

International Champions Cup Singapore

CONTE FEARS AXE WILL FALL

He wants to avoid the fate of Mourinho and Ancelotti, both sacked after winning EPL

Wang Meng Meng

As the confetti rained from the sky, a silvery trophy was hoisted. And yet, the winning feeling felt like ages ago for Antonio Conte.

Those victorious scenes as Chelsea lifted the English Premier League title in May are long gone.

By yesterday evening, as Inter Milan held aloft the International Champions Cup (ICC) Singapore trophy at the National Stadium, the Italian openly voiced concern that he could lose his job if he could not keep the Blues steaming ahead.

Normally energetic as he prowls the technical area and loved by the Stamford Bridge faithful for the way he dives into the crowd to celebrate goals, the Italian manager was sombre as he faced the media after the 1-2 loss to Inter that added to an opening 2-3 defeat by Bayern Munich in the ICC.

"For sure, we want to try to avoid a Mourinho season. For sure," he deadpanned, no doubt referring to the 2015-16 season when Chelsea defended the EPL title poorly under Jose Mourinho, and finished in 10th place after parting ways with the Portuguese manager.

Conte continued: "Two years ago,

the team ended the league in 10th place. We want to try to avoid this.

"Two coaches were sacked from Chelsea after they had won the league. I want to avoid that, the players want to avoid that season with Mourinho.

"We are working very well, I hope to find the best solution in the future. We have a lot of young players and it is necessary to try to improve these players."

Conte's words could reignite the managerial feud between him and Manchester United boss Mourinho, who took offence at Conte's touchline exuberance last season.

But perhaps it is Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich whom Conte should be more worried about.

The Russian billionaire is not exactly the most patient club owner when it comes to managerial longevity.

Mourinho was fired after winning the EPL in 2015, as was Carlo Ancelotti in 2011.

In addition, Roberto di Matteo was axed in November 2012, six months after winning the Champions League – the trophy the Russian billionaire craves more than others.

Last season, the Blues marched to the title with the league's sec-

ond-best attack and defence, a record that demonstrated their strength in all departments.

But, at the ICC in Singapore, Bayern struck thrice from counter-attacks and, while Inter earned a penalty to open the scoring before 32,547 fans at Kallang last night, Ivan Perisic's killer second goal was plundered against a backpedalling backline.

And Geoffrey Kondogbia's bizarre 35-metre own-goal past goalkeeper Daniele Padelli in the 74th minute was ironically Chelsea's most dangerous move.

The Chelsea players, though, do not see the need to ring the alarm bells yet.

Attacking midfielder Willian said: "It's good, it's games against big teams. So we have to play this kind of games in the future to prepare well for the league and the Champions League."

Goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois added: "I think we trained very well these two weeks in Asia and we are ready for the new season."

Conte will disagree. And chances are, a certain Mr Abramovich could be reaching for the axe soon if results do not improve.

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THAT MOURINHO SEASON

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ANTONIO CONTE, Chelsea manager, on wanting to avoid what he called a Jose 'Mourinho season'.



A duel between Stevan Jovetic (left) and Cesar Azpilicueta resulted in a penalty for Inter Milan. Jovetic had his spot kick saved by Chelsea goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois, but scored from the rebound to open the scoring for Inter. ST PHOTO: LIM SIN THAI

Spalletti pleased with Inter's ICC Singapore show

Nicholas De Silva

Given last season's seventh-place finish in the Italian Serie A, Inter Milan were undoubtedly the underdogs going into the inaugural International Champions Cup (ICC) Singapore.

Yet, they defied the odds to lift the trophy with a 2-1 victory over Chelsea last night.

Bayern Munich and Chelsea, the two other teams in the ICC Singapore, had both won their domestic leagues and were hot favourites prior to the start of the tournament.

Speaking on the sidelines of Inter's first training session last Wednesday before the start of the tournament, new manager Luciano Spalletti, who moved from rivals Roma only last month, urged for more time to work with his new team but maintained his belief in

the current squad of players.

The 58-year-old Italian praised the competitors and expressed his desire for the club to reach the same level, saying that he would use the tournament to experiment tactically as well as understand his charges.

The players must have heard Spalletti loud and clear as they ended their ICC Singapore campaign unbeaten with two wins, cruising past Bayern Munich 2-0 and then defeating Chelsea last night.

The Italian commended the team for stepping up to the plate against quality opposition.

He said: "Last season was difficult for the team. There were a lot of insecurities in the team when we came here (for the ICC)."

"Playing against teams like Chelsea and Bayern wasn't easy. There was anxiety and apprehension. But their response was great. The team was playing very well; ev-



everything was what I had asked the team to be.

"We played very well until the 60th minute, after that, Chelsea started attacking us. There were a few minor mistakes that we did but I am pleased with the overall performance of the team."

Spurred on by his first trophy at Inter and the team's performance, Spalletti is confident of a better season ahead but insists that there is still work to be done.

He said: "On the positive side, I am surprised by the level of professionalism of the players. It looks like they have made a lot of progress since we started training together but I also have to say there were a few careless mistakes that were made after the 60th minute.

"But, overall, I am surprised by the team and I think we are heading in the right direction."

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Inter Milan's Joao Miranda and Mauro Icardi (third from right) pose with the International Champions Cup Singapore trophy after their 2-1 win over Chelsea. The Italian side won both their matches against their more fancied opponents, having also defeated Bayern Munich. ST PHOTO: LIM SIN THAI

SPORTS FIXTURES HIGHLIGHTS				
Event	Home	Away	Timing	Venue
Sun, 30 Jul 2017				
US Soccer League	LA Galaxy	Seattle Sndrs	10.00am	LW*
Motor Racing	Hungary Race (final)		8.00pm	LW
Club Friendly	RB Leipzig +	Benfica	9.00pm	LW
Club Friendly	Arsenal	Sevilla	11.20pm	LW
Mon, 31 Jul 2017				
US Soccer League	Toronto FC	NY City FC	2.00am	LW^

+ This match is played on neutral ground.
LW* : Telecast not available at Livewire(Singapore Pools)
LW^ : Telecast available at Livewire(Singapore Pools) only
Visit singaporepools.com for the latest 'Live' telecast listing.

LOTTERY

TOTO Mon, 31 Jul 2017 Draw No. 3288/2017

Group 1 Prize **\$2,200,000** est.

Draw Venue: Singapore Pools (Private) Limited, 210 Middle Road, #01-01, Singapore 188994

SINGAPORE SWEEP Wed, 2 Aug 2017 Draw No.08/2017

First Prize **\$5,000,000**

National Day Draw 2017

No person under the age of 18 years shall be allowed to purchase a ticket or to claim any prize.
LW: Livewire (MBS) & Livewire (RWS) (21 years and above)
LW*: Livewire (Singapore Pools) (21 years and above during 'Live' telecast)
SB: SportsBuzzer(Kranj) (18 years and above)
Singapore Pools Account Service. Call 6786 6688 for more details. **PLAY RESPONSIBLY** Stay Sober. National Problem Gambling Helpline: 1800-6-668-668 RCB Reg No.: 198002023