



PATRICK KLUIVERT

'Sign Kluivert'

Football

INTERNET, London

Manchester United striker Ruud van Nistelrooy has once again urged his club to sign his fellow Holland international Patrick Kluivert from Barcelona.

The Barclaycard Premiership's leading goalscorer believes the pairing would be a match for anyone as the Red Devils aim to repeat their 1999 Champions League triumph next season.

Van Nistelrooy told The Sun: "We could be the best scoring partnership in the world."

"We love working together and I would love it even more if we could practise together every day and play together at club level. We will be a fantastic partnership."

Kluivert's future at the Nou Camp is uncertain as the club enters a period of transition, with a presidential election looming.

Van Nistelrooy added: "Some-

times when Patrick and I play together it is just 'there' between us and that is the time you feel how special football can be for fans and players.

"I cherish those times when we just click in the middle of a game or a training session with Holland."

Meanwhile, another of van Nistelrooy's international teammates Roy Makaay has indicated his desire to move to Old Trafford after learning his current club Deportivo La Coruna have no plans to offer him an improved deal.

Makaay, who scored 40 goals in all competitions last season, told the Daily Mirror: "Two years ago I offered them (Deportivo) the chance to improve my deal and I would give them a very long contract extension because I liked it here so much."

"But there has been no response to my offer so that told me I wasn't valued."

"I know that Barcelona and Bayern Munich are interested but my preferred move would be to Manchester United."



ARSENE WENGER

Wenger staying put

Football

INTERNET, London

Arsene Wenger has refuted his agent's suggestion that he could quit Arsenal in a fortnight.

The Gunners boss has been linked with Real Madrid and met Real chairman Florentino Perez last week.

Agent Marc Roger had claimed the Arsenal board were not giving Wenger sufficient funds to realise his dream of winning the Champions League. And he predicted that the former Monaco manager could walk out on the FA Cup winners.

But Wenger, who has been at Highbury for six-and-a-half years, said he intends to stay with the

Gunners. "It is simple," he told the club's official website.

"I am committed to Arsenal and will not get involved in any of this speculation."

Arsenal insisted earlier this week they were 'not perturbed' by the reports.

A club statement on Tuesday added: "Arsene himself has reiterated his commitment to the club on a number of occasions and we see no reason to pass further comment on the subject."

French sports paper L'Equipe had reported earlier that Wenger had met Real president Florentino Perez in Paris.

The paper reported that Wenger met Perez, Real's director of sport Jorge Valdano and agent Marc Roger in the departures lounge at

Orly airport in Paris last Friday afternoon and that the party then adjourned to a hotel.

Wenger, contacted by L'Equipe later, limited himself to saying: "I met lots of people on Friday."

He then told the paper: "I am still contracted for two years at Arsenal and I will go to the end of this engagement."

"We will see what happens after that but I could even stay at Arsenal."

Del Bosque's current deal expires in the summer and, after the club were eliminated in the Champions League semifinals by Juventus, the outgoing European champions put contract talks on hold.

Shevchenko honoured

REUTERS, Kiev

AC Milan striker Andriy Shevchenko has been awarded Ukraine's 'Merited Master of Sports' honour by the country's State Sports Committee, it was announced on Friday.

Shevchenko scored the decisive penalty in a shootout to give Milan a 3-2 victory over rival Italians Juventus in Wednesday's Champions League final.

The award is Ukraine's highest sports honour, a legacy from the Soviet era usually presented to Olympic or world champions.

Nakata for Chelsea?

AFP, Tokyo

Japan international Hidetoshi Nakata is to trade in his jersey from Italian Serie A side Parma to sign a contract with English Premiership side Chelsea, a news report said Saturday.

The three-year deal, with an estimated transfer fee of 10 million pounds (16.35 million dollars, 13.89 million euro), will be signed in the next several days, the Tokyo Chunichi Sports newspaper said, citing a source close to Chelsea.

Executives of the club and 26-year-old Nakata already met in London in early May, the source told the newspaper.

Japanese television networks have already begun contacting Chelsea TV, the club's official station, for the rights to broadcast from practice sessions.

Voeller blasts Basler

REUTERS, Wolfsburg

Germany coach Rudi Voeller has hit back at former German striker Mario Basler for his criticism of the team as boring and straight-laced.

"Instead of drinking five half-litre bottles of beer and smoking a pack of Marlboros in 10 minutes, he would have been better off listening to what trainers had to say now and then," Voeller told reporters at a news conference on Friday.

"He got far too little out of the talent that God gave him," Voeller added in a rare attack from the normally mild-mannered coach.

"I would wish he would show a bit more self-criticism. Instead of criticising players who work their arses off for their clubs and Germany, he should take a critical look at his own career."

Rooney in but Rio out

Football

AFP, London

England centre-half Rio Ferdinand is to miss the friendly international against Serbia-Montenegro on Tuesday and the Euro 2004 qualifier with Slovakia on June 11, because of a knee injury.

The former West Ham and Leeds defender, 24, is now due to have surgery next week.

Following an examination by club medical staff Friday, United said in a statement on their official website: "Rio Ferdinand's left knee was examined today and following discussions between the Manchester United medical team and the England doctor it was felt to be in Rio's best interests that he undergo an arthroscopy (keyhole surgery) at the beginning of next week."

"As a result, he will be unavailable for the next two England games."

England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson said: "We are very disappointed to lose Rio Ferdinand but this is obviously the right decision for medical reasons."

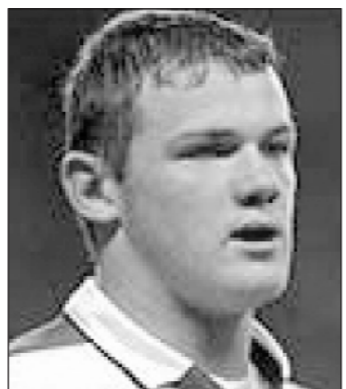
"I would like to emphasise the excellent co-operation between Manchester United and ourselves over this issue."

Eriksson will not be calling up a replacement for the matches at Middlesbrough and Leicester

respectively.

Ferdinand, who became Britain's most expensive player when he joined United for 29 million pounds (46 million dollars) from Leeds in 2002, sustained the injury while playing last week's friendly win over South Africa.

But there was better news for Eriksson and England when Everton said Friday their teenage forward Wayne Rooney would be fit for the Serbia-Montenegro match.



WAYNE ROONEY

In a statement on their official website, Everton said that having examined the teenage forward's knee injury following his return from England's training camp at La Manga, Spain, they were satisfied he was fit.

Everton physiotherapist Mick Rathbone said: "We have checked

Wayne out today. He has trained in the past few days and reported no reaction so he will join up with the squad on Sunday."

The Goodison Park club's announcement will come as a relief to Eriksson following the club's country row over Rooney's international availability that the Swede has had with Everton manager David Moyes.

Rooney, 17, sustained the injury during the 2-1 league defeat by Manchester United earlier this



RIO FERDINAND

month and after the game Moyes confirmed he was withdrawing him from the South Africa trip.

However, the Football Association insisted on verifying Rooney's fitness for themselves following statements by Moyes that he did not want his young striker playing too many matches.

Leeds won't let Kewell go

Football

INTERNET, London

Leeds chairman John McKenzie insists the club will do all it can to hang on to star player Harry Kewell.

The Australian forward has again been strongly linked to Manchester United and Arsenal, with Arsene Wenger reportedly ready to offer Ray Parlour plus cash in exchange for Kewell.

Leeds are still in financial difficulty, with debts in the region of 80 million pounds after over-stretching themselves under former chairman Peter Ridsdale.

But McKenzie regards Kewell as a major asset and is reluctant to sell, even though he knows the player can leave on a free transfer under the Bosman ruling in 12 months' time.

He told the Yorkshire Post: "We remain hopeful that we can sign Harry to a new deal but it does depend on whether he is hell-bent on playing in the Champions



HARRY KEWELL

League next season.

"I hope he will stay and Leeds manager Peter Reid wants him to stay, but if we are not successful in persuading him to sign a new deal then we are not going to sell him for silly money."

"Even if he wants to leave, it has to be a deal that is right for the club and which mirrors our investment in him over the years."

"We are not seeking to sell anybody unless they feel they want to leave."

Lippi might resign

AFP, Rome

Juventus coach Marcello Lippi said Friday he would quit if he fails to guide the Italian club to Champions League success next season.

Juventus lost to AC Milan on penalties in Wednesday's all-Italian final in Manchester, Lippi's third failure in four European Cup finals as coach of the Turin club.

"We will try again with all our energy to win the Champions League final next year. If we do I will stay, otherwise I'll leave to spend more time with my grandson Lorenzo," said Lippi, whose contract ends in 2005 but has a one-year extension clause.

"To have only won twice in seven finals (in the club's history) is a poor return for a team like Juventus that has won more league championships than anyone (in Serie A). I'm determined to get us to a fifth final."

His only triumph was against Ajax in Rome in 1996, but Lippi is far from disheartened by his record on Europe's biggest stage.

"I don't feel like a loser. I am a coach who always puts out a team prepared to give 100 per cent."

"In six and a half years at Juventus I have always won something and in the year I was sacked I took the team to the European Cup quarter-finals."

"If you win you're a hero and if you lose you're an idiot," added Lippi, in his second spell with the Serie A champions.

Kanoute set for Spurs?

Football

INTERNET, London

Frederic Kanoute wants to join Tottenham and could leave relegated West Ham within a fortnight.

The French striker's agent, Willie McKay, said the Hammers are negotiating a four million deal for the 24-year-old forward with Spurs.

And he confirmed Kanoute, who scored five goals in 17 games in an injury-hit season, is eager to move to White Hart Lane.

McKay said: "Freddie is very keen to go to Tottenham because he feels it would be a great move for him."

"He is disappointed he didn't play many games last year because he thinks if he had then West Ham

wouldn't have gone down.

"He's been to America and has now had his injury problems sorted out."

McKay added in an interview with BBC Sport: "There has been interest from other Premiership clubs, but Freddie believes

Tottenham are best suited to him and he thinks he could strike up a good partnership with Robbie Keane."

"Freddie obviously wants to play in the Premiership and Glenn Hoddie has told the Spurs chairman, Daniel Levy, that Freddie is the player he wants."

"At the moment it's a question of price and it's down to the two clubs to agree on one, but I think it will be in the region of four million pounds."

"West Ham probably would have wanted more and last year they probably would have got more, but it is a buyer's market now."