

Real to Chelsea: Robinho can be yours for £32m

Real Madrid have told Robinho that he will be allowed to leave the Bernabéu after all, though only if Chelsea offer what would amount to a British record sum of £32m for the Brazil international as negotiations between the clubs continue to crawl towards a resolution.

The Chelsea chief executive, Peter Kenyon, travelled to Madrid on Wednesday to meet the Real director, José Angel Sánchez, though the Londoners' second bid for Robinho, worth about £26m, has been turned down. Negotiations between the two clubs remain ongoing, with Chelsea confident a compromise can be reached. Kenyon has since returned to England but is expected to travel back to the Spanish capital today in an attempt to break the impasse over the 24-year-old's future as the transfer deadline of September 1 edges closer.

He can be encouraged that the Real president, Ramón Calderón, has at least indicated that the player, who has long since stated his desire to move to England, will be allowed to depart even if Chelsea will resist raising their offer to such an inflated level. Calderón, in a

meeting with the player's agent, Wagner Ribeiro, and the club's sporting director, Predrag Mijatovic, earlier this week, had tried to persuade Robinho that his suitors' efforts to sign him had been half-hearted and said Real would not allow "such an important player to go at a knock-down price".

However, during that meeting Calderón and Mijatovic did concede that they would allow Robinho to leave if Chelsea upped their offer to £32m, a fee they did not anticipate the London club matching. "Until August 31 anything is possible," said Ribeiro. "Until the transfer market closes we do not give this matter up as closed. The president, Ramón Calderón, has promised Robinho that, if the club is presented with an offer of £40m, he will be allowed to leave."

That, in itself, will not guarantee the player completes a transfer to Stamford Bridge, given that Chelsea are reluctant to up their bid to that level, but it has strengthened Robinho's resolve to agitate for a move. Relations between the Brazilian and the Spanish club appear to have fractured beyond repair and, while there are concerns in the player's camp

that Calderón could still renege on his promise, the saga does appear to be edging to a conclusion. Indeed, should the president go back on his word, the forward is prepared to go public with his complaint. At the very least Real want to raise as much money as they spent on Chelsea's Arjen Robben some 12 months ago - £36m (£29m).

Calderón, under pressure from supporters, had initially hoped to offload Robinho earlier in the summer to raise funds in his attempt to sign Cristiano Ronaldo from Manchester United. That served to unsettle the Brazilian and, once it became clear Ronaldo would not be swapping Old Trafford for the Bernabéu, left Real with an aggrieved first-team player. Indeed, Robinho has been upset that Madrid's claims, in relation to Ronaldo, that a player who is not happy at his club should always be allowed to move did not apply to him.

Chelsea and their manager, Luiz Felipe Scolari, are keen to add the Brazilian to their squad, though they will not pay over the odds. Scolari currently has only one fit first-team forward in Nicolas Anelka but may end up keeping Andriy Shevchenko

at least until January after Milan last night said negotiations over the Ukrainian had been "frozen".

"Milan had wanted to take the player on loan with the right to buy him but Chelsea said no because they wanted us to buy him outright," said Milan's vice-president, Adriano Galliani. "Therefore negotiations are through." Milan had been struggling to cover Shevchenko's wages, with Chelsea unwilling to subsidise his



£121,000-a-week pay as part of a season's loan deal.

Robinho

Wenger eyeing Villa star after Liverpool reject £10m Alonso bid

Arsene Wenger confirmed Arsenal's interest in Aston Villa midfielder Gareth Barry after a move for Xabi Alonso collapsed.

Alonso had agreed personal terms on a move, but Wenger pulled out after Liverpool said Arsenal's £10million offer was not enough.

Barry, also a long-term Liverpool target, has already played for Villa in the UEFA Cup and is ineligible for the Champions League until February.

But Wenger will decide whether or not to move for the midfielder after the draw for the group stage next week.

The Arsenal manager said: 'There is interest in Gareth Barry, but I cannot say much more. Once someone plays in Europe it devalues a player for the season, but it doesn't necessarily mean you don't buy him.'

'Barry is a good player, but the problem with players who are 27 or 28 is that you pay big money and then you get nothing back.'

Wenger made the surprise signing of Manchester United defender Mikael Silvestre this week, but the Arsenal chief claims he has always wanted to sign him.

Silvestre, 31, has signed a two-year contract and is expected to be in the squad for tomorrow's Barclays Premier League trip to Fulham.



Barry

Wenger added: 'Sometimes you need a player in the squad with the qualities you think will help.'

'Silvestre can play left-back and centre-back. It's an area where we had no experience.'

He has a great attitude and we're a bit light on experience in the dressing-room.

'He is 31, but top-class central defenders can play until they are 34, no problem.'

Liverpool last night lodged an improved £8m bid with Espanyol for Spain and ex-Manchester City midfielder Albert Riera, 26.

Capello's job not in danger, says Triesman

Lord Triesman, the Football Association's independent chairman, has assured Fabio Capello that his position as England coach will not be affected by the imminent departure of the FA's chief executive, Brian Barwick, the man who effectively moved to appoint him towards the end of last year.

Confirmation that Barwick would leave Soho Square on December 31 emerged during England's stuttering draw with the Czech Republic on Wednesday. While there had been long-standing tensions between Triesman and his chief executive, the timing of Barwick's departure after less than four years in the role and with Capello yet to take charge of a competitive match did come as a surprise, not least within the FA.

With that in mind, Triesman summoned staff at Soho Square yesterday to explain the reasons for the departure, chiefly, "differences in opinion over what role the chief executive should undertake" and moved to reassure all that it remains "business as normal". While Capello did not attend that meeting because he was out of the country, members of his staff were present and were told that the head coach's position is unaffected.

Asked for his reaction after England's friendly, Capello said the chief executive's exit was not an issue upon which he should comment. "My reaction is that it's not my job," he said. "It's a decision for the board."

There were suggestions last night that David Gill, Manchester United's chief executive, might be considered as a replacement though it remains to be seen whether Triesman feels there is any need

to replace Barwick; it is believed he did not rate Barwick's management skills, so the chief executive's position was always likely to be undermined. Many of the role's tasks can be covered by the recently appointed chief operating officer, Alex Horne.

However, leading members of the FA board would like a replacement for Barwick to be appointed and a search to begin swiftly. Last night the former FA chief executive David Davies questioned whether a replacement was needed. Davies said: "Would you not be better off having a chairman, president, who leads the organisation, who is elected every four years and can be thrown out after four years if the whole of the game does not want that person?"

A prominent figure who could be affected by Barwick's departure is his biggest ally at Soho Square, the director of corporate affairs, Simon Johnson. Johnson was due to play a major role in the FA's bid to host the 2018 World Cup finals but this now seems unlikely. There may also be implications for the head of communications, Adrian Bevington.

Barwick expressed regret at the manner of his departure yesterday, though he defended his achievements. "I'm proud to have been in charge," he said. "I'm a huge football person and to have been chief executive of the FA is a special thing. I'm proud to have been able to do the job. The organisation has come on in leaps and bounds which is very important to me." With a pay-off of about £450,000 agreed with the FA, Barwick could leave his position much earlier than planned.