

Marseille ready to pay millions for Anelka

PARIS, Mar 12(Reuters/Internet) Olympique Marseille want Nicolas Anelka and are prepared to pay up to 100 million francs (16 million dollars) to get Arsenal's brilliant teenage French striker.

It's true OM are interested in Anelka, club president Robert Louis-Dreyfus told Friday's France Football magazine.

"We already have good forwards, but for the Champions' League we need reinforcements up front," Louis-Dreyfus said.

He said that Marseille had tried last year to approach Anelka, who scored both goals when world champions France beat England at Wembley in a friendly last month.

Even if I'm ready to go up to 80 million francs (13 million dollars) or even 100 million for the transfer fee and offer him more than what he earns today at Arsenal, I can't compete with the salary he could get elsewhere," Louis-Dreyfus said.

He said there were Italian and Spanish clubs who could pay Anelka a bigger salary.

The magazine said a factor in Marseille's favour might be that Anelka, who will be 20 on Sunday, misses his home country and does not have much of a life in London outside football.

Anelka told France Football: "I'm very flattered. I'm very pleased that OM are interested in me. But I still have four years on my contract with Arsenal. And for now I'm fine there."

It's true that if I were to return to France, OM are the biggest club. But elsewhere there are bigger clubs than OM prepared to put up more than 100 million (francs).

Asked which country he would most like to go to if he left London, Anelka said: "Spain. I'd love that. Because there are lots of goals. Yes, Spain more than Italy. But France would be good too."

Luxemburgo says he's the boss

SAO PAULO, Mar 12: Brazil coach Wanderley Luxemburgo has said team sponsors Nike have no say in team selection in an attempt to quell rumours, reports AFP.

Luxemburgo is set to announce a 22-man squad today for friendly matches against South Korea on March 28 and Japan on March 31.

"Nike have no say. I have the last word," Luxemburgo said.

The matches are important in the build-up to the 1999 Copa America, "The South American ball" championships, in Paraguay, and the Confederations Cup in Mexico.

There had been unconfirmed reports at the World Cup final that Nike put pressure on the then coach Mario Zagallo to play Ronaldo even though unfit, because of vested interests.

Luxemburgo also said he was doing an intensive course in English to ensure there would be no misinterpretation of his comments in foreign newspapers.

Women's WC soccer Tickets sale starts

NEW YORK, Mar 12: Ticket sales have been stronger than expected as the countdown to the Women's World Cup enters its final 100 days, reports AP.

The 16-team soccer championship opens June 19 at Giants Stadium in the New York area, with the United States playing Denmark. The title game is July 10 at the Rose Bowl in the Los Angeles area.

More than 260,000 tickets have been sold for the tournament, including 45,000 since the draw was held a month ago. And the biggest promotional campaigns have yet to begin.

"There has been a lot of demand, anticipation and excitement for the tournament," WWC 99 president Maria Messing said during a conference call Thursday. "We expect full or almost full stadiums for certain games."

Messing said they had hoped to be at 95,000 as of December, but had sold about 200,000 tickets at that point. Organizers now predict between 400,000 and 500,000 for the tournament, compared to earlier projections of about 380,000.

The numbers are especially impressive because they seem to be driven by the faithful soccer fan. The general American sports fans, who usually rally around major events — the men's World Cup five years ago was the most profitable in history — haven't gotten as involved in ticket-buying yet, another encouraging sign for the tournament.

"We think the demand is greater than we had projected," Messing said. "It's one of two things: the people we thought would buy are buying a whole lot earlier, or a lot of people are interested in coming to the tournament."

"Our sense is it is a soccer crowd, because the sales are driven by word of mouth or when the US team appears on TV. We believe it is a sophisticated soccer audience buying the tickets, and they do not need to see a lot of advertising. We do believe as we get closer to the tournament, we will see the 'big event people' get involved and want to be there."

In addition to East Rutherford, New Jersey, and Pasadena, California, games will be held in Chicago, Foxboro, Massachusetts; Washington; Portland, Oregon; San Jose, California; and Stanford, California.

Messing emphasised that the level of excitement for the third Women's World Cup is building abroad, too.



Bangladesh cricket captain Aminul Islam spent some time with a group of young boys from Scholastica in the gallery yesterday during the opening day of the first Asian Test Championship final between Pakistan and Sri Lanka at the Bangabandhu National Stadium. The meeting was sponsored by Milo.

Hooper hopeful of 3rd Test



ADELAIDE, Mar 12(Reuters/Internet) Former West Indies vice-captain Carl Hooper said on Friday that he had decided to rejoin his beleaguered teammates for the third cricket Test against Australia.

The West Indian all-rounder missed last week's humiliating 312-run defeat in the first Test at Trinidad because his infant son is ill. The family lives in Australia.

Hooper also made himself unavailable for the second Test starting in Jamaica on Saturday but told Reuters on Friday that he would travel to the Caribbean on Sunday to prepare for the third Test, starting in Barbados on March 26.

"I don't want to start a sinking ship," Hooper said. "If we are going to go down, I want to be a part of it."

"I don't want to sit here and watch the tellie and watch us going down. I want to be there," he said.

Hooper also said he would consider taking on the West Indies captaincy if the selectors offered him the job.

But he said he was happy to pledge his support to the current skipper Brian Lara. Hooper also served as Lara's deputy on the recent tour of South Africa which the West Indies lost 5-0.

"I've never really thought too much about that, but if that comes along, well I would consider it," Hooper said when quizzed about the leadership issue.

"It's hard for me to think

about that right now, there are so many other things going through my head."

Hooper said Lara's strength of character would determine whether he could withstand

ries to stay in Adelaide with his Australian wife Connie Tam-bakis and their infant son who is undergoing tests for an undisclosed medical condition.

He had intended to wait for the latest results on his son's condition, which were expected later on Friday, but said he felt he had to make an immediate decision on his cricketing future or risk missing the whole series.

"If anything over this side (in Adelaide) takes a turn for the worse, the board has more or less assured me that they will allow me to come back," he said.

"But I think it's a time also where West Indies cricket can ill-afford to be without some of their main players and I just think I've got to bite the bullet and go."

Hooper said earlier this week he had felt "torn in two" watching on television as the West Indies collapsed to their worst Test match total of 51 in the first Test loss at Port-of-Spain.

He said the West Indies board had not placed him under any pressure to make a quick return.

"I understand the situation, I understand the people back in the Caribbean are very, very hurt, not only from the performance in South Africa, but now we've lost the first Test match," he said.

Hooper added that he was confident that he would be fit enough to play in Barbados but wanted to have a warm-up match before being thrown back into the international arena.

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continuing criticism and speculation over his captaincy.

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