

## Premiership online

AFP, Hong Kong  
Hong Kong's upstart broadband TV channel has wrested the potentially lucrative rights to broadcast English Premiership football from a rival cable company, a statement and media reports said Wednesday.

The move cements online TV's emergence as an alternative to cable TV in Asia following a bid by Singapore's SingTel broadband service to broadcast English football.

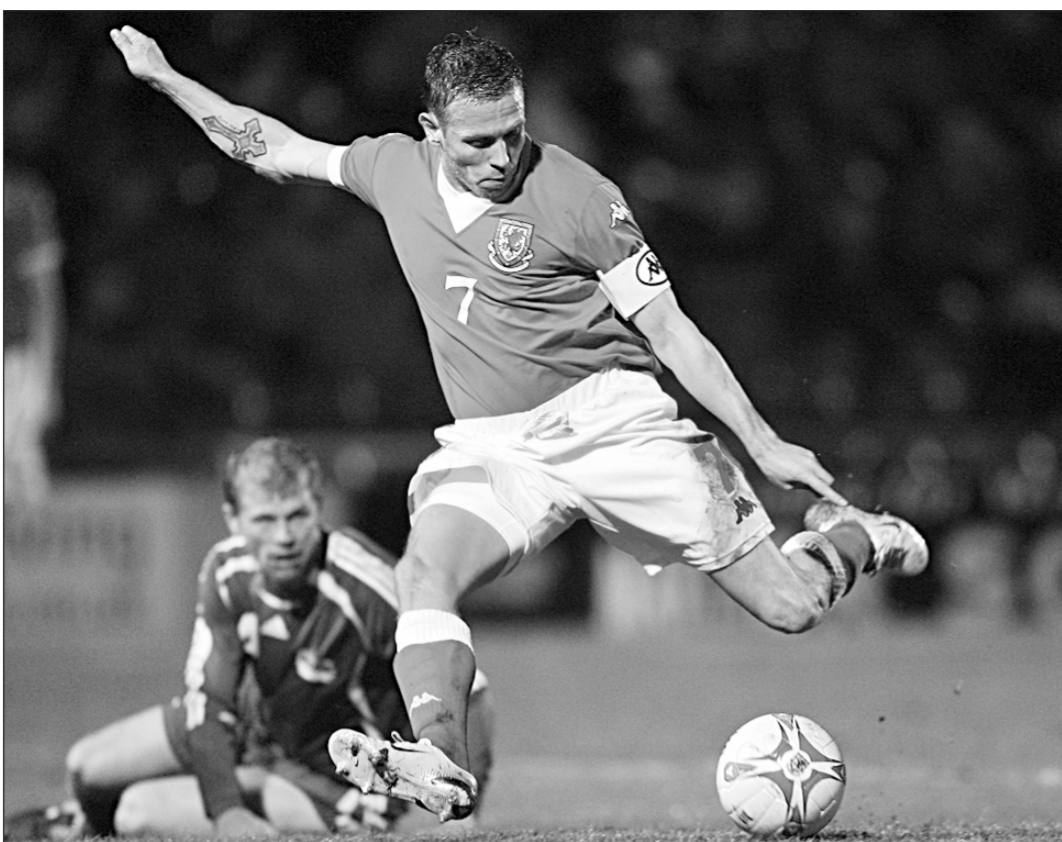
NOW Broadband, a unit of telecom operator PCCW, said it had secured the licence to screen 380 matches both on its service to TV sets and on its mobile phone video service.

It outbid i-Cable Communications with a 1.56 billion Hong Kong (200 million US) dollar offer for the licence to show all top-flight English games between next year and 2010. The Standard newspaper reported, citing market sources.

The report said the bid was so high that i-Cable wasn't able to come in with a counterbid.

"The first bids made by the two operators were so significantly apart that the English Premier League decided against holding a second round of bidding," a source was quoted as telling the paper.

The report said analysts expected NOW -- which has 654,000 subscribers -- to have to pay a further 400 million dollars in operating costs to show the games.



Wales striker Craig Bellamy (R) shoots with his favoured left-foot to score against Liechtenstein during their friendly match at The Racecourse Ground in Wales on Tuesday.

## Wales thrash Liechtenstein

AFP, Wrexham

Jason Koumas' sparkling double and Craig Bellamy's guidance helped Wales to a 4-0 friendly win over Liechtenstein here on Tuesday.

Koumas, who was among the scorers in Wales' 3-1 win over Cyprus in last month's Euro 2008 qualifier, put John Toshack's side ahead with two long range strikes in the opening quarter of an hour.

Then the tireless Bellamy and his boyhood pal Chris Llewellyn wrapped up a good night's work late on.

Toshack said: "We can be pleased. We scored four goals which is always pleasing and they were good quality goals as well."

"Maybe at the back there were two or three sloppy balls but some of our football was very pleasing."

Bellamy added: "I believe we could have scored more, we had more chances but you can't be too dissatisfied. It was a good performance, a lot of players

came in and did well and it's always nice to get a win."

The result was the perfect way to mark captain Ryan Giggs' 60th cap whilst it consigned Liechtenstein, with manager Urs Meier in charge for the first time, to their 10th consecutive defeat.

Wales were flying from the start at Wrexham's Racecourse ground stadium with Liverpool striker Bellamy and Robert Earnshaw as a front pair and Giggs in a free role behind.

They took the lead on eight minutes when Koumas glided in from the left and unleashed a 25-yard shot that soared into the top corner of the net.

Boavista keeper Peter Jehle was beaten again on 14 minutes when Bellamy worked the ball back to Giggs, who set up Koumas for another long-range effort.

Toshack replaced the injured Giggs and Richard Duffy with Carl Fletcher and Joe Ledley respectively at the break with Bellamy taking over as skipper.

On 69 minutes, there were three Wrexham men on the pitch for the first time since the early 70s when Wales replaced Davies

with Mark Jones, who won his first cap.

Bellamy was finally rewarded for his industry with the third goal on 75 minutes when Jones' touch sent him into the box to wrong foot a defender and blast a 12 yarder into the roof of the net.

And with a minute to go Bellamy's lay-off allowed his good friend Llewellyn to score his first goal for his country.

Wales had set up this friendly to provide them with a useful yardstick ahead of a Euro 2008 qualifier against San Marino in March.

And the win will come as a timely end of year pick-me-up for Toshack's men after a stuttering start in their bid to qualify for the next European Championships.

They lost their opening two ties to the Czech Republic (2-1) and Slovakia (5-1) before their fortunes picked up against Cyprus to leave them in fourth and with plenty of work to do in fourth in Group D.

AFP, Lisbon

## Mourinho planning early retirement

Chelsea's Portuguese manager Jose Mourinho plans to retire from coaching well before he reaches his 60s, he said in a newspaper interview published Tuesday in Portugal.

"I think my career won't be too long, it will be a shorter career than that of those traditional coaches who are still active at 60 or 65. I don't want any of that," he told sports daily A Bola.

"But I want to live out my career at the highest level of intensity, responsibility, of pressure," he added. "I don't know how to live without pressure anymore."

Mourinho, 43, joined London-based Chelsea in June 2004 from Portuguese side FC Porto in a deal worth 4.2 million pounds a year. He signed a new five-year deal with the London-based club in May 2005.

The Chelsea manager has said he wishes to run the Portuguese national team at some point in his career.

## Terim wants Italy return

AFP, Madrid

Turkey tactician Fatih Terim confesses he'd love a return to Italian football after spells at Fiorentina and Milan.

"This country is my second home," he said ahead of tomorrow night's international friendly in Bergamo.

"I like coming back very much and will always have fond memories of Italy. It's not an easy time for us, but it's important to honour the great captain Giacinto Facchetti. The result won't be the primary concern."

The test game was organised in the birthplace of former Azzurri hero and Inter President Facchetti, who died last month from cancer.

Terim is glad to be part of this special event at the Stadio Atleti Azzurri d'Italia and admitted he's not lost his taste for Serie A football.

"Would I return to an Italian club side? Why not? I won't exclude it, especially as I'm much more experienced now than I was back then."

The Emperor was fired from Fiorentina in a row with Vittorio Cecchi Gori before a brief spell at Milan also ended in dismissal in 2001.

"I don't want to talk about the past," insisted the Turk. "Milan are Milan, a great club that will know how to get themselves out of their current situation quickly."

The post-World Cup excitement may have passed for the rest of the country, but Roberto Donadoni's men were still given a very warm welcome by over 3,000 fans in this evening's

training session at the Stadio Azzurri d'Italia.

The squad paired off into 10 players each for a game between ranks. In the yellow bibs were Marco Amelia, Gianluca Zambrotta, Fabio Cannavaro, Manuel Pasqual, Mauro Camoranesi, Cristian Brocchi, Angelo Palombo, Stefano Mauri, Tommaso Rocchi and Emiliano Bonazzoli.

In the blue were Gianluigi Buffon, Massimo Oddo, Cristian Zaccardo, Andrea Barzagli, Marco Materazzi, Daniele De Rossi, Alberto Aquilani, Simone Barone, Antonio Di Natale and Alberto Gilardino.

The yellow side won 2-1 thanks to goals from Lazio midfielder Brocchi and Reina's Mauri, while Di Natale of Udinese netted for the blues.

## Messi under the knife

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona forward Lionel Messi has had a successful operation after fracturing a metatarsal bone in his foot, the Spanish champions said Tuesday.

The Argentine midfielder injured his left foot in a league game against Real Zaragoza on Sunday and is set to be out of action for three months.

Doctor Antoni Dalmau said: "The operation went well. There were no complications."

"For the bone to set properly, he will need three months."

Messi's injury is a further blow to Barcelona's hopes of retaining the Spanish league title and the Champions League trophy with striker Samuel Eto'o also out for five months with a bad knee injury.

Brazilian midfielder Edmison was also injured in the game twisting an ankle and he will be out for around 10 days, while Argentinian international forward Javier Saviola has been ruled out for up to six weeks after injuring his left thigh scoring the final goal in Sunday's 3-1 win.

## Valencia target Lippi & Buffon

AFP, Madrid

Valencia sporting director Amedeo Carboni has reportedly said the club intend to bring coach Marcello Lippi and goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon to the Metastella.

"The two primary objectives of our campaign are to bring Lippi and Buffon here," Carboni told the last executive meeting of the club's board, according to Calcio Mercato.

Such a statement could be considered disrespectful to Valencia's incumbent coach, Quique Sanchez Flores, who has built a side capable of challenging for the Liga title.

Lippi coached Italy to its World Cup win in the summer, but opted to leave the post afterwards.

Number one Italy national goalkeeper Buffon, meanwhile, has remained loyal to Juventus despite the club's relegation to Serie B on match-fixing charges.

Valencia's veteran keeper Santiago Canizares is yet to sign a new contract with the club.

## Guardiola hangs up his boots

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona's multi-decorated former captain Joseph Guardiola announced Monday he was retiring from football.

The 35-year-old midfielder, whose career was touched by a drugs scandal, hangs up his boots with half a dozen Spanish titles (1991-94, 1998-99), and a Champions League trophy as a member of Johan Cruyff's 1992 Barca 'dream team'.

After a decade (1990-2001) at the Nou Camp Guardiola moved on to Serie A side Brescia for the 2000-01 season, then AS Roma before returning to Brescia in 2002-03 before a spell with Qatar outfit Al-Ahli.

Last year he received a seven-month prison sentence relating to his time in Italy when he was accused of using the banned steroid nandrolone which he was not made to serve.

"Pep" Guardiola was capped 47 times for Spain between 1992 and 2001 with one of his five goals for the national side coming in the 1994 World Cup in the United States.

Announcing his retirement on the Catalan radio station RAC-1 on Tuesday he said he was tempted by the notion of becoming a manager.

# Fergie plans all well ahead

AFP, London



Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson has demanded another win at Sheffield United on Saturday to ensure his side keep their advantage over Chelsea ahead of next week's clash.

United lead Chelsea by three-points before next weekend's Premiership showdown having recorded six straight wins since the disappointing draw at Reading in September.

With a healthy goal difference advantage as well, Ferguson knows his team will retain top spot ahead of Chelsea's visit to Old Trafford even if they lost at Bramall Lane and Chelsea come through their London derby with West Ham unscathed.

But the United manager knows just how much the pressure would be eased if they could beat the Blades to maintain a buffer on the back-to-back champions.

"The game with Chelsea will be a massive one and we want to be going into it with a three-point lead," said Ferguson.

"Chelsea's excellent starts to the last two league campaigns are the main reason why they've won the title."

"They have left us all catching our breath, but thankfully we have enjoyed a good opening to the season this time round."

Having dropped points in just two of their opening 12 fixtures -- their only defeat coming on home soil against Arsenal -- United are enjoying one of the best starts to a league season in Ferguson's 20 years as manager.

But the Scot is acutely aware the title race is a long way from over.

Once the Chelsea game has gone, United will then embark on a testing run of eight games in five weeks, which includes trips to Manchester City, West Ham and Aston Villa.

Even if they come through those tests, Ferguson accepts his team will probably stumble at some stage.

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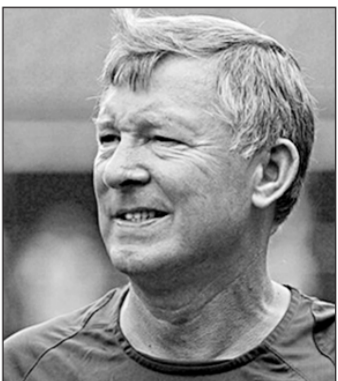
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too confident because there are a lot of potholes ahead and they will trip up somewhere.

"The important thing is how you recover. You have to have the consistency that champions need and the kind that we've had many times in the past."

As usual, Ferguson will hope his international stars return home without injury this week, although already there is a minor worry over Ryan Giggs, who picked up an ankle knock leading Wales to victory over Liechtenstein in Wrexham.



SIR ALEX FERGUSON

## Mascherano staying put

INTERNET, undated

Javier Mascherano is unlikely to return to club football in Brazil, according to his agent Walter Tamer.

Rumours had surfaced that both Mascherano and teammate Carlos Tevez, could join Flamengo after the club's former president Helio Ferraz and vice-president Kleber Leite arrived in London on Tuesday for a meeting with Kia Joorabchian, the president of MSI, who own the transfer rights to the two players.

But Tamer said: "I believe the possibility of Mascherano signing for Flamengo or any Brazilian club is zero. He elected to go to Europe, and that is where he is likely to stay."

## CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

- ACROSS**
- Census statistic
  - Gung-ho
  - Inclination
  - To anger
  - Cattle's chaw
  - Erté's style
  - Swag
  - Work unit
  - Dixie
  - Blue shoe material
  - Historic period
  - Means justification
  - Parts of goblets
  - Superficial
  - Jib, for one
  - Hostel
  - Lou Grant
  - Schuss
  - Cookware
  - Inundated, maybe
  - Unemotional
  - Basilica area
- DOWN**
- Experts
  - Mentor
  - Facility
  - No more than
  - Zinger
  - Insecticide abbr.
  - Always
  - Perfume label word
  - Spring mo.
  - U.S. spy org.
- 34 Advance**
- 35 Karaoke need**
- 36 Book**
- 37 Misstep**
- 38 Samples the tea**
- 39 Entanglement**
- 40 Busy with**
- 41 Incubator sound**
- 42 Danger-field's lack**
- 43 Unaccomplished**
- 44 Md.**
- 45 Neighbor**
- 46 Lettuce variety**
- 47 Newspaper page**
- 48 Second-hand**
- 49 No more than**
- 50 Zinger**
- 51 Insecticide abbr.**
- 52 Always**
- 53 Perfume label word**
- 54 Spring mo.**
- 55 U.S. spy org.**

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59						60				61

**CRYPTOQUIP**  
R U A D Z W J A C S H A I S C I  
K A Q D K E D B C C W N P B Q P N P S  
I E A . E Z B W U B H A P S J E I  
E P B K Q S D I K B Q A R A C C .  
Yesterday's Cryptquip: IF A PROSPECTOR FINDS A PIT THAT'S HAUNTED, I GUESS HE MIGHT CALL THAT A GHOULDED MINE.  
Today's Cryptquip Clue: E equals I

The Cryptquip 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.

## Valencia looking for Reina

AFP, London

Spanish outfit Valencia are on the trail of Liverpool's Spanish 'keeper Jose Reina, according to a report here Wednesday.

Liverpool's manager Rafael Benitez used to coach the east coast Spanish side and now current Valencia handler Quique Flores is hoping to tempt Benitez into letting Reina go with an eight million pound bid (15 million dollars).

According to The Sun Flores wants the 24-year-old Reina to replace the aging Santiago Canizares.

The carrot for Reina is a chance to boost his status in the Spain set-up, in which he plays second fiddle to Real Madrid's Iker Casillas.

Benitez has already admitted that Liverpool, who sit ninth and 14 points adrift of leaders Manchester United, are virtually out of the Premiership race.

Reina, who replaced 2005 Champions League final hero Jerzy Dudek as the Red's first choice keeper, joined Liverpool for six million pounds (11.37 million dollars) from Villarreal after starting his career at Barcelona.

# 12x3

## Ancelotti predicts Milan recovery

AFP, Rome

AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti is confident his team will quickly end their poor run of form which has seen them lose four of their last five Serie A matches.

"Things are not going well, but I am convinced we will snap out of it," he told the club's website on Tuesday.

"It's not to say I'm not worried, because I am. It's a very negative period, but it hasn't happened by chance. These poor results our down to several factors."

"We have spoken a lot about our lack of preparation in the summer due to several of our players returning from the World Cup and needing to rest, and also about the injuries we've had."

"But now we have to put all that behind us and start working in a different way. I don't know if we are doing too little, or trying too hard. Whatever it is, it's not enough. Three consecutive home defeats, plus the loss at Atalanta, is not good and things must change."