

Kahn closes door on Man Utd

Football

INTERNET, Berlin

Bayern Munich goalkeeper Oliver Kahn has committed his future to the German champions but admitted interest from Manchester United.

"There have been a lot of rumours and a lot of speculation recently and there is always some truth to it," the German international said answering the question on a possible move to Manchester.

"One thinks about it. But I'm already playing for the best club in the world, so there are actually no need for thoughts like that anymore.

"One really has to think carefully about whether it makes sense to move on."

Earlier this month Bayern Munich chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge has insisted Kahn would not be leaving the German champions.

In the past Kahn, who helped his team win an 18th league title this season, hinted he was considering a move abroad.

Media reports have linked him to several clubs including Manchester United. But Rummenigge stressed the 33-year-old, who joined Bayern in 1994, had

a contract for another three years and was not for sale.

"He has a contract until 2006. Even if we had 15 offers for him, we would not let him go," Rummenigge told Abendzeitung Munich newspaper.

Kahn made headlines in Germany after admitting he had cheated on his pregnant wife with a barmaid.

Bayern bosses have repeatedly said they wanted Kahn to join the team's staff after his retirement from playing.



OLIVER KAHN

Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld had suggested the goalkeeper wanted to leave the club because of the pressure from the media over his personal life.

Kahn is one of Germany's highest-profile figures and was the first goalkeeper to win the Golden Ball award for best player at last year's World Cup finals.

Houllier's prediction

Football

INTERNET, London

Liverpool boss Gerard Houllier is predicting a golden future for Sven-Goran Eriksson's England - tipping them as potential World Cup winners in 2006.

Houllier believes England will demonstrate their progress by making a major impact at next summer's European

Championship in Portugal and could follow it up by claiming the ultimate prize.

Liverpool will provide two of the mainstays of England's future with Michael Owen and Steven Gerrard.

And Houllier believes Everton's

brilliant 17-year-old Wayne Rooney will also play a key role.

England have put themselves firmly in contention to qualify for next season's European showpiece with their win against Turkey at The Stadium of Light.

And Houllier is convinced a good showing at Euro 2004 could be a dress rehearsal for even greater glory in Germany two years later.

"Those players have more experience now and I think they will make an impact at Euro 2004."

"But they are still very young and in 2006 they will be even better."

Rooney may be the jewel in the crown of rivals Everton, but Houllier has no hesitation in agreeing the youngster is an outstanding



GERARD HOULLIER

Houllier told the BBC Sport website: "I think in Euro 2004 England will reach the quarterfinal or the semifinals. After that anything can happen."

Liverpool striker Owen has confirmed his reputation as an outstanding international marksman - and the emergence of Rooney has delivered the prospect of a potent all-Merseyside strike force.

Houllier said: "England have a huge crop, and a very unusual range, of good players."

"You need two or three world class players. England have players like that in Owen, but I just felt the World Cup in

Japan had come a little to early for the team to fulfil its full poten-

Champs League ticket rush

AFP, Rome

Tens of thousands of Italian football fans were left disappointed as tickets for next Wednesday's Champions League final between Juventus and AC Milan were snapped up within hours.

More than 200,000 supporters applied for tickets for the Manchester showpiece, but only 40,000 were successful.

Around 38,000 tickets were divided equally between the two clubs with an extra 1,400 seats sold as part of four packages.

About 11,000 tickets have been reserved for European football's governing body UEFA, while 6,000 seats will be occupied by journalists and security staff.

The remainder of tickets for the 62,295 capacity Old Trafford stadium have been set aside for club officials and sponsors.

Fifty planes have been chartered for travelling fans, leaving from Turin, Milan, Venice, Bergamo, Verona, Rome, Bologna and Venezia.

Milan are to show the match on a gigantic screen at their San Siro stadium for those fans who were unable to purchase tickets.

Reds link up with Sporting

REUTERS, Manchester

Manchester United and Sporting of Portugal have agreed a formal link-up, say the Premier League champions.

The clubs will exchange players and scouting information and join together to develop young talent through the co-operation agreement.

United will also travel to Lisbon to play a friendly against Sporting on August 6 to mark the opening of their new 52,000-seat Jose Alvalade Stadium, one of the venues for the 2004 European championship finals.

"I'm delighted that we are joining forces with Sporting."

We've had many meetings with the club and they have the same ambitions, foresight and philosophy as us, and I know it will be a great partnership," United manager Alex Ferguson said in a statement on Friday.

Keegan keen on McManaman

Football

INTERNET, Manchester

Manchester City boss Kevin Keegan is launching an ambitious to bring Steve McManaman back to the Premiership, according to newspaper reports.

The Real Madrid midfielder has one year remaining on his current contract at the Spanish giants but is reportedly tiring at his lack of regular first-team football.

And Keegan believes the oppor-

ty is believed to be McManaman's salary.

The 31-year-old is reported to be on £65,000-a-week in Spain.

But Real are keen to cut their vast wage bill and, as such, are said to be willing to part with the player on a free transfer.

McManaman has played under Keegan before, when the ex-Newcastle manager was in charge of the England national side.

And Keegan is hopeful the player's arrival will reignite Fowler's goal-scoring talent next season.



STEVE McMANAMAN

tunity for the former

Liverpool star to team up with best friend Robbie Fowler could seal the move.

The only major stumbling block

Should the deal go through, McManaman would replace Marc-Vivien Foe, who has returned to Lyon after a year-long loan at Maine Road.

Ferdinand's fitness fear

Football

REUTERS, London

Central defender Rio Ferdinand is a fitness concern for England's Euro 2004 qualifying match against Slovakia at Middlesbrough on June 11.

The Manchester United player told newspapers on Saturday he was worried about a knee injury that has been troubling him recently.

"I have had it for a little bit of the season, especially at the back end," Ferdinand was quoted as saying. "I am hoping it is not that serious but it is gradually getting worse and causing pain."

"I am just keeping my fingers crossed. I am going to La Manga (in Spain) with the England squad and I will see the physiotherapists and assess what happens from there."

The squad will be in La Manga preparing for a friendly with Serbia and Montenegro on June 3 and the Euro 2004 tie with Slovakia eight days later.



RIO FERDINAND

Ferdinand played the first 45 minutes of England's 2-1 friendly victory over South Africa in Durban on Thursday.

Coach Sven-Goran Eriksson is already without central defenders Sol Campbell, Jonathan Woodgate and Wes Brown for the Slovakia match due to injury.

Full-back Gary Neville, who can play in the middle, is also unavailable while John Terry is doubtful with a thigh strain.

Bowyer to join Magpies

Football

REUTERS, Newcastle

Controversial midfielder Lee Bowyer has agreed a four-year contract with Newcastle United.

Newcastle manager Bobby Robson moved quickly to secure the former Leeds player's services when he became a free agent after being released by West Ham United who were relegated from the premier league two weeks ago.

"Newcastle United today announced that they have agreed terms with England international Lee Bowyer on a four-year con-

tract," the club said in a statement on Friday.

(Newcastle) chairman Freddy Shepherd and manager Sir Bobby Robson met with the player yesterday to finalise matters.

"They are confident that Lee will be an asset to Newcastle United. There is no transfer/compensation fee involved. The player, who is now away on holiday, will undergo a medical examination on his return."

The 26-year-old former Charlton player, who has one full England cap, has a chequered past.

He was cleared of all charges after being involved in a protracted court case over an assault on a student in Leeds in 2000.

Eriksson defends players

AFP, London

England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson on Friday jumped to the defence of eight squad members following criticism of their decision not to travel to meet former South African president Nelson Mandela in Johannesburg.

Eriksson said he understood their decision to rest ahead of Thursday night's 2-1 friendly win over South Africa, rather than making the early-morning return flight to meet Mandela on the eve of the match.

South Africa captain Lucas Radebe had expressed his surprise at the decision of Paul Scholes, Phil Neville, Paul Robinson, Danny Mills, Gareth Barry, Joe Cole, Gareth Southgate and Steven Gerrard not to make the trip.

"I'm very unhappy and quite frankly astonished at the criticism that has been levelled at some of the England players in recent days as they chose not to make the trip to meet Nelson Mandela," said Eriksson.



Molefe says sorry

Football

AFP, London

Thabang Molefe, whose challenge broke a bone in David Beckham's thumb, has apologised and said he did not mean to harm the England captain.

The 23-year-old South Africa defender clashed with Beckham in the first half of the friendly international in Durban, breaking his scaphoid, the bone leading from the thumb to the wrist.

Molefe said he wanted a Zulu healer to aid Beckham's recovery. "I will now use a Ju-ju man to make him feel better," he told Saturday's Sun newspaper. "He will not use medicine from a hospital, but instead he will use leaves and trees."

"I feel sorry for him. I only real-

ised after the match that his thumb was broken," Molefe continued. "I tried to talk to him, but the media were all around him. If I had spoken to him I would have apologised."

He added: "I am a United fan. Beckham is a very big player, one of the best in the world. Injury is part of the game. But my intention was to clear the ball - I wasn't going for his arm or any part of his body."

"I am a Manchester United fan. I respect Beckham very much."

Beckham could be in plaster for up to two months but is expected to be fit enough for Manchester United's tour of the United States in July.

Beckham winced with pain after the foul for which Molefe was cautioned and he made way for Jermaine Jenas six minutes into the second half of Thursday's match.



DAVID BECKHAM

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 38 Teller's partner 1 Brewery ingredient 5 Commercial 8 Hurries along 12 Tend texts 13 Brother of Shemp 14 "...with sugar?" 15 Long, thin candy 17 Tat lead-in 18 U.N. dream 19 Job, e.g. 21 Eccentric 24 Here-there link 25 Pugilistic ploys 28 Put an end to 30 Squid squirt 33 Mis-inform 34 Buenos Aires 35 Prompt 36 Harem room 37 Iditarod terminus

Crossword grid with numbers 1-53

CRYPTOQUIP L Z Q H G P F M D T H Q T Z V V M J B , W A H J G N Z V F Q W G J Z F J U H F V T W P D W G L B D G F U J Q F M D N Z P P A D Q . Yesterday's Cryptoquip: ASKED HOW HER NEW COUCH WAS WORKING OUT, SHE SAW FIT TO ANSWER, "SOFA, SO GOOD!" Today's Cryptoquip clue: P equals G The Cryptoquip 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.