



Manchester United's caretaker manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer (R) celebrates their victory with midfielder Paul Pogba (L) after a match (file photo)

Pogba wants 'happy coach' Solskjaer to stay at Man Utd

AFP | London

Paul Pogba hopes Ole Gunnar Solskjaer is given the Manchester United manager's job on a permanent basis after the Norwegian turned the club's fortunes around.

The former United striker has transformed the mood and results at Old Trafford, leading the club into the Champions League quarter-finals and lifting them into contention for a top-four finish in the Premier League.

When Solskjaer was given the role following the departure of Jose Mourinho in December it was widely assumed he was merely keeping the seat warm for a bigger managerial name but his success has led to a clamour for the appointment to be made full-time and midfielder Pogba has now added his voice.

"Of course we want him to stay," the France midfielder told Sky Sports. "The results have been great. I have a great relationship with him, he has a great relationship with the players.

"When a player is happy, he wants to keep being happy. Solskjaer deserves it. He knows the club, he knows everything about the club.

"He is a really happy coach that gave confidence back to

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PAUL POGBA

the players. This gave us the freedom to play and enjoy football again because maybe we lost that with the results that we had before."

It is a striking contrast to the final months of Mourinho's reign, with Pogba the player who was repeatedly claimed to be at odds with the Portuguese.

He declined to elaborate, saying only: "Maybe we lost confidence, maybe things went wrong. A lot of talking outside that we weren't used to.

"I don't like to talk about the past. I like to talk about the future because that's what matters. We are better now and the results have been brilliant."

Despite their good run, United were beaten by Wolves in the FA Cup quarter-finals on Saturday, a week after losing to Arsenal in the Premier League -- the only two domestic defeats since Solskjaer replaced Mourinho in December.

Novak says all good with Roger, Rafa

Djokovic has dismissed suggestion of a rift with Federer as tennis politics persist

Novak Djokovic maintains he would welcome the input of Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal despite Kermode ouster

AFP | Miami

Novak Djokovic played down a reported rift with Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal on Wednesday, saying he welcomed their views on the controversial ousting of ATP Chairman Chris Kermode. Federer and Nadal ripped top-ranked Djokovic, current president of the ATP Player Council, for failing to contact them over the decision to terminate Englishman Kermode, whose reign began in 2014 and concludes at year's end after a vote at Indian Wells earlier this month.

Serbian star Djokovic vociferously pushed for change despite many within the game strongly advocating for Kermode to remain in charge.

Federer said Wednesday he was not "chasing" Djokovic for an explanation despite claiming at Indian Wells it was "hard to understand" why Djokovic turned down a request to discuss the situation.

Djokovic, however, maintains he would welcome the input of the Swiss and Spanish legends.

"We welcome them as well as anyone else who wants to join the political discussions," Djokovic said ahead of the ATP Miami Open, where he is due to begin play Friday.



Novak Djokovic (L) and Roger Federer shake hands at the end of their tennis match in Paris (file photo)

"The player council is only part of the structure. We are not part of the board or deciding anything. We are in consultation and collaboration with player board representatives.

"Federer and Nadal have been icons of our sport for so many years and their opinions are extremely important to everyone. If they want to be active and part of it, either officially or unofficially, I think it's only positive for us.

"I saw Roger today. We were cutting the ribbon at the opening of the center court. We had a small chat but there was no time to talk about the political stuff. Hopefully we will have time in the next few days to go through some things."

Novak sees no change

Nadal stressed the decision to make a change at the top of

the ATP was so big that everyone should have been consulted, raising the chance of a major fall-out between the three stars.

"I have not noticed anything from their side or from mine," Djokovic said.

"It's not necessary for people to create any tensions or divisions between us. On the contrary, I have a good relationship with both of them. We always respected each other. We are rivals of course so it's hard to be friends.

"We need an open dialogue and for people to have different opinions. That's what a democratic society is. We all try and be part of that."

Djokovic said many players were frustrated at the current system.

"It's frustrating for me personally and other players who have been part of the structure

because it has failed us many times," he said.

"And many times when top players wanted to be involved and be heard they felt like everything they have said was not really followed through in a way it was supposed to be."

Political conversations will continue over the next few months as Kermode's successor is found, but for now Djokovic, who suffered an early exit in California, will aim to transfer his energy into landing a seventh Miami title.

Djokovic, 31, enjoyed a stellar 2018, winning Wimbledon and the US Open before taking his major tally to 15 by reigning in Australia at the start of 2019.

Federer, meanwhile, is chasing his 101st career title after narrowly losing to Austrian Dominic Thiem in the Indian Wells final last weekend.

Disgruntled Icardi back training with Inter



Inter Milan's forward Mauro Icardi (R) misses an opportunity to open the scoring during a match against Parma

AFP | Milan

Disgruntled Inter Milan striker Mauro Icardi returned to training with the club yesterday after a month on the sidelines amid a protracted contract dispute.

The 26-year-old Argentine has been absent since February 13 after being stripped of the captain's armband.

He had complained of a knee injury but the club insisted a scan has not revealed any new injury.

But he returned to the fold at the team's Appiano Gentile training centre, north of Milan, training separately in a reduced squad as many of his teammates are on international duty.

The strained relationship had thawed in recent days with Icardi missing the team's 3-2 derby win over city rivals AC Milan which moved them third in Serie A, two points ahead of their rivals.

Inter are 22 points behind leaders Juventus, and 13 adrift of second-placed Napoli.

Luciano Spalletti's side have crashed out of the Europa league and are now looking to consolidate next year's Champions League place.

Icardi -- joint top scorer in Serie A last season with 29 goals -- has scored 15 goals in all competitions for the club this term.

He has not scored in the league since December 15, with his last game against Parma on February 9.

Inter next play Lazio on March 31.

Giroud seeks France return to boost game time

Reuters | Paris

Chelsea striker Olivier Giroud wants to move back to France when his contract expires at the end of the season after growing frustrated by a lack of

playing time under manager Maurizio Sarri.

Giroud has not started a Premier League game for Chelsea since the club signed Argentina international striker Gonzalo Higuain in January.

"The future may be hectic this summer," Giroud told French radio station RTL. "I'm not afraid to go down a level to have more playing time. It could be I end my career in France."

The striker, who won the World Cup with France last year, scored 33 goals in 73 league appearances for Montpellier before moving to Arsenal in 2012, and has attracted interest from Olympique Lyonnais, according to reports in the French media.

The 32-year-old has been used mainly in the Europa League by Sarri and is the competition's top scorer this season with nine goals in nine appearances, but does not believe he can force his way into the Italian coach's Premier League plans.

"Today, I have the impression there's clearly no competition (for places in attack) since January. It's like that, I know



Chelsea are sixth in the Premier League, three points below the fourth and final Champions League qualification place currently occupied by Arsenal

that I will only play in the Europa League," Giroud added.

"I try to do what it takes to be as effective and as important as I can for the team."

Chelsea are sixth in the Premier League, three points below the fourth and final Champions League qualification place currently occupied by Arsenal.

Sarri's side could also secure Champions League football for next season by winning the Europa League, where they face Slavia Prague in the quarter-finals.



Olivier Giroud