

Everton join race for Kleberston

AFP, Liverpool
Everton said Thursday they were interested in snatching Brazilian World Cup winner Kleberston from under the noses of Premiership rivals Leeds United.

The Atletico Paranaense midfielder has been linked with numerous moves to Europe since the summer, with Leeds the latest club to move for the 23-year-old.

Leeds, with seven million pounds (11 million dollars) from the expected sale of England striker Fowler to Manchester City, were reported Wednesday to be ready to splash four million pounds on Kleberston.

However, Everton said Thursday they had also made contact with their Brazilian's club over the possibility of signing the star who blossomed in Korea and Japan, playing five times and starring in the World Cup Final victory over Germany.

Leeds are still favourites to bring the Brazilian to England once the star settles his marriage plans.

Kleberston was believed to have brought forward plans to marry Dayane Da Silva when she turns 16 next month so she can eventually join him in England.



PHOTO: AFP

Paris-Saint-Germain's Brazilian forward Jose Aloisio celebrates after scoring against Le Havre during their French League One.

League One PSG owe Aloisio

AFP, Paris

Beleaguered Paris Saint Germain coach Luis Fernandez received a welcome boost on Wednesday as his side edged struggling Le Havre 1-0 to give them their first home win since December 4.

PSG's win - a Jose Aloisio goal giving them a return of seven points from the last 27 - leaves them six points adrift of Nice, who drew 2-2 with Montpellier, and Marseille, who beat Rennes 2-0 on Tuesday and trail on goal difference.

However, it was Auxerre who moved into the role of prime challengers as a double strike by French international Djibril Cisse earned them a 2-0 win over Guingamp.

With none of the teams above them winning Auxerre trail Nice and Marseille by three points with two matches in hand.

Nice had to come from behind twice to draw at Montpellier. Lyon lost 2-0 at Bastia for whom former Lyon star Florian Maurice grabbed the second while Sochaux and Monaco drew 0-0.

Aloisio headed home in the 35th minute from Argentine international Mauricio Pochettino's freekick to give PSG some respite after Fabrice Fioresse had missed an open goal for the French giants.

Aloisio too had been guilty of

spurning a great chance when one on one with goalkeeper Alexandre Vencel.

The visitors were none too pleased with the decision to grant the goal as they had been down to 10 men while former PSG defender Gregoire Paisley was receiving treatment following a clash with Aloisio.

Montpellier stunned Nice with a double strike from Cedric Barbosa in the first-half.

He grabbed his first of the season in the third minute following good work from former Colombian international Victor Bonilla.

Abdelmelak Chemad levelled the match with his third of the season in the 20th minute but a minute later Bonilla once again set up Barbosa, who took his chance splendidly with a cross shot past Pascal Gregorini.

However, Nice showed the stubborn streak that has held them in such good stead on their return to the top flight as Kaba Diawara brought them all square in the 65th minute after he controlled a long ball over the home defence and shot past Montpellier goalkeeper Rudi Riou for the 27-year-old's 10th goal of the season.

Lyon failed to rescue their recent poor away form as they went behind at Bastia to a goal by Ghanaian international Mikael Essien in the 68th minute in what may well be his last score for the Corsicans and against a club who want to sign him!

Maurice then struck against the club where he made his name rifling home a fierce 18 yard shot past Gregory Coupet for his fifth goal of the season to leave Lyon with just one point from their last four away matches.

Earlier, Monaco had failed to become the first team to win at Sochaux this season when they were held.

Monaco's Croat-born striker Dado Prso, whose goal clinched the title back in 2000, did get the ball in the net in the second-half but it was ruled out for offside and minutes later he saw his header come back off the crossbar.

Monaco's frustrating evening got worse when their outstanding Mexican central defender Rafael Marquez was sent off for a second bookable offence in the 81st minute but Sochaux rarely threatened to take advantage of their opponents numerical inferiority.

Auxerre's French international striker Djibril Cisse hit home his seventh goal of the campaign away at Guingamp and followed it with a beautifully struck cross-shot in the dying minutes of the game.

The relegation battle between Sedan and Ajaccio ended 1-1.

Ajaccio took an early lead through Yohan Demont - with his first goal at this level - but were pegged back three minutes before the break as Senegalese World Cup hero Henri Camara levelled.

Dudek defiant as ever

AFP, Liverpool

Out-of-favour Liverpool goalkeeper Jerzy Dudek insisted on Thursday he had a vital role to play for the club this season despite being dropped for the last 11 games.

The Poland international lost his place to Chris Kirkland after a series of errors, culminating in a mistake which allowed Manchester United to score the opening goal in their 2-1 win over Liverpool in December.

Dudek has been linked with Barcelona and Arsenal, just 16 months after he arrived at Anfield in a 4.5 million pound (seven million dollar) move.

But the 29-year-old believes he still figures in manager Gerard Houllier's plans.

"Even though I am out of Liverpool's first team at the moment, I do not consider my season to be finished," he said on his personal website.

"Maybe I would think that way if I

was in another country and experiencing the same situation, but not in England and not at Liverpool, where we still have a lot of games to play.

"Potentially there are a lot of games remaining this season. And as the manager has said, everyone has to be involved in them - if they want to be.

"Of course, I want to be. I want to show people that what happened to me in November was just an accident. I just wasn't in good form. But now I feel better and we will see how things turn out."

Liverpool have not won in the Premiership for 11 games and face in-form Southampton at the weekend.

"Perhaps our season will start on Saturday against Southampton," said Dudek.

"There are around 17 or so matches left to play in the league, and that's not taking into account the ones we have left in the Worthington Cup, the FA Cup and the UEFA Cup."

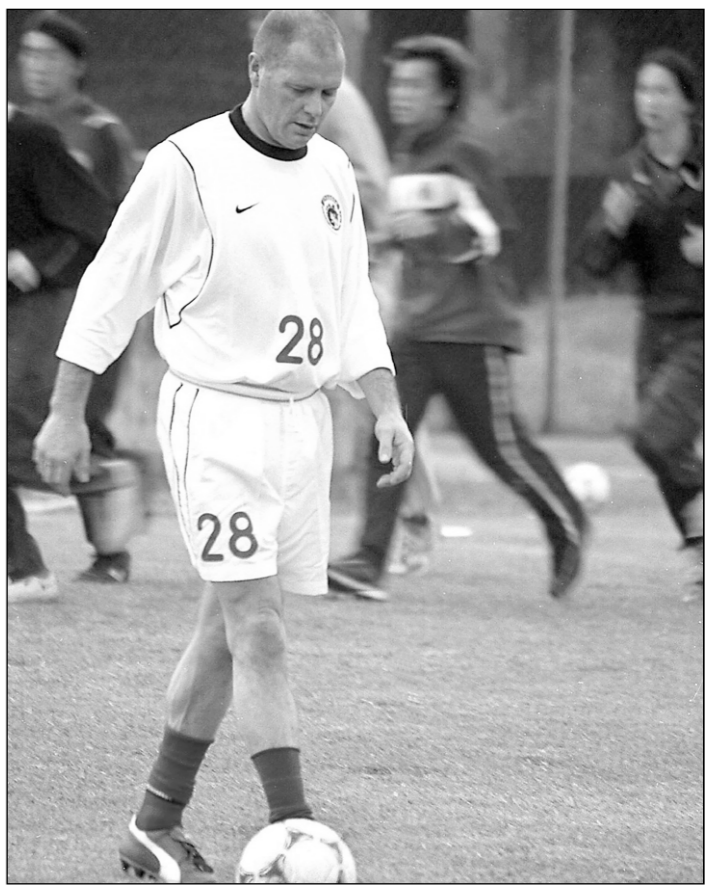


PHOTO: AFP

Former England international Paul Gascoigne working out in Haikou, on the Chinese resort island of Hainan yesterday.

World Youth Cup in Japan?

AFP, Tokyo

A possible US-led war on Iraq may force a switch in venues for the upcoming World Youth Cup from the United Arab Emirates to Japan, a Japanese football official said Thursday.

The world's football governing body FIFA has asked Japan, which co-hosted the World Cup finals with South Korea last year, to consider the possibility, said Takeo Hirata, general secretary of the Japanese Football Association.

"It is not clear if only Japan has been approached. We will take it if Japan is the only one," Hirata said.

He added, however, that both FIFA and the United Arab Emirates were prepared to host the under-20 world youth championships as scheduled from March 25 to April 16. "It is quite natural for them to weigh a remote possibility."

Both the Gulf state and Japan are bunched in the Asian Games family.

Japan are among the 24 teams to compete in this year's competition.

Charlton seek replay

AFP, London

Charlton have tabled an unprecedented formal request to the English Premier League for their weekend defeat by Chelsea to be replayed because of the state of the sand-covered pitch.

Wet weather has reduced Chelsea's pitch to a quagmire this season and Saturday's game, which Chelsea won 4-1, was only able to go ahead after the surface, which was due to be reurfed, was heavily sanded.

Charlton are claiming that league rules were breached because they were not warned the match would be taking place on what they described as "an artificial sand surface" rather than grass, and that their players did not have the opportunity to practice or even to ensure they were wearing the right footwear.

"At no time prior to our away fixture at Stamford Bridge on Saturday, January 11th, were we informed by Chelsea FC that we would be playing on an artificial sand surface and not grass, contrary to the rules of the FA Premier League (Rule 17, Section 1)," Charlton chief executive Peter Varney said in a statement.

The Premier League said they had received the complaint and would look into it.

"The Premier League shall investigate this matter as it would with any complaint made by one member club against another," a spokesman said.

Chelsea immediately made it clear they would fight any attempt to have the match replayed, insisting that referee Mike Dean's decision to let the match go ahead could not be overturned.

"Chelsea have not received any request from either the Football Association or Charlton Athletic regarding a replay of Saturday's match," a Chelsea statement said.

"The referee and match officials carried out an inspection of the pitch before the game. Their decision was that the surface was in a satisfactory condition for the match to be played."

Muralitharan piqued

Cricket

AFP, Brisbane

Champion Sri Lankan off-spinner Muttiah Muralitharan said here Thursday he might not return to play in Australia because of persistent crowd abuse.

The 30-year-old said he was fed up with taunts about his controversial bowling action and claimed sections of the Gabba Ground crowd laughed at him when he was injured in Sri Lanka's four-wicket loss to Australia Wednesday.

Muralitharan hurt his leg in the outfield and will not play in Friday's vital match against England in Adelaide. It is not clear how long he will be sidelined.

The injury continued Muralitharan's difficult career in Australia, where he was called for throwing in 1995-96 and 1998-99. The International Cricket Council has cleared his action.

Muralitharan said he could no longer field on the boundary in Australian matches because of abuse from crowds.

Captain Sanath Jayasuriya moved him away from his position near the boundary rope Wednesday.

"They should keep their mouths shut," Muralitharan said.

"I thought it might have been better this time, but people still say things like 'chucker'."

"That's not fair to say because I have been proved not to be. The crowd should realise that and if it's going on like that I might not be able to come and play here any more."

Lanka's next Test tour to Australia, which could be as early as October, depending on scheduling.

There had been speculation whether Muralitharan would play in the current tri-nation series, but he arrived in Australia last month insisting he had never considered withdrawing.

But he has changed his mind



MUTTIAH MURALITHARAN

after his first three appearances in the series, with some Gabba spectators chanting "no ball" last night when Muralitharan bowled.

He still claimed an excellent 4-27 from 10 overs, including the wickets of key Australians Matthew Hayden and Damien Martyn.

Australian fast bowler Brett Lee, whose action has also been questioned and cleared, was teased briefly by England's Barmy Army during the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne.

Australian batsman Justin Langer leapt to Lee's defence, labelling the Barmy Army "a disgrace."

Muralitharan asked why similar sentiments were not expressed

about Australian crowds.

"If some people are saying that to Brett Lee, it's said to be disappointing but, if it's me, it's something different," he said.

"They were laughing when I got injured last night. When some other players get injured they would never laugh."

Many fans have been looking forward to Muralitharan returning for a Test series after Sri Lanka played their last Test in Australia in January 1996. Since then, Muralitharan has surged into third position on the list of all-time wicket-takers in Tests and one-day internationals.

He has continued in form this month, recovering from a hernia operation to take combined figures of 7-107 from 30 overs in his three appearances.

Indians

FROM PAGE 13

Zealand, after a 4-3 defeat at home in a seven-match one-day series against West Indies, have raised concerns about the team's prospects in the February 9 to March 23 event.

Indian cricketers have played non-stop in the last year, their schedule including home and away Test series against West Indies and England, a home series against Zimbabwe as well as the Champions Trophy tournament where they finished joint winners.

Saurav Ganguly's beleaguered side can hope to acclimatise to more pace-friendly pitches during their fortnight-long stay in South Africa before starting their World Cup campaign on February 12 with their opening pool A game against outsiders the Netherlands.

Mboma's J-League party awaits

AFP, Tokyo

Patrick Mboma, who powered Cameroon to Olympic and African titles, said Thursday he was happy to "come home" to Japan's premier league after four roller-coaster years in Europe and Africa.

J-League club Tokyo Verdy announced Thursday it was to sign a 11-month contract, effective February 1, with the World Cup star pending clearance from the world's football governing body FIFA.

Mboma, the 32-year-old forward with Libya's Al Ittihad, said in a statement issued in Japanese: "I have been dreaming that some day I will play (again) in Japan, which was the starting point for my leap onto the world level."

He dazzled in his first J-League spell in 1997-1998 after moving from Paris Saint-Germain to Gamba Osaka. He scored 25 goals as the top J-League scorer in 1997, earning the nickname "the black panther of Naniwa (Osaka)."

"By playing flat out, I wish to show all of you in Japan how valuable I am and how much I have grown," Mboma said.

Verdy said it expected to receive FIFA approval Friday for the transfer of Mboma, who was reportedly locked in a dispute over Al Ittihad's failure to pay him.

Mboma had reportedly received offers from a number of clubs in Europe but opted for a Japanese comeback, which will earn him an estimated annual 80 million yen (680,000 USD).

Verdy, which finished fourth in the J-League's 16-club first division in the second stage of last season, need a striker to fill the gap left by former Brazil forward Edmundo who moved to the Urawa Reds at the end of the season in November.

Mboma's first stint with the J-League ended after his disappointing performance at the 1998 World Cup finals in France. He moved to Italian club Cagliari and switched to AC Parma in the middle of 2000.

He was voted the 2000 African footballer of the year when Cameroon triumphed at the African Nations Cup and the Sydney Olympics.

Ask Adams

AFP, London

Former England and Arsenal skipper Tony Adams has warned Premiership players have turned to gambling for their thrills because clubs have stamped down on drink and drugs.

Adams, a recovering alcoholic who was once jailed for drink-driving, claims big-money betting is now rife among top stars.

"It is something about which the clubs need to be aware," Adams told the Sun newspaper Thursday.

"Because of the number of tests that are available these days, it would be difficult for any player to drink to excess or take drugs."

"It would be seen and detected straight away. But those with addictive personalities are turning to gambling to get their buzz."

The 36-year-old, who now runs a charity called Sporting Chance to help sportsmen with addiction problems, says gambling is having a serious effect on the form of some players.

"More and more players are buying horses and with that comes

gambling," Adams said. "It is hard to detect because there are no obvious signs like there are with drinking or taking drugs. Players can do it not just at the casino or at a race track but also through the internet."

"It can be just as dangerous as any other addiction."

Chelsea's Icelandic international striker Eidur Gudjohnsen admitted last week he lost 400,000 pounds (643,000 dollars) in five months at a casino.

"I have seen for myself just how dangerous this gambling thing can be. I will definitely not put another foot in the casino," Gudjohnsen said.

"I can easily see how young people can get sucked into gambling and I am happy to stand up as a warning to others not to get hooked."

And former Republic of Ireland striker Tony Cascarino claimed earlier this week that England players gambled thousands of pounds in a card school during last year's World Cup.

Cascarino said one England player wrote out a cheque for 30,000 pounds on the plane home after running up gambling debts during the tournament.

Members of former England manager Kevin Keegan's squads were reported to have splashed out 15,000 pounds a hand in poker games during the 2000 European Championship but Sven Goran Eriksson promised a new era when he took over in November 2000.

Dutch star Ruud van Nistelrooy Van Nistelrooy also revealed that Manchester United's players regularly play cards for money when travelling to away games.

"The players spend a lot of time travelling. Oh, and maybe I shouldn't say this, but a lot of them play cards," van Nistelrooy said.

"Yes, they play for money. I can see them writing stuff down all the time when they are playing."

"They play on the train when we go to London, in hotels or on the plane and the manager is fine as long as he is winning."

A United spokesman said only small amounts of money were involved.

"Our players do play cards for fun to pass the time and the amounts of money involved are small. It's really just for fun and to pass the time as they are travelling," he said.

O'Neill knows soon

AFP, Glasgow

Celtic's players are hoping to learn in the next few days whether Martin O'Neill will still be their manager next season.

O'Neill, whose current deal expires in the summer, has been absent from the Scottish champions mid-winter training camp in Florida while holding negotiations on a new contract in Barbados.

But he was expected to join up with the players on Thursday and striker John Hartson said the squad expected an announcement imminently.

"My gut feeling is we will all get our answer very shortly because there is a lot of pressure from the fans and the press," the Welsh international told the Daily Record.

Having dragged Celtic out of the doldrums with back-to-back Scottish Premier League titles, O'Neill is one of the hottest managerial properties around.

He was approached by Leeds before the appointment of Terry Venables last summer, has fre-

quently been tipped as Alex Ferguson's successor at Manchester United and, in recent days, has been speculatively linked to a possible move to Liverpool, where Gerard Houllier is under pressure following the club's recent slump.

Hartson said the players were keen to know what O'Neill's intentions were, but said they would understand if he opted to leave Parkhead in pursuit of a fresh challenge elsewhere.

"I just feel he should be allowed to make his own decision," Hartson said.

"He's been unbelievably successful when you consider the amount of trophies he has won this club and the turmoil we were in before he arrived."

"So people must respect his decision, whether he stays or goes."

"I can understand the anxiety because the fans want to know his answer. I understand that and I think the players would like to know as well."

"But he's his own man and it's entirely up to him."

O'Neill's players had originally expected to see their manager in Florida on Sunday night but Hartson

insisted his absence had not disrupted the squad's training.

"To be honest the players haven't had any word about what is going on. Obviously I thought he was going to be over here from the off but so far we haven't seen him."

"It hasn't really affected us, though, because the boys are training well and we don't see a lot of him through the week at home either. He only comes to training on a Friday or sometimes through the week so it's nothing new to the lads not to see him every day."

"I would certainly like to see him stay. He brought me to the club, showed faith in me and was brave enough to pay a lot of money for me."

"But, on the other hand, if he chooses to go then I think he should go with everybody's blessing. He deserves to be shown a bit of respect for what he has achieved here."

"He has the right to go if he wants to go and every Celtic supporter should agree with that."

"I'd be gutted if he went as I think most of the boys would be but everybody wants to know the decision and the majority of people want to see him stay."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across, Down, and Cryptquip sections.

Cryptquip puzzle grid with letters and numbers.

CRYPTOQUIP
B M X S N H B W N V C A M
D X S B H M N E E A M M X
K S B W I N B C H D A H H B K E N
C O X C O N W I A B V H N B V N
Yesterday's Cryptquip: BY IRONING MY BEST DRESS PANTS THE WRONG WAY, I ACCIDENTALLY DE-PLEATED THEM.
Today's Cryptquip Clue: H equals S
The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.