



WHAT DO YOU THINK? A combo picture showing English superstar David Beckham and his wife Victoria (top) during their visit to in June and a Japanese female pet owner putting a mask of Beckham with her four-year-old female poodle Jyo-jyo as a look-a-like of Victoria during the 'Look-Alike Pet Contest' in Tokyo yesterday.

Bundesliga stars lose privilege

AFP, Berlin

Tax breaks for Germany's highly-paid footballers for working unsociable hours were voted out by the country's parliament, the Bundestag, on Friday.

The tax breaks, aimed to benefit nurses, transport workers and other traditionally low-paid but vital jobs, were also benefiting professional footballers.

The revelation in September that 2001/02 German champions Borussia Dortmund were paying bonuses free of taxes sparked a storm of protest in Germany and led Finance Minister Hans Eichel to promise the law would be changed.

Under the new law, payments for night working paid by clubs to players are limited to 12.5 euros, with a 25-euro limit for working on Sunday.

Spitting ban on Mihajlovic



AFP, Nyon

Lazio's Sinisa Mihajlovic was suspended for eight matches by UEFA on Friday for spitting at Chelsea's Romanian striker Adrian Mutu during the Italian side's 4-0 Champions League defeat this week.

The Serbian was also punished for improper conduct towards a UEFA official after being sent off for a foul on Damien Duff which earned him a second yellow card in the

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SINISA MIHAJLOVIC

Viduka at it again

AFP, Leeds

Australian striker Mark Viduka's career at Leeds appeared to be over on Friday after another confrontation with the struggling Premiership club's manager Peter Reid.

Viduka was left out of the squad which travelled to Portsmouth for Saturday's Premiership clash after what the official Leeds website described as "a fresh training ground bust-up" with Reid.

Reid confirmed that Viduka had been "dropped from the squad following a training ground incident," but would not comment further.

Viduka was also dropped by Reid for last week's defeat by Arsenal and subsequently fined by the club after turning up late for training and the match itself.

Giggs relishing Anfield challenge

AFP, Liverpool

Ryan Giggs is planning to rub salt into the wounds created by Manchester United's current ascendancy over Liverpool in English football's fiercest rivalry.

Giggs and his United team-mates travel to Anfield on Sunday in search of a victory that could effectively kill off Liverpool's receding hopes of forcing their way back into this season's title race.

A win would also represent another step by Giggs towards his goal of ousting a trio of Anfield legends from the record books.

Alan Hansen, Phil Neal and Kenny Dalglish, stalwarts of the great Liverpool teams of the late seventies and early eighties, all won eight championship medals - an achievement Giggs equalled when United won their eighth Premiership title last season.

Now the Welsh winger has set his sights on making the record his exclusive property.

"It's a big target for me. To win eight is great, but there are a few others on eight as well, all from Liverpool, so hopefully I can get to nine this season," Giggs said.

Underpinning the rivalry is the fact that United have, in the last decade, dominated English football as comprehensively as Liverpool did during their glory years.

It is a situation which rankles with Liverpool fans and has clearly contributed to the intense pressure on manager Gerard Houllier to construct a team capable of knocking United off their perch.

The Frenchman himself has implicitly acknowledged the need to shake things up at Anfield with his attempts to forge a more attacking style following the summer acquisition of Australian Harry Kewell.

At times Liverpool have looked like genuine title contenders. But the transformation has also suffered from teething problems which have contributed to four defeats in 11 games and left Houllier's men ten points off the pace being set by Premiership leaders Arsenal.

The contrast with a year ago when Liverpool were sitting comfortably at the top of the table could not be more marked.

But Liverpool fans will also remember that the promising start was followed by a winter collapse which ultimately saw their side slide to fifth and miss out on a place in the Champions League.

The slide was accelerated by defeat at the hands of United at Anfield in a match which will always represent a painful memory for Liverpool goalkeeper Jerzy Dudek.

Two howlers presented Liverpool's bitter rivals with victory and ended with the 30-year-old being replaced by Chris Kirkland as Houllier's first choice goalkeeper.

The Poland international is now back to his very best and claims he has banished the demons of the worst afternoon of his career.

"I know what happened, but for me I have only the good memories about that game," he said. "I do not want to play it any more in my mind, we will see what happens next time."

It remains to be seen however whether Dudek has truly recovered from the agonising moment when he allowed the ball to slip through his legs for Diego Forlan to score the simplest of goals.

Forlan went on to claim a second goal courtesy of another Dudek error and the Liverpool goalkeeper will have to come face to face with the Uruguayan again on Sunday.

Fergie's top five



Football

AFP, Manchester

The race for this season's Premiership title will see Liverpool making a late resurgence to join Manchester United, Chelsea, Arsenal and Newcastle in a five-horse race, says United manager Alex Ferguson.

Title-holders United, currently in third place, are being kept in line by leaders Arsenal and second-placed Chelsea with only two points separating the top three.

However Ferguson expects Liverpool, languishing in eighth place just above Newcastle but 10 points behind Arsenal, to bounce back and stake a late claim among the more obvious contenders for the championship.

Gerard Houllier's side are beginning to make their way out of an early season slump and Ferguson believes that the Reds' change to a more attack-minded game could pay dividends - beginning Sunday when United pay a much anticipated visit to Anfield.

"This may be another occasion where they will have a go," said



ALEX FERGUSON

Ferguson.

"It should make for an open match, and I am looking forward to it. This is always a prime fixture for us. It's probably the most important fixture of the season, irrespective of Arsenal's and our domination of the Premier League over last few years.

"Historically in this area it is a big,

big game. Liverpool, as well as Newcastle, have started to pick up their form. I have no doubt the five we spoke about at the start of the season will be there."

Ferguson will again look to Roy Keane to stamp his mark on the game. The former Republic of Ireland midfielder was outstanding in the Champions League victory against Rangers in midweek.

Ferguson claims that Keane is now very much a father figure in the dressing room as well as being a leader on the pitch.

"We have said it time and time again that he is the biggest influence in the club," said Ferguson.

"When he's on the field there is a completely different aspect to the game. Everyone is on their toes; he keeps everyone going. That's how he's made his name in the game. The players absolutely adore and respect Roy Keane.

"If there are any problems in the ground he is the first to come and see me. If any lad has got a problem he will come and see me on their behalf. That's the great role of a captain."

Kaiser questions Bayern character

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich president Franz Beckenbauer has thrown down the gauntlet to the German champions' team of under-achieving stars by asking if they have any character at all.

Bayern, who are struggling to make their normally incisive impact on the Bundesliga this season, have recently fallen to successive defeats at the hands of league rivals Schalke 04 and French outfit Lyon.

A 2-1 Champions League home reverse against Lyon on Wednesday, in which recent Bayern reject Elber scored the winning goal for Lyon, has only deepened Bayern's current crisis.

And Beckenbauer, who says he is starting to get annoyed with all the excuses on the team's lack of success, has called for the team to show some true grit out on the pitch.

"I can not understand how one of the best teams in Europe has looked so disjointed for the past two matches," Beckenbauer told German daily Bild. "There is no sense of enjoyment, no movement off the ball."

Borussia Dortmund are Bayern's next opponents and the 'Kaiser' claims Sunday's match against their arch rivals will be a test of character.

"Against Dortmund we will find out whether the team has character," insisted Beckenbauer.

"We are facing elimination from the Champions League and no-man's land in the Bundesliga so we need people with character.

"We need people who are willing to fight and show passion on the pitch."

Bayern defender Willy Sagnol recently claimed the side lacked a leader on the pitch and such talk has not gone down well with the Kaiser.

"What gets on my nerves is this constant talk of leaders," declared Beckenbauer. "In this team there have to be eleven leaders."

Bayern sit fourth in the Bundesliga, six points adrift of leaders VfB Stuttgart.



PHOTO: REUTERS

STAYING POSITIVE! Perugia's Saadi Gadhafi watches his team's UEFA Cup match against Aris Salonika at the Renato Curi stadium in Perugia on November 6.

Gadhafi acting brave



Football

AP, Perugia

The soccer-playing son of Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi vowed Friday to continue his career in Italy's top division despite a suspension following a failed doping test.

Saadi Gadhafi's suspension was announced Thursday pending a follow-up test. He faces a ban of up to two years if the second test is also positive.

"This event has made my desire to train and play in Serie A grow bigger," Gadhafi was quoted as saying by the ANSA news agency.

Gadhafi has not played since joining Serie A team Perugia in a much publicized deal in June.

"What I'm thinking about now, as a professional player, is the fact that I'm not training," he told Italian reporters in a downtown hotel where he has been living since joining the team. "My thought is going back to playing, to training."

Gadhafi was found to have an excessive amount of a performance-enhancing steroid norandrosterone in his system after a 0-0 draw with Reggina on Oct. 5. Players are randomly chosen for testing after every match, regardless of whether they take the field.

Gadhafi said he likely tested positive due to medicine he took for his ailing back -- a possibility that had already been raised by Perugia officials.

"There has been a mistake," he told private TG-5 television. "I will go to all the doctors who have examined me."

But he also indicated he didn't want to blame soccer authorities.

"The Olympic Committee and the Italian Federation are doing their job. I've got nothing to say against them," he said.

ANSA said Gadhafi planned to join his national team in Tunisia this weekend in his position as vice president of the Libyan soccer federation.

On Thursday night, Gadhafi was cheered by Perugia fans as he showed up at the stadium to watch his team defeat Aris 2-0 in a UEFA Cup match.

Brazil to support SA only if...



AFP, Pretoria

Brazilian President 5, visiting South Africa, backed the country's bid to host the 2010 World Cup -- but on condition that the South Africans put up no obstacles to a win by Brazil.

South African President Thabo Mbeki surprised dinner guests at a state banquet in Pretoria on Friday evening by asking Lula to endorse the bid.

Lula in turn astounded the same audience by responding positively and without hesitation.

"We are hoping to host the 2010 World Cup and we are certain of doing this with the support of Brazil," Mbeki said.

"With your distinguished football record, the International Football Federation (FIFA) can hardly refuse if

Brazil says the cup must go to South Africa."

Lula replied: "Brazil will have no doubt about supporting South Africa to



LUIZ INACIO LULA DA SILVA

host the World Cup.

"There is only on provision, however. You cannot create any impediment to Brazil winning the cup in 2010," he told the laughing dinner guests.

The competition among African candidates to host the 2010 World Cup intensified last month when French President Jacques Chirac

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Real to protest



Football

AP, Zurich

Real Madrid said Thursday it planned to appeal a FIFA decision that it must pay Inter Milan another euro10 million (US\$11.5 million) for the transfer of Brazilian striker Ronaldo.

On Wednesday, world soccer's ruling body said Real Madrid must pay the fee within 30 days but has the right to lodge an appeal to the FIFA Executive Committee within 20 days. FIFA said it had yet to receive Real Madrid's appeal, but added that it was unlikely to come until close to the deadline.

A Real Madrid spokeswoman said the club could not comment further for the moment.

FIFA said that, contrary to various figures reported Wednesday, the additional payment will bring to euro45 million (US\$51.5 million) the total amount Real Madrid is having to pay Inter for the Brazilian striker.

The original deal in August 2002 was a euro35 million (now US\$40 million) fee. However, Madrid was to pay an extra euro10 million if it refused to allow a player of Inter's

choice to join the Italian club in January 2003.

The Italian powerhouse had complained to FIFA that it was owed the supplemental fee because the player of its choice --



RONALDO

midfielder Santiago Solari -- refused to move to Inter.

But according to a news report in the leading Spanish sports daily, Madrid said it feels it has a case because Inter made Solari a "ridiculous offer," which "infringed the terms of the transfer specified in the contract agreed with Madrid and Inter."

Inter Milan was forced to transfer Ronaldo, one of the world's best

strikers, to Real Madrid in the 2002 off season following his feud with Argentine coach Hector Cuper. His departure brought criticism from the Italian club, who said it was an act of betrayal.

Since Cuper was fired as Inter coach, Ronaldo has been quoted in the Italian press saying he would now consider returning to Inter at some point.

Inter president Massimo Moratti's latest response was that it is unlikely Ronaldo would return.

"We've chosen separate roads," Moratti said, "although it's nice to hear that from him."

Ronaldo, a three-time winner of the FIFA Player of the Year award, is currently the Spanish league's leading scorer. On Saturday, the Brazilian ended a three-game scoreless spell, netting twice to lead Real Madrid to a 3-0 home win over Athletic de Bilbao.

It brought his season tally to eight and lifted Real Madrid to the top of the Spanish league standings jointly with Valencia.

French soccer player Zinedine Zidane remains the world's most expensive player, moving to Real from Juventus at the end of the 2000-2001 season for US\$65 million, still a record in the sport.



PHOTO: AFP

LIKE HUSBAND LIKE WIFE: Big supermarkets chairman Sergio Maia unveils a poster showing Milene Dominguez, wife of Brazilian superstar Ronaldo during a press conference to announce a new advertising campaign in Sao Paulo on November 6. Milene's husband Ronaldo too was hired by French supermarkets Carrefour for the same promotional purpose just a few months ago.