Viduka wants **Boro stay**

AFP, Middlesbrough

Veteran Australian striker Mark Viduka says he wants to sign a new deal to stay with English Premiership side Middlesbrough.

The 31-year-old's current threeyear deal runs out at the end of the

"I would like to stay. I love coming to work. I get on with everybody. I enjoy coming to work every day," Viduka told the Evening Gazette

The Australian has been linked with moves away from the Riverside in the past, and there is set to be fresh speculation over his future

"There have been rumours before the start of every season I have been

here," said Viduka. "But I know nothing of anything

happening. I just get on with the job." Viduka's season has been disrupted by a toe injury but he is determined to play a full role as manager Gareth Southgate attempts to steer Boro, who are just two points above

the relegation zone, to safety. Boro began the busy Christmas period with a morale-boosting 2-0 win at fellow strugglers Charlton on Saturday and Viduka wants to see that form continue with games against Everton, Blackburn and

Sheffield United to follow. Viduka said: "The Christmas games are always very influential. We could come out of the Christmas programme in a very good state or a

Roma play down Montella talk

INTERNET, undated

Roma coach Luciano Spalletti has downplayed suggestions that Vincenzo Montella could be in line for a January move to England.

The experienced Giallorossi forward has been linked with Fulham after struggling to win a place at the Serie A side this season.

The Cottagers could well be looking for reinforcements but Spalletti has stated he has made no plans to dispose of Montella despite his lack of playing

"I think Montella has been penalised by the way I have managed my team," Spalletti told Sky Italia.

"Everyone underlines his big duties, but I can't play all my players.

"Especially because he has good technique but isn't physically strong.

"It could become difficult allowing him to stay under certain conditions, but nothing has been said vet.

However Montella is known to be desperate for first team football and is unlikely to accept a minimal role at Stadio Olimpico in the New Year.

Drogba wants Malouda

INTERNET, undated

Chelsea sensation Didier Drogba wants former Guingamp teammate and friend Florent Malouda to come to Chelsea. Lyon's versatile winger has been the revelation of French football over the last few seasons and has been linked with a move to Stamford Bridge.Malouda has become a starting line-up player for the National Team after catching the eye in Ligue 1

and the Champions League recently. And Drogba -- who has scored 15 goals in 25 league and continental matches for Chelsea this season -gave a hint that Malouda may be

winging his way to the "other" Blues: "Florent (Malouda) has to win the award for best Ligue 1 player" Drogba

"Why? Because Chelsea only sign the best players from the French league!

Jose Mourinho signed Didier Drogba and Michael Essien after they won the awards for Lique 1 player of the season.

Betting arrests in Vietnam

AFP, Hanoi

Police in Vietnam have arrested at least 14 people accused of illegal online betting on international football matches, police and state media said Monday.

"We arrested several people early Sunday," a police official in Ho Chi

Minh City said without elaborating. The raid was organised in 13 different locations. At least 14 people were detained and around 7 billion dong (437.000 dollars) were confiscated on the spot, said the daily

Thanh Nien newspaper. The arrested men had received betting orders on the English Premier League from local gamblers and had

then onpassed them abroad. Football gambling is illegal but widespread in the communist nation. where officials are considering whether to legalise the betting to avoid what they called "the bleeding of foreign currency"

Major syndicates bet on foreign matches, but since its debut 2000-2001 season, the domestic V-League has also been marred by allegations of corruption and matchfixing among players.

Cahill vows strong return



Hobbling Everton mid-fielder Tim Cahill believes he will return from his lengthy, injuryenforced absence a better player.

The Australian international, who is expected to return to the first-team in January, is stepping up his rehabilitation from a knee injury suffered against Aston Villa on November 11, and has kicked a ball again for the first time.

"I've not had one down moment throughout this injury, I've worked hard and looked at the positives, said Cahill

"I've spent a lot of time with mv family and with my boys because (in the past couple of years) I've not had the chance to have a proper

"There's a lot to my game that I need to think about and I've been working on other areas.

"Obviously it's hard being injured but you have to have high

Despite his absence, Cahill remains Everton's top scorer with seven goals and was playing a crucial role for the Merseysiders when he suffered the injury which was caused by a challenge from team-mate Lee Carslev.

"I want to come back fully fit and start where I left off." he told the Liverpool Daily Post.

"I scored a few goals and was playing well but the biggest thing was that I got injured.

"I have to look at the pluses and the plus is that I've had a bit of a rest and when I get back hopefully I'll be revived for the start of the New Year - I hope to be buzzing and scoring



Keeper row resurfaces



Chelsea have been ice-cool in their pursuit of a third consecutive Premier-ship title but Tuesday's meeting with

Reading here at Stamford Bridge promises to test their temperament to Jose Mourinho's team are still

counting the cost of their last encounter with the Royals in October, when both the Londoners' first-choice goalkeepers Petr Cech and Carlo Cudicini were hospitalised after clashes with Stephen Hunt and Ibrahima Sonko respectively. Cech has not played since after fracturing his skull in the collision with

Hunt - with Mourinho angrily accusing the Irishman of deliberately attempting to hurt the Czech international - and the repercussions from that match are still rumbling on.

A police investigation into a series

of death threats sent to Hunt and Sonko, apparently by disgruntled Chelsea supporters, is still ongoing, while Mourinho has refused to retract his criticisms of both the former Crystal Palace winger and the standard of healthcare at the Madejski Stadium,

which he felt had endangered the lives

of his players Steve Coppell, the Reading manager has no intention of resting the duo for the trip to west London, despite the possibility they will be targeted by the home supporters. Hunt, for one, is expecting a reaction.

"People have singled me out for little things that normally people wouldn't make a fuss over." he said. "I don't know why they do it and I wish evervone would just let me get on with "The collision was just one of those

things and an awful lot of games have been played since then. I'm an honest player - I'm going to play hard but I will also be fair.'

The simmering acrimony between

to an occasion which is already crucial in determining Chelsea's hopes of retaining the title

Chelsea have failed to sparkle for much of the season but their character has never been in doubt. In their last two league matches. a

pair of 3-2 victories away to Everton and Wigan have been plucked virtually out of thin air. But another win in the early kick-off

on Boxing Day will see them displace

Manchester United at the top of the

table, although Sir Alex Ferguson's side could regain the lead when they meet Wigan two hours later. The championship race is tantalisingly poised ahead of the English game's traditionally stuffed Christmas schedule, but Didier Drogba, the Chelsea forward,

harbours no doubts over his side's "The race for the title is just between Manchester United and us but before long we will take over the leadership and United will be fin-

Hughes wary of Bellamy

AFP. Blackburn



Blackburn manager Mark Hughes fears old-boy Craig Bellamy could increase the

pressure on his struggling Rovers side when the Wales striker returns to Ewood Park with Liverpool on

Bellamy quit Blackburn for Anfield when the Merseysiders triggered the forward's cut-price six-million-pound get-out clause in the close season.

After a difficult start, Bellamy is now delivering the kind of performances for Rafael Benitez's side that helped secure a UEFA Cup spot for Blackburn last season and has scored four times in his last four league outings.

But while the forward and his Liverpool team-mates have moved smoothly into third place in the Premiership behind top two Manchester United and Chelsea, his former colleagues are struggling at

the opposite end of the table - and find themselves in an unexpected relegation fight.

Hughes maintains his side is too good to remain in the lower reaches for long, but defeat to Liverpool could see them sink into the bottom three.

The problems confronting Blackburn were laid bare in Saturday's 6-2 thrashing at Arsenal and Hughes admits the in-form Bellamy - who scored Liverpool's opener in the 2-0 win over Watford could add to their woes.

"Craig Bellamy proved he is a quality player for us last year," Hughes said. "That is the reason why

he was coveted by Liverpool. "He has had a bit of a settling in period, but quality always comes to the fore and it was only a matter of time before Craig started scoring the goals we know he is capable of.

"He did a great job for us last year and we were sorry to see him go. We will enjoy welcoming him back - and hopefully beating him."

Bellamy could be joined at Anfield next month by Rovers's Australia who has yet to agree a new contract and is free to talk to other clubs during the January transfer window.

Benitez tried to sign the full-back before this season but baulked at Rovers's asking price. Neill, though, can leave for free at

the end of the season, and Blackburn are now likely to be tempted by a much reduced offer. Five straight wins have dragged

Liverpool out of mid-table and Dutch striker Dirk Kuyt believes that defence has been the key to their recent success

"The fact we haven't conceded a goal for more than 10 hours gives us a lot of confidence," Kuyt explained.

Encounters between the two north-west sides have been robust affairs in recent years and Liverpool midfielder Xabi Alonso expects Tuesday's match to be no different.

"They are always physical contests," he said. "Since my time in England I have discovered that Blackburn is one of the toughest teams to play against."



Bayern want a poacher

INTERNET, undated

Bayern Munich general manager Uli Hoeness admits the club are in desperate need of a predatory

Bayern were dumped out of the DFB-Pokal after a 4-2 defeat against Alemannia Aachen earlier this week, and Hoeness believes Felix Magath's side are crying out for a traditional centre-forward.

"Now and then, you have just got to put it in with a toe-poker," he said. "They (the strikers) all want to score wonderful goals.

Aachen striker Jan Schlaudraff, who was on the scoresheet on Wednesday night, could be the man to solve Bayern's problems with reports he has been offered a contract by the German champions and two other unnamed clubs.

The Germany international is available for 1.2 million euros (£800,000) next summer and although Hoeness admits Bavern would like to broker a deal in January, he is also aware that is unlikely.

"He will pay dearly for that goal (in the DFB-Pokal)," joked Hoeness. "If he was available (Bayern

would sign him in January), but that does not seem the case. Aachen are not willing to let their star striker leave, despite the fact

they will earn so little when he does move on in July. However, as Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge recently revealed Magath will be handed a 30 million euro (£20 million) transfer kitty, Aachen could be persuaded to

sell in the January transfer window.

Jose blasts int'I schedule

AFP, Lisbon

National teams are required to play far too many matches, Chelsea's Portuguese coach Jose Mourinho said in a newspaper interview published on Monday.

"There are too many matches with minor teams and because of this when there are serious matches players are at risk of not being at the level that people expect," he told Portuguese sports daily O Jogo.

"It is too much to have groups of seven to eight teams that play 14, 15. 16 matches to qualify, which serve mostly to injure players," he

Mourinho, who has guided Chelsea to two successive Premiership titles after taking FC Porto to the Champions League triumph, suggested that qualifying groups should instead consist of just three or four national teams matched by their ability. "The best would play against the

worst. Instead of Portugal playing against Kazakhstan and England against San Marino, let Kazakhstan and San Marino play against Andorra." he said. Mourinho, who is under contract

with Chelsea until 2010, has said he would like to coach Portugal before retiring from football.

Moratti calls for focus

INTERNET, undated

Internazionale president Massimo Moratti has warned his tabletopping players against complacency.

Inter equalled the Serie A record for the number of successive wins on Saturday with a 2-1 home defeat of Atalanta - their 11th on the trot - and currently lead second-placed Roma by seven points heading into the winter break.

But Moratti is eager for coach Roberto Mancini and the players to maintain their concentration between now and the end of the

He told www.inter.it: "Eleven consecutive victories represent many battles won. "But we still haven't won any-

thing and the boys have fully

understood this. Mancini also has the right attitude in this "We're happy to spend Christmas without any worries and with serenity, but we know we have six months ahead in

which we will have to do well to

win.'

Inter struggled to see off a stubborn Atalanta side at the San Siro, but an Adriano strike and an own goal from Simone Loria enabled them to overcome Cristiano Doni's shock opener. Mancini said: "We knew it

would be a very difficult game, we weren't expecting an easy afternoon. "It was the first time (Marco) Andreolli and (Nicolas) Burdisso

had played together in the centre

of defence, and Atalanta have

done very well in recent matches. "After suffering in the first half we did very well in the second half and overturned the result."

South America's plight

Football

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

South America's top clubs have to sell off their best players to cure an economic crisis caused by bad management and stayaway fans, a survey in the Brazilian O Globo newspaper claimed on Sunday.

The Deloitte company claim that the transfers of players accounted for 30 percent of income for Brazilian clubs in 2005, 50 percent for Argentinian sides and 53 percent for Uruguayan

In those countries, gate receipts

bring in just seven percent of reve-

However, in Europe, ticket sales are responsible for 34 percent of Enalish clubs' incomes, 31 percent

in Spain and 16 percent in Italy. Only Mexico among Latin American countries can boast a similar balance to Europe with 25 percent of revenue generated at the turnstiles compared to 23 percent from the sale of players.

Brazil was the top exporter of talent in 2005 with 804 players, worth 100 million dollars (76 million euros), on the move.

Brazilian international Robinho was the most expensive export costing Real Madrid 30 million

Santos.

Despite the transfer revenues Brazilian clubs still ended 2005 with a combined deficit of 83.5 million dollars (63.5 million euros).

reported Deloitte The O Globo newspaper concluded that South American clubs were caught up in a vicious circle fans stay away from the games as the top stars can only be seen on television, playing in the top

European leagues. In the last 10 years, the average attendance at Brazilian games has been 12,000, with 10,600 in Argentina and just 4,800 in Chile.

Wenger hails Walcott



ready to play for England even though the teenage forward has failed to secure a regular starting place for the London giants.

Wenger's comments emphasised the strength of Arsenal's squad, especially compared with their next opponents Watford. Bottom-of-the-table Watford.

Premiership on Tuesday, have scored just 11 goals in 18 league matches this season. In stark contrast, the Gunners put six past Blackburn on

who host Arsenal in the

future for 17-year-old Walcott, bought from Southampton in January this year for a fee that could yet rise to 12 million pounds. "I feel 2007 is a big year for

Theo," Wenger said. "Theo has

played a few games and done

Wenger is upbeat regarding the

well... I must say he will be a candidate for England now.

"He is ready to handle that now. He has the personality and he is intelligent.'

Walcott, despite never having figured for Arsenal in the Premiership last season, was the surprise package in England's squad at the World Cup, but returned from Germany without kicking a ball.

Walcott's appearances have meanwhile been limited by the form of another young Gunner --Robin van Persie, who with nine goals this season is Arsenal's leading scorer.

The Dutchman, 23, scored twice in the final five minutes on Saturday, as Blackburn collapsed.

While Walcott and Van Persie look set to stay at Arsenal for a number of seasons, German goalkeeper Jens Lehmann could be playing elsewhere next year.

Ahead of the Watford fixture, the 37-year-old was reported in one German newspaper as saying that he has not ruled out a move to Spain or back to Germany as he awaits a new contract offer from

While Arsenal are scoring for fun, despite Thierry Henry's absence through injury, Watford are missing clear-cut chances in

Watford were always going to

every game they play.

find life tough on their return to the Premiership this season, with little money to spend and a squad possessing almost no experience of the top-flight. Their survival mission was made almost impossible, however,

season, Watford lost star striker Marlon King for the remainder of the campaign owing to injury. Compounding their misery, they are unable to replace King until January when the transfer

when only a few games into the

window re-opens. Watford manager Aidy Boothroyd, while acknowledging that a new striker is a priority, insisted he has not lost faith in his current squad, including King's replacement Darius Henderson who has not scored a single goal this season.

"I know the situation we're in and I think I've got the people, with the additions of a few others, to get out of it," Boothroyd said

Gangster Adebayor

Football

INTERNET, undated

Arsenal striker Manu Adebayor admits he'd probably be a gangster if he hadn't got himself out of Togo. One of the Premiership's inform players, Adebayor, says some footballers simply do not

appreciate how lucky they are. Now a national hero back home he told The Sun: "In the past Togo was quite a good place to live and of course I still love it now. But it is a little difficult as, politically, it is not

bly be a gangster if I weren't a footballer. Most of my friends from when I was young are bad boys. "They roam my home city of Lome. They drink too much, smoke

"To tell you the truth, I'd proba-

drugs and are involved in crime. "But that is life in some parts of Africa. It is so different to other parts of the world and you have to

accept that. "You have to enjoy life. Some footballers forget how lucky they

are. It is a wonderful lifestyle. "At Arsenal, the players are a very nice bunch. I am so lucky. "But elsewhere, many players

have forgotten where they have

come from and where they are going to. "They have their money and they think that is life. They need reminding what they were doing

when they were 15. That they

37 Deuce

38 Speak

39 Seesaw

41 Timber

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46 Time for a

50 Bee keep-

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54 State

55 Employ

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57 Crockett

56 Part of the

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8 Andy's pal

5 Hold the

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13 Caviar

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15 Maker of

17 Elevator

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35 Foreman

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22 Mimic

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26 Mined

27 Futon

31 Winter

32 Round

34 Pack

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11 Mtg.

Solution time: 21 mins

16 That girl

6 Seek the

heart of

London. My girlfriend Charity weren't going to nice restaurants.

yam, which is like mashed potato, and that would be it. "We'd have it for dinner, the following lunchtime and then

cooks it - but we don't eat it every "Growing up, it was always the same food. Mum would prepare

"Because if I was like some of those footballers I was talking about, I would rather put a gun in my head. Unfortunately, you cannot tell them to change.



ADEBAYOR

CRYPTOQUIP 11-8

OX QNHS FNBRPJR

GJXPSGFQ

LHUBSHU, QNH'SG O INSGB INOSBGS

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: BECAUSE MY POOR

MIGHT SAY HE'S TICK-SKINNED. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: S equals R

DOG IS PLAGUED BY SMALL PARASITES, YOU

puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the

CRAIG BELLAMY