



# Roman Abramovich should give Carlo Ancelotti chance to buy big at Chelsea

*Roman Abramovich has moved out of his Knightsbridge home while extensive renovation is done. The question now is: will he extensively renovate Chelsea's team?*

By Jason Burt

**H**is home in Lowndes Square is to be gutted inside, behind its stucco-fronted façade. The billionaire has assiduously acquired properties around it and, when they are all knocked into one, it will be some residence. So much for his home improvements. Now it's the assiduous acquisition of players for his other lavish London project – Chelsea Football Club – that should occupy him.

Abramovich has been spending more and more time in the United States – after his partner Dasha Zhukova gave birth in Los Angeles before Christmas and made it clear she wanted to stay there as much as possible – but he has not given up on Chelsea. However if he was lured into, say, buying up a basketball franchise, then there may be there would be some nervousness at Stamford Bridge.

Abramovich was there on Tuesday to witness his club's defeat by Inter Milan and trudged to

the home dressing room afterwards to sit with the players. "He didn't speak," Florent Malouda revealed. "Everyone was quiet in the dressing room because we were really disappointed."

The Champions League exit will have hurt Abramovich even more not just because Jose Mourinho had won but because his Inter team included Lucio, who Chelsea had tried and failed to buy six years ago, Samuel Eto'o, who they had similarly tried to recruit, Maicon, who they turned their noses up at, and Wesley Sneijder, who as recently as last summer was not deemed good enough for Chelsea.

This summer, with the threat of a transfer ban having been lifted, will be the big test for Abramovich, indicating what he's willing to invest.

Having constantly chopped and changed managers in the belief that they were the root of the problem and he wasn't getting value for

money after spending more than £600 million on the club, it could be time for a root-and-branch reform of the playing staff although, according to sources, that's still not his overriding belief.

He has considered taking this course before. As recently as last summer, in fact, when Carlo Ancelotti was promised the funds to make changes and encouraged to try to bring in some of his own recruits before accepting that the small pond of top-class talent targeted by Chelsea has some over-priced fish in it.

Ancelotti was let down. Luiz Felipe Scolari will know how he feels. The Brazilian failed at Chelsea after a bright start and, rightly or wrongly, ascribed much of this to the club's inability to sign Robinho.

Scolari had identified a lack of youth and pace as a problem and Ancelotti, during his negotiations last year, was promised the money

to recruit players he wanted. There was talk of Kaka and, more realistically, Andrea Pirlo who, it was decided, was too old, while negotiations took place with representatives of Carlos Tevez and Emmanuel Adebayor.

A concerted effort was made to sign Franck Ribery and tentative approaches were made to acquire Sergio Aguero, a player eventually deemed too expensive.

Apart from Daniel Sturridge and Ross Turnbull only Yuri Zhirkov arrived. The fee was said to be around £17 million but that was, as one Abramovich associate called it, a "Russian deal" which means that CSKA Moscow may have received more or far less than was quoted for the undisclosed transfer. It was less than £10 million.

It's evident that Chelsea need to make changes. There is a sense at the club that if they don't, then they will become another AC Milan. They may have the Rossoneri's former coach, but do they want a similarly ageing squad? Surely not.

Ancelotti must be given time. But he must also be given his head. Abramovich wants the team to have an "identity" and the Italian had thought he was delivering it although, privately, he must have been frustrated that the playing staff was so unaltered.

Ancelotti is having to work, as he did in Milan, without the chance to implement changes and will do so uncomplainingly.

But he can only truly be judged after the summer if he gets the chance to bring in the players he wants. Abramovich should give him that chance – as he did the big-spending Mourinho of course – although whether he is willing to go for the kind of radical overhaul he has undertaken to his town house remains to be seen.

### Three things for Roman Abramovich to consider

1. **Sell a big name:** Too many players are in a comfort zone. Getting rid of one of the established stars would remind them that they are not bigger than the club. That nothing lasts forever. It may also change the dynamics in the dressing room.

2. **Give the manager greater control:** Carlo Ancelotti should be allowed more say in the running of Chelsea, including control of the youth policy and recruitment. He has a good relationship with sporting director Frank Arnesen but needs more power.

3. **Buy big:** Chelsea have talked about a marquee signing and John Terry – who probably should have been sold last summer to Manchester City – has spoken of the need for ambition. Abramovich doesn't want to spend over-the-odds but sometimes it's necessary as a statement of intent.

## Hicks and Gillett given three weeks to accept £100m deal

*New York hedge fund imposes deadline on offer for 40 per cent stake in Liverpool*



HICKS

**L**iverpool's American owners are under more financial pressure to settle their debts than has previously been thought, with the New York-based company bidding to take control of the club imposing a three-week deadline to take or leave their offer.

The Rhone Group's proposed £100m investment for a 40 per cent share would enable the Liverpool chief executive, Christian Purslow, to deliver the entire sum to the Royal

Bank of Scotland, the club's bankers, to pay down £100m of debt as the bank has demanded. But the time pressures the club currently faces are also compounded by the fact that Liverpool appear to have just 20 days to deliver some of that £100m figure to the bank. The presumption has always been that the deadline is July, by which time the club's current debt facility expires and must be renegotiated.

Liverpool's predicament appears to leave Rhone Group's partners Steve Langman and Robert Agostinelli in a strong position to take over a controlling stake – despite having offered a price which values the club at a half of the £500m Tom Hicks and George Gillett rejected from Dubai International Capital two years ago. There are currently no other prospective buyers lined up for Liverpool. *-The Independent*

