

# United's summer of discontent

Football

INTERNET, undated

Even the World Cup could not completely overshadow it.

Manchester United's summer of discontent is several months old - indeed, its roots lie in February - and is by no means over. The unhappy include Ruud van Nistelrooy, simmering after his omission from the Carling Cup and forced into outright opposition after being banished from the Charlton game. Also among their number is Cristiano Ronaldo, publicly eyeing up a move to Spain and vocal in his criticisms of Sir Alex Ferguson and David Gill.

And a third, albeit with a very different perspective from the other two, is Ferguson. Having waged a guerrilla war to keep Wayne Rooney out of the World Cup, he now has to deal with the repercussions of his participation in it.

Having deemed van Nistelrooy more dispensable than his supposed adversary Ronaldo, he now faces the prospect of losing both. And having declared his intention to complete his transfer dealings by the time Germany returned to normality, he is yet to finalise a signing.

Conclusive proof that the Glazers will back their manager with the funds to compete with Europe's wealthiest clubs is yet to arrive. If Ronaldo's restlessness and Old Trafford's apparent lack of allure are symptoms of Ferguson's declining powers, he remains as combative as ever, as van Nistelrooy has discovered; whether public alienating a prized player is the best way of realising his market value in the transfer market is another point.

Ronaldo, almost a decade younger, has tired of the invective and bile directed at him since Rooney's red card in Gelsenkirchen. The unsettling effect of Real Madrid's presidential election, coupled with the warmer climes of Spain and an atmosphere unpolluted by his enemies, has led him to regard La Liga as a preferable home.

There was talk of a rapprochement between Rooney and Ronaldo but the Portuguese, it appears, is not for budging. Repeated assertions that the winger is not for sale are not designed to placate the Portuguese; it is too soon to tell if they will deter potential buyers.

But United, often the pursuer of supposedly unavailable players, are now experiencing a taste of their own medicine.

And even for Ferguson, it is a novel situation. He has orchestrated the departure of Old Trafford

heroes in the past; others have gone with his tacit acceptance, but none of their leading lights has left against his express wishes. Ronaldo could belong in an entirely new category to David Beckham, Juan Sebastian Veron, Jaap Stam, Paul Ince and Andrei Kanchelskis.

The impact of Ronaldo's departure would be felt, and not just in the forthcoming season. The long-term plan was that the generation of

Veron and Beckham that should have financed the construction of a new team.

Instead United could start the season with the two fixtures in midfield being Ryan Giggs and Paul Scholes, constants over a decade and more. It is proof of their longevity, but hardly the sign of a bright new dawn.

For too much of the past three seasons, they have been

van der Sar's new understudy.

The alternatives to Rooney are more problematic. Unless Torres arrives, Louis Saha's mobility and unselfishness will earn him the role of the most advanced attacker. But the options only range from the untried (Giuseppe Rossi) to the unfit (Alan Smith); the latter is a category that usually includes Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, more icon than player in recent seasons.

Replicating Chelsea's awesome strength in depth - with Andriy Shevchenko added to Didier Drogha and Hernan Crespo in attack and a midfield replenished by Michael Ballack and Salomon Kalou - is impossible. But overcoming the disruption to the midfield and attack by acquiring three enviable recruits to finally wrest United out of transition might not be.

With all previous Keane impersonators fluffing their lines - indeed, Ferguson is yet to successfully replace Nicky Butt, let alone his greatest captain - there is the sense that no one individual should be saddled with that toughest of tasks. Instead, acquiring two midfielders with a combination of attributes could suffice.

Carrick, pursued for much of the summer, offers excellence in distribution and acute positional sense, but not the capacity to dominate. Vieira, if his renaissance at the World Cup provides an accurate guide, has the drive, while Juventus' relegation may be the stroke of fortune Ferguson requires. Milan, spared Serie B, may still be able to discourage the Scot, a long-term admirer of Gattuso.

Wherever his attention falls, time is at a premium. United, minus many of their foremost players, are already in South Africa in preparation. That imports' acclimatisation to the English game and British buys' burgeoning understanding with new team-mates matters is proved by recent seasons.

United, often riddled by injuries and struggling to accommodate newcomers, have been lacklustre off the blocks, while Chelsea have wasted little time in stamping their authority on the Premiership.

Giggs warned this week that another slow start could result in a fourth successive season without a title. The best antidote to the recent past - or to the potential loss of Ronaldo - is venture into the transfer market and recruit the calibre and quantity of players that United require.

Because, if history repeats itself at Old Trafford, a summer of discontent could be followed by a winter of discontent. And that, assuredly, is worse.



ALEX FERGUSON

Fergie's Fledglings would be eased out, replaced by the Scot's big boys.

Fundamental to them were the three Rs - Rooney, Ronaldo and Rio [Ferdinand], acquired at a combined cost of £70 million. A fourth R - Ruud van Nistelrooy - may have identified himself more with the earlier era, with men such as Roy Keane and Beckham who now form United's past, and in the process condemned himself to their history books.

The emergence of Rooney as the focal point of the attack helped seal his fate. Deprived of Ronaldo, it would look less like another all-conquering team and more like continued transition, an uneasy state United have lurked in since 2003, the year of their last title and the multi-million pound sales of

marooned in a midfield wasteland, where undistinguished signings were accompanied by converted defenders or forwards. Keane's move into retirement - via Celtic - only compounded the need for high-quality arrivals.

Lacking van Nistelrooy, set to be reunited with Beckham at the Bernabeu if a transfer to Real Madrid proceeds, there would be a need for attacking reinforcements too.

And the shortlist seems star-studded: supposed targets include Fernando Torres, Patrick Vieira, Gennaro Gattuso, Andrea Pirlo, Javier Mascherano, Mahammadou Diarra, Marcos Senna and Michael Carrick. The first newcomer, however, seems rather more underwhelming: Tomasz Kuszczak, set to become Edwin

falling out with then manager Graeme Souness. The striker insists he must thank Rush for his move from Blackburn. Bellamy said: "I used to hound Rushie all the time when I was 18 and 19 and around the Welsh squad."

"Basically I was telling him he was my hero, and he used to say 'yeah, cheers for that'. I was just a kid at the time, but he had a big part in me joining Liverpool. He has said nice things about me in his newspaper columns - they came at the right time. I appreciate that. He was my hero and I can't thank him enough."

"I am following some great Welsh strikers at Liverpool, my

# Bellamy wants to emulate hero

Football

INTERNET, undated

The Wales striker Craig Bellamy has hailed his hero Ian Rush for the part he played in his £6.5m "dream move" to Liverpool.

Bellamy, who recently turned 27 and has scored nine goals in 35 games for his country, says Rush is his idol and he aims to live up to the faith shown in him by Liverpool and Wales' record goalscorer.

Bellamy, who scored on his Liverpool debut yesterday in a 2-0 friendly win at Wrexham, left Newcastle 18 months ago in acrimonious circumstances after



PHOTO: AFP

Welsh striker Craig Bellamy speaks at a press conference at Liverpool club in north-west England on Friday.

# Milan insist no departures

INTERNET, undated

AC Milan are adamant there will be no big-name departures this summer despite their absence from next season's Champions League.

Milan were docked 44 points from their 2005/06 tally for their part in the Italian match-fixing scandal, meaning they will miss out on European football's premier club competition when the new campaign resumes.

They will also start the 2006/07 season in Serie A with a 15-point deficit.

Despite the loss of income generated by the Champions League, Milan insist they do not need to balance the books by selling their more valuable players.

"No-one will leave," said a statement on the club's official website.

Milan did sell Andriy Shevchenko to Chelsea earlier this summer as the Ukrainian was eager to join the Premiership champions. However, the club has reiterated he is an exception to the rule.

"After Shevchenko there will be no others," continued the statement.

"Milan wants to make it clear, to everyone and with the utmost respect and seriousness, that contracts will be respected."

# PSV eye Kromkamp

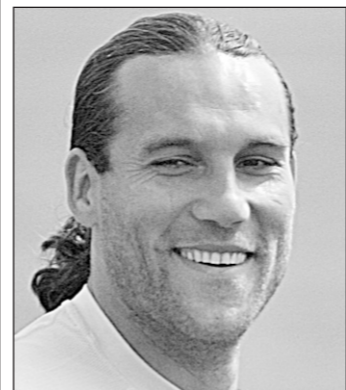
INTERNET, undated

PSV Eindhoven chairman Rob Westerhof has confirmed he is pursuing a move for Liverpool full-back Jan Kromkamp.

The Holland international moved to Merseyside in January from Villarreal in a swap deal for Josemi, but has failed to make the right-back slot his own, making 10 of his 17 appearances as a substitute.

"We have contacted Liverpool to ask what Kromkamp's status is," Westerhof told Voetbal International.

"They made it clear his situation is pretty hazy. We don't know if we can loan him or if we must buy him. Maybe we will get some clarity soon."



DADO PRSO

# Prso calls time on Croatia

INTERNET, undated

Croatia and Rangers striker Dado Prso has confirmed his retirement from international football.

The 32-year-old had hinted the World Cup finals would be his last appearance for his country and the former Monaco forward has confirmed he wants to focus solely on his Ibrox career under manager Paul Le Guen.

Croatian football association president Vlatko Markovic said: "Dado has been one of the best players Croatia have had over the past few years."

"But the strain of playing in four tournaments - the Scottish league, the Scottish Cup, Europe and internationals - would have proved too much for him."

"Something had to go and he chose to give up playing for Croatia."

# Corradi close to Man City

INTERNET, undated

Former Italy striker Bernardo Corradi will be unveiled as a Manchester City player later today, according to the player's agent.

City have agreed terms with Valencia over a transfer fee thought to be in the region of £1million for the 30-year-old. "We are currently in Manchester negotiating Corradi's contract with City," Moreno Roggi said.

"Everything has been agreed between the clubs and I think in a couple of hours' time, the player will have signed his contract."

"Corradi is very happy." Corradi spent last season on loan at Parma after a disappointing spell in Spain.

Parma had hoped to exercise an option to keep the striker for a further season but Valencia chose to receive the money generated by a permanent transfer.

Corradi made 35 Serie A appearances for Parma, hitting 10 goals to help the club finish in a respectable 11th position.

# Wenger steers clear of bargains

Football

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger said on Tuesday the Gunners won't get involved in the race to pick up bargain buys at scandal-hit Juventus because they can't afford it.

The Italian giants were relegated to Serie B and were penalised 30 points for their part in the country's match-fixing scandal which saw Lazio and Fiorentina also demoted.

A host of big names are expected to leave Juventus, who were also stripped of their last two titles and banned from the Champions League.

Real Madrid, Barcelona and

Manchester United have already been linked with the likes of Italy's World Cup winning skipper Fabio Cannavaro and former Gunners star Patrick Vieira.

But Wenger won't be reaching for the cheque book.

"This situation is disturbing the market because you have a flow of players coming out," Wenger told the club's official website, www.arsenal.com.

"But don't forget that the players of Juventus are very well paid and not many clubs in the world can afford to pay these kinds of wages."

"We can't afford to do it. That is why we are not disturbed by the Juventus case."

Meanwhile, Wenger confirmed he is looking closer to home for reinforcements as he attempts to

sign a replacement for the injured Philippe Senderos.

Senderos is out for three months with a dislocated shoulder suffered playing for Switzerland at the World Cup and Wenger admits West Brom defender Curtis Davies is a possible target, although not at the 12-million-pound price tag being quoted.

"We have lost Senderos for the next three months. Johan Djourou and Gael Clichy have had injuries as well," he said.

"If we find a player who can play centre-back and left-back then we are still open for transfers."

"Curtis Davies I like. I have not made an inquiry or a bid but I like the player. I will not be making a bid as high as 10million or 12million pounds."

# Atletico won't sell Torres

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Atletico Madrid have no intention of selling Fernando Torres despite speculation that the Spain striker will leave the club during the close season.

"At the moment we have not received any offers for Fernando Torres," club president Enrique Cerezo was quoted as saying in sports daily Marca on Tuesday.

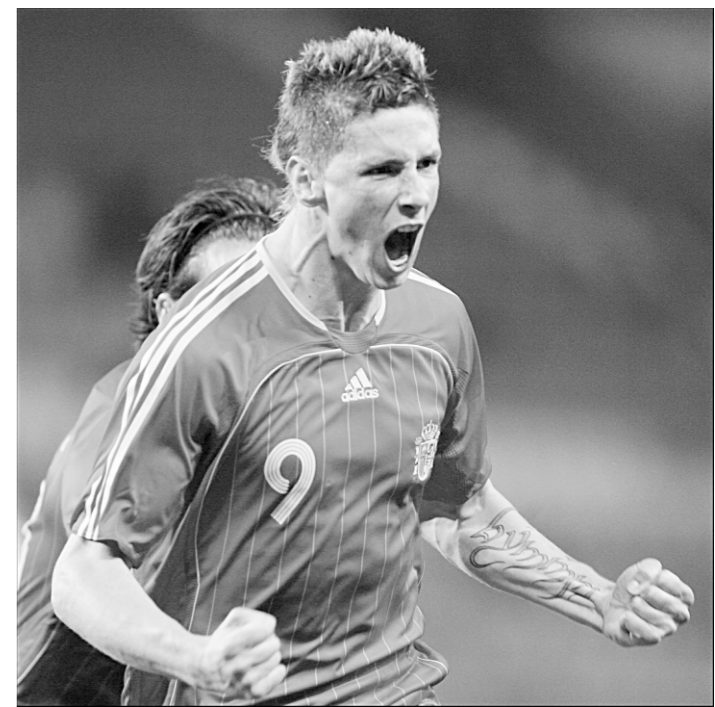
"If Fernando Torres ends up leaving Atletico it will be because he wants to, because we have no intention of selling him."

"If a club does make an offer for Fernando we will listen to it, as we do with any player, but that does not mean we will accept it."

Atletico coach Javier Aguirre has said he has spoken to Torres and that the player would give no guarantee he would stay.

But the Mexican made it clear that he wants the 22-year-old to remain at the club.

"Fernando and Atletico have very strong links," Aguirre told Marca on Tuesday. "Atletico



FERNANDO TORRES

need him and he needs Atletico.'

Torres, who was one of Spain's most impressive performers at the World Cup, has been Atletico's top scorer in

each of the last four seasons. Spanish and English media have reported that Manchester United are preparing a bid for the striker.

# Tevez worries Corinthians

Football

INTERNET, undated

Carlos Tevez's late return to Brazilian champions Corinthians is starting to worry their supporters and senior figures at the club.

Tevez was given a longer break to return to Argentina for family reasons. But Corinthians' defeat at the weekend leaves the champions with the possibility of them facing a relegation battle.

Corinthians supporters feel that the team needs Tevez to break their run of bad form.

Corinthians main investor Kia Joorabchian told Radio Record in Brazil "The thing is that he needed some more days to resolve some personal problems

in Buenos Aires with his family and I don't know what the problem is with that."

Joorabchian also went on to criticise his personal treatment by the club, supporters and the media, since taking over the Sao Paulo giants.

"These two years that I have been at Corinthians have been really tough. Everything that I do is criticised."

"I am reaching a limit. I am getting tired of all this."

"I have to give explanations about everything. All the negotiations I do are criticised, but when I brought in Nilmar nobody said anything."

"Sometimes I feel that I don't want to continue with this project because it seems to be that Corinthians doesn't want me to continue with it."

# Liverpool in Kuyt chase

INTERNET, undated

Liverpool are reportedly on the verge of making a 15 million euros bid for Feyenoord striker Dirk Kuyt.

After selling Fernando Morientes to Valencia and letting Djibril Cisse join Marseille on loan, Rafael Benitez is eager to reinforce his attacking force.

After several bids including exchanges with goalkeeper Jerzy Dudek or full-back Jan Kromkamp were rejected by the Dutch club's board, Benitez' last offensive is likely to grant him what he wants.

An aerial threat and a clinical finisher - he has scored more than 100 Eredivisie goals with Feyenoord - Kuyt will not be easy to land as his club have told him he must report for training and forget about his ideas of leaving.

The 26-year old has also been on Arsenal's and Newcastle's wishing list.

# Pessotto out of danger

INTERNET, undated

The condition of Juve team manager Gianluca Pessotto has improved greatly, according to reports from a doctor at Le Molinette hospital in Turin.

It had been feared that Pessotto may not recover from falling 15 metres from his fourth storey office window on June 27.

However, the doctor in charge of his recovery today revealed that the 35-year-old's life was no longer at risk.

"The patient's condition is continuing to slowly improve," stated Doctor Pierpaolo Donadino. "We can now say that his life is not in danger."

The discovery of a rosary in his hands during the fall brought about speculation that Pessotto had tried to commit suicide, partly due to depression and stress brought about by the Calciopoli scandal.

Pessotto chose to quit playing at the end of last season after 243 games in the Bianconeri shirt. The much-loved six-time Scudetto winner has been regularly visited by his ex-teammates and even had the chance to see the World Cup when Fabio Cannavaro dropped in.

Ciro Ferrara has stated that he would like Pessotto to work with him as part of the youth development team. His recovery will be a big relief to the Italian football community.

# Ribery not for sale: Diouf

INTERNET, undated

Marseille chairman Pape Diouf made it clear in an interview with French daily L'Equipe that France international Franck Ribery was not for sale.

Following some promising performances at the last World Cup, several clubs including Lyon, Arsenal and Bayern Munich showed interest in the young midfielder.

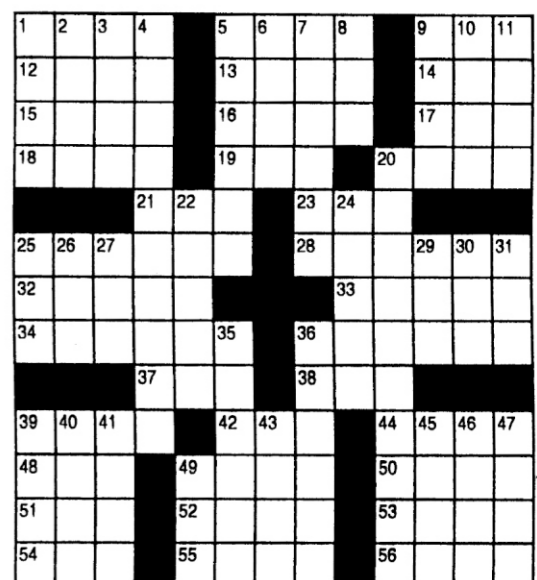
"We count on him for the club to be more ambitious. He will stay in Marseille. Whatever offers will come, our intentions are clearly to answer no. He will not leave," Diouf said.

The player himself declared his will to join Lyon a few weeks ago, and the club president Jean Michel Aulas is ready to make a 23-million euros offer.

## CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

- ACROSS
- 1 Poet
- 5 Denomination
- 9 Vacationing
- 12 Culture medium
- 13 Tartan group
- 14 Standard
- 15 Mentor
- 16 "— She Sweet?"
- 17 Exist
- 18 Appear
- 19 Gun
- 20 LummoX
- 21 See
- 25—
- 23 Kindling, eventually
- 25 Place to soak and socialize
- 28 Cigar
- 32 Famed firefighter
- 33 Quickly
- DOWN
- 1 Super-market
- 20 Piano piece
- 22 Blender
- 24 Varnish alternative
- 25 Swindled
- 26 Praise in verse
- 27 Greek cross
- 29 Hlatus
- 30 Lemieux milieu
- 31 Grownup elver
- 35 Repre-sentation
- 36 Moved hastily
- 39 Skater
- 40 Acknowledgement
- 41 George Herman Ruth
- 43 Ambience
- 45 Zilch
- 46 Bender
- 47 Makes up one's mind
- 49 Basic learning

Solution time: 27 mins.



## CRYPTOQUIP

T W R N A K U H K O S N  
O H T S V K Q R E Q K L E Q K W Q K K .  
V N P N H Z M T D G P N H A T J M Z

LESS ZMKA MNUT-JN-SHLGP?  
Yesterday's Cryptiquip: THE TWO YOUNG METEOROLOGISTS SPLIT UP. THEY WERE HAVING A VERY STORMY RELATIONSHIP.

Today's Cryptiquip Clue: P equals Y  
The Cryptiquip 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.