

RANIERI SACKING STUNS FOOTBALL WORLD

Leicester
Claudio Ranieri admitted his dream had died after he was ruthlessly sacked as Leicester manager in a brutal move that brought the wrath of the football world down on the troubled champions' Thai owners.

Ranieri was axed barely two weeks after the owners gave him their "unwavering support" despite

disastrous results that have left Leicester just one point above the relegation zone.

Leading Premier League bosses including Jose Mourinho and Jurgen Klopp expressed dismay at the move and backed Ranieri, who only last month was named FIFA's coach of the year for scripting one of the most unbelievable stories in football.

British media also aimed withering criticism at Leicester's Thai owners, King Power, who said they had no choice but to oust Ranieri.

The owners were "snakes", "brutal", "cruel", commentators said amid reports Ranieri had lost the backing of senior players over his tactical tinkering.

- 'My dream died' -

The popular 65-year-old Italian admitted the decision was a huge blow as he had dreamt of staying in charge of Leicester for the rest of his career.

"Yesterday my dream died," Ranieri said.

"After the euphoria of last season and being crowned

Premier League champions all I dreamt of was staying with Leicester City, the club I love, for always. Sadly this was not to be."

Despite the pain of his abrupt exit, Ranieri was determined not to sound a bitter note.

"The adventure was amazing and will live with me forever," he added.

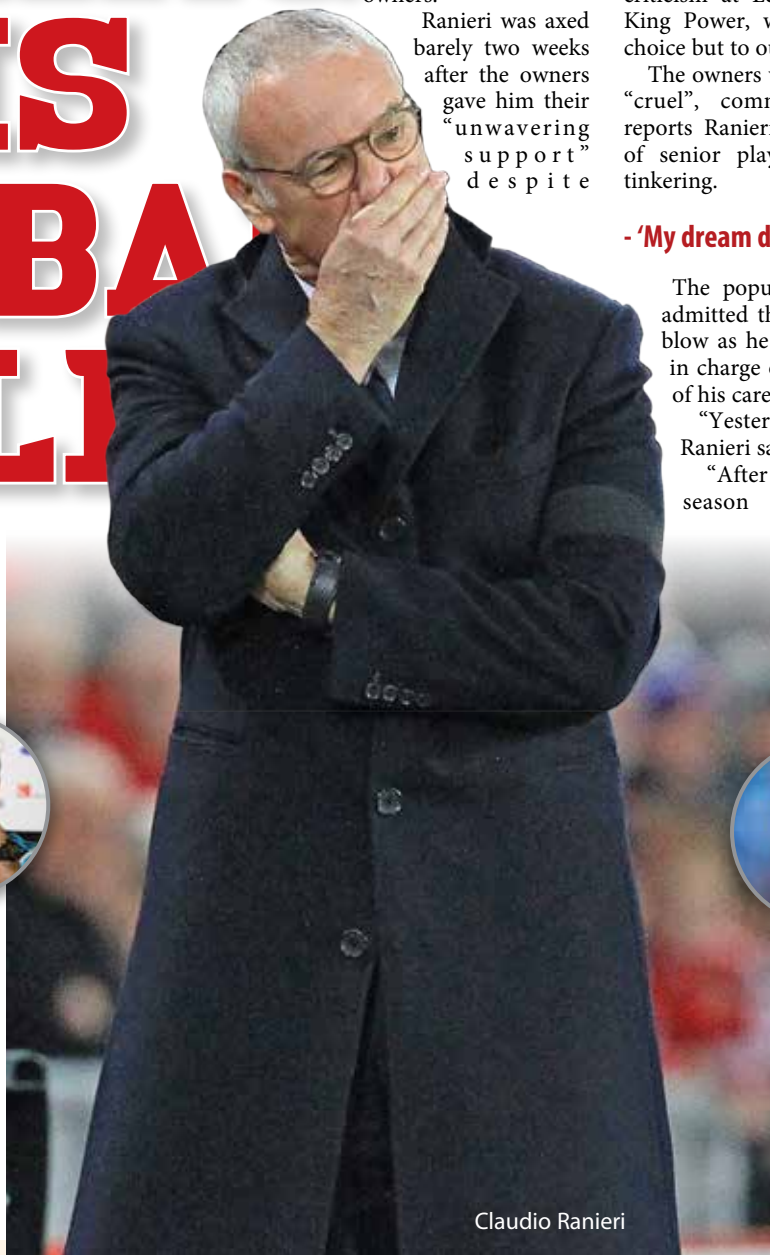
"My heartfelt thanks to everybody at the club, all the players, the staff, everybody who was there and was part of what we achieved.

"It was a time of wonderfulness and happiness that I will never forget. It's been a pleasure and an honour to be a champion with all of you."

Mourinho sympathised with Ranieri after being axed by Chelsea last season following a rift with star players and the Manchester United boss turned up for his press conference on Friday with the initials CR on his training gear in tribute to the Italian.

"It is my little homage to somebody that wrote the most beautiful history of the Premier League," Mourinho said.

"Somebody that probably deserves the Leicester stadium to be named 'Claudio Ranieri' -- and he is sacked." (AFP)



Claudio Ranieri

Football world reacts

JOSE MOURINHO

The Manchester United manager wrote on Instagram: "Champion of England and FIFA manager of the year. Sacked. That's the new football. Keep smiling amico. Nobody can delete the history you wrote."



LUCIANO SPALLETTI

"For Ranieri it's scandalous, unacceptable," said AS Roma coach and fellow Italian Spalletti. "He has to be congratulated. He was the one who created this chemistry in the team and the locker room that made it possible to win the championship. And when you win an English championship against City, United and Chelsea, if you have a little dignity, you even accept to be relegated without touching anything."



GARY LINEKER

"After all that Claudio Ranieri has done for Leicester City, to sack him now is inexplicable and gut-wrenchingly sad," former England and Leicester player Lineker wrote on Twitter. "I shed a tear last night - I shed a tear for Claudio, I shed a tear for football and I shed a tear for my club," Lineker told BBC radio.



STEVE CLARIDGE

"Must be a better way of dealing with this than the term 'sacking', move upstairs, bring someone in to 'help', sacking does him a disservice!" former Leicester City striker Claridge wrote on Twitter.



RIO FERDINAND

"Just seen Ranieri news. Shocked after last night display! Wins the league & still not afforded the time to fight for safety. Unreal scenes!" wrote former ManU defender Ferdinand on Twitter.



Player power didn't force Ranieri out

Leicester

Leicester caretaker manager Craig Shakespeare has laughed off claims a players' revolt was behind the shock sacking of Claudio Ranieri.

The Premier League champions stunned the football world on Thursday by dismissing Ranieri just nine months after he led Leicester to an incredible title triumph.

But Shakespeare, who served as Ranieri's assistant, dismissed claims senior players contributed to the decision by complaining about the Italian's methods to Leicester's Thai owners. "I'm not aware of any senior



Craig Shakespeare

players going to the owners so that's news to me," he told reporters on Friday.

"From a football point of view I have to tell you that the players are very professional.

"They are very hurt and very frustrated. I've not had one problem with them on the training field. They are very diligent and professional.

"They will be very disappointed, like everybody else, that the manager has lost his job."

Shakespeare revealed he spoke briefly to Ranieri by telephone on Thursday after the news broke and described the Italian as shocked.



ROY HODGSON

The former England manager is keen on a return to the dug out and could be the man to guide Leicester out of relegation trouble. He helped Fulham to survival in 2008 when they looked dead and buried. Saving Leicester would help restore his reputation, which was tarnished by England's wretched form at the 2014 World Cup and their Euro 2016 exit against Iceland.

FRANK DE BOER

Ranieri was plucked out of the blue to replace Nigel Pearson in 2015 and De Boer is another outsider available. The Dutchman was sacked in November after just 85 days in charge at Inter Milan. He won four league titles in his six years at Ajax and was also Holland's assistant manager. He has been linked recently with Glasgow giants Rangers.



NIGEL PEARSON

The 53-year-old has already had two spells at Leicester and is reported to be favoured by some Foxes players for another return to the club. He was dismissed in June 2015 having guided Leicester to a relegation escape by winning seven of their last nine games to beat the drop having looked certain to go down. However, Pearson's relationship with the owners broke down after a string of bizarre off-field antics and the sacking of his son James.



Five candidates to replace Ranieri

ROBERTO MANCINI

The former Manchester City manager is available after leaving Inter Milan last year. He spent a brief time on loan at the Foxes in 2001, playing five times before leaving to become Fiorentina manager after just a month at their old Filbert Street ground.



DAVID WAGNER

The Huddersfield boss has earned many plaudits for the work he has done at the Terriers having turned them into realistic promotion contenders in the Championship. The German took over in November 2015 when Huddersfield were 18th in the Championship and has slowly rebuilt them with limited finances. Wagner is a close friend of Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp.

