



IM Ziaur Rahman of Biman (L) makes a move during the final round engagement of the First Division chess league yesterday.

— Star photo

Real coup as Gullit buys Ba



NEWCASTLE, Dec 20 (Mail/ Internet): Newcastle manager Ruud Gullit was celebrating last night after beating Real Madrid to sign Milan's French winger Ibrahim Ba for £5.5 million.

Ba, 25, flew in from Rome to complete the deal on Tyneside and disappoint the European champions.

His decision confirmed Gullit's belief that Newcastle are now regarded as one of England's elite clubs.

The exciting Frenchman is likely to be paraded for the Toon Army before today's game with Leicester at St James' Park.

He looks certain to make his Premiership debut alongside Alan Shearer and Duncan Ferguson in the Boxing Day clash with Leeds.

Gullit had earlier kept his cards close to his chest, saying: 'You never sell the fur of a bear before you've shot it.' But then he joked: 'I have brought my cannon with me!'

The signing of Ba, together with the £8m purchase of Scottish striker Duncan Ferguson, means that Gullit has spent virtually all the £15m collected from outgoing deals since he took over in August.

Ba, banished to the Milan bench after falling out with coach Alberto Zaccheroni, said: 'I want to play in England. Even in the Premiership the pressure

is not the same as playing in Italy.'

Ba, born in Senegal, was a surprising absentee from the French World Cup-winning squad last summer. But the bleached-blond winger is seen as a logical replacement for Keith Gillespie, who joined Blackburn for £2.35m this week with Gullit's approval.

The Newcastle boss added: 'It wasn't a difficult decision to sell Gillespie. The club offered him a new contract, but after a while he refused to sign it so I knew he wanted to leave. Keith had a bit of a difficult time here recently and he would have been able to leave on a free at the end of the season so we made a good deal out of it. I'm still looking for players in a number of positions. I hope to do some shopping and get somebody else in before Christmas.'

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Elliott, back in defence after a stand-in spell at centre forward, added: 'Duncan's got the presence and personality to become a Tyneside hero. The fans up there will love him for his rebellious attitude and passionate nature.'

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Howey and Shay Given fit is a boost. I know the team I want to put out.'

Matt Elliott, Leicester's Scottish central defender, is hoping that Ferguson's move to Newcastle will help persuade the centre forward to end his self-imposed international boycott. Elliott may want the former Everton icon to miss today's Premiership clash, but he said: 'It would be great to see Duncan playing again for Scotland.'

'We could certainly use his striking skills and power and I'm sure our manager Craig Brown would welcome him with open arms.'

'There wouldn't be a problem with the rest of the squad because they know he is one of the most fearsome strikers in the game.'

'He is not a Bergkamp, Shearer or Zola. He is very much his own man but when it comes to power in the air I don't believe there's anyone better.'

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