



Confident Harry Redknapp happy to joke Fábregas wants to join Spurs

On the verge of arguably the biggest game of his life, in the Champions League against Milan, Harry Redknapp cut a confident figure at a charity auction



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Harry Redknapp talking at One to One charity breakfast at The Cumberland Hotel Photograph: Sonny Malhotra/Handout pic

The auctioneer opted for gentle persuasion. "Come on, Spurs fans," he said. "Think of all that money that you pay for your season tickets." The lot in question was lunch with one H Redknapp Esq at Gary Rhodes's restaurant in London's Cumberland hotel and the bids from the assembled corporate guests rose in multiples of £500.

At £7,500, the auctioneer stepped in to suggest both bidders paid the money and that they called it a dinner table for three. At a stroke, £15,000 was raised for One to One Children's Fund, a Hampstead-based charity that aims to rebuild the lives of disadvantaged children.

Redknapp joined in the applause. The Tottenham Hotspur manager was not only the star prize at the £100-a-head breakfast at the Cumberland but also the guest of honour. It was 36 hours before arguably the biggest game of his life, the Champions League last-16 second-leg showdown with Milan at White Hart Lane, and it was tempting to wonder whether any other manager in Europe would have found the room at such a juncture for a fundraiser.

Those closest to him had told him to rearrange for another time. Yet this was classic Redknapp, big-hearted to a fault and keen to help others out. Say what you want about him, and plenty of people have, but the size of his personality and the quickness of his wit allow him to energise this type of occasion. It felt as if the 224 guests were in the palm of his hand and it was not difficult to imagine how he imposes himself in the dressing room, how he coaxes and cajoles the best out of his players.

He was introduced by his accountant, Malcolm Webber, who reminded everyone that

Redknapp's first game as a manager had ended in a 9-0 defeat for Bournemouth against Lincoln City. The second was not much better, a 5-0 loss to Leyton Orient. It has been quite a journey for Redknapp to the highest level and to the point where supporters in suits will pay so handsomely for the pleasure of his company over ballotine of foie gras.

Redknapp was in fine form as he fielded questions from the floor. Which Premier League player would he most like to sign? "Well I know that Fábregas wants to come to Tottenham," he replied, breezily. "He keeps ringing me up. I said: 'Look Cesc, we have got a good midfield, you will have to be on the bench ...'"

He discussed the English options. "I love Stevie Gerrard, obviously, although he's not getting any younger. It's difficult. A lot of the English players are at the latter stages of their careers. You would have said Wayne Rooney eight months ago but at the moment he doesn't look anywhere near the player that he was. What's happened to him, I don't know ... something's happened to him in his life or whatever. You would have picked Rooney, for sure, a year ago but at the moment, I wouldn't be so sure. I'd probably ring Cesc back."

Inevitably, the popular notion of Redknapp as the heir apparent to Fabio Capello as the England manager came up. Redknapp reiterated his desire to see an Englishman succeed the Italian and, although it is known that he would jump at the chance, he was not outspoken on the subject.

"We have been down the road with Sven ... you know, bless him ... he didn't set us alight," Redknapp said. "And now we have Capello, who is one of the greatest managers of all time. If he cannot make a success of it, it's quite frightening. It's a difficult job and the moment you get it, the papers slaughter you. It does not seem a lot of fun."

The story that brought the house down, though, was the one about Paulo Futre and the strop that he threw ahead of what would have been his debut for West Ham United against Arsenal in 1996. Redknapp thought he had an Upton Park superstar in the making but there was a problem on the eve of the season's first game. The Portuguese would not wear the No16 shirt that had been assigned to him.

"He came to me and said 'Futre 10'," Redknapp said. "'Eusébio, Pelé, Maradona 10; no fucking 16.' We argued. He threw the shirt down, trod on it and left. We had to tell the referee so I said: 'Frank Lampard [the assistant manager] has made a big mistake, he has filled the team sheet in wrong, Futre is not even here.'

"We then had to ask Arsène Wenger for his permission. He thought it was a tactical ruse. We told him we were not that clever. We lost the game 2-0. Futre, though, came in on Monday and said that everything had been sorted. He'd got John Moncur's No10 shirt after telling him he could stay at his villa in the Algarve. And he said that he'd refund all the kids who had brought 'Moncur 10' shirts. I told him we'd sold 50,000. Then, about a month later, he did his knee and that was the end of Paulo Futre."

The high-stakes Milan tie felt a world away as Redknapp timed his lines to perfection. He dismissed the fear that Gareth Bale and Luka Modric would seek pastures new if Tottenham did not qualify for next season's Champions League. "They came to the club when we were not in the competition and, if we don't get in next year, it's their fault," he said, with a smile.

After 40 minutes or so, it was time for him to leave but not before one last trick. "I've got another auction lot," Redknapp declared. "A load of you can come to Spurs Lodge and watch us train. You can have some lunch with us ... Daniel Levy might buy you a sandwich if you're lucky."

The auctioneer leapt back in and, moments later, the charity had pocketed a further £5,000. Redknapp looked like the man with the Midas touch. Relaxed and positive, he intends to prove it against Milan.

One to One Children's Fund is a small charity making a big impact, trying to relieve the suffering of children who are innocent victims of poverty, disease and conflict, with projects in South Africa, Kosovo, the Middle East and the UK. The charity is the

inspiration of chairman David Altschuler and was started in 1999. The charity's mission is to work towards rebuilding lives of children, one child at a time. We remedy and prevent the adverse impact of HIV/AIDS and trauma on children, working hand in hand with communities to develop and implement projects which can be scaled and replicated. Find out more at www.onetoonechildrensfund.org