

McLeish ice cool on Brum worries



McLEISH

BIRMINGHAM boss Alex McLeish insists "It's business as usual" after the latest off-the-field events at St Andrew's.

The club's owners are in dispute with the investment bank Seymour Pierce, who have won a court order that effectively gives them control of the club's shares.

Seymour Pierce have sued to recover the fee it said it was owed for laying the groundwork for Carson Yeung's takeover of the club.

While Seymour Pierce were not ultimately involved in Yeung's takeover of Birmingham last year, they successfully argued that they were still due a "success fee" under the terms of the original agreement.

Last month, Birmingham were ordered to pay Seymour Pierce £2.2million. That payment should have been made by Monday but as Birmingham failed to meet the deadline, Seymour Pierce have now won a court order that gives them a charge over Birmingham's shares.

It means that Birmingham cannot pay a dividend or raise money through a share issue.

Birmingham are still bidding to appeal the original ruling that they should pay £2.2m and are also contesting a separate High Court action after issuing a writ against the club's former owners.

The news puts a negative light on what has largely been a season of success on the field for McLeish and his team, and the manager said today: "I've not had any new directives from anybody else. It's business as usual."

"It looks a technicality that the board will sort out. I've no idea if the club will finish up paying the money because it is not a department I immerse myself in. It is an administration part of the club."

"It is probably one of those cases which is agitating and it is up to Carson Yeung and vice-chairman Peter Pannu to sort it out."

"I cannot see it escalating because it is hopefully a technicality which needs to be sorted out."

"So far as I'm aware there is not anything to panic about. The club were aware I was doing a media conference and they could have put me on my toes against anything that we should be avoiding or be troubled by."

McLeish does not believe it will have affected his players and he added: "I think the players only read about themselves and do not start looking at the business section of newspapers."

"I don't think they are going to rush out and buy the Financial Times."

"They are only really bothered about getting their name on the team-sheet and getting their wages."

"If the case gathers momentum people will notice what is going on."

"It's in its infancy in regard to newspaper headlines and hopefully it will be resolved."

While the financial dispute is not concerning McLeish, money has been on the agenda when it comes to finalising his transfer budget for the summer.

McLeish has insisted that nothing will be done in terms of signing players that could affect the long-term future of the club.

He said: "There have been meetings between myself and club officials where we have agreed that we are not going into those kind of areas where we are spending £40m on players and wages."

"We felt it was a step too big. Everyone is agreed that we take one step at a time."

Manchester City's riches can shatter Premier League's glass ceiling



ADEBAYOR

Manchester City's wealth has shattered the cartel at the top of the Premier League

Manchester City are out of contention in every competition, yet a great prize is within reach. Should the side's grip on fourth place be unbreakable the club will make their debut in the Champions League or, to be more precise, the qualifiers. This could not be the sort of romantic episode that saw Everton flicker in the tournament for a couple of weeks in August 2005.

The circumstances are wholly different and the means exist at City to break the assumptions that had been mistaken for eternal truths. There is no reason why Manchester United, Chelsea, Liverpool and Arsenal should go on making up the top four. In fact Liverpool's membership seems to have been revoked since they are sixth. If this phase in the history of the Premier League has not come to a close, it may still be subject to alterations.

City are already a club apart. They have a thirst for extravagance that is almost quenched elsewhere. While there is absurdity in, say, the acquisition of Joleon Lescott for £22m, the Eastlands enterprise is so sustained that its impact is registering. The club's grip on fourth may not be broken.

The programme ahead will be taxing, but the games to come for pursuing Tottenham Hotspur pit them against sides including Arsenal, Chelsea and Manchester United before they travel to City. Money is now making its mark at Eastlands. Various

figures are cited for the cost of the Carlos Tevez deal, but any of them would make you giddy. Nonetheless, the Argentina attacker already has 22 league goals for the club in this campaign, three more than he amassed in two complete seasons at United. His present club have a greater dependence on him that seems to bring out the best in Tevez. Roberto Mancini is also vindicating himself, if only to a humdrum degree. The notion that was floated of him going back to Italy was an odd one. When he was grappling last month to get the ball from David Moyes, his opposite number at Everton, he looked like a person straining to hold tight to the job at City.

It is a rare if not unique post. There may be superior means at the manager's disposal than at any other club. Even Real Madrid, some £260m in the red, might be developing an interest in frugality. In England Sir Alex Ferguson insists there will be no recruitment fever at Manchester United, despite the fact that the knack of wringing influential performances out of the veterans on the staff is one that must fail sooner or later. The debt-laden Glazers, for that matter, do not act as if expensive showmanship has a place in their strategy.

Arsenal also live within tight limits, although theirs exist for a healthy reason. While the cost of the Emirates Stadium is gradually cleared, Arsène Wenger must

practise self-denial. While that suits his ascetic ways, Arsenal's prospects would be better still if, for instance, he was not reduced to re-signing someone such as Sol Campbell on a free transfer. The narrow merits of that deal were demonstrated when the manager did not dare put the 35-year-old on the field for a moment in either match with Barcelona.

All is well with Chelsea, who will assume a four-point lead if they beat Bolton tonight, but key men such as Didier Drogba and Frank Lampard are in their 30s. Whatever is done about renovating the squad, it is virtually unimaginable that the proprietor, Roman Abramovich, will choose to repeat the splurge of the early years. That reflects the sluggishness of the world economy but it must also stem from a question that will ultimately swim into the mind of anyone in his position. Why splash out some £700m when recouping such sums from a potential buyer is all but impossible?

The principal difference at Manchester City is one of timing. Sheikh Mansour took over the club as recently as September 2008 and is at a very different phase in the cycle from Abramovich. The adventure is scarcely begun and there is much prestige yet to be accumulated as ever more outstanding footballers are signed. Should Mancini show himself to be worthy of trust, tepid curiosity about City will be replaced by fear.