



PHOTO: INTERNET
Newcastle captain Scott Parker (C) is congratulated by referee Thomas Einwallner (L) after they made it to the knockout round the UEFA Cup by playing out a goalless draw against Latvian minnows Ventspils at St James' Park on Thursday.

Milan fail to land Ronaldo

AFP, Rome

AC Milan have failed in their bid to sign Real Madrid's Brazilian striker Ronaldo because the Spanish club's asking price is too high, the Serie A club confirmed on Friday.

"Negotiations regarding the possible transfer of Ronaldo are over," said a statement posted on Milan's website.

According to Italian news agency ANSA, Milan directors Ariedo Breda and Adriano Galliani refused to match Real's price tag of 30 million euros (38 million dollars).

ANSA said Breda and Galliani are now trying to complete the signing of another Brazilian striker, Ricardo Oliveira, from Real Madrid's Spanish rivals Real Betis.

Ronaldo, who joined Real Madrid from Milan's city rivals Inter four years ago, was a World Cup winner with Brazil in 1994 and 2002.

In 1994 he was a non-playing squad member, but he scored both goals in the 2002 final victory over Germany.

Ronaldo has won the FIFA World Player of the Year award three times, in 1996, 1997 and 2002.

Oliveira was a Spanish league winner with Valencia in 2003 and moved to Betis the following year.

Last year he was loaned out to Brazilian side Sao Paulo after knee surgery.

He has scored four goals in 11 appearances for Brazil.

Oliveira helped Brazil win the Copa America in 2004 and the Confederations Cup in 2005, but he was not included in this year's World Cup squad.

Arsenal snub Atletico's bid for Reyes

AFP, Monaco

Arsenal vice-chairman David Dein said Thursday that the Gunners had turned down a bid from Atletico Madrid for their want-away Spain striker Jose Antonio Reyes.

"They have made an offer which has been rejected," Dein told Sky Sports News television in Monaco where the Champions League group stage draw was held.

Dein could not say whether Reyes was likely to leave Emirates Stadium but added: "As it stands now he is an Arsenal player and may very well remain an Arsenal player."

He also said there had been no further progress in the proposed sale of England left-back Ashley Cole to English Premiership champions Chelsea, nor in the proposed transfer of France defender William Gallas in the opposite direction.

Both players are unhappy at their current clubs and wish to leave, but the two London teams are struggling to agree a deal.

"There is no further news; it's a state of impasse," he said on Cole's situation, with the transfer window period soon to close at the end of the month.

"If we were to (sign Gallas) it would almost certainly be part of the Ashley Cole deal. But there is no further progress on that either. That could be part of it but at the moment there's not been any progress."

Newcastle, Marseille scrape into knockout phase



AFP, Paris

Newcastle and Marseille scraped into the UEFA Cup knockout round but did little to raise the profile of a tournament slumbering in the shadows of the Champions League.

Newcastle drew 0-0 with Latvian minnows Ventspils but went through on away goals having won the first leg of the second preliminary round tie 1-0.

The Magpies, who paraded new 10-million-pound signing Obafemi Martins on the pitch before kick-off at St James's Park, dominated from start to finish, but were denied by goalkeeper Andris Vanins.

Vanins saved from Emre, James Milner - who also hit the bar with a free-kick - and Charles N'Zogbia, while Scott Parker, Damien Duff and Titus Bramble all went close.

"The most important thing is we're through," Duff told Channel Five.

"It's where you want to be, hopefully this year will be a long run in the UEFA Cup."

Duff also backed former Inter Milan star Martins to become a hero on Tyneside.

"It's brilliant," said the Irishman.

"I know him from watching him over the last few years in the Champions League. He's got electric pace and can finish as well so he can be a legend up here."

Marseille also failed to find the net against Young Boys Berne but progressed courtesy of a 3-3 draw in Switzerland two weeks ago.

The Swiss could have stolen the tie at the death when Marcos saw a header come off the bar.

"I am very proud of my team," said relieved Marseille coach Albert Emon.

"What was important was qualification. We achieved that. I would have been disappointed if we were eliminated."

Irish minnows Derry City also reached the next round with a 2-2 draw at home to Gretna of Scotland giving them a 7-3 aggregate win.

Welsh side Llanelli, who were just 1-0 down against Danish outfit Odense after the first leg, fell to pieces on neutral territory at Swansea, losing 5-1 on the night and 6-1 on aggregate.

Amongst others going through to the next stage were Germany's Hertha Berlin who drew 2-2 at Ameri Tbilisi in Georgia but went through 3-2 on aggregate while Trabzonspor of Turkey beat APOEL Nicosia of Cyprus 1-0 for a 2-1 aggregate win.

The night's marathon tie was played in Ireland where Drogheda beat IK Start of Norway 1-0 on the night for a 1-1 aggregate score.

Ninety minutes of extra time couldn't separate them but it was the Norwegians who were left celebrating after clinching victory 12-11 in a penalty shoot-out.

ITALIAN SUPERCUP

Inter, Roma lock horns



AFP, Rome

The first major Italian trophy is up for grabs on Saturday when Inter Milan take on Roma in the SuperCup.

The traditional curtain-raiser for the forthcoming Serie A season pits the league winners against the cup winners.

Inter finished third in Serie A last season but were crowned champions after the two teams that finished above them, Juventus (1st) and AC Milan (2nd) were found guilty of match-fixing.

Inter won the Italian Cup last season, so Roma, the team they beat in the final, will be their opponents at the San Siro.

Chilean international David

Pizarro, who left Inter last week to join Roma, is keen to put one over his former team whose coach, Roberto Mancini, used him sparingly last season.

"Mancini promised me more games next season, but I preferred to leave," said the 26-year-old midfielder.

"Roma are one of the most important clubs in Italian football and I wanted a new challenge."

"Initially I had doubts about the move because I like Milan as a city, but I came round to the idea."

Argentine striker Hernan Crespo believes Inter will need time before their huge, star-studded team gels.

"There are a lot of us and many of us are new," said the journeyman forward, who rejoined Inter from English Premiership outfit Chelsea for a second spell earlier this month.

"We have to work hard to find the right balance and convince ourselves that we are really strong. We know there are many of us, but everyone will get their chance," added Crespo who endured an unhappy first experience with Inter between 2002 and 2003.

Among Inter's other signings this summer are Swedish striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic and France captain Patrick Vieira, both from disgraced Turin giants Juventus.

AC Milan hold the record for the most SuperCup wins having lifted the trophy five times since it began in 1988.

In the past, the event has been held in the United States (twice) and once in Libya in an attempt by Italy's football federation to try and attract more foreign fans to Italian football.

Hargreaves pleads for United move



AFP, Munich

England international Owen Hargreaves has again pleaded with Bayern Munich to sell him to Manchester United, a move he says would be "in the interests" of all parties.

Bayern are adamant that Hargreaves should honour his contract with the German champions, which runs till 2010, however the Canadian-born midfielder is desperate to play in England.

Hargreaves prompted the anger of the German champions after meeting with United manager Sir Alex Ferguson last week, the day after England's friendly with Greece.

Hargreaves said he was prepared to pay 25 million euros to sign the international but they have a herculean task on their hands judged by the mood in the Bayern boardroom.

"We are Bayern Munich, not Hamburg who have just let Khalid Boulahrouz go (to Chelsea), here

should allow him to leave before the August 31 transfer deadline.

"In the nine years I've been at Bayern I've always given 100 percent for the club. I feel I should be treated with respect, and that I should be allowed to sign for Manchester United," Hargreaves told Bild daily newspaper.

"The club doesn't want me to leave, and that is Bayern's right, but they also know what I want. Joining United would be a huge step in my career."

Hargreaves, 25, saw his stock increase after solid midfield performances for England in the World Cup.

United are said to be prepared to pay 25 million euros to sign the international but they have a herculean task on their hands judged by the mood in the Bayern boardroom.

"We are Bayern Munich, not Hamburg who have just let Khalid Boulahrouz go (to Chelsea), here

it's the employers who decide, not the employee," said Bayern's Karl-Heinz Rummenigge days ago.

Hargreaves was then taken to task, in front of his teammates, and he was told he had "prostituted" himself to the English club.

He was also fined 25,000 euros and Bayern threatened to complain to football's world ruling body FIFA if Manchester United persisted in their bid to lure him to England.

However Hargreaves said he wants the episode to end, by his departure for Old Trafford.

"All this has to come to an end. I didn't want the situation to deteriorate like this: we have to find a solution that's in the interest of everyone," he added.

Rummenigge however seems unmoved.

"Owen can leave if he wants, but not until July 1, 2010. That's our last word on the matter."

United mean business

AFP, London



Manchester United are determined to continue their perfect start in the English Premiership on Saturday and will be hoping cross-town rivals Manchester City can do them a favour by topping Arsenal.

United, top the table with two straight wins, travel to Watford, Arsenal go to City while Liverpool host West Ham in their bids not to be left trailing in United's wake.

Champions Chelsea travel to Blackburn on Sunday looking to get their bid for a third straight title back on track after Wednesday's shock 2-1 defeat at Middlesbrough.

United's Ole Gunnar Solskjaer reckons that three years without some Premiership silverware at Old Trafford has fired up his teammates with a steely determination.

"It's been a really good start. We're young and we've got a fresh squad," said the Norway striker.

"We've had the experience of losing for the past couple of years, and we've lost together and that's put good hunger back into the team and the spirit is fantastic."

But Watford boss Aidy Boothroyd said his team refused to be intimidated by United.

"It will be hard, but if you worry

about reputations, you might as well go back into the Championship without even playing the matches," he said.

Solskjaer insisted the Red Devils were concentrating on blazing a trail at the top of the Premiership rather than worrying about Chelsea's progress.

"We don't think about any other results. As long as we play as we can, we'll be winning games," he said.

However, Arsenal skipper Thierry Henry said Chelsea's defeat at Middlesbrough had given everyone plenty to cheer.

"The result is not only good for us. Everyone can look at that result and say, 'We can have a go.' We'll see what we can do at Manchester City."

He added that he was not fully fit and may have to content himself with a place on the substitutes' bench at City's Eastlands home.

"Body-wise I'm OK but I've had trouble turning with the ball and putting some pace into it," he said.

"Usually it takes a month or a month-and-a-half to get going. I have to take it slowly and if I can go out there and help the team, I will."

Liverpool host West Ham in the first league match at Anfield this season and are determined not to lose further ground.

"People are talking about catching Chelsea, but we know it's going to be really difficult because they are such a good team," said their Spain

midfielder Xabi Alonso.

"There's a long way to go and we've only played one game. But we feel confident that we can do things properly this season to mount a challenge."

West Ham have four points from their first two matches.

Everton travel to Tottenham, who put on a classy performance Tuesday to beat Sheffield United 2-0, with goals from Dimitar Berbatov and Jermaine Jenas.

But Spurs boss Martin Jol said the pair face a race against time to be fit to face the Toffees.

"Berbatov got a knock on his ankle but hopefully he will be OK," the Dutchman said.

"JJ did not train on Thursday because he had a problem with his toe. We will have to wait and see but hopefully he will be available."

Charlton have lost both their matches so far, leaving new boss Iain Dowie raring to get stuck into Saturday's visitors Bolton -- who have not won away from home in eight months.

"It's a pressure game, but I can't wait for it. We have not had an ideal start -- but this is where character comes to the fore," he said.

Their top striker Darren Bent should have recovered from a dead leg sustained midweek.

Bolton assistant boss Sammy Lee said they were determined to end their winless streak.

"We don't want to get into some sort of scenario where we are only known as a home team," he said.

"We have got to make sure we don't get into that mould. We want to get into a mould of whether we are playing home or away, we perform to our maximum."

Wigan were top-flight debutants last season and they host Reading, who find themselves in the same boat this time around.

Elsewhere Saturday, Sheffield United, who were runners up to Reading in the second-tier Championship last year, visit Fulham.

In Sunday's matches, Blackburn host Chelsea, while Newcastle travel to Aston Villa. Middlesbrough welcome Portsmouth on Monday.

FIXTURES

(1400 GMT unless stated)
Saturday
 Charlton v Bolton, Fulham v Sheffield Utd, Liverpool v West Ham (1145 GMT), Manchester City v Arsenal (1615 GMT), Tottenham v Everton, Watford v Manchester Utd, Wigan v Reading
Sunday
 Aston Villa v Newcastle (1300 GMT), Blackburn v Chelsea (1500 GMT)
Monday
 Middlesbrough v Portsmouth (1900 GMT)

Spurs target Baptista

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's Brazilian midfielder Julio Baptista is a target for English Premiership outfit Tottenham, Marca sports daily reported on Thursday, saying the London side were preparing an 18-million-euro bid.

Baptista, who came to the Bernabeu only a year ago from Seville for 24.5 million euros, has been stressing for weeks that he has no intention of leaving the meringues but with the frenetic transfer activity which culminated in the arrival of Mahamadou Diarra from Lyon his future is in the balance.

Another Brazilian midfielder, Emerson, is also a new face, increasing the competition for a starting place.

Marca said Spurs hoped to tie up a deal in the next few days but Real are still pondering their options as they still have not given up hope entirely on luring Jose Antonio Reyes back to Spain from Arsenal, though AC Milan's Brazilian star Kaka appears to be a non-starter.

Baptista, who Marca quoted as saying that "I have said 300 times I am not going -- I am happy here" -- was last year on Arsenal's radar screen and a deal involving him and Reyes was mooted earlier in the summer.

Larsson handed two-match ban



AFP, Stockholm

Former Barcelona and Celtic star Henrik Larsson on Friday received a two-match ban from the Swedish Football Federation (SFF) after punching a rival player in a Swedish Cup match.

"Larsson's actions had nothing to do with the run of play and can not be seen as an unintentional reflex. ... The (federation) rules the incident merits a two-match ban," the SFF said in a statement.

Larsson, who won last season's Champions League title with Barcelona before moving to Swedish side Helsingborg, hit Elfsborg player Jon Joensson in the chest during the match on August 19.

Joensson had to leave the pitch injured but no action was taken by the referee who did not see the incident.

A private individual who was watching the match filed a police complaint against Larsson, although on Wednesday prosecutor

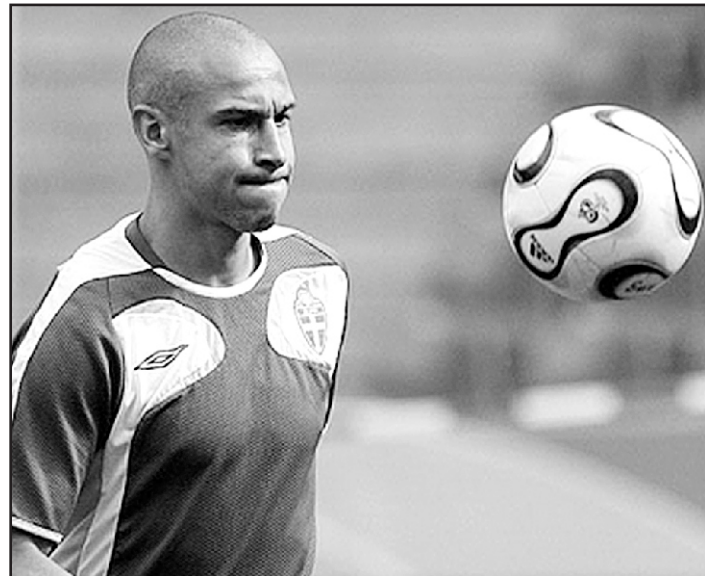
Tom Svensson said he would not launch an investigation.

The SFF launched its own investigation into the affair which resulted in Friday's suspension.

Larsson has denied intending to

harm Joensson, saying he was attempting to pull away from the player.

Larsson will miss upcoming matches against Gais and Malmoe FF.



HENRIK LARSSON

Thatcher apologises for horror challenge



AFP, Manchester

Manchester City's Ben Thatcher has apologised to Portsmouth's Pedro Mendes for the shocking challenge which put the Portuguese star in hospital.

Former Wales full-back Thatcher, who could also face police action, wrote a letter to the midfielder saying he was sorry for the dreadful tackle which knocked Mendes unconscious during the goalless draw at Eastlands on Wednesday.

Mendes, 27, suffered a seizure and needed oxygen after Thatcher elbowed him in the face.

He has been released from hospital, though he will need medical and neurological supervision during the coming week before he is given the green light to play again.

"Immediately after the game I tried to find out how Pedro was," Thatcher told City's website.

"I have written to him today apologising for what happened."

Whether that will be enough to dissuade the Football Association (FA), the game's governing body in England, from launching a charge against the 30-year-old remains to be seen.

If that was not bad enough, Thatcher has been warned by Professional Footballers' Association chief executive Gordon

Taylor that he has left himself open to a law suit, should Mendes opt to pursue the matter.

It is not the first time Thatcher has found himself in trouble for reckless behaviour.

Six years ago, he was banned for three matches by the FA after being caught smashing his elbow into the face of Nicky Summerbee.

And earlier this month, on the Blues' pre-season tour of China, the former Tottenham defender was sent off against Shanghai for two bookable offences. He left an opponent requiring hospital treatment for a punctured lung after a similar challenge to Wednesday's, which also went unseen by the referee.

Marseille aim to consolidate

AFP, Paris



Champions Lyon travel to Nice buoyed by last week's morale-boosting 2-1 win at last season's runners-up Bordeaux.

However, there was worse news on Thursday as they were paired with Real Madrid in the Champions League group E and also face tricky trips to eastern Europe to play Dynamo Kiev and Steaua Bucharest.

Lyon did top a group containing Real last year, though, beating the galacticos 3-0 at the Stade Gerland before drawing 1-1 in the Bernabeu.

The Loire-based minnows come from a town more known for its 24-hour endurance motor racing and its third century amphitheatre but they have proved the surprise package after three matches this season.

Le Mans have won twice and drawn once so far but will have their work cut out to keep their unbeaten run going against the Mediterranean giants.

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Bordeaux missing out on top spot after losing a 1-0 lead against Lyon.

Bordeaux have had a week off to smart over that disappointment and may be fresher than Lille who travelled to Skopje in Macedonia on Wednesday to secure their qualification to the Champions League group stages at the expense of Rabotnicki.

Both teams face tough tests to make it through to the second round in Europe as Lille were drawn with AC Milan, AEK Athens and Anderlecht while Bordeaux face Liverpool, PSV Eindhoven and Galatasaray.

Capital giants PSG travel to Sochaux on Saturday with their hosts able to call on loanee signing Anthony Le Tallec from Liverpool.

FIXTURES

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