



Roman Abramovich has allowed his advisers to attempt to find a manager for Chelsea, but he will have to make a decision soon

Photograph: Sergey Ponomarev/AP



CHELSEA

Abramovich may well be limited in his search for a manager by the interests of his courtiers, says Gabriele Marcotti

PERHAPS one day, it will all become clear. Maybe, at some point in the distant future we will – once and for all – discover just why in the hell the upper echelons of Chelsea – the folks who, between them, earn in excess of £5 million a year – are taking so long to identify and sign a new manager.

Because it's frankly absurd that a club of Chelsea's magnitude should be managerless at this point of the year, particularly when pretty much everyone knew as early as three months ago that there would be a vacancy come the end of the season.

Four years ago, when Claudio Ranieri was the dead man walking, Chelsea sealed the deal to bring Jose Mourinho to the club as early as late April, while he was still the manager of Porto. And there was no great cloak and dagger routine to it. Mourinho was seen by many openly chatting with Blues chief executive Peter Kenyon in Monaco.

Finding the right guy and talking to him even though he was under contract at another club – a club which Chelsea could have met a

few weeks later in the Champions' League final no less – did not seem to be a problem in 2004. So what is the big deal now?

For a start, there was an entirely different climate at Chelsea back then. Roman Abramovich was a fresh-faced zillionaire wishing to entertain himself in the world of football. He was trusting and open. Four years of in-fighting, backstabbing and bickering in his Stamford Bridge court have changed his outlook somewhat and understandably so.

A whole gaggle of people, both Chelsea employees and outsiders, have gotten rich (or, in some cases, richer) off Abramovich. And, in some cases, perhaps the Russian magnate thinks their advice was not always as disinterested as he would have liked.

That's why, on this occasion, Abramovich opted to take a step back. Until some ten days ago, he had offered his entourage no real guidance in terms of Chelsea's succession, beyond asking them to canvas what was available and come back with a realistic idea of who was viable and who was not.

He then decided their search was to be as creative and wide-ranging as possible, because, initially at least, it hadn't been. Abramovich was served up the usual names: Guus Hiddink, Sven Goran Eriksson, Frank Rijkaard.

Abramovich was, it is understood, unimpressed. There was a fourth candidate, one pushed by two of his most trusted advisors, Luiz Felipe Scolari, the current coach of Portugal and the man who led Brazil to the 2002 World Cup title. Scolari was a top-drawer candidate, but, it was felt, Abramovich wanted alternatives.

Thus Mark Hughes was added to the list, though a source familiar with events suggests that there were reservations about him. Reservations which had more to do with his agent than anything else.

Some of the people who have Abramovich's ear and do business with Peter Kenyon apparently felt that Hughes may have wanted to do business with a different set of agents and intermediaries. Because the cold hard truth of it is that the new manager of Chelsea won't just bring a new set of management skills, tactical ideas and training regimens. He will also provide a preferred way of doing business, trusted advisors he likes to use to bring in players, maybe even favoured agents towards whom to throw some business. And that may not suit all the people who are currently near the top of Abramov-

ich's payroll, both those employed by Chelsea and those acting as more or less unofficial "advisors".

Another early runner was Roberto Mancini, the recently sacked Inter Milan boss. Abramovich's camp is very familiar with him, having put him forward for the CSKA Moscow job four years ago (a job he eventually turned down to join Inter). Mancini however has become embroiled in a vicious legal dispute with Inter. He believes the club owe him and his staff some £32m over the next four years and he wants them to pay up, not least because he feels he has a very strong case.

But both Mancini and Scolari serve up additional hurdles. In the Italian's case, there is the issue of compensation. If he takes another job, he waves goodbye to his enormous severance package. Ordinarily, you might expect his new employers to pick up at least some of the tab, but given the sheer size of it, Abramovich is reluctant.

The problem with Scolari is that he is the Portugal manager at Euro 2008 and, as such, won't be available until the end of the month. On Friday, he indicated that he would be moving on after the tournament but it is clearly not easy to seal a deal with him and discuss transfer targets, as well as Chelsea's many contractual conundrums in the middle of Euro 2008.

And yet, several of Abramovich's advisors are pulling hard for Big Phil. They insist that, while he is

away, they can still be in contact with him and execute his transfer wishes. That attitude is what made Abramovich uneasy.

There is a strong suggestion that he feels as if he's being railroaded into appointing Scolari, a man who was a very close and long-standing relationship with some (but definitely not all) members of his inner circle. Hence the decision to sound out others, mostly in Serie A: Milan's Carlo Ancelotti, Roma's Luciano Spalletti and Fiorentina's Claudio Prandelli.

Spalletti has declared he is staying at Roma, but it is understood that this may have to do with the fact that he was not made a firm offer after meeting with Chelsea at the Hotel George V in Paris.

Ancelotti, on the other hand, left his meeting with Chelsea officials believing he did have a very solid (and lucrative) offer in hand, only to find, a few hours later, that the club's enthusiasm had cooled. He too has ruled himself out.

All this has left Abramovich somewhat confused. It seems that, for one reason or another, his trusted advisors can't deliver any high-profile manager (apart from Scolari, and, even then, there are no guarantees).

Whether this has to do with genuine hesitation on Chelsea's part or, perhaps, the fact that some of Abramovich's men have their own priorities remains to be seen. Stay tuned.

Warner's son touts glamour match tickets

EXCLUSIVE

By Andrew Jennings

JACK Warner, king of the World Cup ticket touts and a FIFA vice-president, was at it again last weekend, announcing the Trinidad v England game was a sell-out – while secretly giving his son Daryan hundreds of high-price tickets to sell to desperate fans.

"I and six friends – from England, Scotland and Wales – flew to Trinidad from Barbados for the game," England fan Grant Trebble told me. "We hadn't got tickets so we asked around. We were told we

could purchase them from a Warner-owned jet ski shop in the town of Maraval.

"The woman in the shop had piles of \$100 tickets (£51) but only for cash. She wouldn't take credit cards. She told us they had been kept back for dignitaries and guests of the T&TFA and were for numbered seats in the covered stand."

Mr Trebble, a businessman in Barbados for the past 18 years, added, "When we got to the stadium our tickets were taken from us so we couldn't claim our numbered seats. The announcers kept asking people to move on to let more fans into the ground. By the time the game started it was hard to see any safety

staircases, there were so many fans crammed on them."

Jack Warner's son Daryan owns the Atlantis Maritime Jet Ski Shop in Maraval. It is also home to Daryan's Nauti Krew company, used to launder thousands of tickets obtained illicitly by the Warners for the 2006 World Cup.

After I exposed this racketeering, FIFA's executive committee secretly ordered that a travel agents owned by the Warner family must pay one million dollars to charity "to compensate for the profits it had made through the resale of 2006 FIFA World Cup tickets".

The company paid \$250,000 in March last year, coincidentally the

same amount as FIFA's annual grant to the T&TFF, leaving a balance of \$875,134 still to be paid.

The densely crowded Hasely Crawford stadium last Sunday is reminiscent of another big game back in 1989 when the USA travelled to Trinidad to contest a final slot in the 1990 World Cup in Italy. Warner printed 45,000 tickets even though the stadium would hold only 28,500 fans.

Although Jack Warner had a ticket surplus last weekend he refused to give any to members of the Trinidad World Cup squad that qualified for Germany 2006. Two weeks ago an arbitrator ordered Jack Warner to stump up millions of pounds in

profits from 2006 that he had refused to hand over to the players.

The weary England squad were dragged to an unwanted game in Trinidad because the FA seeks Warner's support for their bid to host the 2018 World Cup.

As we went to press, Daryan Warner was, according to his attorney, unavailable for comment. Jack Warner did not respond to our questions, and Fifa claimed they would be unable to respond until next week.

All documents relating to Jack Warner's reselling of tickets to World Cup 2006 can be found at transparencysport.org