

International Champions Cup Singapore

NEW COACH PLOTS INTER RESURGENCE

Spalletti believes players can improve, sets target of qualifying for Champions League

Nicholas De Silva

He might be just beginning his reign at the club, but manager Luciano Spalletti has announced yesterday his desire to restore Inter Milan to their former glories, starting with Champions League qualification next season.

Speaking on the sidelines of the club's training session at Bishan Stadium ahead of the International Champions Cup (ICC) Singapore, the Italian who joined from rivals Roma last month said: "Our goal is to get to fourth position. The bare minimum is to get back to the Champions League."

But the 58-year-old was realistic about his targets, admitting that a title challenge would be tough given their 24-point gap from the top three Serie A clubs last season.

"It is possible that the top three might underperform this year, but at the end of the day we are Internazionale we cannot count on that to happen. We have to count on our own strength," he said of the 18-time Serie A champions, who won the Champions League in 2010.

He maintained his faith in the squad when discussing transfer activity.

"We need time to understand each player. I feel each one can play better this year and form the foundation. We can't count on new players coming in," he added.

New signing Milan Skriniar, 22, echoed his manager's ambition.

"We have a successful history and a very strong team of players... I believe we can achieve the Champions League spot with the current team," said the defender.

Addressing transfer rumours, Spalletti revealed that no formal offer has been made for Chelsea target Antonio Candreva but left the door open for Ivan Perisic to make a

potential exit.

"We want to keep Perisic as he is a very important player in the team and we are counting on him to start the new season but if somebody comes in with a very difficult offer to reject then we'll consider," he explained.

On a lighter note, players Tommaso Berni and Federico Valietti brewed up a storm at Amoy Street Food Centre yesterday.

They visited 82-year-old stall Coffee Break, where they learned how to make kopi-o from third generation owner Jack Sai.

After a brief demonstration by Sai, the duo took turns to replicate the process and stayed true to tradition, finishing off with the signature tarik - pulling the coffee.

The players and their Italian entourage enjoyed the local beverage, with most nodding in approval.

"It's completely different. In Italy we usually take espresso which is short and strong but this is longer. It has a great taste and nice smell. I really like it," raved Berni, 34.



Inter Milan captain Mauro Icardi training with his team-mates at the Bishan Stadium. The Serie A side are set to play with a three-man defence against Bayern Munich tonight. ST PHOTO: LIM SIN THAI

OLD GUARD TO RESTORE PAST GLORIES

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LUCIANO SPALLETTI, Inter manager, does not feel he has to make more signings.



Inter players Tommaso Berni (right) and Federico Valietti learning how to make local coffee at Amoy Street Food Centre. Berni noted that kopi-o is very different from Italian espresso but enjoyed the beverage. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES FOR ICC

Childhood friends Split up and reunite

ROOTING INTER-EST

I was once his captain at Hajduk Split's youth academy. So, it's a very big pleasure to see one of my friends play against top teams.



STIPE PLAZIBAT, Home United striker, on Inter Milan midfielder Ivan Perisic, his friend since they were eight.



Home United's Stipe Plazibat (far left) and Inter Milan's Ivan Perisic hanging out at Gardens by the Bay. However, when they meet, they barely talk about football. PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/IVANPERISIC444

Ho Cai Jun

They are best friends, separated thousands of kilometres by work. And this week's International Champions Cup (ICC) in Singapore gave Inter Milan midfielder Ivan Perisic and Home United striker Stipe Plazibat the perfect chance to catch up.

The Croatian duo, who first met at Hajduk Split's youth academy when they were both just eight years old, spent some precious time together at Gardens by the Bay on Tuesday.

"We met only for an hour, visited the gardens and went for coffee," said Plazibat on what he did when he met Perisic, who has recently

been linked with a transfer to English giants Manchester United.

"I had an S-League match (against Warriors FC on Tuesday) so I couldn't walk around for too long, and he has obligations too."

"It's always nice to see a friend whom you see only one to two times in a year."

While they might be heavily occupied with their footballing careers, Plazibat and Perisic have been keeping in contact through WhatsApp a few times a month.

Besides Croatia, the two Split natives have also met at other places. Last November, Plazibat was invited by Perisic to an entertaining Milan derby, and saw his friend score a late equaliser against AC Milan to salvage a 2-2 draw at the San Siro Stadium.

Every time they hang out, "football is the last thing" that they talk about, according to Plazibat.

The 27-year-old added: "When we talk, we just want to take our

minds off football. We just have normal talks between friends.

"Of course, we also ask about each other's family. We know each other from eight years old, so we know each other's family members."

Not surprisingly, he will be cheering for 28-year-old Perisic at the National Stadium when Inter face Bayern tonight and Chelsea on Saturday.

"I was once his captain at Hajduk Split's youth academy," he said. "So, it's a very big pleasure to see one of my friends play against top teams. I'm glad to see him perform on this high level."

And while he will not be donning Inter's black-and-blue jersey, he said: "I don't normally support Inter Milan. But when (Perisic) is playing, I support Inter Milan."

"That's the biggest way I show my support."

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