

Atletico demand Reyes payment

REUTERS, Madrid

Atletico Madrid say Jose Antonio Reyes owes the Primera Liga club two million euros (2.56 million dollars) in compensation after the forward spurned their approach to join city rivals Real on loan from Arsenal.

"The agents and the player signed a pre-contract agreement which included a two million euro penalty clause if the player did not play for Atletico this season," sports director Jesus Garcia Pitarich told a news conference on Friday.

"Our legal services will intervene to claim this money on behalf of the club."

Spanish international Reyes has denied signing a pre-contract agreement with Atletico, saying it would have been illegal.

After Real's initial approach appeared to be rebuffed last month, Atletico stepped in and made an offer for Reyes.

Arsenal eventually rejected Atletico's bid and completed a loan swap with Real late on Thursday night in which Brazilian forward Julio Baptista moved to London in exchange for Reyes.

West Ham in 'exploratory' takeover talks

INTERNET, undated

West Ham have had 'exploratory discussions' about a possible takeover of the club but insist talks are at an early stage.

Kia Joorabchian's company, Media Sport Investment, have been linked with a takeover of the Hammers.

Joorabchian made an investment in Corinthians in December 2004, with Argentinian duo Carlos Tevez and Javier Mascherano leaving the Sao Paulo side and arriving at Upton Park from the Brazilian club yesterday.

A statement to the Stock Exchange from West Ham read: The board confirms that it has had exploratory discussions in relation to a possible bid but these discussions are at a very early stage and there can be no certainty that an offer for West Ham will be forthcoming.

However, the east London club insist there is 'no contractual link' between any potential takeover and Thursday's sensational signings of Argentinian internationals Javier Mascherano and Carlos Tevez.

West Ham would not confirm who they have been in talks with. MSI, who owned both players after buying them for their previous club Corinthians, had been investigating a possible takeover bid last summer.

Arsenal sign Brazilian youth

INTERNET, undated

Arsenal FC have confirmed that they struck a pre-deadline 5-million-pound deal to sign Brazilian youth international Denilson on a long-term contract from Sao Paulo FC.

The 18-year-old full name Denilson Pereira Neves will be loaned to a smaller European side to gain experience, according to his hometown club Sao Paulo. The midfielder has played just 12 first-team games, but has experience of facing English opposition having appeared against Liverpool FC in the 2005 FIFA Club World Championship. The former Brazil Under-17 captain is now turning out for the U20s.

Red Star sign Ailton

AFP, Belgrade

Serbia's champion side Red Star Belgrade signed Brazilian striker Ailton and Ecuador's Segundo Castillo, officials said on Friday.

Ailton, 33, who played for German side Hamburg and Turkish Besiktas, arrived here late Thursday, Red Star Belgrade said in a statement, without revealing financial details of the deal.

Local media reported that the transfer was estimated at around 300,000 euros (385,000 dollars) for a two-year contract.

The 24-year-old midfielder Castillo also arrived on Thursday to join Red Star.

The former European Cup winners earlier this week sold their midfielder Nenad Kovacevic and defender Milan Bisevac to French side Lens, while striker Nikola Zigic signed for Spanish Racing Santander.

"We tried to fill in gaps left after recent transfers with the best possible players," Red Star president Dragan Stokjovic told reporters.



Iran's Vahid Hashemian (L) tries to win the ball from South Korea's Dong-Jin during their 2007 Asian Cup qualifying match in Seoul on Saturday.

UEFA concern over Hammers deal

Football

AFP, London

European football chiefs have expressed their concern over the shadowy transfer deal that saw Argentinian stars Javier Mascherano and Carlos Tevez join English outfit West Ham.

A swirl of intrigue has surrounded Mascherano and Tevez' shock move to Upton Park, with speculation raging that the South American duo are merely being placed in the shop window before being sold to a bigger club next year.

Though the deal has been described as "permanent" by West Ham, no other details about the transfer from Brazilian club Corinthians have been divulged.

Reports have said the two players would have been valued at between 40-60 million pounds in an open transfer market - money that West Ham plainly does not have.

The deal is believed to be part of a takeover bid of the Hammers by

Football

AFP, London

British-born Iranian businessman Kia Joorabchian, whose company Media Sports Investment (MSI) owned the two players.

Yet the lack of transparency surrounding the deal has caused concern at European football's governing body UEFA.

"This is certainly a strange deal and it is worrisome because it is part of this evolution of football in which money always plays an increasing role and more traditional values such as loyalty or regional roots or liking for a club seem to be very old fashioned," a UEFA spokesman said.

"We feel the same as the supporters. Football is more than a business. It is something completely different, it involves loyalties, emotions, fidelity. These are two exciting players but, at the same time, this was the jersey of Bobby Moore and Geoff Hurst - people who spent their lives at the club. Maybe these players will be at West Ham 10 years from now. If so, that is great. But, at the same time, one cannot help but have some doubts."

Sources close to Joorabchian meanwhile denied that Tevez and Mascherano would be sold on to a bigger club next year.

"It is preposterous to say they have just come here to be put in the shop window," a source close to Joorabchian was quoted by the Press Association news agency as saying.

"There are no plans at all for them to move. This is the best place for them to be and show their talent to the full extent. It is good for West Ham."

"They are obviously not going to play in a team that is struggling against relegation but, if it all goes well, they will stay at West Ham."

West Ham confirmed in a statement to the London Stock Exchange Friday that they had held talks with Joorabchian and MSI over a potential takeover bid.

Joorabchian has been repeatedly linked to various Russian tycoons, including Chelsea's billionaire backer Roman Abramovich. Joorabchian has denied any link to Abramovich.

Substance over style

INTERNET, undated



A few hours after Ramon Calderon was named as Real Madrid CF's new president on 8 July, the most sought-after coach in the club's recent history began his second spell at the helm. Fabio Capello was back, a decade after leaving an indelible mark on the Santiago Bernabeu.

There was delight among the club's supporters, desperate to taste success again after three barren years without a trophy. They see the Italian, who took Madrid to the title during his single-year stay in 1996/97, as the one man truly capable of turning the club's fortunes around. To achieve that end though, those same fans will have to get used to Capello's style: magic, improvisation and flair will be suppressed in favour of hard work and pragmatism. Time will tell if they are willing to accept that.

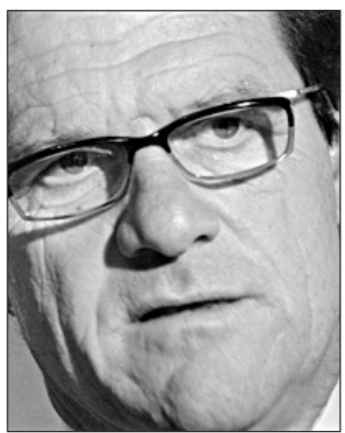
Not surprisingly the new Madrid coach focused first on defence as he began planning for the new season. Working hand-in-hand with the club's sporting director, Predrag Mijatovic, Capello was quick to return to his former club to take advantage of Juventus' demotion to Serie B. In signing Fabio Cannavaro and Emerson his first recruits were two players in whom he has complete confidence. Missing out on Gianluca Zambrotta was tempered by the news that Roberto Carlos had agreed to stay for at least one more season. Having completed his plan for

the defence Capello turned to attack. Just as he had in his first spell at the club, Capello made it clear that the team would play with a traditional centre forward with the power and skill to find the net with whatever chances fell his way. Ten years ago, the Roman coach brought in Fernando Morientes to replace Davor Suker. This time he pinpointed Ruud van Nistelrooy to fill that role though Ronaldo, for the

at Juve where the Brazilian was paired with Patrick Vieira.

The Trofeo Santiago Bernabeu, during which Van Nistelrooy scored twice in a 2-1 win against RSC Anderlecht, gave Diarra and Emerson the first chance to play together. The pair's greatest problem lay with who to pass to once possession had been won. Capello, though, appears to have the answer in Antonio Cassano. The Italian coach looks to have, once again, brought out the best in the talented forward who saw Capello as a father figure during their time together at AS Roma. Capello is looking to Cassano to provide the link between midfield and attack and the 24-year-old appears ready to repay Capello's faith. He has lost six kilograms and since the arrival of his mentor and is beginning to look again like the player that was so highly rated during his time in Serie A.

With the new season just days away the Capello revolution is far from complete. Mijatovic left the door open when asked about the possibility of more signings following the arrival of Diarra. Capello wants another central defender and is keen to move Sergio Ramos to right-back. The former Sevilla FC player is more defence-minded than Michel Salgado and Cicinho and would bring more balance. Jose Antonio Reyes, long linked with a move finally made the swap and the rumours surrounding Ronaldo took rest. There may be some way to go yet but the new-look Madrid is taking shape in the master's image.



FABIO CAPELLO time being at least, provides competition. Calderon had promised Kaka, Arjen Robben and Cesc Fabregas would sign in his election manifesto but Capello soon made it clear that the most urgent necessity was a powerful midfielder, not a playmaker, and he advised the board to move for Mahamadou Diarra. Alongside Emerson, Capello plans to create a solid axis in the centre similar to the one that brought him so much success

Iran salvage draw

REUTERS, Seoul

Striker Vahid Hashemian scored deep into injury time to earn Iran a 1-1 draw with South Korea in their Asian Cup 2007 Group B qualifying match on Saturday.

The Hanover 96 striker took advantage of Kim Sang-sik's defensive error to rescue Iran after Reading's Seol Ki-hyeon given Korea a 1-0 lead at the stroke of half-time.

Before Hashemian's strike, South Korea were looking at a potential five-point lead at the top of the standings. But instead, the group remains wide open with third placed Syria also in the running to qualify for next year's finals in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam.

South Korea lead the group with seven points from three matches, with Iran second on five. Syria are third with four points and bottom team Chinese Taipei have yet to earn a point.

The top two teams qualify for the finals.

Both Korea and Iran were able to call upon their top European-based players with Manchester United's Park Ji-sung, Tottenham's Lee Young-pyo and Seol lining up for the Koreans against Hashemian, Hamburg's Mehdi Mahdavia, Bayern Munich's Ali Karimi and Bolton Wanderers' new signing Andranik Teimourian.

Korea's next match is against Chinese Taipei at home on Wednesday while Iran are away to Syria.

Baptista vows to impress

INTERNET, undated

Julio Baptista insists he is not at Arsenal just to make up the numbers.

The 24-year-old has joined the Gunners from Real Madrid in a transfer deadline day deal which took winger Jose Antonio Reyes in the opposite direction.

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has kept a close watch on the versatile Brazilian, who is able to play either as a striker or in an advanced midfield role.

Indeed, the Gunners tried to sign him a year ago, when the player opted for Real instead.

But Baptista has no intentions of being a bit-part player at the Emirates Stadium.

"It is my hope that I can win a title with Arsenal this season," the Brazil international declared.

"Arsenal is one of the best clubs in Europe."

"I am very happy to be given the opportunity to come here, where I know the manager a little."

Baptista has been named in the Brazil squad which will take on South American rivals Argentina at Arsenal's Emirates Stadium on Sunday.

The Brazilian feels he will have no trouble settling into life with the Gunners.

He said: "I know nearly all the players here."

"I know Gilberto the most from the Brazilian national team and I also know Thierry (Henry) and (Cesc) Fabregas."

"In fact, I could probably name all the players."

Arsenal were busy over the final few hours of the transfer window, with Ashley Cole and Pascal Cygan also departing.

William Gallas arrived as part of the deal which took England left-back Cole to Chelsea.

The veteran France defender is looking forward to a fresh challenge.

He said: "Arsenal has a great history and sense of tradition and, combined with the fantastic facilities, offers me a great move."

"It is a chance to build on my career and enjoy what will hopefully be further successes."

Bristol City trio jailed

AFP, London

Wales defender Dave Partridge was jailed along with two of his Bristol City teammates on Friday for their part in a drink-fuelled brawl.

Partridge, 27, was sentenced to two months in prison for causing actual bodily harm during the fight in October 2005, while City colleagues Steve Brooker, 25, and Bradley Orr, 23, were both given 28-day jail sentences.

A fourth City player Scott Brown, 21, was ordered to do 100 hours of community punishment as a result of the clash outside Romeo Browns nightclub in Bristol city centre. Partridge, currently on loan at League One Leyton Orient, was also ordered to pay a thousand pounds compensation to bystander Andrew Rowley, who he hit during the fracas.

The players were said to have been drinking for eight hours when Partridge became involved in a fight with the nightclub's bouncers after they had ejected him for spilling his drink over a woman customer.

A Bristol City statement on the League One club's website hinted they may appeal against the verdicts. The statement said: "The club is very disappointed by the judgement and, together with the players and their legal advisors, will be looking at all the options available to them."

Transfers of power

Football

GABRIELE MARCOTTI

The transfer market closed on Wednesday, which means it's report card time. Increasingly, titles and trophies are won not by what happens on the pitch, but what happens in the transfer campaign.

Read below to see who, among Europe's biggest clubs, goes to the head of the class and who gets the dunce cap. Bear in mind that the transfer game isn't just about buying great players - it's about getting them at the right price.

Arsenal: A

Ashley Cole was never going to stay anyway, so the Gunners did the right thing in getting the best possible deal for him: 10 million dollars plus William Gallas, the best all-around defender in the Premiership is an absolute steal.

Swapping an unhappy Jose Antonio Reyes for a motivated Julio Baptista was also a master-stroke. He'll give them the physical presence that has been lacking since the departure of Patrick Vieira. Tomas Rosicky is a younger version of the departed Robert Pires and jettisoning Sol Campbell and his wages made sense. All this and they ended up with a positive transfer balance. Well done, Arsene Wenger and David Dein.

Olympique Lyonnais: A-

Lyon managed to get a good price for Mahamadou Diarra while hanging on to the rest of its starters, no mean feat. Alou Diarra won't fill his namesake's shoes, but ought to get the job done, he came relatively cheap. Kim Kallstrom adds some elegance to the midfield, while Sebastien Squillaci provides another option at the back. If he recovers his form from two years ago, he'll be a crucial pick-up. Waiting in the wings is Jeremy Toulalan, one of the bright young things in the French game. Another sterling transfer effort for Jean-Michel Aulas.

Barcelona: A-

Didn't do much, but what it did, it did well. Gianluca Zambrotta is a major coup on either flank. Lilian Thuram might not be getting any younger, but he adds depth to the back line. Eidur Gudjohnsen is a smart player who'll contribute off the bench, but don't expect him to match the departed Henrik Larsson's goal-scoring exploits. The only quibble is the failure to sign a true centre-forward for the bench.

Valencia: B+

The summer was mostly about intelligent house-cleaning, offloading half a dozen highly paid veterans who were surplus to requirements. But Asier del Horno is a clever addition to an impressive back four, while Fernando Morientes and Francesco Tavano offer options up front. The calculated

risk here is Joaquin: if he's fit and happy, he could be the transfer coup of the summer.

Liverpool: B+

The new strike force of Dirk Kuyt and Craig Bellamy (provided he keeps it together off the pitch) is an instant upgrade over Morientes and Djibril Cisse and, what's more, they came at the right price. Fabio Aurelio is a gamble after his injury, but a worthwhile one. If Jermaine Pennant stays out of trouble and fulfils even a fraction of his potential, he'll be a good signing too, but for now, the jury's out. Rafa Benitez wanted to add depth and versatility to the squad and he certainly did so, despite not securing an A-list superstar.

AS Roma: B

With no money to spend, Roma had to get creative. It sold well, at least in terms of jettisoning big contracts (though seeing Cesare Bovo go was heart-breaking), and focused on securing the two guys coach Luciano Spalletti really wanted: striker Mirko Vucinic and playmaker David Pizarro, who could be this year's comeback kid after his nightmare at Inter.

Bayern Munich: B

It's decidedly easier when you dominate the domestic market. But Bayern nevertheless did well strengthening every department with Daniel van Buyten at the back, Mark van Bommel in midfield and Lukas Podolski up front. Plus, Michael Ballack and his wage demands are gone for good. Hanging on to Owen Hargreaves at all costs was probably not the smartest thing to do from a business perspective, but at least it showed the world that Bayern won't be pushed around.

Real Madrid: B-

There was plenty of work to be done and Fabio Capello certainly wheeled and dealt. Fabio Cannavaro is a short-term solution at the back, Mahamadou Diarra is a beast in midfield, but the price paid for Emerson seems a bit stiff, especially given his injury-riddled campaign last year. Reyes is a gamble, but an intelligent one. Ruud van Nistelrooy is a useful pick-up, though the failure to move Ronaldo, whom he effectively replaces, is a big minus. In fact, Real's squad remains too big and the failure to offload some players could come back to haunt it.

Chelsea: C+

Owner Roman Abramovich may not care about overspending, but it's obvious that Andriy Shevchenko, John Obi Mikel, Salomon Kalou, Cole and Khalid Boulharouz (more than 100 million dollars between them) were hardly bargains. Neither was Ballack who, despite being a free agent, was signed to the kind of mega-contract that has already annoyed some of the senior players (including John Terry and Frank Lampard) who make two-thirds as much as he does. The good news is that Chelsea now

has a genuine goal-scorer and a true left-back. The bad news is that squeezing Ballack into this line-up forces Jose Mourinho to re-think his tactical set-up. Most worryingly, the loss of Gallas is an enormous blow and one which could and should have been avoided.

Inter Milan: C

With the turmoil in Italian soccer, this could have been a golden opportunity for the Nerazzurri, but the early impression is that they've blown it. Hernan Crespo's return and Zlatan Ibrahimovic's arrival strengthen the frontline on paper: Integrating them into a team where, until very recently, Adriano was the main man, won't be easy.

The signing of Vieira makes sense if it's the Vieira admired at the World Cup - if it's the guy who was dragging himself up and down the pitch at Juventus last season, Inter would have been better off without him. Fabio Grosso at least plugs the gaping hole at left-back while Maicon is one of the most undervalued right backs around. Letting Obafemi Martins go could turn into one of those trademark bonehead Inter moves (like selling Roberto Carlos, Dennis Bergkamp, Adrian Mutu, Andrea Pirlo, Adriano...the list goes on and on). Still, you can't help but think that, after spending all that money, Inter is still a work in progress. Oh well - at least it didn't buy Ronaldo, too.

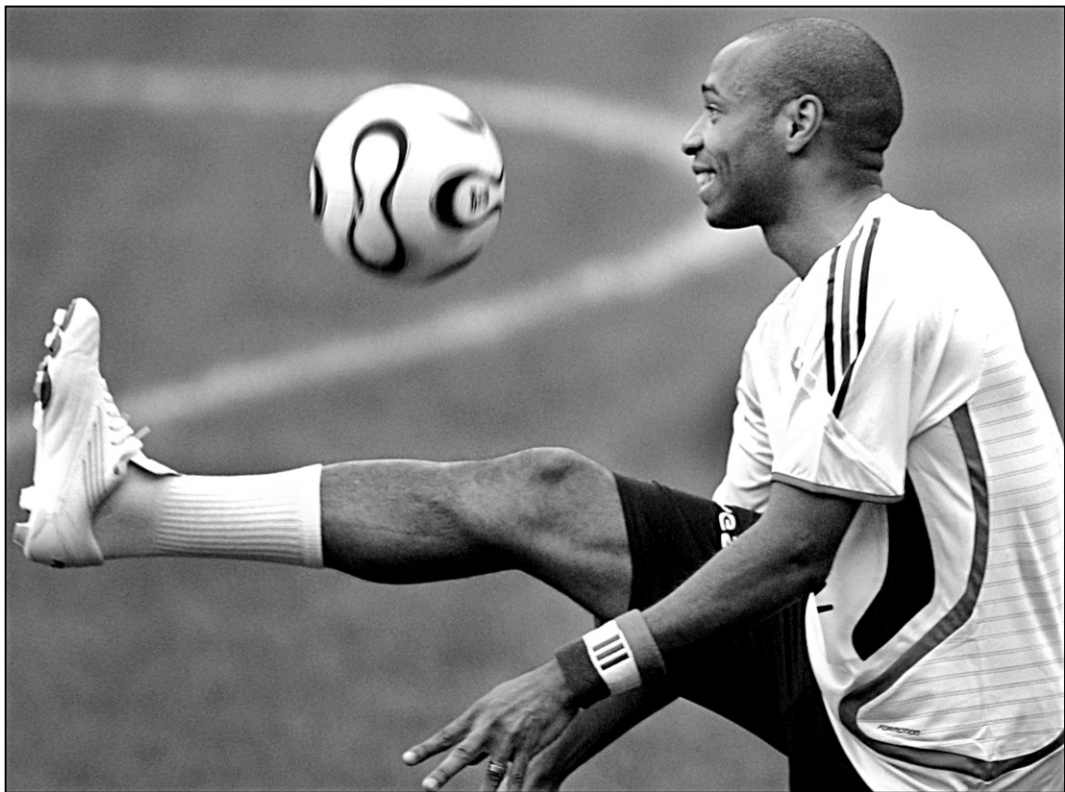
AC Milan: D

Kudos for getting 50 million dollars for Shevchenko, but that's about it. Yoann Gourcuff may one day be the heir to Manuel Rui Costa, but for now he's an unknown quantity. Ricardo Oliveira is a huge gamble given his injury record. And Daniele Bonera is a serviceable jack-of-all trades, but not really a replacement for Jaap Stam. Meanwhile, the squad looks decidedly weaker than last year.

Manchester United: D

Van Nistelrooy is gone and his 21 league goals last season haven't been replaced. Michael Carrick will help the midfield, but for 30 million dollars, United could have done better (Mahamadou Diarra, anyone?). United sleep-walked through the transfer market, chasing players it didn't need (Hargreaves) and failing to secure those who truly would have helped (Fernando Torres).

(Gabriele Marcotti writes for SI.com)

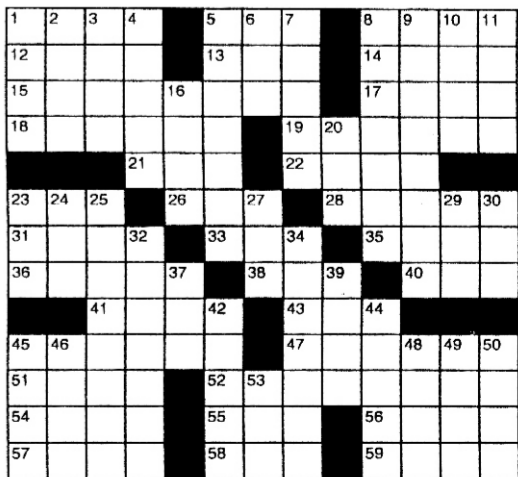


France striker Thierry Henry juggles with the ball during a training session in Tbilisi on Friday, prior to their Euro 2008 qualifying match against Georgia.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
 1 Revue segments
 5 Frank McCourt book
 8 Mimicked
 12 Stead
 13 Took the prize
 14 Grain storage area
 15 Vocal range
 17 Unforeseen problem
 18 In a way
 19 Extraterrestrial
 21 Id counter-records
 22 Recording
 23 Fre-quantly, in verse
 28 High peak
 28 Rage
 31 Restrain
 33 Dopey pal?
 35 Use scissors
 36 Bridge protector?

DOWN
 1 Priestly vestments
 2 Florentine farewells
 3 Region (Abbr.)
 4 Hotel accommodation
 5 Double
 6 Charged bit
 7 Golfer Sam
 8 Lends a hand
 9 Ever-green growth
 10 Vivacity
 11 "Reservoir -"
 16 Frat-party garb
 20 Fleur-de-
 23 World Series abbr.
 24 Bear hair
 25 Brass instrument
 27 Rep. or Dem.
 29 Predetermine
 30 Car buyer's stat
 32 Swollen hand
 34 Continue
 37 Fate
 39 Successful feat
 42 Profundity
 44 Giggly noise
 45 Sketched
 46 Green land
 48 - song (cheaply)
 49 One
 50 Dregs
 53 "Eureka!"



CRYPTOQUIP
 N B G A X D T Q B G J G R
 D N B S Z E G O Z I S G N R B Q I E
 G X S Q J Q C N D Z . A Z J N V A S C Z
 K N O T N R V X K S A Z S Z J K Q .
 Yesterday's Cryptquip: SINCE MY BIRTHDAY IS AT THE BEGINNING OF MAY, I HAVE OFTEN VISITED TAURUS ATTRACTIONS.
 Today's Cryptquip Clue: K equals P
 The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals Q, it will equal Q throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.