

Anelka has to wait

MADRID, Aug 20: French international Nicolas Anelka will miss his scheduled debut for Real Madrid against Mallorca on Saturday because of a last minute hitch over paperwork, it was reported here Friday.

According to Marca, the Spanish daily, Anelka's former club Arsenal have blocked the release of the 20-year-old striker's pass which is essential before he is allowed to play in the Spanish league.

The English Premiership outfit are seeking guarantees from Real over the 36 million dollars transfer fee, the second largest in footballing history.

Marca also reported that the two clubs were at odds over the precise details of the deal, struck in London at the start of the month.

Anelka has already received his official Spanish pass to play in the 1999/2000 league but is unable to step out in the Real strip until his player's permit arrives.

DFB's way of showing respect

FRANKFURT, Aug 20 (Reuters/Internet): The German Football Federation (DFB) said on Friday there would be a minute's silence before Bundesliga matches this weekend in memory of victims of the Turkish earthquake.

"This is to express our sorrow and solidarity to Turkey. Many people who have lost friends and relatives in the earthquake are football fans and they have our sympathy," DFB President Egidius Braun said.

A minute's silence would also be observed at second division matches and the DFB said it had written to lower leagues asking them to follow suit.

Germany is home to some two million expatriate Turks. The official death toll from the earthquake is around 7,000 people, with 30,000 hurt.

German champions Bayern Munich said on Thursday they planned to play a benefit match in Turkey against first division side

Besiktas Istanbul for victims of this week's earthquake. Bayern vice-president Karl-

Heinz Rummenigge said the match would be staged during the traditional winter break in the German soccer season.

Haessler on Ribbeck's mind

MUNICH, Aug 20 (Reuters/Internet): German coach Erich Ribbeck may recall veteran midfielder Thomas Haessler for next month's European championship qualifiers against Finland and Northern Ireland.

"He never said 'no' to the national team," Ribbeck told the Bild daily on Friday. "The situation for Haessler is the same as for any other player: if he performs well, he's a candidate. In Finland I need experienced people."

Ribbeck is due to name his squad for the two qualifiers on Monday. Germany face Finland in Helsinki on September 4 and Northern Ireland in Dortmund on September 8.

Haessler, 33, last played for his country at last year's World Cup finals in France, where Germany were knocked out by Croatia in the quarter-finals. He recently moved to TSV 1860

Munich after a frustrating season with Borussia Dortmund.

Middlesbrough's Christian Ziege could also be recalled by Germany after a series of impressive

performances for his new English premier league club.

Libregts frustrated

LAGOS, Aug 20: Nigeria's Dutch coach Thijs Libregts on Thursday slammed the Nigerian Football Association (NFA) as being "riddled with mistrust and disrespect" and said he saw no future in Nigerian football, reports AFP.

The former Dutch player, appointed in September last year, stayed away from this week's international friendly between Nigeria and Mozambique in Maputo to underline his unhappiness in the post, he told reporters Thursday.

The coach described his 11-month relationship with the NFA as "totally frustrating" and said that he had still not been paid his July salary nor received an agreed match bonus from last year.

But he said: "The problem is not only money. There are technical issues, working conditions and a communication gap... I think that there is no future to work together... money is just an aspect of the lingering feud," he said.

NFA Secretary-General Tijani Yusuf admitted to reporters that the coach, whose performance has come under increasing fire in the Nigerian press in recent days, is owed some allowances.

Libregts, meanwhile, said he will only take part in training the national team ahead of its August 28 friendly against Ghana if the NFA respected his contract.

Nigeria and Ghana are to play the friendly ahead of the draw for the African Nations Cup early next year for which the two countries are co-hosts.

Premiership preview

Gunners gunning for repeat glory



LONDON, Aug 20 (Reuters/Internet): Arsenal and Manchester United meet on Sunday (1500 GMT) in an early season clash of the heavyweights that could have great significance in eight months' time.

With both sides unbeaten on seven points, and similarly-placed Aston Villa away at Chelsea, a victory for either team could see them opening up an early lead at the top of the premier league table.

Last season Arsenal followed up a 3-0 Charity Shield win with a 3-0 Highbury victory in September and they will be delighted with another repeat following their 2-1 Wembley success three weeks ago.

They expect Dutch winger Marc Overmars and England keeper David Seaman to return, although influential French midfielder Emmanuel Petit and centre back Tony Adams will be missing and Dennis Bergkamp is doubtful.

United have injury problems at the back where goalkeeper Mark Bosnich and defenders Gary Neville, Wes Brown, David May and Ronny Johnsen are out. Jaap Stam is also struggling.

United will want to improve on their performance last weekend, when they were under par for an hour before beating Leeds United 2-0.

Other matches this weekend (league positions in parentheses, all kick-offs Saturday 1400 GMT):

Chelsea (7) v Aston Villa (2) New Chelsea signing Gabriele Ambrosini is expected to start on the bench after completing his 5 million dollars move from Vicenza on Thursday. Already hailed by manager Gianluigi Viali as the "Italian answer to Ryan Giggs", Ambrosini will be vital in providing crosses for target man Chris Sutton.

Lee Hendrie looks set to start for second-placed Villa in place of George Boateng, who has yet to settle convincingly into his

new role at Villa since his summer transfer from Coventry City. Chelsea will provide a real test of Villa's long shot championship credentials.

Coventry City (16) v Derby County (17) After a poor start -- one goal and one point from three games -- and the loss of Darren Huckerby to Leeds, Coventry will be hoping new six million pound signing Robbie Keane can kickstart their season.

Derby meanwhile, will be disappointed that their proposed signing of Esteban Furesi, second-top scorer in Argentina last year, has fallen through.

Everton (18) v Southampton (6) After an encouraging draw with Manchester United on the opening day, Everton have slipped back to their bad ways and let in three in both their last two games.

Southampton have earned six points from their first three games -- five more than they managed from their first nine last season. Striker Kevin Davies returns to the fray after a torrid time at Blackburn, who have taken Egil Ostenstad in exchange for the 22-year-old.

Leeds United (8) v Sunderland (13) Leeds were unlucky to lose at Old Trafford last week and their front-line is likely to cause pain for Sunderland's defence. Michael Bridges will face his old club if he shakes off an ankle injury.

After the 4-0 defeat to Chelsea on the opening day, things improved for Sunderland last week when they packed their defence to draw 0-0 at home with Arsenal. A repeat of those tactics is likely.

Middlesbrough (4) v Liverpool (14) Middlesbrough have looked impressive in winning their last two games away from home. Impressive German international Christian Ziege has scored in both victories. Paul Ince faces the club he left in the summer.

Liverpool suffered the first major shock of the new season last week, going down at home to Watford, and are missing several top players through injury, including Dietmar Hamann, Vladimir Smicer and Michael Owen.

Newcastle United (20) v Wimbledon (11) Ruud Gullit's men are languishing at the foot of the table after three straight defeats, despite spending 17 million pounds on new players during the summer. The under-pressure Dutchman hopes the return of aggressive striker Duncan Ferguson will mark a turnaround.

Wimbledon's Carl Cort will be hoping to score in his fourth game in a row. Robbie Earle will play despite fracturing his cheekbone in last week's draw with Coventry.

Sheffield Wednesday (19) v Tottenham Hotspur (5) Wednesday have played poorly, taking just one point so far, and need a lift. It will be hard, though, against Tottenham, who have come from behind to win their last two games, scoring six goals in the process. Defender Sol Campbell is out with Achilles tendon trouble.

Watford (15) v Bradford City (10) Watford stunned Liverpool at Anfield last week but it is victories over the likes of Bradford that are necessary if Graham Taylor's low-budget side are to avoid the drop.

Bradford are unbeaten so far and will have the same attitude as their hosts -- this is a must-win game.

West Ham United (9) v Leicester City (12) West Ham are unbeaten so far but injuries and work permit problems mean Harry Redknapp will have to cobble together a makeshift defence.

Leicester have played well and but for successive last minute own goals by Frank Sinclair they would be joint top.

Monday (1900 GMT) Leeds United v Liverpool. The two old rivals play their second game in three days.

Bhutia yet to receive work permit

CALCUTTA, Aug 20: Star-striker Baichung Bhutia, who became the first Indian to sign for a European football club, was yet to get a work permit, reports PTI.

"I am yet to get the work permit, but hope to get it within the next few days," Bhutia, who has signed a three-year contract with English Second Division club Bury, told newsmen here yesterday.

"Now everything depends on the British government who are to issue the work permit. Since I have already signed the contract with Bury, I think they would be able to procure the permit by showing a copy of the agreement to the government," he said.

The nimble-footed footballer from Sikkim, who has been selected for the prestigious Arjuna award for 1998, was also yet to take an international transfer, so far, I have only taken a no-object certificate to play a match for football club Bury.

But I will apply for the international transfer soon.

Wales squad for Euro 2000 qualifier

CARDIFF, Aug 20 (AFP): Wales' new caretaker coach Mark Hughes on Thursday named the following squad to play Belarus in the European Championship Group One qualifier on September 4 in Minsk:

TEAM
Goalkeepers: Paul Jones (Southampton), Mark Crossley (Nottm Forest).

Defenders: Darren Barnard (Barnsley), Mark Delaney (Aston Villa), Chris Coleman, Kit Symons, Andy Melville (all Fulham), Robert Page (Watford).

Middlefielders: John Robinson (Charlton), Mark Savage (Leicester), Gary Speed (Newcastle), Mark Pemberton (Exeter), Carl Robinson (Wolves), John Oster (Sunderland).

Forwards: John Hartson (Wimbledon), Nathan Blake (Blackburn), Dean Saunders (Bradford), Ryan Giggs (Man Utd).

Campbell fighting fit

LONDON, Aug 20: Tottenham Hotspur defender Sol Campbell faces a fitness race for England's two crucial European Championship qualifiers against Luxembourg and Poland early next month, reports AFP.

The centre-back has been ruled out of the Premiership trip to Sheffield Wednesday on Saturday with the damaged calf muscle he picked up at West Ham.

But time is running out for Campbell after Tottenham's visit to Chelsea in midweek was postponed because of the Stamford Bridge club's Champions' League qualifier against Skonto Riga in Latvia.

"Sol won't be involved again this weekend and his target now is our home game against Leeds on August 28, but even then he could be short for England," Spurs' manager George Graham said.

England coach Kevin Keegan names his squad next Thursday for the two qualifiers on September 4 at Wembley and September 8 in Warsaw and is certain to be without Arsenal central defender Tony Adams, who has yet to figure for the Gunners this season after a double-hernia operation in July.

Adams has been pencilled-in for an Arsenal comeback at Liverpool a week on Saturday, but Highbury boss Arsene Wenger has already indicated it would be too late to expect him to then feature in the crucial international double-header.

Campbell would normally be an automatic selection alongside team-mate Martin Keown at the heart of the England defence but there must now be a big doubt over him.

West Ham's Rio Ferdinand or Gareth Southgate of Aston Villa is the likely stand-in.

Keane moves to Coventry

COVENTRY, England, Aug 20: Irish striker Robbie Keane on Friday became Britain's most expensive teenager when he joined English Premiership side Coventry City from Wolverhampton Wanderers for nearly 6 million pounds (9.5 million dollars), reports AFP.

Keane, 19, signed a five-year contract at Highfield Road after Coventry beat off competition from Aston Villa and Middlesbrough.

"It's quite flattering to come to Coventry City and play in the Premier League," said Keane. "It's something I always dreamed of."

Although Coventry refused to disclose the fee, it is understood Keane becomes Coventry's record signing, beating the 4 million pounds boss Gordon Strachan paid Deportivo La Coruna last month for Mustapha Hadji.

Keane will replace Darren Huckerby, sold to Leeds last week, and could make his Premiership debut at home to Derby on Saturday.

Keane added: "I am excited about joining such an ambitious Premiership club. The new stadium will be finished in two years. It sounds fantastic and with a capacity of over 40,000 it deserves a winning team. I want to be part of that."



Los Angeles Galaxy's Zak Ibsen (L) faces a sliding tackle from Jose Luis Montes de Oca of Necaxa during a qualifying match for the CONCACAF Cup at the Rose bowl in Pasadena on August 18.

Primera Liga begins today



MADRID, Aug 20: Saturday's Spanish Primera Liga kickoff could be billed as the return of the Millionaires' Row as reigning champions Barcelona and eternal rivals Real Madrid shape up for another battle to the death.

Both clubs, backed by habitually huge season ticket sales, have sprayed money around like confetti in their annual bid for supremacy while the rest of the league joust for scraps from the rich men's table.

In the past 15 seasons the bitter rivals have won the title seven times each with Atletico Madrid daring to snatch the championship away in 1996 to show the big two they can't always have it their own way.

For Real, and Welsh coach John Toshack in particular, the stakes are high after the club raided the coffers for a mere bagatelle of 50 million dollars in order to fund the arrivals of French international striker Nicolas Anelka from Arsenal and Bosnian striker Elvir Balic from Fenerbahce.

Other talent, fortunately for Madrid's "meringues", came slightly cheaper in the shape of England winger Steve McManaman -- a free transfer from Liverpool -- and Michel Salgado, surely a "snip" at 12 million dollars from Vigo.

Real open their campaign at Mallorca on Saturday.

The team will take time to bed down, I don't think you'll see us at our best for a few weeks," forecast Toshack, in his second spell at the club whom he led to the 1990 title.

Toshack insists Fernando Morientes and Anelka can partner each other with Raul just behind them in the "hole".

"If they couldn't play together I wouldn't have bought Anelka," said Toshack.

"Mallorca will be tough," Toshack told Marca magazine. "But the league is a marathon. In a marathon the people who hit the front at the start aren't the first to the line."

Barca, champions in each of the past two seasons and who face Real Zaragoza on Sunday, unsurprisingly looked to the homeland of Dutch coach Louis van Gaal for their main new recruit -- Ajax's Finnish international striker Jari Litmanen.

Litmanen takes the former Ajax contingent to six -- not ideally what the Catalan public wants but they will be appeased if Barca reap another championship and rub Real's noses in it once more.

Van Gaal, whose men were unstoppable in the second half of the season -- they stormed to the line with 14 wins in their final 16 games -- has also signed highly-rated forward Dani Garcia from Mallorca.

Compared to the big two the other clubs are cast in the role of also-rans, but heading the list of those forced to play catch-up are Celta Vigo, who finished fifth last time round and Deportivo La Coruna.

Deportivo once caused a storm by playing a string of foreign players but they are now largely reliant on Spanish talent, including Ivan Perez Munoz, signed from France's Bordeaux.

Mallorca, who reached the Cup Winners Cup final last season in their first European campaign, are also hoping to get in on the act under new coach Mario Gomez, who has arrived from Argentina's Lanus to replace fellow Argentine Hector Cuper, now in charge at Valencia.

Another. Anderlecht veteran Enzo Scifo and striker Luc Nilis quit the international scene after the World Cup, going public with their criticisms of

Belgian soccer bosses reportedly began the search for a replacement on Wednesday immediately after visitors Finland heaped more embarrassment on the home side with a 4-3 win, their first in five meetings with Belgium.

The defeat was Belgium's sixth in nine games and a fourth consecutive home reverse. Belgium have won only four of their last 19 matches, including a disappointing and heavily criticised World Cup performance last year when they drew all their first round games and left France amid their fans' roar of disapproval.

Belgian media widely reported on Friday that the soccer union had a shortlist of three candidates to replace Leekens in a bid to inject new blood into the struggling side and to mend fences with a group of star players who have lost the coach's confidence for one reason or

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Cuper has already made a bright start to his new tenure, leading Valencia to a Spanish Super Cup win over Barcelona.

Having lost Dani -- and also Marcelino to England's Newcastle -- Mallorca, third last season, must look to their own new faces, former Barca man Miguel Angel Nadal and Argentine keeper German Burgos, as they push for a first domestic trophy.

Ex River Plate star Burgos has a hard act to follow as he steps into the shoes of Carlos Roa, who has retired to pursue religious interests.

Vigo, who has enjoyed a fine tune-up with a 3-0 win over Real the highlight.

Atletico Madrid, boosted by the arrival of Dutch hitman Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink from Leeds but unsure whether they have a place for mercurial Brazilian Juninho, will meanwhile attempt to invoke the triumphant spirit of 1996 after placing in the bottom eight last time.

Italian Claudio Ranieri takes the reins after masterminding Valencia's Spanish Cup success -- over Atletico --

Even before the league season starts, interest in football is already at fever pitch, with even minor friendlies being televised live, while TV rights for the season have soared to some 400 million dollars.

Saturday Mallorca v Real Madrid. Athletic Bilbao v Betis, Valencia v Racing Santander.

Sunday Numancia v Valladolid, Deportivo La Coruna v Alaves, Oviedo v Celta Vigo, Atletico Madrid v Rayo Vallecano, Malaga v Espanyol, Sevilla v Real Sociedad, Barcelona v Zaragoza.

Leekens in the line of fire



BRUSSELS, Aug 20 (Reuters/Internet): Georges Leekens, the combative and self-assured Belgium

soccer coach, faces the axe just nine months ahead of the Euro 2000 championships his nation is due to co-host.

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