



David Beckham is greeted by journalists as he arrives at the airport for Real Madrid's training camp in Graz on Thursday.

PHOTO: INTERNET

United agree Carrick deal

AFP, London

Manchester United have finally reached a deal to sign England midfielder Michael Carrick from Tottenham Hotspur. British newspapers reported Friday.

The transfer will cost the English Premiership runners-up around 15 million pounds (28 million dollars, 22 million euros).

United boss Alex Ferguson has been chasing the defensive-minded midfielder ever since the end of last season and has seen previous bids for him knocked back.

Carrick, who turns 25 on Friday, has yet to agree personal terms at Old Trafford but will double his wages by penning a 50,000-pounds-a-week deal, The Sun reported.

The Daily Mirror said Manchester United would pay around 12 million pounds straight away with the rest dependent on success-related clauses, and Carrick was expected to agree a four-year contract.

The Daily Star said the deal was yet to be formalised for the player Ferguson has targeted to be his long-term replacement for the combative former United captain Roy Keane, who quit the club in December.

Carrick, born in the Newcastle suburb of Wallsend, was a trainee at West Ham United and moved to Spurs in a 2.75-million-pound deal in August 2004.

He has seven caps, though was only used in the 2006 World Cup during England's 1-0 second round win over Ecuador, as manager Sven-Goran Eriksson preferred Bayern Munich's Owen Hargreaves in the holding role.

Chelsea in talks over Ashley

AFP, London

Arsenal have held talks with Chelsea over the potential sale of defender Ashley Cole to the English champions, according to the Gunners' vice-chairman David Dein on Friday.

England star Cole, 25, has been a long-term target for Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho, who is keen to land a left-back after selling Asier Del Horno to Valencia earlier this week.

Chelsea and Cole were both investigated last season after allegations the Blues had tapped-up the player in an attempt to persuade him to move to Stamford Bridge.

Cole was furious that Arsenal's directors and manager Arsene Wenger did not support him during the controversy and is said to be determined to quit the Emirates Stadium this summer.

Chelsea reportedly had a 16 million pounds offer rejected by Arsenal recently and Dein confirmed he had been talking to the west London club about Cole.

He told BBC Sport: "We have had a couple of very civil conversations with Chelsea and there is nothing else to say on that."

"As we speak now he is an Arsenal player and until you hear otherwise he is an Arsenal player."

"If something happened and we decided to take an offer that's another story but at the moment he is under contract to us. He's our player. He started with us when he was 16 and if something else happens we will wait and see."

LIBERTADORES CUP

Libertad held at home

Football

REUTERS, Asuncion

Brazil's Internacional rode their luck to hold out for a goalless draw away to Libertad in the first leg of their Libertadores Cup semifinal on Thursday.

Libertad, quarterfinal conquerors of Argentina's River Plate, twice struck the woodwork as they were foiled in their attempt to build a lead for next week's return in Porto Alegre.

Midfielder Pablo Guinazu hit the inside of the post from the edge of

the penalty area in the first half after pouncing on a poor clearance by the Internacional defence.

Almost immediately, Cristian Riveros found Rodrigo Lopez unmarked inside the penalty area but he shot weakly at goalkeeper Clemer.

The Paraguayans came even closer with three minutes left when Riveros crashed a long-range volley against the underside of the crossbar.

The ball hit Clemer on the back as it rebounded but bounced harmlessly out of play for a corner.

Internacional had plenty of possession and left-back Jorge Wagner was twice close with

powerful long-range shots in the first half. The first was blocked by a teammate and the second tipped over by goalkeeper Hector Gonzalez.

Winger Rafael Sobis was a constant menace to Libertad, forcing a good save from Gonzalez with a shot on the turn and shooting narrowly past the upright midway through the second half.

Neither side have won the competition before.

The winners will meet either defending champions Sao Paulo of Brazil or Guadalupe of Mexico in the final. Sao Paulo won 1-0 away in the first leg on Wednesday.

Milan renew Torres interest

Football

INTERNET, undated

Milan are ready to make a fresh bid for Atletico Madrid symbol Fernando Torres, reports in Italy insist.

The Via Turati club are now focusing on signing new players following the Calciopoli verdicts

and netting a partner for 22-year-old Alberto Gilardino is their primary objective.

The Rossoneri are keen on finding a new striker to replace Andriy Shevchenko, who left the club for Chelsea before the World Cup Finals.

Torres has recently stated that he wishes to stay with the Colchoneros despite interest from numerous clubs all around

Europe.

The Madrid outfit have already refused a 25.7million-pound offer from Manchester United which shattered their dream of seeing Torres in action alongside Wayne Rooney.

Torres has been eyed by Milan since he was 17 and, if UEFA confirm their participation in the Champions League, the Rossoneri may immediately start negotiations with the Spanish club.

Other possible targets for the San Siro legends are still Zlatan Ibrahimovic of Juventus, Chelsea's Hernan Crespo and Cagliari striker David Suazo.

The Honduras-born player is highly considered by Coach Carlo Ancelotti and may represent a valid alternative in case Milan are excluded from European competition on ethical grounds.

The Via Turati outfit are understood to have offered Marcio Amoroso and Marco Borriello, along with an economic package, to Sardinian chief Massimo Cellino.

Barcelona leave Vieira to Inter

INTERNET, undated

Inter are in pole position to sign Patrick Vieira after Barcelona insisted they are not keen on the Juventus player.

The Frenchman is believed to have already agreed to a San Siro move, but there were recent reports suggesting that the Spanish outfit may hijack the switch.

However, the Nou Camp outfit insist their summer spending spree at Juventus ended with the capture of Lilian Thuram and Gianluca Zambrotta.

"We have never considered the idea of signing Vieira," said Barcelona sporting director Txiki Begiristain.

"There has been no contact with Juventus nor with the player himself regarding a transfer to Barca."

Although Juventus have now claimed that they will not be selling any more players this summer, the international is expected to go.

Vieira has asked for a transfer following the club's demotion and Inter are keen to land him following the loss of Juan Sebastian Veron earlier this summer.

The former Milan man only joined Juventus last summer when Arsenal accepted a 14million-pound approach from Juve.

Lens want Milan spot

INTERNET, undated

French club Lens are ready to do battle with UEFA in a bid to replace scandal-hit Milan in next season's Champions League.

The outfit have sent all necessary documentation to the European football governing body and will appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport if necessary.

After the emergency meeting held on Thursday, UEFA decided to include Milan in Friday's preliminary round draw on a provisional basis.

UEFA are considering their options on ethical grounds and the panel will meet again on August 2 to confirm its final decision.

If Milan were not admitted, France could add a name to the list of teams for the next Champions League and Lens, who finished fourth in Ligue 1 last term, argue they should benefit.

"I didn't think that the Italian teams would be allowed to take part in the European competitions next year," stated Lens director general Francis Collado.

"On the other hand, I find it reassuring that UEFA itself questions if it would be appropriate to admit Milan to the next Champions League," he concluded.

Lens have asked UEFA to examine the issue carefully and have stressed the importance of the ethical and moral aspects of the controversy.

Lens President Gervais Martel said he would do all that is in his power to protect the rights of his club and of all French football.

A simple end to this story is very unlikely given that Lens are threatening an appeal to CAS in case the August 2 decision is not the one hoped for.

Juventus to lodge appeal with CONI

AFP, Rome

Juventus, who on Tuesday were stripped of the Serie A titles they won in 2005-06 and in 2004-05 and relegated to the second division with a 17-point penalty for match-fixing, are to lodge a further appeal against their punishment with the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI).

The disgraced Turin club will present their case to CONI, the governing body of Italian sport which oversees the activities of all the various federations, including the FIGC, by Saturday.

Juventus will also appeal to CONI against the sentences handed down to former general manager Luciano Moggi and chief executive Antonio Giraudo, who were both banned from taking up a role in sport for five years.

The shamed club were originally thrown into Serie B with a 30-point deficit for the start of the forthcoming season by an FIGC tribunal for their part in the scandal, before an appeal saw the points-penalty reduced to 17.

Security ensured to lure Hewitt

REUTERS, Sydney

Security guards will accompany the Australian Davis Cup team to Argentina in September to encourage Lleyton Hewitt to play in the semifinal tie, Tennis Australia (TA) said on Wednesday.

The former world number one, unpopular in the south American country because of a number of acrimonious matches against Argentine players, has not decided whether to make himself available for the September 22-24 match.

"Security's of paramount importance to Tennis Australia for all of our players so we've got a plan in place and we're working through that with Lleyton now," TA chief executive Steve Wood said.

"I think he's (Hewitt's) looking over that plan at the moment and considering what he's doing."

"We've got a plan in place in conjunction with the ITF and the Argentinean tennis federation to deliver the security that makes all the players comfortable."

Wood said the charged atmosphere common at Davis Cup matches increased the importance of security issues.

"It's just a very patriotic, galvanising environment to have countries playing against each other," he said.

"We've seen that in other sports in recent times and we just want to be sure that our team is comfortable and protected and looked after on and off the court."

Hewitt, Australia's top-ranked player at 13th in the world, missed the first-round win over Switzerland but led his country to victory over Belarus in the quarterfinals.

Benitez unhappy over Israel prospect



AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez insisted on Friday that his side should not have to play their Champions League qualifier against Maccabi Haifa in war-torn Israel.

Benitez's men were paired against Israeli champions Maccabi in Friday's draw for the third qualifying round of the competition and are scheduled to play the second leg of the tie in Haifa on August 22 or 23.

But the on-going cross-border conflict with Lebanon makes Israel a highly dangerous destination at present and Benitez is adamant the match should be played on a neutral venue.

He told Liverpool's website:

"There is no way we should be going to Israel to play a game of football at this time. It's crazy to even consider it. UEFA cannot put anyone at risk."

"The situation is very clear in my mind. It's a crazy situation and totally unacceptable to even think about us going over there at this time."

"I feel sad for the people over there at the moment because it's a terrible time for them, but we have to put the security and safety of everyone involved before anything else and that means we cannot travel there. It would be impossible to concentrate on the game."

Benitez has previous experience of a tie in Israel being moved to Cyprus during his time as manager of Spanish club Valencia and he believes UEFA, European football's governing body, must make a similar decision.

He added: "UEFA need to make a decision quickly because there will be lots of our supporters wanting to know what is happening."

"A few years back when I was with Valencia we were drawn to play Maccabi Haifa in a UEFA Cup tie and the match was switched to Cyprus. The situation then was nowhere near as bad as it is now."

"Valencia also had a European game in the Ukraine on the day the twin towers were attacked in America and I can remember the confusion that caused with the players on their mobile phones constantly to their families who were wondering when we'd be getting back. It's impossible to prepare for a game in these circumstances."

Liverpool, five times winners of the European Cup, will play the first leg of tie at Anfield on August 8 or 9.

Barcelona wary of Real

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid's new signings are giving European and Spanish champions Barcelona cause for concern as they prepare for the start of the new Primera Liga season.

"We are conscious of our own strengths but also of the difficulties we face with the new management now in place at Real Madrid," Barca sports director Txiki Begiristain told the club's Web site.

Real's new president Ramon Calderon has installed former Juventus boss Fabio Capello as coach and this week completed the signings of Italy's Fabio Cannavaro and Brazil midfielder Emerson.

Dutch striker Ruud van Nistelrooy is set to be presented as their third new face later on Friday, while further signings are expected.

"Step by step Real are putting together a team, although luckily we have more stability and can start working together now as our squad is complete," Begiristain said.

Barcelona have added Icelandic

forward Eidur Gudjohnsen and Juve defender Lilian Thuram and Gianluca Zambrotta to their squad, who have last season won the Champions League and their second successive Spanish title.

"Everyone knows we struggled to win the two titles last season and we have to remember that. If we can get our team playing the same way again I am sure we will be able to be proud of the side once more," said Begiristain.

"Perhaps we will be able to win a title or two but we won't set a target of how many because it is not fair on the players."

Shevchenko targets Champions League

Football

AFP, London

Chelsea striker Andriy Shevchenko admitted on Friday his main target this season is to bring the Champions League to Stamford Bridge.

Ukraine star Shevchenko, who joined the English Premiership champions from AC Milan for 30 million pounds (55 million dollars) in May, knows exactly what it takes to win Europe's leading club competition after helping Milan to success in the 2003 edition.

The former Dynamo Kiev player also played in the 2005 final, when Milan were beaten by Liverpool on penalties, and believes Chelsea are perfectly equipped to win the tournament.

Shevchenko told Chelsea's website: "As a player my objective is always the same. My team comes first. I have the same objectives as the team. They have won the league and I would like to help the team to win the Champions League."

"Chelsea have been consistently wanting me for the past three years and I wanted to play for a club with great champions, great organisation, great management and Chelsea was the one I chose."

"When you put all those things together you come up with one objective, which is to win. You can really only see at the end of the year how things work out but I feel the team has the quality."

Jose Mourinho's side were beaten in the Champions League second round by eventual winners Barcelona last season, and had

lost at the semi-final stage in the previous two seasons.

Mourinho, who won the competition with Porto in 2005, brought in Shevchenko to provide the cutting edge Chelsea have lacked at times in Europe.

Shevchenko is training with his new teammates in Los Angeles as they prepare for Saturday's friendly match against the MLS All-stars.

He added: "They are great players and a great group. I felt there was a real togetherness in the team. Everyone has accepted me really well."

"This change in clubs has only helped increase my motivation. It has only been one training session but it is a good style, a little different to what they do at Milan, but you are talking about two good styles for training and for me it only helps motivate me."



FERNANDO TORRES



Chelsea coach Jose Mourinho (L) directs striker Andriy Shevchenko during the Ukrainian's first training session for his new club at the University of California at Los Angeles on Thursday.

PHOTO: INTERNET