

Avram: I'll do things my way

By Jim Keat

AVRAM GRANT has opened his heart on stepping into Jose Mourinho's shoes and insisted he will prove himself - his way.

The Israeli is determined to win over Chelsea fans who have slammed his appointment and the critics who have questioned his credentials.

Rumours persist he is just a stop-gap while owner Roman Abramovich searches out a new long-term manager.

Yet after guiding his side to a brilliant win over Valencia in midweek, Grant said:

"All my life, I have been forced to prove myself.

"Now it is obvious I'll have to do it at Chelsea as well.

"It doesn't

faze me at all, I am used to it. Jose Mourinho is a big name to follow, he did great things for the club, but

doubts some have and even I was shocked when I was appointed. But I will continue to be my own man. I will do it my way."

Chelsea's victory in Spain was a vital first step in winning over the fans.

The Blues have been on a poor run, failing to win any of the last four Premiership games and firing blanks in all of them.

They also stumbled to a disappointing home draw against Norwegian strugglers Rosenborg in their opening Champions League match.

But Grant is off the mark now and insists that — despite rumours to the contrary — he does have the full backing of the Blues squad.

He added: "I didn't expect to get the job so I am not surprised that other people have reacted to it with huge surprise. But I am confident I have the backing of my whole team.

"Other than the first day, when the players were in a state of shock at Jose leaving and me being their new manager, they have been 100 per cent great to me.

"It has not been an easy time for any of us, change is never like that.

"For me it is completely new — I am not used to taking over a team when the season is already in full flow. So I know how the players feel.

"But now we will unite and go forward." Grant is used to fighting adversity. He failed to even win over the supporters in his own country when he coached Israel to an unbeaten 2006 World Cup qualifying campaign.

They punched above their weight and eventually only missed out to last-16 finishers Switzerland on goal difference — yet he still took stick.

He became Hapoel Petah Tikva's youth coach aged just 19, and won the youth championship with them before going on to win two titles in three years as manager of Maccabi Tel Aviv.

Grant then won two titles as boss of rivals Maccabi Haifa and created history by leading them into the Champions League — the first Israeli side ever to have that honour.

That brought the call from his country before a coaching role at Portsmouth and, a fortnight ago, the chance to take succeed Mourinho.

Grant insists he has been through enough to take whatever comes his way.

He said: "The Valencia win is hopefully the first of many. There were some good signs and we will improve but I'll take any criticism as my only thoughts are on the team.

"I know my critics will remain but I'm not worried or angered by it. I'm getting to know the English critics as much as they are me.

"I understand I'm receiving the usual reception a foreign coach gets in their country and it is up to me to deal with it.

"That is fair, as long as they understand my situation. Chelsea had a certain way until now — but now we have embarked on a new way.

"This year has not been good for us but things will change."

Chelsea now face an awkward clash at Bolton on Sunday where they will be tested in a different way.

Yet Grant is confident in his ability to adapt to any situation.

He never made it as a player but taught himself to coach when he was 18, studying Bob Paisley, Austrian Ernst Happel and ground-breaking LA Lakers basketball chief Pat Riley.

He is not fazed about a lack of qualifications and added: "I do not like to talk about myself too much but there are certain things that I am very proud of.

"It is true I was never a professional player but then Mourinho never was either.

"Look at the great things he did as a manager. I just want to be given the chance to get on with the job." -THE SUN



now it is a new time, it is my time. "I'm taking everything in my stride and I realise I will be watched closely by the supporters. I understand the

Carra: We need spirit of 2005

By Phil Thomas

JAMIE CARRAGHER has demanded a return to the incredible spirit of 2005 to stop Liverpool's Euro express from sliding off the rails.

The Reds have stumbled to a solitary point in their two Champions League games.

After their most inept display in years, Marseille snatched a shock Anfield win on Wednesday.

It left the winners of two years ago third in Group A, needing at least one win away at Turkish side Besiktas or in the French return to avoid a humiliating exit.

Centre-back Carragher is the last man to mince words and after the worst performance under Rafa Benitez, he was not about to change.

The no-nonsense Scouser told his tortured team-mates: We got ourselves into this mess — now show the bottle to drag ourselves out.

Carragher admitted: "Marseille probably deserved it to be honest.

"We just never got started, didn't perform on the night

and we have to hold our hands up about that.

"We did the best we could but Marseille put in a very good performance and sometimes you have to credit the opposition.

"We have to be confident we can still qualify — the players have proved in recent seasons that we're very good in this competition. "It's going to be difficult but it is up to us to show the character and the quality to go through.

"If it goes down to the final game in Marseille, then it won't be easy for us, but we have done well in recent years, so it won't be easy for them either."

The only plus point is that the Reds have been in this position before — and bounced back to devastating effect. In the group stages in 2005, only an incredible finale saw them save their skins when they were on the point of being humbled by Olympiakos.

And then they produced the greatest comeback in

European history to overturn Milan's 3-0 half-time lead to lift the famous trophy on penalties.

Carra added: "We've been in this position before. It is more difficult than we'd have wanted but we've had good experiences and good times in the past.

"Yes, we've made it tough for ourselves but hopefully the next four games will be enough for us.

"If you are getting beaten at home in the Champions League, you have to go for it late-on.

"We did that — but it's a shame we didn't put the pressure on them earlier on.

"I don't know why we have started slowly in the Champions League.

"We have done all right in the Carling Cup and are doing okay in the league, so it's difficult to put your finger on it."

Liverpool struggled to string more than two passes together against Marseille.

The midfield pairing of Momo Sissoko and Steven

Gerrard never came close to paying off while, bizarrely, the ultra-reliable Javier Mascherano stayed on the bench.

Benitez was clearly giving some of his stars a break ahead of Sunday's Premier League Anfield clash with Spurs.

But it made a mockery of his assertion they have the strength in depth for all challenges.

Now keeper Pepe Reina has delivered the blunt message to the Reds that they have got to sort it out — and quickly.

Reina, who had no chance with Mathieu Valbuena's long-range winner, said: "Everything went wrong and we have to sort it out.

"It was disappointing because we never play like this. We were late and almost always behind the ball.

"Last year we were brilliant in the Champions League but started the Premier League poorly. Now it looks like it's the other way round.

"I don't know if we are more focused on the league but we need to learn from these mistakes.

We have two tough games against Besiktas now and then host Porto — we have to make sure we do better."

Full-back Steve Finnan admits the Marseille defeat will have a huge impact on Liverpool's entire approach to remaining games.

He said: "We didn't have enough creativity to open them up and this changes the way we have to approach the rest of the games a lot now.

"It's now an uphill task with difficult away games but there's enough confidence in the squad to get the results to go through."



CARRAGHER