



Jose Mourinho

# Mourinho bats off return to Real

AFP | Manchester, United Kingdom

Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho gave short shrift when quizzed on the possibility of a sensational return to Real Madrid as he prepares for a reunion with one of his old pupils, Cristiano Ronaldo, and Juventus in the Champions League today. A run of five games without a win has left Real boss Julen Lopetegui on the brink of the sack just four months after accepting the thankless task of

replacing Zinedine Zidane at the Bernabeu after three straight Champions League titles.

Mourinho's future at United is also in doubt with the Red Devils languishing in 10th in the Premier League, nine points off rivals Manchester City and Liverpool, just nine games into the new season.

However, the Portuguese batted away a series of questions from Spanish and Italian journalists on whether a Real return would interest him at Old Trafford yesterday, highlighting that he signed an extended contract just this year till 2020.

"No, I'm happy here. I'm happy to see my contract out to the very last day of that contract and I would like to stay after my contract ends," said Mourinho. "All I'm thinking about is Manchester United."

Ronaldo is returning to Old Trafford for just the second time since he left United to join Madrid for a world record fee in 2009.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner made his name in Manchester, but showed no mercy on his last visit when he and Mourinho teamed up to dump United out of the Champions League

in 2013.

And Mourinho is well aware of the challenge he faces in setting up a defence that has conceded 16 times in the Premier League already this season to stop the top scorer in the Champions League for the past six seasons.

"He is one of the best players of all time," added Mourinho. "It's as simple as that."

Juve 'more than a contender'

After winning seven straight Italian titles, Juventus splashed 112 million euros (\$129 million) on a 33-year-old Ronaldo to take them one step further in Europe and deliver a first Champions League title for 23 years.

And Mourinho believes Italian champions are the favourites to win this year's competition.

"For the last five years or so they've been real contenders to win the title. They've been to a couple of finals, they've won Scudetti on the trot and they have a really special player, who makes a real difference as well."

"As far as I'm concerned, Juventus are more than just a contender this season to win the Champions League."

Mourinho was encouraged by his side's second-half reaction in coming from behind in a 2-2 against Chelsea on Saturday, despite the disappointment of conceding a 96th-minute equaliser.

And Romelu Lukaku called on United to start games with the same intensity they have finished in recent weeks having also turned around a 2-0 deficit to beat Newcastle 3-2 before the international break.

"The first half we just started slow. No initiative on the ball and no movement," said the Belgian striker.

"Then in the second half we did everything we said we wanted to do in the first half. We do it always in the second half and that's why we come back to get great results."

"But now the key is to start games how we start them in the second half, and maintain it as much as we can."

Both sides have been dealt injury blows with Alexis Sanchez missing for United, while Juventus travelled without Sami Khedira and Mario Mandzukic.

## Former Serie C boss named new Italian FA president

AFP | Rome

Gabriele Gravina, the former head of Italy's third division Lega Pro, was elected president of the Italian football federation (FIGC), almost a year after the resignation of his predecessor.

The 65-year-old Gravina was the only candidate in the running and earned 97.2 percent of votes in first round to secure position.

Gravina, previously one of three candidates in an unsuccessful January election, stood down from his Lega Pro post last week in preparation for his renewed bid to become the FIGC chief.

Carlo Tavecchio resigned from the job last November following the national side's failure to qualify for the World Cup in Russia.

Italy's Olympic Committee appointed Roberto Fabbricini as FIGC commissioner in February after an election failed to produce a new president.

## Lopetegui promises to fight but cannot guarantee future

AFP | Madrid

Julen Lopetegui has said he will fight to turn Real Madrid's stuttering season around but could not guarantee he will be in charge for the Clasico against Barcelona on Sunday.

Lopetegui's future is in doubt just four months after swapping the Spanish national team for Madrid on the eve of the World Cup.

His side face Viktoria Plzen in the Champions League on Tuesday, on the back of five games without a win and having lost all of their last three.

"What I've learned about this club is to fight, that is the DNA of this club," Lopetegui said at a press conference yesterday.

"That's what we're going to do, fight, both the players and the coaching staff. We know results haven't been great but we are going to turn this around. We are going to fight."

Asked if he knew that he would be in the dug-out when



Levante's Roger Marti celebrates his goal during their match against Real Madrid

Madrid visit Camp Nou this weekend, Lopetegui said: "I'm here now, that's all I can say. I am the coach at this moment."

"If you ask me what is going to happen in a month or a year, I can't tell you. We're focused on the present."

Madrid's poor run has left

them seventh in La Liga while defeat to CSKA Moscow in the Champions League last month sees them sitting third in Group G.

## Ronaldo insists he is an 'example'

AFP | Manchester, United Kingdom

Cristiano Ronaldo stated yesterday he is an "example" in his behaviour on and off the field amid allegations of rape made against the five-time Ballon d'Or winner in the United States.

"I know I am an example, 100 percent, in the pitch and outside the pitch," Ronaldo told a press conference ahead of his return to Manchester United, where he spent six years as a player, with Juventus in the Champions League.

A former American model Kathryn Mayorga, 34, of Las Vegas, accused Ronaldo, in a 32-page complaint filed last month with a district court in Nevada, of raping her on June 13, 2009 just before he joined Real Madrid from United.

Ronaldo strenuously denied the allegations in a statement just over two weeks ago and has been backed by his club.

## Chelsea Coach Marco Ianni Charged over Jose Mourinho Fracas

AFP | London

Chelsea assistant coach Marco Ianni has been charged with improper conduct in a touchline flare-up with Jose Mourinho that led the Football Association to remind the Manchester United manager of his responsibilities.

Tensions escalated in front of the Stamford Bridge tunnel after Ross Barkley's equaliser deep into stoppage time saw Chelsea secure a 2-2 draw on Saturday.

Former Chelsea manager Mourinho was angered by the way Ianni, an assistant to current Blues boss Maurizio Sarri, celebrated in front of the United



Chelsea assistant coach Marco Ianni celebrates their second goal in front of the Manchester United bench

bench.

Portuguese coach Mourinho leapt from his seat and had to be

restrained by security staff as a melee ensued.

Both Ianni and Sarri have

since apologised to Mourinho, with the United manager saying he now considers the matter closed.

But the FA, English football's governing body, has decided to take action.

"Chelsea coach Marco Ianni has been charged following the game against Manchester United on Saturday," said an FA statement.

"It is alleged that his behaviour in the 96th minute constituted improper conduct."

"In relation to this incident, Jose Mourinho has been formally reminded of his responsibilities whilst both clubs have received similar official remind-

ers in terms of the behaviour expected of their staff and players at all times whilst in the technical area."

Mourinho, speaking ahead of United's Champions League match against Juventus on Tuesday, played down the fracas by saying he did not want it to damage Italian coach Ianni's career. "I want to thank Sarri for his honesty," Mourinho told reporters. "I want to thank Chelsea for its honesty too."

"But I'm not happy that it's going too far with the young boy (Ianni)."

"He apologised to me, I accept his apologies. I think he deserves a second chance."

"I don't think he deserves to be sacked, I don't think he deserves anything more than the fact that his club was strong with him."

"Everybody makes mistakes, I made a lot of mistakes, so I hope they let the kid go on."

Mourinho does not face further FA action relating to the incident but is preparing to answer a separate charge of using abusive, insulting or improper language following United's 3-2 win over Newcastle, relating to remarks he allegedly made in Portuguese. He has until Wednesday to respond and Mourinho could face a touchline ban if the charge is upheld.