

Hefty tag on Richards

INTERNET, undated

Manchester City are demanding a massive £20 million from Chelsea for teenage defender Micah Richards. The Mirror says Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho has made Richards his top target for the New Year after admitting concerns over his squad's defensive depth. City do not need to sell as Richards is under contract and they still have most of the Shaun Wright-Phillips 21 million pound windfall from Chelsea just 16 months ago. So chairman John Wardle will be looking for the same sort of fee for a player whose potential is bigger than Wright-Phillips - and is arguably worth even more.

Disgraced player sent home

AFP, Rome

Promising French footballer Garra Dembele who is facing trial here over raping an American student has been released and allowed to return to France. The 20-year-old Malian-born player - who is regarded as one of the great hopes of French football after playing for both the French Under-19 and Under-18 sides - must return to Rome for his trial in March, his lawyer told AFP. Dembele, who began his career at Auxerre, denies the charge and says that the student consented to having sexual relations with him in the loo of a Rome nightclub.

Baptista itching for a chance

REUTERS, Madrid

Arsenal's Brazilian attacking midfielder Julio Baptista can see a future for himself in the Premier League, if he is given the chance to adapt to the English game. The 25-year-old international moved to London at the end of August in a one-year loan deal from Real Madrid, with Spain forward Jose Antonio Reyes going in the opposite direction. However, with both clubs having options to buy the respective players at the end of the season, Baptista has had few chances to prove his worth, making only two league starts so far. "Arsene Wenger tells me he will wait until I get used to this league, but until I play regularly I won't achieve that," Baptista told Spanish sports daily AS on Tuesday. "The idea is to participate as much as possible and at the end of the year evaluate everything and decide if the positives outweigh the negatives. "I don't want to be just one more player. I want to help the team. But I can imagine myself being here for a few seasons." Considered surplus to requirements at Real in August, Baptista is unsure how he would fit in if he returned to the Bernabeu. "Real are a very different side to the one I left. Coach Fabio Capello would have to change his system for me to get back in the team," he added. "I don't know if my exit was down to the club or Capello."

Baptista joined Real from Sevilla in 2005 in a deal worth \$24.20 million, but failed to hold down a regular place with the nine-times European champions.

Alves extends Sevilla stay

INTERNET, undated

Daniel Alves has agreed a one-year contract extension with Primera Liga leaders Sevilla which ties him to the club until June 2012. It is the fourth extension the highly-rated full-back has signed since joining Sevilla from Brazilian side Bahia in 2003, although the buy-out clause in his contract remains at 60million euros (£40.3million). The 23-year-old, whose existing deal was due to run out in 2011, had been linked with a number of Europe's biggest clubs in recent months with Liverpool, Chelsea, Barcelona and Real Madrid all reportedly showing an interest in the attacking defender. However, Alves has committed himself to Sevilla, and club sporting director Ramon Rodriguez Verdejo is delighted with the decision. "It is an agreement which demonstrates that Sevilla, as much as Daniel, are mutually satisfied and that the player feels valued and recognised by the club," Verdejo said on his club's website. Alves, a Brazil international, was a key part of the Sevilla side that won the UEFA Cup earlier this year, and also played the entire match as the Andalusian side beat Spanish rivals Barcelona 3-0 to win the UEFA Super Cup in August. This season he has started 15 of Sevilla's 16 league games, scoring three times, and has also helped Sevilla through to the knock-out stages of the UEFA Cup.

Scolari sets leave date

Football

AFP, Lisbon

Brazil's World Cup winning coach Luiz Felipe Scolari will leave his present post with Portugal after the Euro 2008 campaign is finished he announced on Tuesday. "The 58-year-old - known as 'Big Phil' - told sporting daily 'Record' that it was logical he should finish his term at the helm after Euro 2008 as he felt six years in charge of any team was enough for a coach. His comments may spark interest from Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho as he has said he would like to coach the national side before he retires. "It is logical and only natural that at the end of Euro 2008 I leave when my present contract comes to an end," said Scolari, who after winning the 2002 World Cup with Brazil guided Portugal to the Euro 2004 final and to this year's World Cup semi-finals - their first in 40 years. "The work of a coach is limited to five or six years. "We are already in this time frame but after that, things become more difficult, because they create habits and links with the players which can result in things deteriorating," added Scolari, who was awarded the paper's Portuguese sports personality of the year. Scolari also confirmed in the interview that he had been approached both by Portuguese giants Benfica in 2004 and England prior to the last World Cup finals to replace Sven-Goran Eriksson when the Swede left after the tournament. "The English wanted me to sign the contract during the finals but that I start the job after the finals were over. "However that would have a betrayal of the Portuguese. "It simply wasn't possible.



LUIZ FELIPE SCOLARI

Nobody can sign for one national side and continue to run another. It was a difficult choice but I understood that I could not accept it," said Scolari, who guided Portugal to victory over England on penalties in the World Cup quarter-finals having knocked them out at the same stage of Euro 2008. Scolari said he was not clear about what he would do after he finished with Portugal but he would probably coach a club. "I could stay here, go to another European country or return to Brazil. I just don't know."

Football against football

Football

AFP, Paris

When it comes to level playing fields, it seems the Americans are flattening their European counterparts. An entry draft and salary capping ensure big, rich American clubs cannot dominate smaller, poorer ones. Meanwhile, in Europe, a Russian billionaire can buy an English football club while a powerful body, the G14, slavishly protects the interests of the continent's richest teams. But is the American model providing fairer competition? Comparing the Super Bowl to the Champions League over the last 10 years provides interesting reading. There have been more different winners - eight to seven - of the Champions League in that period and more different quarter-finalists (Conference semi-finalists in gridiron) - 31 to 27. Real Madrid are the only team to have won the Champions League more than once in the last 10 years while two American football outfits - New England Patriots and Denver Broncos - have won back-to-back Super Bowls. Despite this, European football bosses at UEFA are worried for the future. "You can't apply US rules and

regulations in Europe. In Europe you have to let the free market have free reign with buying and selling players and contracts," said UEFA spokesman William Gaillard. "What we can do is introduce sporting rules so no club has an advantage and ensure there is a distribution of profits." One measure UEFA has introduced is a quota system of home grown players to try to stop rich clubs buying up all the best talent across the globe. Right now teams must name in their 25-man Champions league squads at least two players that came through their own system and two more that came through the system in the same country. Neither Arsenal nor Chelsea could manage that and so were forced to name 24-man squads. Life will get more difficult for those two as the quota will eventually rise to four and four. "Already Barcelona have eight and Lyon seven so you can be successful with home grown players," said Gaillard. Across the pond, however, they already have systems in place to ensure competitiveness across the board. National Football League (NFL) spokesman Michael Signora is convinced their system works. "The key thing with the policies that the NFL has in place is that they give fans hope," he said. "Every fan of every team goes into the season thinking they have a chance of winning the Super Bowl - that drives fans." "We think the measures and policies we have in place help create an opportunity for every team to be successful." One significant difference between European football and American football is the number of teams in the league. The same 32 teams play in the NFL from one season to the next, whereas the Champions League has around a 25 percent change in teams year on year. Big guns such as Manchester United, Real Madrid, Bayern Munich and AC Milan never fail to qualify for the group stages. However, last season's two Champions League finalists Barcelona and Arsenal both struggled to get out of their groups. Barca needed a victory over Werder Bremen in their last match while Arsenal needed a draw in Porto to be sure they made it through. In the NFL, champions Pittsburgh Steelers can at best hope for a wildcard while last season's finalists Seattle Seahawks record is not that of potential winners. For now, it seems, the Champions League is maintaining a similar level of competitiveness but Gaillard is not sure it will last. "We are worried. What may be true of the last 10 years may not be true of the next 10 years," he warned.

Cassano to leave Real

Football

AFP, Madrid

Wayward Italian international striker Antonio Cassano is set to end his nightmare year at Spanish giants Real Madrid it was reported on Tuesday. "They have had enough of his moodswings," said sports paper AS. "Capello and sports director Pedja Mijatovic want him to leave." Several Italian clubs including Roma, who bought him for 28million euros shortly after they won the 2001 Scudetto, and AC Milan could be interested in Cassano according to the paper, though, Real will not let him go for just any price. Also his estimated wages of 4million euros a year could complicate any eventual transfer. Cassano's international career has suffered accordingly since he scored on his Italy debut against Poland in November 2003 and played for the Azzurri at the 2004 European championships in Portugal where they went out in the first round group stage. Subsequent to that he was left out by Marcello Lippi because of his expanding waistline and loss of form and not even the move to Real last January could reignite his faint hopes of

making the World Cup squad. He has, though, caught the eye of Lippi's replacement Roberto Donadoni having been included in one of his squad's for two Euro 2008 qualifiers though he was subsequently dropped from the next two.



ANTONIO CASSANO

Hunt shrugs off death threats

AFP, London

Reading midfielder Stephen Hunt, who received death threats after his challenge left Chelsea goalkeeper Petr Cech with a fractured skull earlier this season, says he has no worries about facing the Londoners again on Tuesday. Cech suffered the injury in a collision with Hunt, while his replacement, Carlo Cudicini, was also hospitalised after being poleaxed by Ibrahim Sonko in the stormy clash at Reading in October which the champions won 1-0. Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho accused Hunt of being deliberately reckless and both Reading players received death threats through the post in the days that followed. However, Hunt insists he is excited by the prospect of visiting Stamford Bridge despite anticipating a hostile reception. "You always look forward to playing the champions, and that's Chelsea," Hunt told the official Reading website. "You'd play them every week if you could, it's as simple as that. "I don't know what type of reception I'm going to get. I've had letters from Chelsea fans saying I did nothing wrong. "I can't control anything like that. All I can control is how I play on the day."

Like father, like son at Monaco

AFP, Monaco

At just 38 years old, Monaco coach Laurent Banide can call upon plenty of expert guidance if required - his father Gerard twice occupied the hot-seat at the principality club. Banide, the youngest coach in the French championship, took over from Laszlo Boloni two months ago when Monaco slumped to second-from-bottom of the table after a 3-1 home defeat to Toulouse. Banide was Boloni's assistant and he was offered the job to take over the reins. "I wasn't seeking the job," said Banide. "But I was indebted to the club. It was time to see what I was capable of and to see if my ideas and philosophy worked." When the job came up, he immediately consulted his family including father Gerard, the Monaco coach from 1976-1979 and 1993. "I turned to my friends, my wife and my father for their advice," he said. It was his father who gave him a helping hand on the coaching road putting him in charge of the reserve team as a 25-year-old in 1993 when Banide senior was beginning his second spell in charge of the senior squad. "I saw a new generation of players - Thierry Henry, David Trezeguet, Dado Prso," recalled Banide. Banide has always been attracted to the coaching side of the game. "Leading a training session gives me greater pleasure than taking part in," said Banide. "I have learnt a lot from my father. Love of the pitch, my way of speaking, of conducting a training session. Even the sound and intonation of our voices are identical."

Banide has penned a deal until 2008 and it's so far, so good. Since taking over, he has led the club on a mini-revival with Saturday's 0-0 draw at five-time champions Lyon helping the club to spend Christmas out of the relegation zone.

Depor want Romulo

INTERNET, undated

Deportivo La Coruna are reported to be interested in signing Gremio striker Romulo in the January transfer window. The Spanish club are understood to be keen on bringing in a striker during the winter break and with 11 goals for the Porto Alegre club this season Romulo is top of their list. The player's agent, Andre Cury, admitted that contact had been made. "We have spoken and now we need some time to study the situation," Cury said. The player has also been linked to fellow Brazilian clubs Cruzeiro and Palmeiras. Romulo has had one previous ill-fated spell in Europe, returning home after five months with Mainz in Germany in 2005.

Of Jose and a winter break

Football

PAUL PARKER

Everybody has opinions, but as we all know, sometimes it's a good idea to keep them to yourself. But this is a rule Jose Mourinho seems incapable of adhering to, and this week he's gone and done it again. First off, he brought Everton and Andrew Johnson's reputation and integrity into question when he accused the Toffees' striker of taking a dive in a post-match interview. This time I think Mourinho's gone a bit too far. Of all people in the game, it is a manager who should sometimes keep his opinion under wraps. Moreover, in this instance, the 'Special One' should look after his own camp first and concern himself with putting things right there before criticising others. Most football fans, even Chelsea's own, know that Chelsea themselves have a few players who are all too willing to go to ground. Does Mourinho make such a big fuss over them? Of course not. When he arrived in England, everybody labelled him as a 'breath of fresh air'. As far as I'm

concerned he was just different to the everyday manager. To me it seems he's enjoyed the limelight that being different brought to him, and used that 'out of the ordinary' tag to give himself a forum to voice his opinions. You normally have to earn the right to that, but he expected it from day one. Mourinho's like a player who craves attention and who wants to let everyone know he's there. In fact, he's a poor man's footballer who's trying to make up for his own lost time as a player. He mouths off to get noticed. And he says too much. His way is not the right way to behave. Every manager has made mistakes, there's no doubt about that, but top managers never make the same mistake twice. Mourinho unfortunately does not seem to be learning, and once again he infuriated football purists on Tuesday, not with words this time, but with actions. His brandishing an imaginary yellow card in the direction of Nicky Butt for a perceived foul on Arjen Robben was the last thing we want to see in the game. No one wants to see it on the pitch, so why should we put up with it off it? When players make the same gesture, it smacks of the behav-

iour of a spoilt and petulant person and we can't condone that on these shores. And do we really want our managers to be acting in the same way? I think not. With the festive season coming round once again and footballers in other leagues across the continent kicking off their boots for a few weeks, the clamour for an English winter break has started up once again, but I just can't buy into the idea. I wouldn't want to see it. If you're a footballer, everyday is about football, even if it's Christmas. Winter games are part and parcel of the game and part of the fans' game. There's so much tradition involved in the Christmas schedule, with fathers taking sons to the game on Boxing Day for example, it would be a shame to say goodbye to it. As a player, you look forward to the end of the season in May, and that's when you get your break. The last thing you want is more 'pre-season' training, and certainly not in January. Players just get on with it. The game has certainly benefited from continental influence, but this is one aspect we don't need in this country. It's a tradition, like the FA Cup, and the game would be poorer for its loss.

Torres going nowhere

INTERNET, undated



Atletico Madrid striker Fernando Torres says he will stay at the club until 2008. The Spain international has been linked with moves to Manchester United and Chelsea but has reiterated his belief that he will stay at the Vicente Calderon until the end of next season. "I have signed another contract with Atletico until 2008 and my idea is to Honour that," he told "Interviú" magazine. "I want to

win titles in this club" "After the World Cup in Germany I received many offers to leave Spain but I decided to stay here and now I am not thinking about anything else," he continued. Torres added, however, that he thinks the club are overvaluing him: "My release clause is 40 million euros but I believe that no player is really worth that." Atletico have had one of their best starts to a season in recent years and currently lie fourth in La Liga standings, thanks in part to new coach Javier Aguirre, who arrived in the summer after leading Osasuna to an unprecedented

Champions League qualification spot last term. "I am happy with the coach Javier Aguirre because he is winning matches," Torres declared, before adding a word of warning to Atleti's notoriously trigger-happy directors: "While we have suffered bad moments, you must account for the fact that being coach of Atleti is different to Osasuna" "I ask that the directors be patient this year as results take time." "If I was a director without doubt I would look to the sporting director of Sevilla, Ramon Rodriguez, for inspiration, on account of his incredible work in the transfer market."



FERNANDO TORRES

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 24 List-end-
 25 Greek
 26 Famous
 28 Altar
 29 Treads
 30 Brylcreem
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CRYPTOQUIP

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 P F R F Q K Y F C F X - E F T C F Q Y .
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF LIFE AT YOUR LODGING HOUSE IS ENTIRELY HUMDRUM, I'D SAY YOU'RE A BORED BOARDER.
 Today's Cryptoquip Clue: C equals T
 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 puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.