

City net Trabelsi

AFP, Manchester

Tunisian World Cup defender Hatem Trabelsi on Thursday completed his move from Ajax to English Premiership side Manchester City.

The 29-year-old full-back, who was once linked with moves to Manchester United and Arsenal, has been plagued by a succession of knee injuries in recent seasons and needed to undergo a series of tough medical tests before convincing City boss Stuart Pearce that he could cope with the demands of the season.

Now he needs to secure a work permit before he can be officially unveiled as a City player.

"He has played at the highest level for Ajax, and been to three World Cups. He captains his country as well, so it is a good CV," Pearce told www.mfc.co.uk.

"I have watched him play for Ajax over the last three years and been very impressed with him.

"He is an attacking full-back we're just waiting on that work permit now."

Trabelsi is unlikely to be the last new face at Eastlands, with Swedish goalkeeper Andreas Isaksson poised to sign once David James completes his move to Portsmouth.

Having told Pearce of his desire to quit the Blues, it seems only a matter of time before the England keeper completes his switch to Fratton Park.

However, cash-rich Portsmouth, backed by new owner Alexandre Gaydamak, have been warned James will be going nowhere unless they come up with an acceptable deal, believed to be around the one-million-pound mark.

"David has expressed a wish to leave and I have to be prepared for that eventuality," said Pearce.

"But the bottom line is whether the finance we are being offered is acceptable. Portsmouth have made one bid, which has been rejected.

"Unless the situation changes David will have to stay here and carry on doing what he has been doing for the last two-and-a-half years, which is keep goal very well for Manchester City."

Although James' desire to spend more time with his fiancée, who is based in the south of England, is a major influence behind his desire for a move, so too is the potential offer of a three-year contract at Portsmouth.

Currently in the final year of his present deal at City, James knows he has no chance of getting a similar offer if he stays where he is.

The goalkeeper spoke to his manager during the Blues recent two-match tour of China, with Pearce insisting there has been no major fall-out.

"David has been as good as sold," said the City chief.

"I understand the reasons for him wanting to leave. He is not anti-Manchester City and he is not anti-Stuart Pearce."

Inter eye Gigi

INTERNET, undated

After signing the Juventus duo of Patrick Vieira and Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Inter chief Massimo Moratti is reportedly eyeing a move for Gigi Buffon.

Stories in the peninsula on Friday suggest that the Via Durini outfit expressed an interest in the world champion during negotiations for Ibra's transfer on Wednesday.

The Nerazzurri are understood to have offered the Old Lady almost £13m and veteran keeper Francesco Toldo in return for the current Italian No 1.

Although Buffon has pledged his future to the Bianconeri outfit he could be tempted by the opportunity of competing for the Scudetto and playing in the Champions League this term.

Juventus have declared that the player is untransferable, but may now consider the option of letting him go if Inter striker Julio Cruz were to be included in the move.

Moratti's club, who take on Juventus tonight in a three-team tournament along with Napoli, is now considering Juve's request for Cruz to be included in any proposed deal for the custodian.

It's unclear, though, whether the 32-year-old Argentine would accept Second Division football even with La Vecchia Signora.

Milan are also still in the race to sign Buffon and are seemingly waiting to make an offer after their Champions League preliminary round tie against Red Star Belgrade on August 23.

Juventus fans are keeping their fingers crossed that Buffon doesn't move on to Inter as the Tuttosport newspaper, based in Turin, outlined today.

Their front page underlined the frustration of the supporters who haven't taken too kindly to Juventus strengthening their great rivals this summer.



PHOTO: AFP

South Korean Ji-Sung Park (R) and Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo are pictured during Manchester United's open training session at Old Trafford in Manchester on Friday.

Kuszczak moves to Old Trafford

AFP, Manchester



Manchester United's summer-long pursuit of goalkeeper Tomasz Kuszczak came to a successful conclusion on Thursday when West Brom agreed to loan out the Polish international for the coming season.

United manager Sir Alex Ferguson had expected the deal to be tied up last month, once the club returned from their tour of South Africa, but the move was held up with West Brom demanding Giuseppe Rossi move to the Hawthorns.

However, a compromise solution has now been thrashed out.

While United still expect to sign Kuszczak permanently in 12 months' time, the current agreement only sees the 24-year-old move to Old Trafford on loan.

In exchange, West Brom will get defender Paul McShane and goalkeeper Luke Steele on a permanent basis.

Kuszczak's arrival means Ben Foster is now free to head to Watford and link up with the Premiership outfit for a second season, having played a major role in their promotion to the top flight last year.

Kuszczak will now act as understudy to United's first-choice goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar, with Ferguson looking to the former Hertha Berlin star to stake a claim to be United's new number one when

the veteran Dutchman calls time on his own career, probably after Euro 2008.

With Foster now guaranteed the Premiership experience Ferguson thinks is essential, and Tim Howard looking for a return to form at Everton, the United camp are hopeful they have enough strength in the goalkeeping department to maintain healthy competition for the next five years at least.

Foster's excellent form last season also saw him named on the standby list for England's World Cup squad.

And he said: "I was delighted to get the call yesterday giving me the all-clear to sign all the paperwork. "Now I'm really looking forward to a year in the Premiership with Watford."

Rooney laments being targeted

Football

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United striker Wayne Rooney believes he has become the number one target of over-zealous referees.

The England forward faces a three-match ban after being re-carded for elbowing a Porto player in a pre-season game in Amsterdam last week.

The incident comes just weeks after his controversial World Cup dismissal.

It was the fourth red card of Rooney's career, and the third on foreign soil in 12 months.

Sir Alex Ferguson has already expressed his fears that the 20-year-old has become a marked man for officials, eager to make a name for

themselves, and Rooney believes there could be some truth in this.

"Possibly, I am getting picked on," he said. "Referees get a lot of headlines with some of the decisions they make.

"I am not having a go at the referee but it is just the way the game has gone and sometimes, players have to take the consequences of that.

"In the Premier League the referees let it go a bit but the foreign refs slow it down and are quick with the cards."

"I feel a bit let down," said Rooney, who was speaking at the launch of his recently-released autobiography 'Wayne Rooney: My Story So Far'.

"If you watch the video, I did not take my eyes off the ball once.

"On the way down, my hands brushed against the player. There

was not much contact but the lad went down and stayed down.

"I certainly feel a bit harshly done to."

Meanwhile Rooney has called on the boo-bosses to lay off teammate Cristiano Ronaldo with the Portugal winger being blamed for his active role in getting Rooney sent off during England's World Cup quarter-final defeat.

"I would rather he didn't get any stick," said Rooney. "You do not want to see any player get booed."

"Unfortunately, whenever England do not do well in a World Cup or a major tournament, people look for a scapegoat. This year, people turned on Cristiano and tried to make him that.

"I am not going to lie, I was disappointed with his involvement in the sending off. But that is in the past now. He was playing for his country, I was playing for mine.

"But I think he is big enough to deal with anything that come his way. You saw that the other night. Cristiano got booed but he still scored two fantastic goals."

Rooney spoke to Ronaldo on the evening of the quarter-final and was assured by him there was nothing personal about his conduct, especially the infamous wink to the Portugal bench.

"A lot has been said about the wink," said Rooney. "I have spoken to him about that but it had nothing to do with me being sent off."

Meanwhile Rooney backed John Terry to be a successful England skipper and Liverpool midfielder Steve Gerrard vice-captain.

"Both Steven and John Terry are great captains," said Rooney. "Steven is a good friend and a has a great attitude.

"But I also know John Terry will do a fantastic job for England, as he has done for Chelsea. He is a real leader on the pitch."

"I was joking when I said to (England manager) Steve McClaren I wanted to be captain," he said.

"I am not ready to be captain of my club yet, let alone my country.

UEFA CUP RESULT

AFP, Paris

Results of UEFA Cup second qualifying round first leg matches on Thursday: Karvan Evlakh (AZE) 0 Slavia Prague (CZE) 2 Tchemomoretis (UKR) 0 Plock (POL) 0 Rubin (RUS) 3 BATE (BLR) 0 KF Tirana (ALB) 0 Kayserispor (TUR) 2 Artmedia (SVK) 2 Dinamo Minsk (BLR) 1 Ried (AUT) 0 Sion (SUI) 0

Roeselare (BEL) 2 Achnas (CYP) 1 Bnei Yehuda (ISR) 0 Lokomotiv (BUL) 2

CSKA Sofia (BUL) 0 Kula (SCG) 0 Zimbru Chisinau (MDA) 0 Zaporizhya (RUS) 0 Hertha Berlin (GER) 1 Ameri (GEO) 0 IK Start (NOR) 1 Drogheda (IRL) 0 Odense (DEN) 1 Llanelli (WAL) 0 Randers (DEN) 3 Kaunas (LTU) 1 Brann (NOR) 3 Atvidabergs (SUE) 3 Molde (NOR) 0 Skonto Riga (LAT) 0 Hapoel (ISR) 1 Domzale (SLO) 2 Young Boys (SUI) 3 Marseille (FRA) 3 Twente (NED) 1 Levadia (EST) 1

Ventspils (LAT) 0 Newcastle (ENG) 1 Dinamo Bucharest (ROM) 1 Beitar (ISR) 0 Partizan Belgrade (SCG) 2 Maribor (SLO) 1 Sarajevo (BIH) 1 Rapid Bucarest (ROM) 0 APOEL (CYP) 1 Trabzonspor (TUR) 1 FC Basel (SUI) 1 FC Vaduz (LIE) 0 Flora (EST) 0 Bronby (DEN) 0 Suduva (LTU) 0 FC Bruges (BEL) 2 Grelna (SCO) 5 Derry (NIR) 5 Mattersburg (AUT) 1 Wisla (POL) 1 Fehervar (HUN) 1 Grasshoppers (SUI) 1

Played Tuesday OFK Belgrade (SCG) 1 Auxerre (FRA) 0 Omonia (CYP) 0 Litex Lovech (BUL) 0

Return legs: August 24

Rosicky relishing rough stuff

AFP, London

Arsenal midfielder Tomas Rosicky insists he can cope with the physical challenge of competing in the Premiership.

Czech Republic star Rosicky, 25, joined Arsenal from Borussia Dortmund in a 6.8 million pound (£12.9 million dollar) move earlier in the summer and is preparing for his first taste of English football's frenetic nature.

Rosicky, who was one of his country's few impressive performers during the World Cup, has spent the last five years with German team Dortmund, where he sometimes found himself bullied out of games by more aggressive opponents.

But he made an impressive debut for his new club in their Champions League qualifying win at Dinamo Zagreb on Tuesday and can't wait to experience the cut and thrust of the Premiership when Arsene Wenger's side kick off their domestic campaign against Aston Villa on August 19.

"It is different in England to the way they play in Germany. Everything is a little bit harder and faster," Rosicky said.

"I feel I've prepared very well for it and can cope with the challenge.

"I do know I'm not the strongest player but I'm not afraid of engaging in a duel with my opponent. I have no problems with that.

"I've followed Arsenal and English teams for a while so I didn't need to speak to anyone about moving to the Premiership."

The former Sparta Prague player believes playing under Wenger, and alongside world class talents like Thierry Henry, will make him a more complete player.

"I wanted to play for Arsenal simply because of the different way they play their football compared to other teams. Because of that style I have been wanting to come here for a while," he explained.

"I really enjoyed the Dinamo game. It was nice to play that sort of football. I enjoy the way they play and to be part of that was good. I felt I fitted in quite well."

Rosicky has no doubts that Arsenal can compete with champions Chelsea despite their pre-season purchases of AC Milan striker Andriy Shevchenko and Germany captain Michael Ballack.

He said: "Arsene has told me his plans and the concept is to win as much as possible. The team is very strong so I believe we will be able to compete in every competition, including the Champions League.

"I don't feel it puts any extra pressure on me, certainly not at this stage. My main goal right now is just to integrate fully into the team.

"It is hard to say what is going to happen. Chelsea are a very good team, but so are Manchester United and Liverpool. I'm looking forward to competing with those teams."

'Terry can be great'

Football

AFP, London

England manager Steve McClaren believes John Terry can become one of the country's all-time great skippers.

The 25-year-old Chelsea defender was named by McClaren to take over the national team armband from David Beckham, who stepped down from the role after the World Cup, and will lead the team for the first time against Greece on Wednesday.

"Choosing a captain is one of the most important decisions a coach has to make," said McClaren.

"I'm certain I've got the right man in John Terry. I'm convinced he will prove to be one of the best captains England has ever had.

"John has all the attributes an international captain needs: leadership, authority, courage, ability, tactical awareness and a total refusal to accept second-best.

"He has been an inspiration for Chelsea and is at his best in adversity.

"Over the five years I've been involved with the England coaching set-up I've seen first hand the respect that John has among his fellow players.

"There are a number of strong leaders in the squad and he will not

lack support on and off the pitch."

Liverpool midfielder Steve Gerrard was also a contender for the role, but he will become vice-captain.

"It is the ultimate honour to be the captain of your country and I am very proud to be given this great opportunity," said Terry.

"It is an incredible challenge and one I am looking forward to very



JOHN TERRY

much."

Terry has won 29 caps since making his debut against Serbia and Montenegro in 2003.

He had not been considered for England before the 2002 World Cup as he faced assault and affray charges for an incident outside a

London nightclub. Terry was eventually cleared and used the incident as a positive force in his career.

When McClaren talks of the great England captains, Bobby Moore springs to mind ahead of the rest and he had much in common with Terry.

Moore, like Terry, lacked genuine pace but more than made up for it by reading the game brilliantly. Both hail from the same East London streets, play in central defence, wear the England number six shirt and exude authority on the pitch.

Moore has lifted the World Cup, however, and this is something Terry must do before he can truly stand comparison. Claudio Ranieri made Terry his Chelsea skipper when Marcel Desailly was out of the team in 2003.

Jose Mourinho gave him the job on a full-time basis and told McClaren he will not regret his decision.

The Chelsea boss said: "JT deserves it. England deserves a captain like him. He loves to work, loves to win, loves to make people happy and confident.

"He is a captain. I am really happy and on this occasion I also want to wish Steve success in the England job and tell him that at Chelsea we are here to help him."

LIGUE 1

Ribery overshadows French scene

Football

AFP, Paris

Franck Ribery looks set to remain a Marseille player as the transfer saga which has dominated the early stage of the French season creeps towards a close.

The 23-year-old international winger, the target of a reported 22-million-euro bid from champions Lyon, is under contract with Marseille until 2010 but has made no secret of his desire to leave.

However, his second half appearance for Marseille in Thursday's 3-3 UEFA Cup draw at Young Boys in Switzerland on Thursday would, under European rules, sideline him from Lyon's Champions League campaign until the knockout rounds.

"I am Marseillais," said Ribery after his first outing since the World Cup final.

"I am very happy to be here. I hope that we are going to have a good sea-

son at Marseille. The most important thing is that we finish in the top three places to play in the Champions League.

"I was happy to be in Bern on Thursday but it wasn't easy."

Ribery now looks set to play for Marseille on Sunday in their first home league match of the season against Rennes, who themselves may soon be losing a star player.

Both teams started the season poorly with Marseille held at 0-0 at newly-promoted Sedan and Rennes beaten at home by Lille.

Rennes look set to lose Swedish goalkeeper Andreas Isaksson to Manchester City after the English side sold David James to Premiership rivals Portsmouth.

In other games champions Lyon tackle Toulouse at Stade Gerland and will likely welcome back some of their World Cup players who sat out last week's 3-1 opening victory at Nantes.

Capital giants Paris St Germain are looking to bounce straight back after a

disastrous start to the season where they were humiliated by league newcomers Lorient.

On Saturday, they face their second newly promoted team in a row with a trip to Valenciennes.

Lille, who all but booked their Champions League group stage place with a thumping 3-0 home victory over Rabotnicki Kometal, will entertain Lens. Monaco, who began the season with a 1-0 defeat Nancy, entertain Sedan while last season's runners-up Bordeaux travel to Lorient.

FIXTURES

Saturday
Nancy v Sedan, Lorient v Bordeaux, Lyon v Toulouse, Monaco v Saint Etienne, Nice v Nantes, Sochaux v Auxerre, Troyes v Le Mans, Valenciennes v Paris St Germain
Sunday
Lille v Lens, Marseille v Rennes

Young guns may fire Gunners

AFP, London



Thierry Henry insists Arsenal's young guns can break Chelsea's domestic dominance if they stick together.

Chelsea are strong favourites to win a third consecutive Premiership title this season and few experts believe Arsene Wengers side are capable of mounting a sustained challenge after a summer of changes in north London.

Sol Campbell, Dennis Bergkamp and Robert Pires have all departed, while Ashley Cole and Jose Antonio Reyes are both unsettled and looking to join Chelsea and Real Madrid respectively.

Cole looks certain to leave after being left out of the clubs official pre-

season team-photo, but Arsenal captain Henry, 28, is adamant his team-mates can cope with the loss of those star players and compete for major honours, as long as they show real team spirit.

He said: "I give Chelsea their respect but we are going to try to come at them and make sure we can bring the title here.

"The last time we won the title was two years ago and we are going to try to find another way to bring the title back.

"At the start everyone is equal. I never start something saying we are playing for second place. If you do, you might as well stop.

"But if you do not play as a team, whoever you are and whoever you have in your squad, you won't win."

"People do not mention that enough about Chelsea. There is always talk about the money and players they have but they play as a

team and that is why they win.

"That is what we need to do too. Everyone knows when we are in tune we pass the ball well and it is difficult to play against us. Sometimes we need to dig in and have this mentality of playing as a team."

The Gunners reached the Champions League final last season after a remarkable run that included wins over Real Madrid and Juventus and a record-breaking 10 consecutive clean-sheets.

France striker Henry believes that 1-0 win at Real in the last 16 was the moment Wengers boys became men and proved they could live with the continent's best teams.

He added: "After last season everyone knows now within themselves that they can achieve stuff. We needed a key game, and at Madrid, you saw that we were a different team after that.

"We did not win the Champions League but you can build on that. The team has a past now, even though it was not bringing back a trophy.

"Some of the young players who came in, they were in an unknown position but now they know they can do a great job.

"The team can build on that. Now people are more scared about Cesc (Fabregas) and about Emmanuel Eboue.

"Johan Djourou is an international, Philippe Senderos too, Alex Hleb had to adapt in the Premiership and at the end of the season you saw he was better than the beginning, (Emmanuel) Adebayor too.

"I just hope we can carry on like that, and then maybe when we are in trouble, we can say hang on, we did not do all that last year just by luck."

Arsenal kick off the Premiership campaign at their new 390 million pound Emirates Stadium on August 19 against Aston Villa and Henry reckons it represents a fresh start for the team.

He said: "Definitely there is something new starting. Dennis, Sol, Robert, have left and it is a fact that we won't be playing at Highbury."

"It's a bit of a shame on a personal point of view. I have been playing with those guys for a long time. To see them leaving is not easy but that's how it is."

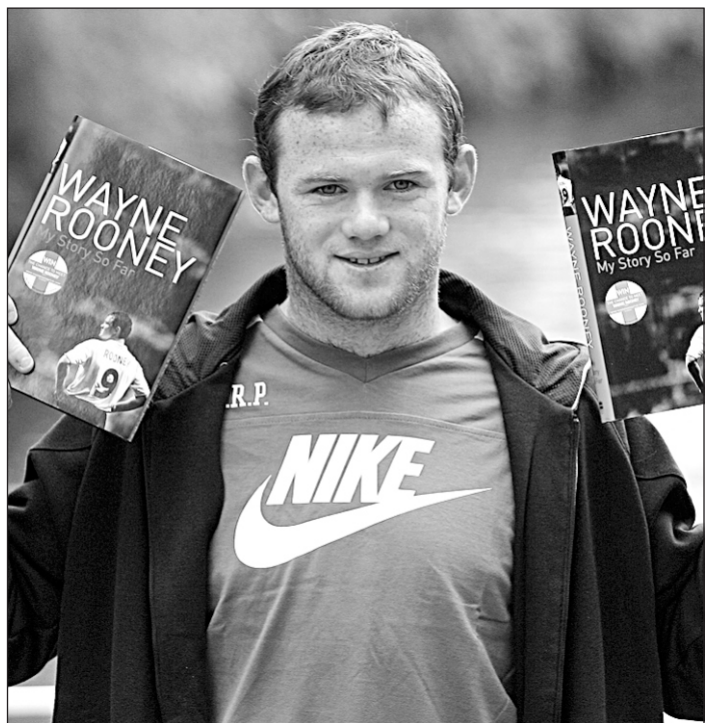


PHOTO: AFP

Wayne Rooney is seen during the launch of his autobiography, 'Wayne Rooney: My story so far' in a hotel in Manchester on Thursday.



PHOTO: AFP FILE

Tomas Rosicky is one of the young stars who will look to propel the Gunners this term.