

Man Utd sack Mourinho

Jose Mourinho's stormy reign at Manchester United comes to an end

● Club and coach split with United 19 points off first place

● External candidate to be appointed as caretaker manager in 48 hours

AFP | Manchester

Manchester United sacked manager Jose Mourinho yesterday after the club's worst start to a season in nearly three decades.

Mourinho, 55, became increasingly spiky in his last few months at Old Trafford, lashing out at the board's transfer policy and turning his fire on his squad, especially record signing Paul Pogba.

His constant complaints about the players' lack of desire had an impact on the pitch, culminating in the 3-1 defeat by Premier League leaders Liverpool on Sunday which left United 19 points behind their opponents.

Mourinho's sacking comes just two-and-a-half years into his tenure and three years and a day since Chelsea sacked him just months after he had guided them to the title.

Reports said United will name a caretaker manager in the next 48 hours.

The club's worst start in the league since 1990 means even Mourinho's ambition of finishing in the top four and a Champions League qualification spot is in danger.

Despite United reaching the Champions League knockout stages, where they face an in-



Manchester United's Portuguese manager Jose Mourinho leaves the pitch following the UEFA Champions League group H football match between Manchester United and Young Boys (file photo)

timidating last-16 tie with Paris Saint-Germain, a combination of poor results, dressing-room discord and criticism of the board proved potent factors in the decision to dismiss the Portuguese manager.

A United source told AFP that Mourinho had been supported in his efforts to sign players and described reports of player power at the club as being key to

the sacking as wide of the mark. United will reportedly have to pay Mourinho £22.5 million (\$28.5 million) -- as the club are still in the Champions League -- to sever the ties.

"Manchester United announces that manager Jose Mourinho has left the club with immediate effect," a club statement said.

"The club would like to thank Jose for his work during his time

at Manchester United and to wish him success in the future.

"A new caretaker manager will be appointed until the end of the current season, while the club conducts a thorough recruitment process for a new, full-time manager."

'Outstanding candidate'

In the longer term former Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane has been linked to the club as has his fellow 1998 World Cup-winning team-mate Laurent Blanc, who played for United. Tottenham Hotspur manager Mauricio Pochettino is also strongly tipped.

One bookmaker makes Pochettino the early favourite and the 46-year-old Argentinian is also former Manchester United midfielder Gary Neville's favoured option.

"They need someone who meets the three key principles of that football club: the promotion of youth, entertaining football and to win football matches," Neville told Sky Sports News.

"People suggest he (Pochettino) hasn't won a trophy yet at Tottenham but with a net spend of minus £29 million or something over the last four years, I'm not sure he could have done more.

"I do think he is the person who is the outstanding candidate."

Mourinho's reign had started well enough with the League Cup and the Europa League trophies but for a club that has been champions of England 20 times, neighbours Manchester City's dominance over them in the league has hurt.

The wound went even deeper for Mourinho as City are man-

\$28.5m
will have to be paid by United to Mourinho to sever the ties as the club are still in the Champions League

aged by Pep Guardiola, who got the better of him when he was in charge at Barcelona and Mourinho was at Real Madrid.

Despite his protestations to the contrary, the United board gave Mourinho plenty of money to compete.

Top-quality players such as Belgian striker Romelu Lukaku -- who he persuaded to snub Chelsea and come to United for £75 million in 2017 -- and Pogba for a then world record fee of £89 million in 2016 have floundered under his authoritarian stewardship.

Indeed it was his deteriorating relationship with World Cup-winning midfielder Pogba -- one of many to feel the lash of his tongue in public -- that symbolised decline at club under him.

Mourinho questioned his attitude while the player hit back with open criticism of the tactics, culminating in him kicking his heels on the bench during Liverpool debacle on Sunday.



Mauricio Pochettino

Pochettino focused on Spurs amid United talk

AFP | London

Mauricio Pochettino insists he is focused on doing his best for Tottenham amid reports he is the leading candidate to replace Jose Mourinho at Manchester United.

Tottenham manager Pochettino was installed as the bookmakers' favourite to take charge at Old Trafford after Mourinho was sacked by United yesterday.

United are expected to appoint a caretaker manager this week to lead the troubled team for the rest of the season.

That would give them time to tempt Pochettino to leave Tottenham, where he has established a reputation as one of the brightest young managers in Europe during his four-year reign.

Pochettino refused to completely rule out any interest in the United job, which might appeal to him given the club's vast resources in contrast to Tottenham, who failed to sign a single player in the summer transfer window.

But the 46-year-old, whose has led Tottenham to third in the Premier League and a place in the Champions League last 16 this season, insists he is only concerned with his current team at present.

"After nearly five years there is a lot of rumours about my position as manager at Tottenham," Pochettino told reporters ahead of Wednesday's League Cup quarter-final at Arsenal.

Pogba deletes cryptic post after Mourinho axed

AFP | London

Manchester United midfielder Paul Pogba quickly deleted a controversial social media post of him smiling after manager Jose Mourinho was sacked by the club.

The volatile Mourinho's exit was in part triggered by the breakdown of his relationship with France midfielder Pogba, who did not even make an appearance as a substitute for Sunday's dismal 3-1 defeat at Liverpool.

Pogba took to Instagram just moments after news of Mourinho's sacking broke, posting a picture of himself smiling and writing 'caption this' next to it.

The 25-year-old's post was widely interpreted as celebrating Mourinho's departure and he was criticised by former



Paul Pogba's now-deleted Instagram post

United defender Gary Neville, who responded on Twitter by writing: "You do one as well!", suggesting he should leave the club as well.

Over 64,000 people had 'liked' Pogba's cheeky message, but he deleted the post 10 minutes later amid claims it was actually part of a marketing campaign for Adidas.

Pogba joined United for a club record £89 million (\$112 million) just weeks after Mourinho was hired in 2016.

But the former Juventus player was repeatedly criticised by Mourinho during his two-and-a-half year reign.

After his inspired performances helped France win the World Cup in Russia in July, Mourinho opted not to praise Pogba, instead infuriating the star by publicly asking why he did not try as hard for United.

Pogba was stripped of the United vice-captaincy earlier this season.

The pair were captured having a frosty exchange on the training ground as Mourinho grew angry with his key midfielder's lethargic performances, dropping him on several occasions to spark talk he would be sold by the end of the season.

WTA increases rankings protection for mothers

Reuters | London

The Women's Tennis Association (WTA) will offer greater rankings protection to mothers returning to the tour after giving birth and introduce a modernised dress rule as part of new rules announced on Monday for next season.

The changes address issues that came up in 2018 when former world number one Serena Williams, who returned to action after giving birth, was unseeded for some events and caused an uproar with a black, skin-tight bodysuit she wore at the French Open.

But after gathering feedback

from players, the WTA said its board of directors approved changes that will allow players out of competition for 52 weeks or longer to use their Special Ranking in 12 tournaments.

A player returning from pregnancy will have a three-year period to use her Special Ranking, which will now begin at the birth of the child.

For players who would qualify for a seeded position in the draw, the updated rule will ensure they will not face a seed in the opening rounds whether returning from pregnancy or injury.



Serena Williams celebrates a winner (file photo)

PSG give Rabiot green light to find new club

AFP | Paris

Paris Saint-Germain have decided to allow unsettled France midfielder Adrien Rabiot to leave the club at the end of the current season, when he will be a free agent, their director Antero Henrique said.

The 23-year-old with more than 150 top flight appearances has been agitating for a transfer for some time, and also snubbed a chance to be a squad member for France's World Cup winning team.

The club's patience over Rabiot's reluctance to sign a new deal snapped on Monday however.

"The club made the decision after a meeting with the player," said sporting director Henrique.

"The player told me he would not sign a new contract and wanted to leave the club as a free agent at the end of season," he said.

Henrique said Rabiot would suffer because of the decision.

"The clear consequence of this is that he will be out of the starting line up for an unlimited period," he said.



Over 64,000 people had 'liked' Pogba's cheeky message on Instagram