

LIFESTYLE

Laporta becomes FC Barcelona president - now for Beckham

By SARAH ANDREWS
The Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain - Joan Laporta was elected president of beleaguered FC Barcelona on Sunday by a landslide after campaigning with a pledge to woo English superstar David Beckham.

Laporta won 53 percent of the votes, compared to 32 percent for Lluís Bassat, his main rival



DAVID BECKHAM

among five other contenders, FC Barcelona's Web site said after all the votes were counted.

The team's Mini Estadi opened Sunday for 12 hours of balloting by 94,339 eligible voters. Turnout was a record 55 percent.

Despite Laporta's surprisingly comfortable win, it remains to be seen whether he can deliver on his pledge to bring Beckham over from Manchester United and raise Barcelona's sagging fortunes. Reports suggest Beckham is leaning instead toward Barcelona's bitter rival, Real Madrid.

Laporta, speaking Sunday night to Spanish National Radio, said he had never actually promised to deliver Beckham.



F.C. BARCELONA soccer club president Joan Laporta at a press conference in Barcelona, Spain. Laporta has said that he has made an agreement with Manchester United to bring player David Beckham to the Barcelona team.

"The electoral promise was to form a strong team," he said. "All I said was we had reached an agreement with Manchester United and now we are going to try to reach an agreement with the player's representatives."

The job of Barcelona president was left vacant when Joan Gaspart resigned in February after Barcelona performed dimly in his 2 1/2 years in charge.

The debt-ridden team has gone four years without a trophy, and at one point this season was in danger of slipping into the relegation zone.

In earlier remarks Sunday, Laporta said his margin of victory gave him a mandate for change.

"I feel strongly endorsed to serve in this post," he said.

Laporta is a 40-year-old lawyer who turned a largely lackluster election campaign into a major international sports story this month by announcing he'd made a bid for Beckham.

The bombshell catapulted Laporta into first place in pre-election polls after he trailed the more conservative Bassat for weeks.

Manchester United said last week it had accepted Laporta's proposal, pending Laporta's election and Beckham agreeing to the move. News reports have estimated the transfer fee at 30 million pounds (US\$50 million).

But Beckham complained through his agents that he felt like a political pawn and said had no plans to meet with Laporta.

And in recent days Spanish media has said Beckham is much more likely to sign with star-studded Real Madrid.

On Sunday, the sports daily Marca quoted an unnamed Manchester United source as saying Beckham will definitely not sign with Barcelona.

Bassat's trump card had been his promise to sign former team hero Pep Guardiola as sports director. Guardiola in turn has said he planned to go all out to lure former centerhalf Ronald Koeman from Ajax as coach.

While Barcelona has struggled in recent years, Real Madrid has won three of the last six European Champions League titles and signed former Barca stars Ronaldo and Luis Figo as well as Zinedine Zidane. ■



A RUSSIAN military cadet enjoys dancing during the Grand Viennese Ball in Moscow, early Sunday. Much of Moscow was asleep early Sunday morning, but by 5 a.m. Gostiny Dvor was still alive with dozens of couples swirling to the strains of "the Blue Danube" as the Grand Viennese Ball came to Russia the very first time.

MINI REVIEWS

DANCE CLUBS

KARMA-BAR
ADDRESS: 3, Pushechnaya Ul.
Metro: Kuznetsky Most
Tel: 924-5633



This is one of the most popular nightclubs in town, especially among English-speaking expats. The interior is designed Eastern-style, and there are hookahs and Pan Asian cuisine for dancers with an appetite. A regular feature of the club is its special parties. To date, the club's promoters have held a number of popular events (for more details, see the club's official Web site at www.karma-bar.ru). Latin American dancing (salsa, merenge, rueda) takes place every Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 9 p.m. to 11 p.m.

EUROPEAN

NEWS PUB
ADDRESS: 18, Petrovka
Metro: Teatralnaya
Tel: 928-8343



A newly designed restaurant club located downtown. Offers mouth watering international cuisine, a full bar including 9 different beers on tap and nightly entertainment.

A popular hangout with expats and well to do russians alike.

Draws crowds in the evenings for the live music and occasional cultural entertainment, so reservations are advised if you are interested in dining. A real value for money 145 roubles business lunch.

Come see what everybody's talking about.

AMERICAN

DOUG & MARTY'S
ADDRESS: 26, Zemlyanoy Val
Metro: Kurskaya
Tel: 917-0150



Mondays Countdown! All hard alcohol including mixes

19:00-20:00 - Order one drink - get four
20:00-21:00 - Order one drink - get three
21:00-22:00 - Order one drink - get two
TEQUILA, VODKAS, RUMS, WHISKEYS, MARTINI, COGNAC. Doug and Marty's-Moscow's Best Foreign Bar-Great food - 50% Discount from noon until 21:00 daily. Moscow's best Buffalo Wings! Buck Happy Hours-Daily from 18:00-21:00. Live sporting events Your "Home Away From Home"