



## Cicinho reveals Perez's last-ditch attempt to keep Zidane at Real Madrid

Fans, team-mates and club officials did not want to see the icon retire, so much so that the Blancos supremo was ready to bust out the cheque book. Former Real Madrid right-back Cicinho has revealed that club president Florentino Perez essentially offered Zinedine Zidane a blank cheque to prevent him from retiring back in 2006, with the incident having happened in the dressing room after Zizou's final club match. Los Blancos played out a 3-3 draw with Villarreal at the Santiago Bernabeu in Zidane's last game, the iconic midfielder having struggled to hold back the tears as he waved goodbye to fans in the Spanish capital. Zidane, who was 34 at the time, actually had one year left to run on his contract but had made the decision to call time on his club career ahead of the 2006 World Cup. Despite his age, there were plenty of people who wanted Zidane to continue at Madrid, including the club's president, who offered him an exorbitant salary packet to try and convince him to stay. "In his farewell match, Zidane was very emotional," Cicinho told ESPN. "We were also as he was a legend who was leaving the game."

"Then, Florentino Perez came into the dressing room and greeted the players one by one. What happened next was unforgettable. "Real Madrid's highest salary at the time was €6.5 million (£6m/\$7m). [Former Madrid attacker] Robinho jokingly said: 'Mr. President, Zizou said that if you sign a two-year contract for €6.5 million, he won't stop playing.' "Everyone laughed, but Florentino was serious and replied: 'If you want, I will bring you the paper now so that you can sign it.' "Cicinho explained that all eyes turned to his team-mate at that point, adding: "Zidane thought about it for a second, looked at him and said, 'No, no... I don't want any more.' "An import from Sao Paulo in 2005, Cicinho spent only one season together with Zidane, but that was more than enough to witness and absorb the Frenchman's special talents. "Zidane was like the conductor of an orchestra," the Brazilian said. "He always helped us position ourselves on the field. Before games, he guided everyone. He was already a coach on the pitch [back then]. "Florentino always said that Zidane played with a suit, such was his elegance on the field. He didn't even break a sweat! It was beautiful to watch him play."

## Lampard: Chelsea should be signing Coutinho

Chelsea boss Frank Lampard can be the man to get Philippe Coutinho back to his best form, according to the Barcelona outcast's former Liverpool team-mate Glen Johnson. Coutinho swapped Merseyside for Camp Nou in 2018, calling time on an impressive five-year career with the Reds and securing a dream switch to play alongside the likes of Lionel Messi. It hasn't been the fantasy move that the Brazilian had hoped for, however, as his failure to replicate his Liverpool form eventually saw him loaned out to Bayern Munich, who are unlikely to exercise their option to buy upon the deal's conclusion. A return to the Premier League has been mooted for 27-year-old Coutinho, with it suggested a retracing of steps back to the English top tier could see the attacker return to his brilliant best. Chelsea have been the most heavily linked club with regards to transfer rumours, and former Blues full-back Johnson says Lampard's man management might be the key to unlocking Coutinho's potential once again. "Obviously you look on paper at his CV, at the clubs he's been at, and it's unbelievable," Johnson told talkSPORT. "You don't get to those clubs without an enormous amount of ability. "He's not reached the heights he's capable of since he's left Liverpool and it's hard to put your finger on why. I know he's a quiet guy, a

very nice lad, but he's got a bit of fight about him on the pitch, he won't be pushed around. "At Barca you go there and there's a superstar in every corner you look, and maybe he just blended in a little bit rather than being the key man. I just think he needs to be made to feel a bit special; he needs an arm around him, and I think he'd get that at Chelsea." Johnson added: "I think he's just a bit cautious when he meets new people and it takes him a bit of time to come out of his shell. That's why I guess when he walks into a new dressing room it will take a bit of time for the lads to get to know him, but he's a really nice lad. "I think it would be great for him and his family to be in London and Lamps could be the man that puts his arm around him and makes him feel he is a key part of their plans, and I think that could force the best out of him. "There is no doubt about it, the boy can play. He's a proper footballer. "He's not the quickest lad and he's clearly not the biggest lad, but his brain, his sharpness and speed of his football brain... he just picks that pass and he's got that technique and perfect mobility in short spaces that opens up defences, and that's something you can't teach. "And if Chelsea get the chance to sign him, they should be signing him. He's unbelievable."



## Thomas Partey would be perfect for Arsenal but Gunners fans should'nt get excited just yet

Thomas Partey is a player who has been on Arsenal's radar for some time. There was some interest in him last summer, and some informal discussions took place to see if a move could be possible, but the transfer fee was deemed too high and the midfielder was settled at Atletico Madrid. Wind the clock forward nearly 12 months and that interest has not only remained but strengthened. Adding a central midfielder to the squad this summer has been high up on Mikel Arteta's list of priorities since the moment he walked through the door at the Emirates in December. Prior to the Premier League-wide shutdown due to the coronavirus pandemic, Arsenal had been searching for players they would like to bring in and Partey's name was towards the top of that list. Atletico Madrid are well aware of the interest, as are Partey's representatives and - as we learned on Tuesday - so is Partey's father. Speaking on the Ghana-based radio station Tru FM, Jacob Partey said: "I called my son after hearing the rumours and he told me that the rumours are true. He told me they are holding talks between him and Arsenal. It all depends on the offer Atletico are demanding."

"If he goes to Arsenal, fine, they have a lot of supporters in Ghana. I will be happy if he decides to move to Arsenal. What they are discussing now is how Atletico will release him." Those comments have caused plenty of excitement among Arsenal fans, although it must be noted that Partey's representatives have distanced themselves from them, insisting they are not true. Indeed, Partey himself reiterated that message on Instagram, posting a link to a statement that claimed "there is absolutely no truth in what the player's dad was alleged to have said". And sources in Spain insist that the 26-year-old is happy in Madrid and that Atletico are confident he will soon sign a new deal to put an end to speculation linking him to an exit. Talks are ongoing with the midfielder about a new contract which, crucially for Atletico, will see Partey's release clause, which currently stands at just €50 million (£44m/\$54m), dramatically increase. Until that contract is signed, however, Arsenal will believe they still have an opportunity to lure the Ghanaian to north London, although the potential to do a deal of that magnitude has lessened because of the Covid-19 shutdown.