

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 three-year deal runs out at the end of the season.

"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 here.

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 very bad state."

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 time."

"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 yet."

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 told TF1.

"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 Ligue 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 match-fixing among players.

Cahill vows strong return

AFP, Liverpool



Hobbling Everton mid-fielder Tim Cahill believes he will return from his lengthy, injury-enforced 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 my family and with my boys because (in the past couple of years) I've not had the chance to have a proper holiday."

"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 spirits for the lads."

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 Carsley.

"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 more goals."



TIM CAHILL

Bayern want a poacher

INTERNET, undated

Bayern Munich general manager Uli Hoeneß admits the club are in desperate need of a predatory striker.

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 Bayern 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'l 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 added.

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 best and the worst 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 table-topping 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 season.

He told www.inter.it: "Eleven consecutive victories represent many battles won."

"But we still haven't won anything and the boys have fully understood this. Mancini also has the right attitude in this sense."

"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 Andreoli 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



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 teams.

In those countries, gate receipts

bring in just seven percent of revenue.

However, in Europe, ticket sales are responsible for 34 percent of English 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

dollars (22.8m euros) when he left 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. In Europe, the figure is 20,000.

Wenger hails Walcott

AFP, London



Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger believes Theo Walcott is 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, who host Arsenal in the Premiership on Tuesday, have scored just 11 goals in 18 league matches this season.

In stark contrast, the Gunners put six past Blackburn on Saturday.

Wenger is upbeat regarding 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

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 Arsenal.

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

Watford were always going to 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, when only a few games into the 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 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



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 in-form 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 stable."

"To tell you the truth, I'd probably 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 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

weren't going to nice restaurants.

"Growing up, it was always the same food. Mum would prepare yam, which is like mashed potato, and that would be it."

"We'd have it for dinner, the following lunchtime and then dinner again. I still eat it here in

London. My girlfriend Charity cooks it - but we don't eat it every day!"

"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

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words.

11-8 CRYPTOQUIP grid with letters and numbers.

CRYPTOQUIP PT FPTG OX QNHS FNBRPJR LNHGDG PD GJXPSGFQ LHUBSHU P'BD OQ QNH'SG O INSGBINOSBGS. Yesterday's Cryptquip: BECAUSE MY POOR DOG IS PLAGUED BY SMALL PARASITES, YOU MIGHT SAY HE'S TICK-SKINNED. Today's Cryptquip Clue: S equals R. 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.



CRAIG BELLAMY