

Cherie turns football fixer to boost agent son's career

By Russell Myers

CHERIE BLAIR has taken time out of her busy international schedule to meet an unknown Mexican footballer to help boost her son's sports agency business.

A car collected 17-year-old soccer prodigy Raul Mendiola from his family's rundown trailer-park home in a Spanish-speaking suburb of Los Angeles and took him to the plush hotel where the wife of the ex-Prime Minister was staying.

Mrs Blair – who is a director of her son Nicky's football agency, to which Raul is signed – spent time chatting to the footballer before posing for a photograph with the bemused youngster.

Just days later, in an apparent attempt to cement confidence in her son's business, Raul's mother Claudia Velador received a picture of a smartly dressed Mr and Mrs Blair, personally signed with the words 'Thank you'.

Claudia takes the picture has now been framed and said the picture in the living room of the family home.

Raul, who moved to America from Mexico ten years ago following the break-up of his parents' marriage, hopes to become a football star after signing to Nicky Blair's Magnitude Limited sports agency.

But he had no idea he had entrusted his future to a man whose parents are on first-name terms with the world's most powerful people.

Speaking from her home in San Bernardino, California, Claudia, 36, said: 'Raul didn't have a clue he was dealing with a former Prime Minister's son.'

'A car came to pick him up at our home and take him to Los Angeles, which is about an hour away. He was taken up to her hotel room and had pictures taken with her, but it was only on the way out when he asked

'Friends say they are influential people'

why there were so many photographers in the lobby downstairs that he was told they were there for the mum of his agent because she was a famous person.

'A few days later she sent me a signed picture of her and Tony Blair. He is in a suit in the picture and she is dressed very smartly.'

'It says "To Claudia" with some scribbles underneath, which I assume are signatures, and then the words "Thank you" in English.'

'I've framed it and hung it up in the living room. I'm Mexican and although I've seen Tony Blair on the television, I haven't attached all that much importance to it.'

'But friends are like, "Wow, this is amazing, these are really influential people" when they see the signed photo and I tell them the story behind it.'

Mrs Blair, a Liverpool FC fan, had been in Los Angeles to give a speech

Car picks up Mexican prodigy from his trailer park home to meet ex-PM's wife

She holds meeting with him at LA hotel

Then sends his mum signed photograph of her and Tony



FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES: Sports agent Nicky Blair and his parents. A signed photo of Cherie and Tony Blair was sent to Raul's mother Claudia

to lawyers on September 15. She became a director of the sports firm in 2009 after Nicky set up the company with Oxford University friend Gabriel Moraes, 25.

Nicky, 26, and Gabriel have made several trips to the United States in recent months as they look to add to their stable of budding footballers to represent.

After signing Raul earlier this year they arranged a trial for him at

Manchester City, the world's richest football club. Claudia said the two budding agents even collected Raul from the airport and put him up at their shared home in Marylebone, Central London, before driving him to Manchester for the trial.

That led Raul's stepfather Pablo Andujo to boast on Facebook that the player was 'spending his first week at the Blair mansion in England training with his trainer'. If the



RISING STAR: Raul Mendiola and, below, the Facebook message about his visit to Britain

Pablo Andujo guero is spending his first week at the Blair mansion in England training with his trainer

Mexican-born prodigy, who is nicknamed 'guero' or blondie in Mexican slang because of his pale skin and blue eyes, is signed to the Premier League football club or another top European side, he can expect a life far different from the one he has been used to.

He was born in the notorious Mexican border town of Juarez, known as 'The Murder Capital' where his father and other siblings Michelle, 18, and Jonathan, 15, still live. Claudia

added: 'It's nice to know Raul is in such safe hands. His dream is to become a professional footballer and play for a side in Europe. I'm sure my son will achieve his dream and become a good player.'

'It's something he wants desperately and if someone as important as Cherie is taking an interest in his future, then I'm delighted.'

A spokesman for Manchester City confirmed Raul had been on trial with the club.

Christmas comes early for MPs enjoying a 25-day break

MPs were last night accused of starting their Christmas holidays early – to enjoy a record 25-day festive break.

The Commons is not due to break for Christmas until the end of business on Tuesday.

But last night it appeared that a number of MPs would not be

returning to Westminster to take part in debates this week.

The first sign that Christmas had come early for some came in the middle of last week when dozens of politicians were overheard exchanging season's greetings.

When The Mail on Sunday reminded MPs that the holiday

begins on Tuesday, Tory and Labour backbenchers revealed they were not under strict orders to show their faces this week.

One senior Tory MP said: 'Both we and Labour are on a one-line whip from party managers.'

'In other words, that's a "turn up if you have specific duties"

request but otherwise, see you next year.' Another MP said: 'Most people won't come back unless they have receptions and dinners to attend with a seasonal flavour.'

TaxPayers' Alliance campaign group director Matthew Sinclair said: 'MPs have already awarded themselves a number of bonus

holidays this year so they risk looking out of touch by sloping off early at Christmas.'

However, one MP hit back, saying: 'Just because some of us aren't in the Commons doesn't mean we're on holiday. Many MPs will be working over the break in their constituencies.'