with renal colic -- commonly caused by kidney stones -- which could also rule him out of the final.

Initially Barca missed Messi's wizardry and the guile of his Brazilian strike partner Neymar, who was rested as he recovers from a groin strain.

The Catalans toiled to break down Evergrande's massed ranks of defenders, until Suarez pounced six minutes before half-time, poking in the loose ball after goalkeeper Li Shuai parried Ivan Rakitic's fierce drive from the edge of the box.

The Uruguayan grabbed his second five minutes after the break when he latched onto a superb Andres Iniesta pass, bringing the ball down on his chest

before volleying past Li to the delight of most in the crowd of 63,000.

Suarez completed his treble from the penalty spot in the 67th minute to record his 21st goal of the season for Barca, who previously won the Club World Cup in 2009 and 2011.

"We knew we were without the two most important players for the team, but all we could do was stay focused and try to reach the final," said Suarez. "I hope (Messi) recovers as quickly as possible."

"We knew there was a big chance we would be playing against River," added the former Liverpool forward. "They won the Copa Libertadores, they are one of the best teams in the Americas and we will have to play well to lift the cup."

Suarez, Messi and Neymar have now plundered an astonishing 130 goals for Barca in 2015 -- more than Spanish rivals Real Madrid.

Evergrande manager Luiz Felipe Scolari praised his players for their efforts after winning a fifth successive Chinese championship and their second Asian title in three years.

"I told my players I was very grateful for a wonderful year," said the former Brazil coach. "We lost 3-0 to Barcelona but a lot of



Barcelona striker Luis Suarez (L) celebrates one of his three goals against Guangzhou Evergrande during their Club World Cup semifinal in Yokohama yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Mourinho sacked

# Sepp appears before judges

AFP, London



Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho has left the club "by mutual consent" after a disastrous start to the season, the Premier League champions announced on Thursday, with Dutchman Guus Hiddink set to take over as interim manager.

"Chelsea Football Club and Jose Mourinho have today parted company by mutual consent," the club said in a statement on their website, confirming earlier media reports.

"All at Chelsea thank Jose for his immense contribution since he returned as manager in the summer of 2013."

Mourinho, 52, led Chelsea to a Premier League and League Cup double last season, but they are currently one point above the relegation zone after nine defeats in 16 games.

Mourinho is reported to have been informed of his fate in a meeting with club officials on Thursday afternoon, following two days of talks at boardroom level.

He was previously sacked by Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich in 2007, after a richly successful three-year spell in which he won two Premier League titles, two League Cups and the



### FACTFILE

#### Managerial career

Teams: Benfica (POR/2000), Uniao de Leiria (POR/2001-2002), Porto (POR/2002-2004), Chelsea (ENG/2004-2007), Inter Milan (ITA/2008-2010), Real Madrid (ESP/2010-2013), Chelsea (ENG/2013-2015)

Managerial honours

Porto: Primeira Liga (2): 2002-03, 2003-04

Taca de Portugal (1): 2002-03

Supertaca Candido de Oliveira (1): 2003

UEFA Champions League (1): 2003-04

UEFA Cup (1): 2002-03

Chelsea: Premier League (3): 2004-05, 2005-06, 2014-15

FA Cup (1): 2006-07

League Cup (3): 2004-05, 2006-07, 2014-15

Community Shield (1): 2005

Inter Milan: Serie A (2): 2008-09, 2009-10

Coppa Italia (1): 2009-10

Supercoppa Italiana (1): 2008

FA Cup.

"His three league titles, FA Cup, Community Shield and three League Cup wins over two spells make him the most successful manager in our 110-year history," Chelsea said.

"But both Jose and the board agreed results have not been good enough this season and believe it is in the best interests of both parties to go our separate ways."

"The club wishes to make clear Jose leaves us on good terms and will always remain a much-loved, respected and significant figure at Chelsea."

"His legacy at Stamford Bridge and in England has long been guaranteed and he will always be warmly welcomed back to Stamford Bridge."

Hiddink having previously fulfilled the role as an interim manager in 2009, making this his second stint at the London side.

Pep Guardiola, the Bayern Munich coach, former Chelsea manager Carlo Ancelotti, Atletico Madrid's Diego Simeone and Italy coach Antonio Conte are reported to be possible long-term successors.

In what proved to be his final Chelsea game, Mourinho's side were beaten 2-1 at Leicester City on Monday -- a club managed by Claudio Ranieri, who he replaced at Stamford Bridge when he first arrived in England in

AFP, Zurich



Suspended FIFA president Sepp Blatter appeared before the world body's ethics judges Thursday to

answer corruption allegations as Switzerland announced it has frozen tens of millions of dollars in accounts linked to football bribes.

Blatter, who with vice president Michel Platini faces a long suspension, arrived at FIFA's base in Zurich in a black Mercedes with his lawyer. He made no comment as he entered.

Before the hearing, Blatter, 79, wrote a letter to FIFA's 209 members calling the FIFA ethics commission's investigators "the inquisition".

As the hearing went ahead, Russia's President Vladimir Putin, whose country will host the 2018 World Cup, said Blatter should be a Nobel Peace laureate.

"That is someone who should be given the Nobel Peace Prize," Putin said. "His contribution to the global humanitarian sphere is colossal."

Blatter is under criminal investigation in Switzerland over a two million Swiss francs (\$2 million/1.8 million euros) payment made to Platini in 2011 for work carried out about a decade earlier.

Platini's case will be heard on Friday, but he has said he will boycott the tribunal. His lawyers will go however.

Platini has said the verdict has been decided in advance and his lawyers say FIFA's ethics committee has recommended a life ban for the French football legend.

Blatter and Platini deny any misconduct.

The ethics committee chamber is expected to announce its verdict next Monday. Appeals to a FIFA appeal committee and the Court of Arbitration for Sport are then possible.

FIFA has been plunged into several corruption scandals this year, which played a key role in Blatter's announcement in June that he would stand



Suspended FIFA president Sepp Blatter arrives at the FIFA headquarters in Zurich yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

down when a new election is held in February.

Platini was considered favourite to take over but his campaign has been frozen since he and Blatter were suspended in October over the payment which they insist was legal.

The United States asked Switzerland to freeze about 50 accounts in Swiss banks linked to its massive inquiry into football corruption, a federal prosecution spokesman told AFP.

Federal justice spokesman Folco Galli said "funds in the high tens of millions (Swiss francs) are blocked."

The Tages Anzeiger newspaper said the figure was between 50 million and 100 million Swiss francs (\$50-100 million/46-92 million euros). Galli declined to comment on the total.

The action involved about 50 accounts in 10 Swiss banks. Numerous FIFA members are known to have accounts in the country.

Nicolas Leoz, a longtime head of the South American confederation, CONMEBOL, had 12 accounts in Switzerland, the Swiss television

programme Eco said, quoting details from the US request.

The United States has charged 39 individuals, including Leoz, and two companies over bribes of more than \$200 million paid for football marketing and television rights deals.

Twelve have so far pleaded guilty. Galli said that because of the scope of the US inquiry, the FIFA case is "one of the biggest cases of foreign help that we are dealing with."

The UBS, Credit Suisse, Pictet, BSI and Julius Baer banks have all received requests for account details.

The federal justice office looks at each request case by case and if suspicious information is confirmed hands details to the United States.

But appeals are possible against the decisions and Tages Anzeiger said it could take years to get all the cases completed.

Germany has also asked Switzerland for judicial help over its inquiry into allegations that bribes were paid to secure the 2006 World Cup finals.

## Juve crush Torino

AFP, Milan

Simone Zaza struck twice while Paulo Dybala and Paul Pogba added late goals as holders Juventus cruised into the Italian Cup quarterfinals with a 4-0 rout of Torino on Wednesday.

And Massimiliano Allegri's men provided some early Christmas cheer with a comprehensive victory over their bitter city rivals to maintain their chances of a second successive double.

Zaza, making a rare appearance amid reports of a January move to the English Premier League, put the hosts ahead with a cracking first-time strike on the half hour after great work on the left wing by Alvaro Morata.

The 24-year-old doubled Juve's lead six minutes after the restart when he guided a low shot beyond Salvador Ichazo and into the far corner.

Dybala has scored in Juve's past two league wins and made it three matches in a row with a well-taken strike in the 73rd minute.

Pogba wrapped up the win with a superb freekick eight minutes from time to set up a quarterfinal clash with the winner of the Lazio-Udinese tie on Thursday.

## Pep leaving Bayern?

AFP, Berlin



Pep Guardiola, strongly linked to a move to the Premier League, has told Bayern Munich he will be leaving the club at the end of the season, German media reported on Thursday.

The Spaniard's three-year contract expires next June and Bayern's head coach has said he will announce "before Christmas" whether he will extend his stay or leave, with Manchester City among the English sides keen to secure his services.

According to German daily Bild, Guardiola gave his decision to Bayern boss Karl-Heinz Rummenigge "last week" amid reports from Spain suggested Carlo Ancelotti was poised to replace him.

"Everything points to his leaving," the paper added. The 44-year-old Catalan is in his third year at the helm of the Bavarian giants.

Last month Rummenigge indicated that talks on his future would begin after December 19 "to avoid any Christmas surprise, one way or the other".

Barcelona daily Sport claimed a month ago that Guardiola had already given his word to former Barca colleagues Ferran Soriano and Txiki Begiristain, now Manchester City's chief executive and director of football respectively, that he would join them at the Etihad next season.

Bild suggested Guardiola was alive to the danger of outstaying his welcome if he remained at Bayern.

"He is someone who enjoys a challenge. That's the reason why he joined Bayern in 2013," the paper said.

Marca say Bayern want three-time Champions League winner Ancelotti to succeed Guardiola.

"The Italian coach has sealed his agreement with Bayern last week," wrote Marca on its website.

"He will sign for three seasons and the announcement will be made next week, when confirming the change on the bench at the Allianz Arena."

Spanish radio station Cadena Cope revealed that Ancelotti "has confirmed to Bayern Munich that he'll take over from Pep Guardiola" despite interest from Manchester United.

## Klopp 'a bit of an idiot'

AFP, London

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp was branded "a bit of an idiot" by West Bromwich Albion winger James McClean in comments reported by the BBC on Thursday.

Klopp was involved in several fiery exchanges with opposition manager Tony Pulis during Liverpool's 2-2 draw at home to West Brom on Sunday and the pair did not shake hands at the final whistle.

The German also raced down the pitch to celebrate Liverpool's stoppage-time equaliser and was confronted by a member of West Brom's coaching staff.

"I've got respect for the man because he's done a great job at (Borussia) Dortmund, but I think he's a bit of an idiot if I'm being honest," Republic of Ireland winger McClean, 26, told BBC West Midlands.

"In the game on Sunday ... you can't act that way. Win, lose or draw, you've got to be respectful."

Klopp made a strong start to his time at Anfield, losing only one of his first 11 games, but Liverpool are currently on a run of three games without victory in all competitions.



Dhaka Bank Ltd sponsored the 4th Dhaka Bank Victory Day Golf Tournament at the Bhatiary Golf and Country Club on Wednesday. Pictured during the prize-giving ceremony at night, Managing Director of Dhaka Bank Syed Mahbubur Rahman formally hands over a golf cart as donation to the BGCC.

PHOTO: COLLECTED